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Remembering Canadians in Global Missions and World Service

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Remembering Canadians in Global Missions and World Service

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Stephen Larson, Gordon A. Jensen, Donald W. Sjoberg, Karen Kuhnert, Peter Mathiasen, and Raymond T. Blacklock

Remembering Canadians in Global Missions and World Service

Stephen Larson, Gordon A. Jensen, Donald W. Sjoberg, Karen Kuhnert, Peter Mathiasen, Raymond T. Blacklock*

Introduction: Addressing the Context

Stephen Larson

ELCIC missionaries bring ministry and service to life in a variety of ways. They are pastors, deaconesses, chaplains, and evangelists, of course. They are also doctors, nurses, and pharmacists. Some teach in schools, translate scripture, administer finances in church organizations, or serve as community organizers. Others fly planes, assist in construction, mechanics, or agricultural innovations.

As you can see from the list below, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) missionaries brought their ministries and skills to life in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. More than any other country, they worked for the sake of the gospel in Papua New Guinea. Two dozen served in India and a dozen or more went to Tanzania and Cameroon, China, and Colombia. Yet even a single individual can inspire life-changing ministry with people—just ask Pastor Brian Rude, who spent more than half his life as a Canadian Lutheran missionary in El Salvador.

Ray and Norma Blacklock taught in Papua New Guinea for 19 years. Peter and Elna Mathiasen provided pastoral ministries in Brazil for 17 years. Together Ray and Peter worked with Bishop Don Sjoberg to compile this list of missionaries who served on behalf of the ELCIC or its predecessor church bodies. To them we all owe our thanks. We are also thankful to Ray and Norma's children who assisted in formatting early drafts of the list.

With names and data on the missionaries coming forward, Karen Kuhnert spent six weeks of full-time research in Lutheran archives and online to find public source material for this draft of the list of names. Along the way she noticed that the considerable work of women in the tasks of human care and development were significantly masked by church sources. Presented early on in missionary reports as “only” spouses, the more complex lives of these missionaries came to light through later biographies and obituaries. The more fulsome historical account shows that in many cases the women preceded their husbands to global service, and while in country held significant leadership roles for the health and well-being of their families and the communities as well as mission growth.

This was certainly true for Dr. Amy Rohrer and her sister, Nurse Anna Rohrer, who served in India, and so too for Thea Ronning and Hannah Rorem, who served in China. Karen writes:

Dr. Amy Rohrer's commissioning for the mission field happened in 1907 and she started in India in 1908. Amy was initially a Normal School trained teacher at the Deaconess orphanage in Philadelphia. There she was recruited by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Pennsylvania Ministerium to spend four years in Medical School so as to help launch a hospital for women in India. She took her Medical Board

* See the Foreword of this issue of Consensus for biographical information.

examinations with the Massachusetts State Medical Board. Her advanced studies were paid for by the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. While studying, she lived at the Mary J. Drexel Motherhouse where she was also trained by deaconesses to become a mission field supervisor of Deaconess Nurses. Four years after her arrival in India, her future husband, August Neudoerffer, followed his brother Ernst to India. After August graduated from public schools in Canada, and was ordained in the US, he arrived in India in 1912 and the two were wed in 1914. Their son, J. Frederick Neudoerffer, went on to be an oversight executive for the ULCA and then for the LCA in India from 1954 to 1959 and 1963 to 1968, and thereafter he was Secretary for southern Asia and the Middle East from 1968 to his retirement in 1984.

In 1915 Amy's sister Anna Rohrer, a Registered Nurse, also joined the Telugu Mission in India. In 1917 she became Mrs. Ernst Neudoerffer. Ernst was ordained by the Canada Synod in 1900. His daughter, Theodora, followed in her stepmother's footsteps and became a Registered Nurse and then Supervisor of Nurses serving the Guntur Hospital in India for thirty years.

A similar story could be told of the Ronning women. Thea Ronning (later Thea Landahl) and Hannah Rorem (later Hannah Ronning) were missionaries to China entering the field alongside pastor Halvor Ronning. They created a mission outreach to women and orphans, particularly girls. Their stories had been lost in the shadows behind that of pioneering pastor Halvor and son Chester Ronning, who became Ambassador and High Commissioner to Norway, Iceland, and India among his diplomatic posts for Canada.

All of these missionaries have stories from which we may learn.

