



ILC NEWS

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Lutheran Tsunami Relief Efforts Underway in Southeast Asia

Lutheran Churches from all over the world are continuing to respond to the disaster caused by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami on 26 December that caused massive destruction and loss of life in 12 countries in and around Southeast Asia.

The earthquake, which news agencies called the most powerful in 40 years, occurred in the Indian Ocean about 160 kilometers west of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The epicenter was about 10 kilometers below the surface. A tsunami, or seismic wave, radiated outward in all directions from where the earthquake struck, catching thousands of vacationers and other people in the coastal regions of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and other neighboring nations off guard.

The death toll from this catastrophe continues to escalate. The estimated number of deaths is over 150 000. Many of the survivors have lost everything. Millions are homeless and are at severe risk because of exposure, fatigue and the potential for disease.

All expatriate Lutheran Church Missouri Synode (LCMS), USA, World Mission staff members are safe and unharmed, and have begun the work of responding to needs around them. Sadly, it has to be reported that Rev. Ranjith Fernando, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sri Lanka and chief translator for the U.S. based Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) in Sri Lanka, was killed along with his wife, Darshini, when the train in which they were riding was overwhelmed by one of the giant waves.

An e-mail message from Lutheran Church-Canada (LCC) missionary Pastor Suchart Chujit in Takuapa, Thailand, says that both he and Shahatay Lutheran Church pastor, Suchart Srigagam lost family members in the Tsunami. The massive waves also destroyed a rented building where one of the Lutheran congregations worshiped.

LCMS World Relief and Human Care distributes disaster aid in two ways:

- through LCMS missionaries serving in affected areas and national church partners such as the India Evangelical Lutheran Church or the Lanka Lutheran Church. This method of distribution connects the ministry of mercy (diakonia) with the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

- through Lutheran World Relief (LWR), a Baltimore, Maryland-based inter-Lutheran agency supported by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church. Lutheran World Relief offers humanitarian assistance through a network of qualified disaster response organizations such as Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) and Action by Churches Together (ACT).

Lutheran World Relief announced that it has launched what it calls the "Wave of Giving Campaign" to raise at least US\$5 million in "a long-term rebuilding effort for the countries of South Asia affected by what some people have termed the worst disaster in history," says an LWR news release. It goes on to say that the aim of the campaign is "to rebuild lives, create livelihoods and restore dignity to millions."

The LWR release says that funds raised will provide "elevated disaster shelters," building materials, psychological counseling, disaster preparedness and first aid, and help repair or rebuild health clinics, schools, and community centers.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans announced that it is providing an immediate US\$1 million grant to the "Wave of Giving" campaign, and a US\$2 million matching grant (dollar-for-dollar) for Thrivent-member gifts to the campaign.

Lutheran Church-Canada (LCC) has established a disaster relief fund to assist those in need. Rev. Dr. Leonard Harms, LCC mission executive, says that a distribution system for goods locally purchased is in place. Funds will be used locally to purchase the necessary items.

Members of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany also show a high level of eagerness to help, *selk info* reports. The SELK supports the German relief organization "Diakonie Disaster Help."

In a memorandum to all churches belonging to the International Lutheran Council (ILC), ILC Chairman Dr. Ralph Mayan and ILC Executive Secretary Dr. Samuel Nafzger have encouraged all member churches to join together in a unified effort to provide for the needs of survivors and to offer comfort and assistance to survivors in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches together with their partners in Asia, provide relief assistance by continuing to deliver most needed basic assistance to survivors, many of whom have sought shelter in community centers including church buildings.

Co-ordination of LWF emergency relief in Indonesia is carried out through Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, the Geneva-based global network of churches and related agencies responding to emergencies worldwide.

God is Our Refuge And Our Strength

Editorial by Dr. Ralph Mayan,
Chairman, International Lutheran Council

The entire world was stunned by the images of chaos and destruction left behind in the wake of the Tsunami to hit the coastal regions of the Andaman Sea just after Christmas. In a flash, residents and visitors to the region lost everything: homes and possessions, livelihood, food, family and loved ones. Over 150 000 people lost their lives. The sheer magnitude of the disaster is beyond human comprehension.

