



Students take a break from studying at a Lutheran school in Nigeria.

A CHURCH BODY THAT WOULD TEACH

by **ALBERT B. COLLVER III**
and **TIMOTHY C. J. QUILL**

A brief look at India, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea provides a vignette of the LCMS' early partners.

From her inception, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been a church focused on mission. Few churches were engaged in mission work at the time, leaving such work to mission societies. But in the mid-19th century, the LCMS recognized the central role the church had in missions and stated in her constitution that the extension of the kingdom of God was one of the reasons for the formation of a synod. While the first four decades of the LCMS' mission work focused on Native Americans, European immigrants and African Americans, the Synod had an eye toward foreign mission work, even if she initially lacked the capacity to carry it out.



Women stand outside the IELC's Meycodu Gospel Center near Kaliyakkavilai, India.

In 1893, the Synod in convention resolved to form a foreign mission board and to begin work in Japan. The Sino-Japanese war and other factors delayed the work, but it did not diminish the Synod's desire to work in foreign missions. Out of these mission efforts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the LCMS founded her first partner churches.

India

The LCMS became officially involved in foreign missions when Theodore Naether and Franz Mohn were commissioned as missionaries to India in 1894. They were instructed to go to a part of India where the Gospel had not been heard, rather than going where others already had laid a foundation. Their work began as a combination of witness and mercy, focusing on

orphanages, boarding schools and hospitals—each providing opportunities for the study of Scripture and the preaching of the Word. Within 30 years, a seminary was built to produce Indian pastors.

And today, although less than 3 percent of the people in India are Christians, President Samuel, the leadership of the Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) and the IELC's 125,000 members continue to work diligently to maintain a Lutheran identity and to reach out to the 1.2 billion people of India.



Young men study for the Holy Ministry in Nigeria.

Nigeria

In 1928, a courageous evangelist named Jonathon Udo Ekong left the rain forests of southern Nigeria and traveled to the United States to obtain a theological education. His prayer? To find a church that was willing to send missionaries to his Ibesikpo people, to find "A church body that would teach the Word of God in its purity and also help in establishing good schools for them." The Lord led Ekong to the LCMS, and the church began sending missionaries to Nigeria in 1936.

This bold mission enterprise took place in the midst of the Great Depression and World War II. Despite economic difficulties, dedicated Lutherans sacrificed to support the work of Lutheran mission in Africa. As early as 1925, African-American Lutherans asked the Synod to send missionaries to Africa and then raised \$60,000 to help with the task. For the next 75 years, scores of dedicated missionaries served alongside the faithful pastors, teachers and laypeople of the Lutheran Church in Nigeria to plant congregations, establish a seminary

and build schools, hospitals and medical clinics, and that work continues today under the leadership of Bishop Christian Ekong.



An LCMS delegation visited Papua New Guinea in August 2011.

Papua New Guinea

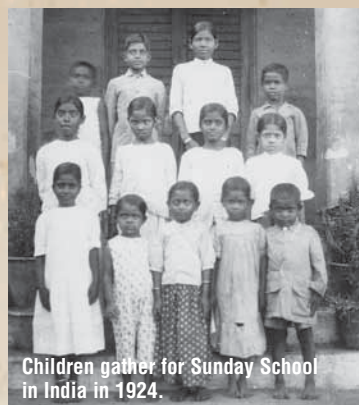
LCMS mission work in Papua New Guinea began in 1948. Missionaries Willard L. Bruce and Otto Hintze and their porters hiked for three days through the central highlands to reach the Enga people, a tribe for whom warfare was a way of life. After nine years of preaching the Gospel of peace, 658 Enga were baptized into Christ on the same day. Today, Archbishop Nicodemus Aiyene leads the Gutnius Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea, which has some 550 congregations, an estimated 54,000 members, 250 pastors and over 500 evangelists.

Sadly, in the 1970s, a disastrous withdrawal of missionaries took place. Few missionaries remain today. The seminary was closed in 2006 but is now reopened and in need of professors. Thus, when an LCMS delegation arrived in Papua New Guinea on Aug. 24, 2011, a large welcome party met them at the airport, setting the tenor of the entire trip by shouting, "The LCMS has returned!"

Witness

These once-fertile mission fields are now our partner churches who work side by side with us in the vineyard, proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and bearing the mercy of Christ into all the world. Pray the Lord of the harvest that He would continue to open doors for the Gospel and empower, by His Holy Spirit, those who hear it to believe it and be saved. 🌸

What Makes a Partner Church?



Children gather for Sunday School in India in 1924.

An LCMS partner church is a Lutheran church body with which the Synod has recognized altar and pulpit fellowship. Today, the LCMS has 33 partner churches with requests for fellowship from several more. Partner churches mutually recognize agreement in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and the Book of Concord. They can share and exchange pastors and other church workers, and members from each church can commune in churches of the other. Although the LCMS has had a connection to some partner churches for more than a century, many LCMS pastors and congregations are largely unaware of who the LCMS' partners are.

From the late 19th century until the middle of the 20th, the LCMS sent missionaries to Brazil, Argentina and to Asia (Japan, South Korea, the Philippines). Along with the churches in India, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, Lutherans in these countries became the first partner churches of the LCMS.



Members are brought into the Gutnius Lutheran Church through Baptism.

➤ **The Rev. Dr. Albert B. Collver III** (albert.collver@lcms.org) is director of church relations—assistant to LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison.

➤ **The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill** (timothy.quill@ctsfw.edu) is the dean of international studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

17
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