Our website is full of pictures, articles, and links to stories for you to discover, reminisce about, reflect upon—and there is room for you to add your own resources and research. Visit our website and select the page “Global Service.” It is appropriate to cite and credit the still developing work of our researchers and the original content creators. Images and articles are from the “ELCIC Archives” unless otherwise identified. Special mention and appreciation must go to our partners at the ELCA Archives for the use of their photograph albums on Flickr. Once complete, the entirety of this missionary storyline in our larger Project “Remembering Today for the Church of Tomorrow” will be deposited at Laurier Archives and Special Collections.

Following the listing of mission personnel there is a brief essay by Gordon Jensen entitled “Missionaries—For the Sake of the Gospel.” Gordon had the challenging task of writing the closing word—which is meant to be an opening word. We invite you into the dialogue! As Dr. Jensen writes,

the stories of missionaries sent to Canada and sent from Canada ought not to be forgotten.” This is a dynamic, first draft compilation of missionaries as of June 2023. We expect the list of names to grow and for more stories to be collected. Our goal is to be inclusive, and we welcome the addition of other Canadian Lutheran missionaries. If you have information about individuals who should be included, we invite and encourage you to please send their story to canadianlutheranhistory@gmail.com.

We give thanks to God for the many years of faithful service of each and every one of these missionaries.

List of Canadian Lutheran Missionaries

Donald W. Sjoberg, Karen Kuhnert, Peter Mathiasen, Raymond T. Blacklock

Symbols and Abbreviations

This symbol to the right is a creation of Canva. It is used in the table below to identify those who, at this point of publication, have died and rest now from their labours by grace. The symbol reflects the Lutheran perspective that the grace of God comes to the world in love as a gift. The descriptors for “Locations of Service” have been chosen with care in light of many factors. The Project Coordinators recognize that nation state names and borders have changed and more specific information can be found in the records of those who served as posted on our website, <https://canadianlutheranhistory.ca>.














The “Description of Service” is intended to be a general category rather than specific identifier of ways and means of service.

Sponsoring Church Bodies in this List

Lutheran Church Bodies in North America	
AbT	Synod of Alberta and the Territories, ELCIC
ALC	American Lutheran Church
AUG	Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church
DWME	Division for World Mission and Ecumenism, LCA
ELC	Evangelical Lutheran Church
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
ELCC	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada
ELCIC	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Estonian LC	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Hauge	Hauge’s Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America
JSO	Joint Synod of Ohio and the American Lutheran Church
LCA	Lutheran Church in America
LFC	Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
Luth. Breth	Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America
TALC	The American Lutheran Church
ULCA	United Lutheran Church in America
Mission Agencies and Organizations	
MAF	Mission Aviation Fellowship
Wycliffe	Wycliffe Bible Translators
WMPL	World Mission Prayer League