Of course questions naturally come; the eternal question, "Why?" The answers we often ponder however sound too much like the simplistic responses given to Job by his three friends. They fail to satisfy and we find ourselves kneeling before our holy and righteous God simply clinging to the grace and mercy revealed in the One who entered our fallen and broken world, because in Him we trust that in this tragedy too the work of God will be displayed.

Tragedies such as this Tsunami forcefully remind us of the frailty of life. We are a fallen people living in a fallen world, a world in bondage to decay. "There will be earthquakes

and famines and pestilences in various places" (Mt. 24:7). We will experience sorrow and sickness, pain and death. How forcefully that message comes through in this tragedy. We therefore feel solidarity with those who have been impacted by the disaster. We mourn with those who mourn; we weep with those who weep. We yearn to help in whatever way we can. We also pause to pray joining with the repentant psalmist of old, who as he experienced trouble humbled himself before the Lord, "Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Oh Lord, how long?

God knows. I don't. But I do know that the end will come. St. Paul speaks of a time when the whole creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay; a time when we, the redeemed children of God, will receive our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8). It is the final step in the salvation plan God enacted after sin entered the world; a plan that centered in the gift of His one and only Son who joined us in this broken world, who experienced the reality of living in this fallen world, yet without sin and who, through His suffering and death and resurrection, overcame the powers of sin, death and the evil one. Yes, that day of liberation will come. Now we wait in hope with faith and trust in Him who has demonstrated His care:

God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.

**Therefore we shall not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the seas;**

though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult....

Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations!

The Lord of Hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge (Psalm 46).

Yes, the day of liberation will come. And as we wait in faith, we give bold witness to that hope opening our hearts, our hands and our voices in service to those who suffer, all those for whom our Savior came.

May God enable our family of member churches to respond generously to the needs of those who suffer. May He give us a heart that is also zealous to share the Good News of Him who is our present help in every trouble, our Savior Jesus Christ.



Venture of Faith to Share the Good News in Adversity Indian Church Aims to Reach 25 Million by 2017

LCMS Harvest News - Vol. 5, No. 1 - In a country nearing a 1.1 billion population, 25 million people may seem like just a "drop in the bucket." But, in fact, it represents a fourth of the total *Ablaze!* global Lutheran mission movement goal of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with 100 million people by 2017. While some scratch their head, pondering how so many can be reached, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) firmly puts its mouth where its faith is - in Jesus Christ, "who is able to do immeasurably more...." Reaching 25 million people with the Gospel is the *Ablaze!* goal to which the IELC has pledged itself.

In 2001, 21 men graduated from Concordia Seminary in Nagercoil, India. The usual practice was to serve a three-year probationary period in a congregation before ordination. However, the seminary faculty offered a new challenge: plant a congregation.

The IELC is the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's (LCMS) oldest partner church, with membership totaling 50 000 in about 400 congregations. However, because only 2.6% of India is Christian, there are thousands of villages throughout the country where no church has ever been planted.

The graduates were given the option to take a regular assignment in an established congregation or go to a new, remote location. Twenty of the 21 men eagerly and courageously accepted the opportunity to devote their first three years of ministry to bringing the Gospel to unreached people.

In 2004, the probation period was completed. Instead of planting one congregation each, God used some men to establish two to four congregations, worshiping 20 to 100 newly baptized believers. Collectively, 39 congregations and preaching stations were planted.

"Even more amazing is that most of this work was carried out in a state that passed an anti-conversion bill in 2003!" says Dr. Herbert Hoefler, LCMS World Mission area director for India and Sri Lanka. "These young evangelists boldly moved forward in the face of daily persecution by Hindu radicals and with the possibility of imprisonment by the government. New Christians also came forward knowing that they and their children would lose government benefits if they departed from Hinduism. It is

truly a work of God's Spirit in the hearts and lives of these people!"

Dr. Monikaraj of the Nagercoil seminary writes, "I am happy to report that by God's grace, this project designed by Dr. Herbert Hoefler works very well in all the places where our probationers work. They are assigned to places where we envision a good harvest."

Now, 18 new probationers will continue this ministry model for the next three years. "As part of our *Ablaze!* initiative," says Hoefler, "the IELC is eager to provide dedicated, self-sacrificing manpower. If we all would let God use us as fully as these young men in India, the goal would be far exceeded, by His grace."

