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A LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good”
(Ps. 107:1).

We are blessed with the gift of faith through Holy Baptism and the preaching of God’s Word in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions. We give thanks to our Lord for so many blessings, including the opportunity to carry out our Lord’s mission in our respective vocations and with the talents God entrusts to us.

In July 2013, the Synod in convention set before the Office of International Mission (OIM) a challenge to double the number of career LCMS missionaries (Resolution 1-11, “To Recruit and Place More Career Missionaries”). By the Lord’s grace, we project that by September of this year, we will have met and exceeded that bold challenge!

In Jesus’ name, we give thanks for those who have accepted a call or solemn appointment to serve as an LCMS missionary. We give thanks to each person reading this who is committed to

supporting our missionaries through personal prayer, words of spiritual encouragement and through each sacrificial donation offered up for this purpose.

The Lord of the harvest is indeed gracious and merciful, overcoming every doubt with the certainty of His constant and enduring love and providing everything that is truly needed to accomplish His will. He continues to call each of us through His Word to labor for His harvest.

As our international career missionary team grows, He continues to open doors of opportunity and possibility. Lutheran church bodies, including our 36 official partner churches around the world, plead for us to send teachers, pastors, theologians, church planters, medical teams and

other skilled lay workers into their midst.

Now is the moment for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to stand boldly and to vigorously make known the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins through Him alone to the entire world!

God is positioning the LCMS to serve our Lutheran partner churches to help them enhance their own witness and mercy efforts, plant new communities of faith and nurture new partnerships so that every tongue confesses

Jesus Christ as Lord.

By grace, God has strengthened the internal capacity of the OIM for effectively responding to these exciting opportunities, and to do so with even greater efficiency. Twelve full-time employees at the International Center in St. Louis, coupled with the regional administration teams, are

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responding to the 2013 convention’s challenge. Not only is this committed team recruiting more qualified missionaries and sending them into ripe harvest fields, the OIM is ensuring pastoral (spiritual and emotional) care for each missionary by deploying them in teams, under a strategic plan developed around the Synod’s six mission priorities adopted in convention (Res. 3-06A).

On the LCMS Mission Advancement side, four full-time specialists in St. Louis and eight staff members deployed around the county, including Gary Thies at Mission Central in Iowa, are working directly with (and caring for) faithful stewards in the Synod whom God empowers to financially support our missionaries. This team also provides professional assistance to our mission-

aries as they grow personal networks of financial partners. God has even blessed the Synod with dozens of lay volunteers who invest their precious energy in this effort!

Now is the most exciting time for LCMS international mission work in several decades! The current potential for a faithful Lutheran witness about Jesus all over the world is unprecedented. A seismic change is compelling many church bodies to seek out the LCMS because of the very treasure we steward, the Gospel, which they desire to teach in its truth and purity in their seminaries, their congregations and in the streets of their communities.

In East Africa alone, the countries of Ethiopia, Madagascar and Tanzania are home to almost 20 million Lutherans. These joyful Christians heard the Gospel proclaimed by missionaries sent from Europe and America. They are now journeying to speak God's truth in the lands of those first missionaries, including the very birthplace of Lutheranism — Germany. We are being invited to partner with them. In the West African nation of Nigeria, opportunities to work alongside our partner church are opening up. Nigeria is home to more Muslims than those who live in Iraq.

The future strength of faithful Lutheranism is shifting to lands south of the equator and toward Asia. The call and challenge we have been handed is to share the theological treasures we steward with these partners so they are fully equipped to carry the biblical Gospel, as it is taught in the inerrant Scriptures, to all of the world.

Western Europe faces many of the same challenges of secularization we in North America are experiencing, perhaps in an even more intense way. Our partner churches are learning how to confess Christ as a minority in cultures and communities that do not have direct experience with or are indifferent and perhaps even hostile to the Christian church. People have forgotten even the most basic Christian narrative, and biblical literacy cannot be assumed. In some respects, a new Dark Age is descending on Europe.

Despite these daunting challenges, the Gospel is being proclaimed in what is a huge mission field! Our partners in Europe look to the LCMS for encouragement and help as they discover new opportunities to speak boldly and lovingly to their neighbors, especially to immigrant groups. Our mission strategy is intentionally designed to support their outreach efforts, and in some cases the LCMS provides workers to help plant new churches among those whose ears and hearts are open to the truth.

H. Mayer, the mission secretary of the Synod in 1956,

noted a strange paradox about Christian mission work:

“And what shall we say when we look at the heathen world? During the past 40 years about 14 million heathen were baptized. But during that same span of time the heathen population increased by more than twenty times that number. Each year there are more Christians, but each year there are still more heathen. We face the strange paradox: The church grows, and yet it becomes relatively smaller.”

If this was true almost 60 years ago, it is true also today. It is precisely why the LCMS is active in mission in the 21st century — reaching out and proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet heard that Jesus died for their sins. It is why we purposefully nurture the faith of new Christians who hear and believe by gathering them around the Word and Sacraments so they may regularly receive God's good and perfect gifts, a foretaste of the feast to come. It is why we establish Lutheran churches which shall exist into the future as faithful communities sharing the Gospel and themselves prepared to send missionaries.

Each generation of Christians is challenged by the devil, this broken world and our sinful flesh in ways that can hinder the spread of the Gospel. Yet in the midst of obvious challenges, the Lord of the harvest brings to light new, exciting opportunities. He promises hope and a future, and He delivers on every promise. In grace and love, He grants hope to carry on, courage to share the Gospel and an understanding that not even the gates of hell will prevail against His Church.

Thank you in the name of Jesus. Our earnest prayer is that you will continue this journey with us, joyfully carrying His Gospel to the four corners of the earth!

REV. TONY BOOKER, EURASIA REGIONAL DIRECTOR

REV. DR. DAVID ERBER, WEST AFRICA AREA DIRECTOR

REV. THEODORE KREY, LATIN AMERICA REGIONAL DIRECTOR

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