Lutherans in Global Mission: ELCIC and Predecessors

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Aadland, Jeanette	Quenzer		Papua New Guinea	1969 to 1972	Teacher	ELC
Albers, Darcy			Pakistan	2012 to 2017		WMPL
Anderson, Rev. Palmer			China	1921 to 1951	Pastor	ELC
			Hong Kong	1952 to 1965	Pastor	ELC; TALC
Anderson, Adelia	Rorem		China	1921 to 1951		ELC
			Hong Kong	1952 to 1965		ELC; TALC
Ariza, Rev. Jose Hernan			Colombia	1986 to 1992	Pastor	ELCIC
Ariza, Carol	Ostrem		Colombia	1986 to 1992		ELCIC
Ariza, Rev. Jose Hernan			Colombia	1992 to 1996	Communications	ELCIC
Ariza, Marjory	Quillian		Columbia	1992 to 1996		ELCIC
Aussillou, Joy	Manson		Cameroon	1980's	Nurse	ELC
Baglo, Rev. Ferdinand E.			Tanzania	1960 to 1965	Communications	LCA
Baglo, Magda	Johanson		Tanzania	1960 to 1965		LCA
Bartling, Linda	Hafso		Papua New Guinea	1970 to 1972	Teacher	AL; ELC
Bay, Janet	Mclarty		Tanzania			
Bengston, Rev. H. Bernard			Tanzania	1946 to 1959	Teacher	AUG
Bengston, Doris	Furrer		Tanzania	1947 to 1950		AUG
Berendt, Erich A.			Japan	1964 to 1967	Teacher	
Beretta, Rev. Troy			Peru	1977 to 1985	Pastor	LCA
Beretta, Anne	Riemer		Peru	1977 to 1985		LCA
Bergbusch, Rev. Katharine			Peru	1994 to 2007	Pastor	ELCIC
Bergh, Joyce			Colombia	1947 to 1960	Teacher	ELC
			Colombia	1963 to 1970	Teacher	ELC
Blacklock, Raymond T.			Papua New Guinea	1962 to 1981	Teacher	TALC; ELCIC
Blacklock, Norma C.	McCoomb		Papua New Guinea	1962 to 1981		ALC; ELCIC
Blacklock, Thomas L.			Papua New Guinea	1994 to 2000	Pilot	MAF
Blacklock, Kirsten	Engen		Papua New Guinea	1994 to 2000		MAF
Campbell, Carmen			Papua New Guinea	1989 to 1991	Teacher Trainer	ELCIC
Daechsel, Douglas			Papua New Guinea	1947 to 1970	Supply Manager	TALC
Daechsel, Doris	Diemer		Papua New Guinea	1948 to 1970		TALC
Dahl, Dr. Bill			Pakistan	1964 to 1983	Medical Doctor	WMPL
Dahl, Doris			Pakistan	1964 to 1983		WMPL
Datars, J. Robert			India	1961 to 1966	Sanatorium Bursar Synod Treasurer	ULCA; LCA
			India	1979 to 1981	Inter-Church Accountant	ULCA;LCA
Datars, Shirley			India	1961 to 1966; 1979 to 1981		ULCA;LCA
Doering, Rev. Felix			Papua New Guinea	1935 to 1968	Evangelist	ALC
Doering, Hedwick	Sterzer		Papua New Guinea	1937 to 1968		ALC



Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Doering, Sr. Adella			Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1968	Nurse	ALC
Eagles, Alice	Gaertner		Papua New Guinea		Teacher	
Engen, Rev. Harold O. P.			India	1965 to 1979	Evangelist	WMPL
Engen, Dorothy	Vinge		India	1965 to 1979		WMPL
Ekstrand, Greta Mona L.			Tanzania	1953 to 1957		AUG
Endress, Lori			Thailand	1999 to 2011	Teacher	ELCA; ELCIC
Eriksson, Luther			India	1958 to 1967		WMPL
Eriksson, Berit			India	1958 to 1967		WMPL
Foreman, Velma			Papua New Guinea		Translator	Wycliffe
Foster, Lydia	Hansen		China	1937 to 1948		ELC
			Japan	1950 to 1955		ELC
Freytag, Rev. Ralferd			Germany	1972 to 1984	Pastor	TALC
Freytag, Harriet			Germany	1980 to 1985		TALC
Guttormson, Olga	Storlie		South Africa	1932 to 1968	Nurse	ELC
Haab, Ernest			Papua New Guinea	1983 to 1998	Community Development Worker	ELCIC
Haab, Kathi	Gallmann		Papua New Guinea	1987 to 1998	Community Development Worker	ELCIC
Hall, Dolores			Papua New Guinea	1966 to 1996	Nurse/ Nurse Educator	ALC; ELCC; ELCIC
Hansen, Bernice			Bolivia	1947 to 1956		WMPL
Hartig, Elizabeth E.			India	1946 to 1960		ULCA
Hauert, Hilda			Papua New Guinea	1935 to 1937	Nurse	
Haugen, David			Central Asia	1986 to 1989	Hospital Admin.	WMPL
			Central Asia	1994 to 2007	Community Development	WMPL
Haugen, Kirsti	Hovdestad		Central Asia	1998 to 2007	Community Development	WMPL
Hesselgrave, Rev. William			Tanzania	1958 to 1968	Pastor	AUG; LCA
Hesselgrave, Lucille			Tanzania	1958 to 1968		AUG; LCA
Hopkins, Lionel			Papua New Guinea	1962 to 1968	Teacher	ELCIC
Hopkins, Elva	Hunter		Papua New Guinea	? to 1968		ELCIC
Hovdestad, Lorne			Ethiopia	1968 to 1974	Agriculturalist	ELC; LCA
Hovdestad, Darlene			Ethiopia	1968 to 1974		ELC; LCA
Hunziker, Juerg			Cameroon	1984 to 1990	Agriculturalist	ELCIC
Hunziker, Sharon	Ruste		Cameroon	1984 to 1990		ELCIC
Hunziker, Juerg			Cameroon	1991 to 1993	Dorm Parent and Maintenance Manager	ELCA
Hunziker, Sharon	Ruste		Cameroon	1991 to 1993	Dorm Parent	ELCA
Jacobsen, Dr. Paul			Cameroon	1970 to 1986	Medical Doctor	TALC; ELCC; ELCIC