LCMS Districts Take *Ablaze!* Seriously

LCMSNews - No. 88 - Paula Schlueter Ross - How are Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) districts responding to the challenge of LCMS World Mission's *Ablaze!* initiative, that is, to share the Gospel with 100 million people - "unreached for Christ or uncommitted to Christianity" - by 2017?

Synod president Gerald Kieschnick and national mission leaders found out in December last year when they met with presidents and mission executives from 15 LCMS districts in back-to-back sessions in Chicago, Detroit and New York. The meetings were designed to share a vision for *Ablaze!* and to provide opportunities for district mission leaders to discuss outreach strategies and set goals.

In a word, the response from districts to *Ablaze!* has been "terrific," according to Dr. Robert Scudieri, associate executive director of the National Mission Team for LCMS World Mission. Scudieri attended the meetings as part of the national *Ablaze!* team that included president Kieschnick, LCMS World Mission Executive Director Dr. Robert Roegner, and Rev. Michael Ruhl, executive director of the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California. "What was really encouraging was that it was clear to us that the districts have already begun taking this seriously," Scudieri said. "I went in thinking that what we were going to do was inspire them to take some action. What happened was, they inspired us with the action they had already taken."

The *Ablaze!* meetings have been repeated in Dallas and San Francisco in January 2005, and will take place again in Minneapolis and St. Louis in March, in an effort to reach mission leaders in all 35 LCMS districts.

Inter-Lutheran Committee Discusses LCMS Role in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue

LCMSNews - No. 76 - The possibility of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), USA, once again being a full participant in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue was raised 14 October 2004 at a meeting in Chicago of the Committee on Lutheran Co-operation (CLC).

The CLC has six members from each the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), including ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson and LCMS president Gerald Kieschnick.

The issue of LCMS participation arose when Dr. Randall R. Lee, director of the ELCA's Department for Ecumenical Affairs, reported on the recently concluded 10th round of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States. That round released a statement, "The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries."

"I took the opportunity to reiterate our desire to be full participants, not just observers, in the dialogue," said Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger. A member of the CLC, Nafzger is executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR).

The Missouri Synod was a full participant in the dialogue from its beginning in 1965 through to the 9th round but was not included as a full participant in the 10th round. Instead, the Synod was invited only to have an official observer - Dr. Charles Arand of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, USA.

In 1992, ELCA and Roman Catholic officials planned a consultation on future talks for the following year without contacting the Missouri Synod. Then-LCMS president A.L. Barry wrote to officials of the respective church bodies to express his concern over the development.

"We want to be full participants," Nafzger said. "President Barry wrote this, the commission adopted a resolution commending him for it, and president Kieschnick and I have reiterated this."

To the 1995 Synod convention, the CTCR reported, "At its September 1992 meeting the CTCR adopted a statement expressing its disappointment with the action to exclude the LCMS from the discussions of the consultation and declaring its support for Dr. Barry's letter, in which he re-affirmed the longstanding commitment of the LCMS to ecumenical dialogue."

"Just because we have not yet resolved important points of disagreement doesn't mean we don't want to participate in the dialogue," Nafzger said. "We are committed to working toward a resolution of disagreements."

The ELCA's Lee told the CLC that a proposed topic for the next round of talks is "Hope for Eternal Life."

German Bishop Says Unity of Church Already Exists in Baptism

Johannesdotter: Divide Significantly Felt at the Eucharist

LWI - In the context of ecumenical dialogue between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches and the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe, Jürgen Johannesdotter, Bückeburg, Germany says baptism must be seen as the real sacrament of unity.

In an article in *VELKD-Informationen* (newsletter of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany - VELKD), Johannesdotter says baptism had not been an issue in the ecumenical dialogue for a long time. On the Eucharist, he points out that the dispute between the churches was nowhere more visible and tangible than here, which was seen as the sacrament of unity for all intent and purpose. Baptism, on the other hand, was recognized both in the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Church, despite all the other differences in sacramental doctrine. In baptism, the gift of the unity of the churches was already a reality, he stresses.

He calls for confidence building measures, saying churches are not divided by theologies but by mistrust.