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Jacobsen, Rosemary	Weldon		Cameroon	1970 to 1986	Teacher	TALC; ELCC; ELCIC
Johnson, Rev. Floyd E.			China	1947 to 1951	Teacher	AUG
			Malaysia	1951 to 1956		AUG
Johnson, Genevieve			China Malaysia	1947 to 1951 1951 to 1956		AUG
Kiel, Rev. Greg			Argentina	1999 to 2002	Mission/Ag. Development	ELCIC
Kiel, Marla			Argentina	1999 to 2002		ELCIC
Kleiner, Rev. H. H. C.			South India	1947 to 1958	Pastor	ULC
				1960 to 1967	Church Treasurer	ULCA; LCA
				1971 to 1981	Inter-Church Activity Facilitator	LCA
Kleiner, Vera Bernice	Grabinsky		South India	1947 to 1981		ULCA; LCA
Knebel, Rev. Frederick			Argentina	1956 to 1962	Pastor	ULCA
Knebel, Valborg	Moren		Argentina	1956 to 1962		ULCA
Kreller, Rev. Margaret			Chile	1978 to 1980	Deaconess	LCA
			Ecuador	1983 to 1987	Pastor	ELCA
			Peru	1988 to 1994	Pastor	ELCIC
Kunkel, Rev. Johann			Liberia	1964 to 1972	Pastor	LCA
Kunkel, Elisabeth	Bergbusch		Liberia	1964 to 1972	Nurse	LCA
Kurtz, Rev. Wilmer			Papua New Guinea	1955 to 1969	Evangelist	ALC; TALC
Kurtz, Lorraine	Hoff		Papua New Guinea	1957 to 1969		ALC; TALC
Landstrom, Connie			Papua New Guinea	1966 to 1974	Bible Teacher	ELC
Lang, Rev. Barry			Guyana	1959 to 1971	Pastor	ULCA; LCA
			Liberia	1972 to 1987	Pastor	LCA
			Papua New Guinea	1987 to 1997	Pastor	ELCIC
Lang, Alice			Guyana	1959 to 1971	Parish Worker	ULCA; LCA
			Liberia	1972 to 1987	Parish Worker	LCA
			Papua New Guinea	1987 to 1997	Parish Worker	ELCIC
Lang, Hans			Japan	1986 to 1989		ELCIC
Lange, Bertha			India	1950 to 1970	Teacher	ULCA; LCA
Leiv, Rev. Leo			Brazil	1958 to 1961	Pastor	Estonian LC
Leiv, Hilda	Haugen		Brazil	1958 to 1961		Estonian LC
Leuze, Dorothy			Papua New Guinea	1964 to ca1986	Teacher Training	
Loberg, Nels			Bolivia	1964 to 1989		WMPL
Loberg, Marian			Bolivia	1964 to 1989		WMPL
Luetkehoelter, Rev. H. W.			India	1961 to 1966	Pastor	ULCA; LCA
Luetkehoelter, Patricia	Youretz		India	1961 to 1966	Nurse	ULCA; LCA
Mathiasen, Rev. Peter E.			Brazil	1958 to 1975	Pastor	UELCC; ELC; TALC
Mathiasen, Elna Mae	Nielsen		Brazil	1958 to 1975		UELCC; ELC; TALC

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
McNair, Albert (Bert)			Papua New Guinea	1987 to 1991	Curriculum Developer	ELCIC
McNair, Frances			Papua New Guinea	1987 to 1991		ELCIC
Melvie, Rev. John			Cameroon	1966 to 1969	Radio Programmer	Luth. Breth.
Melvie, Alice			Cameroon	1966 to 1969		Luth. Breth.
Moore, Rev. Douglas			Papua New Guinea	1981 to 1984	University Chaplain	ELC
Moore, Karen			Papua New Guinea	1981 to 1984		ELC
Morck, Rev. Arnfeld			Colombia	1944 to 1976	Pastor, translator	UELC
Morck, Irene	Norre		Colombia	1944 to 1946		UELC
Morck, Hildur	Thorkelson		Colombia	? to 1976		UELC
Nabert, E. Edwin			India	1956 to 1981	Director of "MESH" a Fair Trade Organization in India	ULCA; LCA
Nabert, Joan	Pauli		India	1956 to 1970		ULCA; LCA
				1970 to 1981	"MESH" Employee	ULCA; LCA; TALC
				1981 to 1992	"MESH" Employee	LCA-DWME; ELCIC
Nelson, Doris			South Africa	1954 to 1970	Nurse	ELC; TALC
Nelson, Grace			Japan	1954 to 1961	Teacher	ELC; TALC
Ingulsrud, Grace			Japan	1961 to 1987	Teacher	TALC
Nelson, Rev. Stephen J.			Cent. Afr. Republic	1986 to 1994	Teacher	TALC; ELCA
			Senegal	1994 to 1998	Learning Center Director	TALC; ELCA
Nelson, T. Maureen	Small		Cent. Afr. Republic	1986 to 1994	Teacher	TALC; ELCA
			Senegal	1994 to 1998	Teacher	TALC; ELCA
Neudoerffer, Ernst W.			India	1900 to 1926	General Council	ELC
				1931 to 1947		TALC
Neudoerffer, Julia	Vandermeer		India	1900 to 1926		ELC
				1931 to 1947		TALC
Neudoerffer, Theodora L.			India	1936 to 1977	Medical Service	ULCA
Niebergall, Rev. Ray			Argentina	1991 to 1999	Pastor/Mission Developer	ELCIC
Niebergall, Beverly			Argentina	1991 to 1999		ELCIC
Nissen, Margaret			Nigeria	1943 to 1975	Teacher	UELC; ELC
Nolting, Joan E.			India	1966 to 1981	Teacher; Administrator; Inter-Church Acct Consultant	LCA
Nommik, Rev. Tonis			Argentina	1967 to 1970	Pastor	Estonian Luth.
Nostbakken, Madel			Cameroon; Cent. Afr. Republic	1937 to 1973	Translator	TALC
Nostbakken, Rev. Paul			Cameroon	1955 to 1969	Pastor	ELC; TALC

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Nostbakken, Doreen	Vinge		Cameroon	1955 to 1969		ELC; TALC
Olson, Arlin			Central Asia	1985 to 1989	Bible teacher	WMPL
Olson, Ruth			Central Asia	1985 to 1989		WMPL
Ostrem, Rev. Gerhard			Colombia	1947 to 1958	Pastor	ELC
Ostrem, Helene	Anderson		Colombia	1947 to 1958		ELC
Patzwald, Alma			Ethiopia	1970 to 1971		
Pederson, Lorna			West Pakistan		Pharmacist	ELC
Pederson, Martha			Zululand	1953 to 1967	House Mother	ELC
Pedersen, Rev. Eric			Japan	1957 to 1975	Pastor	ELC; TALC; ELCC
Pedersen, Miriam			Japan	1957 to 1975		ELC; TALC; ELCC
Philpot, G. Roy			Singapore	1963	Mechanic	AUG
			Tanzania	1965 to 1971	Mechanic	LCA
Philpot, Inez	Hedman		Singapore; Tanzania		Teacher	
Pinno, Erhard			Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1966	Teacher	ALC
				1971 to 1977	Headmaster	ALC
Pinno, Lorene	Fabrizius		Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1966; 1971 to 1977	Teacher	ALC
Rainboth, Mrs. Elaine	Riekert		Papua New Guinea		Teacher	ELC
Rawlings, Elmer			Nigeria	1959 to 1962		UELCC
Rawlings, Martha	Kjearsgaard		Nigeria	1959 to 1962		UELCC
Reble, Rev. Eric			India	1960 to 1965	School Chaplain	ULCA; LCA
				1966 to 1972	Religious Instructor	ULCA; LCA
Reble, Jean	Niergarth		India	1960 to 1972		ULCA; LCA
Ronning, Chester			China	1922 to 1927	Teacher	ELC
Ronning, Inga Marie	Horte		China	1922 to 1927		ELC
Ronning, Rev. Halvor			China	1891 to 1908	Pastor	Hauge
Ronning, Hannah	Rorem		China	1891 to 1908		Hauge
Ronning, Paul			Madagascar	1946 to 1950		LFC
Ronning, Rev. Talbert R.			China	1931 to 1949	Pastor	ELC
Ronning, Ella	Gryting		China	1931 to 1949		ELC
Ronning, Thea			China	1891 to 1897		Hauge
				1897 to 1898		ELC
Rubarth, Hans			Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1965	Hospital Admin.	TALC
Rubarth, Lore	Loriel		Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1965		TALC
Ruccius, Rev. Martin			Liberia	1958 to 1962	Pastor	ULCA; LCA
Ruccius, Winona	Blackwell		Liberia	1958 to 1962		ULCA; LCA
Rude, Diane			Pakistan	1989 to 1993	House Mother	WMPL
Rude, Rev. Brian			El Salvador	1988 to 2012	Pastor	ELCIC
			El Salvador	2013 to 2021	Pastor	AbT Synod; ELCIC