Johannesdotter is also concerned about the wrangling over a date for the next ecumenical *Kirchentag* (church convention), five years after the signing of the JDDJ by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Roman Catholic Church. This may lead to the perception "that the impatient yearning for visible progress in ecumenical relations has been succeeded by a backward movement motivated mainly by church politics," he argues. He notes that "a rather sober mood has taken the place of a euphoric sense of a new beginning," creating the possibility of seeing differences and division as a wound which cannot yet heal.

Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belorussia Founded

Sergej Heil First President

selk-news - At a synodical convention in Bobrujsk, Belorussia, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Belorussia (IELCB) was founded on 9 October 2004. At the same time a new church council was elected with pastor Sergei Heil as its president. At present eleven congregations belong to the IELCB.

At a convention in Witebsk in December 2000, some Lutheran congregations had separated from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and other States and founded the Belarussian Evangelical Lutheran Church. In March 2001, Leonid Zwicki was installed as bishop of the newly founded church in Witebsk by the Lithuanian bishop Jonas Kalvanas Jr., assisted by bishop Dr. Diethard Roth of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) of Germany and the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, Aarre Kougappi.

After irregularities in the ministry of the new bishop, he was removed from office in May 2002. With the renewed constitution of the church, a new beginning in the co-operation of the Lutheran congregations in Belorussia is being undertaken.

SELK Visits Lutheran Church in Lithuania

selk-news - A delegation of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, lead by its bishop Dr. D. Roth, has recently returned the visit of representatives of the Consistory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania (ELCL) in the spring of 2004.

During the meeting in Vilnius with bishop Mindaugas Sabutis, Rev. Dr. Darius Petkunas, Rev. Saulius Juozaitis, and Mrs. Milita Poskiene, it became evident how strong the common ground of both churches is by being bound to the infallible Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions.

The members of the ELCL Consistory and the SELK church council expressed their wish to deepen the mutual relationship. Youth and charity work, meetings of the church council and Consistory, and special projects as for instance

the new hymn book of the ELCL, were named as possible areas of an intensified relationship.

The ELCL has about 22 000 members, served in 53 parishes by 20 pastors.

50th Synod of the ELCE

England's Lutherans Celebrate Jubilee

selk-news - Six young bakers from Germany started it all. In 1895/96 they wrote a letter to St. Louis, USA, and asked the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) for a faithful Lutheran pastor. When he arrived and was installed, the first congregation of today's Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) came into existence - Luther-Tyndale in Kentish Town, London.

In a glance back, former chairman Rev. Arnold E. Rakow at last years synodical convention in Beck Row, Suffolk, near Cambridge, presented many interesting aspects of the history of the ELCE. Each of those young bakers for instance gave one sixth of their salary, so that their pastor would have the same income as they had.

Although founded by Germans, the first Lutheran congregations in England nevertheless sought contact with the LCMS, especially because of the English language. Still many of the ELCE's pastors come from the worldwide anglophone area, the USA, Canada, and Australia. There is even a pastor from Brazil, but no one from Germany.

In 1954 the ELCE decided to become independent. Since then it is an autonomous church body and maintains an own study seminary with Westfield House in Cambridge, which co-operates closely with the local University. At present 17 young men study there, some of them from as far away as the USA, Canada, Brazil, Finland, Sudan and Australia.

The convention of the ELCE on 15 and 16 October 2004 was held under the topic "50 Years of the Lord's Favour - Forward in Faith." God's blessings were indeed visible at the synod: 14 congregations were represented by their pastors and delegates. And it was a meeting in apparent concord and gratefulness.

Besides the regular business, the future way of the church was envisaged. In his report, re-elected chairman Rev. Reginald Quirk pointed at the many possibilities and tasks of proclaiming the gospel. Like the ELCE was determined to expand when it was established 50 years ago, it has to look forward in confidence and hope to the Lord today.

LCP Elects New President

The Rev. James D. Cerdenola has been elected president of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) in October 2004. He succeeds Dr. Eduardo C. Ladlad in this office.

Until his election, Cerdenola was pastor of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in the northern part of the Philippines. As president of the LCP he will move to Manila with his family.

In a congratulatory letter, the executive secretary of the International Lutheran Council, Dr. S. Nafzger encouraged president J. Cerdenola to provide leadership in this very important position to the LCP.