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Sagness, Lila	Youck		Cameroon			
Salte, Trygve			Colombia	1938 to 1944	Pastor	ALC
Salte, Alvida			Colombia	1940 to 1944		ALC
Schaefer, Rev. John G.			India	1921 to 1957	Pastor	JSOALC
Schaefer, Helen	Henke		India	1941 to 1957		JSOALC
Scheske, Ray			Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1970	Teacher	ALC
Scheske, Marilyn	Anderson		Papua New Guinea	1964 to 1970		ALC
Schmidt, Rev. Fran			Peru	2008 to 2012	Pastor	ELCIC
Simrose, Herman			India	1954 to 1973		WMPL
Skaret, Dan			Papua New Guinea; Zambia; Zimbabwe	1981 to 1982; 1990 to 1994	Internal Auditor	ELCC; LWF
Skaret, Brenda			Papua New Guinea; Zambia; Zimbabwe	1981 to 1982; 1990 to 1994		ELCC; LWF
Steinhauer, Linda			India	1953 to 1956	Nurse	ALC
Stolee, Alice			Japan	1957 to 1961; 1963 to 1972	Teacher	ALC
Stolee, Rev. Peter B.			Madagascar	1924 to 1932; 1936 to 1945; 1951 to 1959	Evangelist/ Teacher	ELC
Stolee, Ragna	Lefsrud		Madagascar	1924 to 1932; 1936 to 1945; 1951 to 1959		ELC
Swedberg, Rev. Paul			Liberia	1966 to 1974	Pastor	LCA
Swedberg, Sally	Swenson		Liberia	1966 to 1974		
Symons, Luther			Cameroon	1994 to 1999	Teacher	ELCIC
Symons, Rev. Luther			Thailand	1999 to 2003	Teacher	ELCA
Symons, Nusrat			Cameroon	1994 to 1999		ELCIC
			Thailand	1999 to 2003		ELCA
Tengbom, Rev. Luverne			Tanzania	1956 to 1967	Pastor	AUG; LCA
			Singapore	1985 to 1986	Pastor	LCA
Tengbom, Mildred	Hasselquist		Tanzania	1956 to 1967		
			Singapore	1985 to 1986		
Tenhunen, Helena			Pakistan	1986 to 1990		WMPL
Tveit, Marie			Japan	1958 to 1969	Evangelist/ Teacher	ALC
			Japan	1976 to 1980	Evangelist/ Teacher	TALC
Vinge, Rev. Dan			Japan	1951 to 1957	Pastor	ELC
Von Sicard, Rev. Sigvald			Tanzania	1963 to 1970		LCA
			United Kingdom			
Von Sicard, Judith						LCA
Voss, Henry			Papua New Guinea	1946 to 1972	Builder	ALC
Voss, Ruth			Papua New Guinea	1946 to 1972	Nurse	ALC
Weind, Rev. Walter T.			Liberia	1945 to 1953		ULCA
Weind, Delilah	Wilke		Liberia	1945 to 1953		ULCA

Name	Nee		Descriptor Used for Location of Service	Service Dates	Description Used for Service	Sponsor Body
Welen, Joyce			Papua New Guinea	1962 to 1964	Teacher	ALC; ELC
Wepler, Bonnie			Papua New Guinea	1996 to 2008	Teacher	ELCIC; ELCA
Willrich, Rev. Hubert			Uruguay	1984 to 1992	Pastor	LCA; ELCIC
Willrich, Marcy			Uruguay	1984 to 1992		LCA; ELCIC
Wold, David			Pakistan	1974 to 1976	Nurse	WMPL
Ziegler, Jackie	Ulmer		Papua New Guinea	1960 -	Nurse	

Reflection: Missionaries—For the Sake of the Gospel

Gordon A. Jensen

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with a command by Jesus to “make disciples of all nations,” along with the promise: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20). For over 2000 years, this injunction, accompanied by its wonderful promise, has been the basis for missionary work in the church. The missionaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and its predecessor bodies, some of whom are listed in this publication, have had an important hand in this task. You can also check out the www.canadianlutheranhistory.ca website, under “Global Service,” for some of their stories and more information about missionaries and mission work.

The ELCIC and predecessor bodies have a legacy of sending missionaries. After all, it was missionaries, in the form of pastors and chaplains from the United States and Europe, along with the settlers who sought out the services of pastors, who laid the foundations for the ELCIC. Lutheran settlers recognized the great need for pastors and spiritual leaders, but also realized that they were difficult to obtain. In 1860, for example, a father wrote to the Canada Conference of the Pittsburgh Synod requesting a pastor into the Upper Ottawa Valley:

When on Sunday I sit at my window and look out over the waste fields and snow and the grave of my son, I often times imagine I hear the church bells at home, with their friendly tones, calling the congregation together. But alas! A few years since we have been here without hearing a single sermon! None of our children have been confirmed! We have no consecrated God’s acre! Each one buries his dead where it seems best and bewails his sad loss without one word from a minister of the Gospel. How painfully one misses the presence of a pious pastor in circumstances of heavy sorrow ... If we could only occasionally hear a preacher of our faith we should be satisfied.¹

In response to this plea, one of the actions taken at the constituting meeting of the Lutheran Synod in Canada (1861) was to send missionary Ludwig. H. Gerndt to the people struggling in the Upper Ottawa Valley.² Gerndt was a founding father of the Canada Synod and he was an elected Officer (Secretary) of the newly independent organization. He had previously been a missionary in India, serving at an orphanage in Lohardaga.³

The stories of missionaries sent to Canada and sent from Canada ought not to be forgotten. Missionaries have helped to spread the gospel—the story of Christ’s death and resurrection and resulting promise that God wants to give the fullness of life to all, through

faith in Christ—wherever they have been. It is not an easy task, though. Sometimes, spreading the gospel has come at a great personal cost, whether it be illnesses, isolation from family, or even persecution. One can read many stories about the challenges they faced and how their work was received. Because of their commitment, however, the good news of Christ has been proclaimed, and people have tasted what this fullness of life, as God intended it to be, is like. But it has not stopped there. Enlivened by such experiences, people have then shared their experience of liberation and life with others. As a result, countless people throughout the world, through the dedicated work of missionaries and mission organizations, have discovered—or rediscovered!—this God of life and freedom in their own culture and context.

Missionary work, both in Canada and globally, has not been without conflict and controversy. Like all human endeavours which engage the community, even when people who are trying their best to “do what they think is good for everyone,” flaws and even abuses have happened. At these points in time, it is important to remember that not only individuals but organizations and society itself are what Luther called “simultaneously sinners and justified” (*simul iustus et peccator*). This is not in any way an attempt to excuse harmful behaviours or actions perpetrated whenever the gospel was forgotten, but rather a reminder that we should not be surprised that neither churches nor society have, or can have, spotless, unblemished records in their relationships. This is simply the human reality. What is of crucial importance, however, is how individuals and churches deal with the broken relationships and abuses they have committed or encountered in their ministry. For example, many settlers coming to Canada were not invited to settle by their local Indigenous communities, who were not appreciative of these pioneers and settlers cutting down the rare trees, chasing away the once common wildlife, and polluting the local river of life.

It must be recognized that, at times, missionaries in Canada and missionaries to other parts of the world sought to force Indigenous cultures to adopt European ways, cultures, and norms. This is a part of our Canadian history, a history that has, for too long, been silenced. The churches have often been slow to acknowledge that abuses happened in residential schools, even the ones that they managed. The destructive results of colonization have too often accompanied the churches in their work. When these and other abuses are recognized, the churches have a responsibility to repent, and seek a reconciliation that is life-giving and liberating. This is the gospel approach.