LCSA Re-Elects Bishop David Tswaedi

The 13th General Synod of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA), which took place in Newcastle from 30 November to 2 December 2004, has re-elected Dr. David P. Tswaedi to a third five-year term as bishop.

Among many other issues the synod dealt with the endorsement of a three year HIV/Aids comprehensive plan, the registration of the theological seminary with the government as an independent entity, and the implementation of the *Ablaze!* initiative.

Website with French Radio Program

A website offering the French radio program "Lumière sur le Chemin" on the internet went online 21 December 2004, just in time to share the 2004 Christmas edition of the program.

The 15-minute, weekly program is produced by France's *l'Heure Luthérienne* (Lutheran Hour) and broadcast on various radio stations. Audio cassette copies of the programs are also shared by individuals in various countries. Now francophones around the world, who have internet access, can listen to the program for the week. A small archive of previous programs is also available.

When Rev. David Somers, Montreal, Canada, invited the Lutheran Laymen's League of Canada to establish a website to distribute these programs it quickly became an international project. The program is produced in France and then sent to Canada where it is converted into the mp3 format and uploaded to

a website designed and maintained by Pam McCutchen of the Lutheran Hour Ministries staff in St. Louis, USA.

People who listen to the program are given the option of sending an e-mail response. These responses will be forwarded to the francophone Lutheran Church that is closest to them.

Links to additional francophone resources including print materials and churches are also available on the following websites: <http://www.lumieresurlechemin.ca> and www.mediachrist.com.

Special National Recognition for Lutheran Work in Korea

Asia Lutheran News - A committee of Korean Protestant churches in Seoul, has selected two ministries affiliated with the Lutheran Church in Korea and one Lutheran pastor for special recognition in connection with plans to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the "Great Revival Movement" which began in 1907. The Korea Bethel Series, a Bible study program, and the Korea Lutheran Hour mass communications ministry are cited in the category of most significant church programs.

Rev. Dr Won-Sang Ji (1927-1998), who served as the first president of the Lutheran Church in Korea is being honored posthumously as one of the most influential Korean church leaders.

Task Force Completes Guidelines on Women's Service

LCMSNews - No. 89 - Guidelines have been sent out in early January to help congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), USA, implement a 2004 Synod convention resolution that permits women to hold any congregational office that does not involve the exercise of distinctive functions of the pastoral office.

The guidelines, prepared by a special task force, will be included as an appendix to a 1994 report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) that is being published now in booklet form for the first time. The conclusions of that report, "The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices," were affirmed by the convention.

CTCR Executive Director Samuel H. Nafzger said that the commission agreed to include the guidelines with its report at the request of Synod president Gerald Kieschnick. Nafzger also chaired the five-member task force, which Kieschnick appointed after the convention.

Nafzger said the guidelines simply pull together what the Synod already has said about the service of women.

Talks on Future Links Between German Protestant Bodies Agreements to Reinforce Member Churches' Co-operation

LWI – There is significant progress in negotiations that have been going on for about two years, on strengthening co-operation between member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

In parallel press releases, the EKD and United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) reported that the three negotiation commissions that worked on the draft agreements that would establish the future links between the EKD, Union of Evangelical Churches in the EKD (UEK) and VELKD, worked in a process marked by a spirit of mutual harmony.

The reforms focus on achieving as much common ground as possible, allowing for only the necessary differentiation. The plan is to share resources, promote communication and strengthen common policy making. It is also proposed that the EKD Hannover-Herrenhausen office functions on behalf of the member churches' associations, and accommodate the UEK and VELKD offices. Members of the VELKD General Synod are also to represent their churches in the EKD Synod. It is expected that church institutions, agencies, committees, commissions and boards would be used jointly, as far as possible, ensuring co-ordination and co-operation, while possibilities for merger would be examined.

Bishop Dr. Christoph Kaehler, Thuringia, Germany, vice-chairperson of the EKD Council, described the agreements' conclusion as proof of the strong co-operation among the Protestant churches in Germany, saying this would raise their profile and presence. VELKD Presiding Bishop Dr. Hans Christian Knuth, Schleswig, Germany, stressed that VELKD's autonomy as a church would be retained in the new system

as well as the commitment to its confessional basis. The VELKD would autonomously also continue to develop its ecumenical relations. Bishop Ulrich Fischer, Baden, Germany, chairperson of the UEK general conference, welcomed the spirit of the negotiations as it highlighted common ground and pointed to strengthening the EKD, which was a major aim of the UEK.

The draft agreements will now be forwarded to church governing bodies and synods for consideration. The intention is to present the prerequisite constitutional amendments to the respective legislative bodies for action in 2005. According to the press statement, the new provisions are expected to be effective at the latest on 1 January 2007.

The EKD has 23 Lutheran, Reformed and United churches with over 26 million members. While the respective activities are structured federally at all levels, the EKD is mandated to deal with shared concerns. Its democratically constituted and elected bodies include the Synod, Council and Church Conference. The Church Office co-ordinates the business of the three governing bodies.

The VELKD is a union of eight German Lutheran churches in Bavaria, Brunswick, Hanover, Mecklenburg, North Elbe, Saxony, Schaumburg-Lippe and Thuringia, representing around 10.4 million members.

The UEK comprises of the 13 member churches of the Arnoldshain Conference and Evangelical Church of the Union, with the objective of promoting EKD's unity.

Russia: ELCROS Regains Unrestricted Use of St. Anne's Church

LWI - A Moscow agency that manages federal property has handed back St. Anne's Evangelical Lutheran Church for unrestricted free of charge use to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS). The ELCROS is still hoping to regain ownership of the church built in 1735 by the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia.

Nationalized by the then communist government in 1935, St. Anne's was used as a cinema until summer 2001, when the building was converted into a bar and nightclub in spite of protests by ELCROS Archbishop D. Georg Kretschmar. After many years of wrangling, the authorities confirmed in 2002 that the building would be returned to the Lutheran church. Shortly after an eviction order against the

nightclub managers was issued, St. Anne's Church went up in flames for unknown reasons in the early hours of 6 December 2002, and was completely destroyed. The ELCROS has started securing the remaining structure; the roof destroyed by the fire also needed replacing.

"There in Heaven I Will Dance!"

100th Birthday of a Faithful Christian

selk-news - Together with his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, Friedrich Paul celebrated his 100th birthday in the locality of the St. Mary's Congregation of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, in Berlin-Zehlendorf, on 29 December 2004.

Friedrich Paul was born on 29 December 1904 in the Anton village near Saratov on the Wolga in Russia. After the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, he was transported to Siberia with his family in 1941 and finally ended up in Oktjabrskij in Baschkirien in November 1946, where he and his wife and their five children initially had to dwell in dug-outs.

As there were no more Lutheran pastors after the war, Paul soon got busy secretly starting a congregation in the town, which at first met in private houses before he was able to carry through with building a Lutheran Prayer House.

At the birthday celebration a former member of the congregation from Oktjabrskij described in touching words, how many children were baptized and instructed in the Christian faith by Friedrich Paul as leader of the congregation over decades, how he cared with deep involvement for the youth, preached in the meetings, cared for the aged and sick and conducted the funerals.

With that he very often came in conflict with the local communist party. Again and again he was arrested and maltreated. But the authorities did not succeed in breaking Paul's will. On one occasion all Bibles and prayer books were taken away from the congregation by the local authorities, but Friedrich Paul only replied calmly: "You can take away our books, but what we have in our hearts, you cannot take away." Three month later the authorities returned the books and even apologized!

In October 1995, Paul emigrated with four of his five children to Germany, after his wife had died eight years before. In Berlin he is now cared for by his grand-daughter Irina, which

together with her mother and two sons are active members of the St. Mary's congregation. She and her sons have been baptized by her grandfather in Russia.

Friedrich Paul enjoys remarkable health and undertakes long walks. But his daily main occupation is the Holy Scripture, which he studies with great intensity. He also attentively watches the developments in the churches.

He opened the birthday celebration with a short sermon on Micah 6 v. 8, in which he informed the guests also about his plans for the future: "Here, on earth I have not danced, but there, in heaven, I will dance!"

Did You Know?

The top four languages spoken in the world today are Chinese, English, Spanish, and Hindi-Urdu.

In the world today there are more than 6 billion people and approximately 60% do not have the Scriptures in their native language.

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