Because of the role that missionary agencies played in spreading not just the gospel but also colonizing agendas of Eurocentric nations, the terms “mission” and “missionary” have taken on negative connotations throughout the world. One can see this clearly in the running of residential schools for Indigenous children in Canada. The missions who ran these schools were a part of the colonizing powers. The church, unfortunately, has sometimes confused the proclamation of the life-giving gospel with colonization—imposing their own political and social agendas on other cultures.

Proclaiming the gospel and colonization are vastly different practices, however. Proclaiming and witnessing to the life-giving and liberating gospel does not have anything to do with colonialism. The two have totally different agendas, and thus problems arise when proclamation of the gospel is not distinguished from colonization practices. The first breathes life into communities, while the latter imposes a certain brand of life on the community. The first liberates, the latter enslaves. One reveals and makes possible unlimited possibilities for life as the Creator intended it to be, the other subjugates under laws that

dehumanize people. One treats the neighbours with respect and honour, the other treats the neighbours as objects to be used or even destroyed. Thus, telling people stories about experiencing life in God, which is at the heart of the mission endeavour, has nothing to do with colonialism. The missionaries of the ELCIC have always known that being in mission is about accompanying people as they discover the gospel, as they discover freedom for themselves. This central truth is a part of their “Lutheran DNA.”

The church of today continues to have a responsibility for witnessing to this life-giving gospel by accompanying people as they discover freedom from a colonialism that is even now being imposed by the European cultures. It is not a new challenge, however—it has been an integral part of a missionary’s primary task from the very beginning. Echoing the mission announcement of Jesus in Luke 4:18,⁴ Paul Nostbakken, the former director of World Mission for the ELCIC, reflected this when he stated,

Wherever people are viewed as if they don’t count, we must protest—protest in order to affirm the worth of life in Christ. How can we tolerate the ongoing utter selfishness of oppression, militarism, and political domination which denies the dignity of peace, promotes mass starvation and brutally kills? We must proclaim the good news. We must proclaim the end of oppression. We must proclaim the dignity of life, the dignity of life in Christ. In Christ one is a new creation. In the face of oppression we must proclaim the rule of Christ, the rule of love, and of the recognition of the value of human life.⁵

This is the gospel of which Paul was not ashamed (Rom 1:16). It is also the gospel of which the church, and even society, should not be ashamed, whether it is proclaimed in Canada or throughout the world. The church, other religions, and even society itself ought to be about the task of making it possible for people to experience the freedom and fullness of life in their communities and cultures. This is what it means to be fully human.

For churches, the liberation and fullness of life is the consequence of the gospel message, regardless of who is proclaiming it or working to make it a reality. How can one be ashamed of that which does this? However, whenever the church’s proclamation of this life-giving gospel is contaminated by colonialism, as has admittedly happened far too many times, then it is no longer the gospel. When one culture determines that it is superior to another culture, as happens in colonialism, the gospel of life is silenced. When colonialism takes over from the gospel proclamation, repentance and reconciliation is needed. This is the continual challenge that a church in mission faces. The missional church does not give up the gospel, but it is always challenged not to confuse proclamation of the gospel with imposing a culture. This is the challenge the missionaries of the ELCIC and its predecessor bodies have always faced and, most often, succeeded at.

A church that is truly “in mission for others” is a church that proclaims a gospel that is life giving and liberating, a church that respects the cultures of others and recognizes that God is already present in the culture or society in which they are guests. A church in mission walks respectfully with people so that all involved can discover and experience the life and freedom that comes from God and which helps people discover their humanity in their own contexts, as it was meant to be. This approach to mission is for the sake of the gospel, a gospel that gives and reveals and breathes life, and this is the calling of a missional church. It is a calling to freely proclaim the Spirit of God, trusting God to breathe life and freedom into

communities wherever the gospel is proclaimed. This was also the calling of these many missionaries listed above, wherever they served.

Endnotes

¹ Carl R. Cronmiller, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada* (Toronto: Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada, 1961), 151.

² Cronmiller, *History*, 150–53.

³ Cronmiller, *History*, 152.

⁴ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18, NRSV).

⁵ Paul Nostbakken, “Reflections on a Church in Mission,” *Consensus* 15, no. 1 (1989), 8.

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol15/iss1/2>.