

WHERE HE LEADS...

FOREIGN MISSION OF THE APOSTOLIC LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA

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Church Life in Nigeria Continues to Thrive

BY PASTOR BOB MAKI

Carl Aho, Pastor Frank Famiyeh, from Ghana, and I were privileged to be invited to attend the 51st annual convention of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of Nigeria (ALCN). Fifty one years ago Rev Andrew Mickelson was called by the church in the Uyo region of south central Nigeria to bring the Gospel and Christian teachings to the brethren in the Lutheran churches which had left the Missouri Synod. Rev Mickelson, through much difficulty in funding and travel, was able to go to these beautiful, loving people. Rev Mickelson made several trips to preach and teach in Nigeria and was led to ask his daughter Naomi and husband Philip Johnson, along with their family, to serve in Nigeria as the first missionaries for the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA). Philip died in an auto accident as the family was leaving Nigeria because of the war there. Naomi and the family returned to the USA.

Pastor Elmer and Miriam Yliniemi were then asked by the ALCA to serve in Nigeria. Pastor Yliniemi suffered an illness and almost died, but the Lord led them to teach and train many. They lived in the mission house built by the Johnsons, which would later be used as a church school. Both the Johnson and Yliniemi families served a little over a year in Nigeria. However, God did not abandon those precious Nigerian souls.

After 30 years, the Lord moved the Foreign Mission Board to send missionaries back to Nigeria to see if the work of the early missionaries had borne fruit. I had been chosen

to go and when a Pastor chosen as my traveling partner was unable to make the trip, Pastor James Johnson volunteered to go to Nigeria where his brother Philip had given his life for the Gospel. When we arrived in Nigeria, the Lord moved mightily through the preaching of the Gospel message and sin and differences from the past were covered with the blood of Christ. A relationship in Christ was again established between the ALCN and the ALCA, which has continued to grow. Pastor Johnson rejoiced that the sacrifice made and the diligent planting of the seed of God's Word by Philip and Naomi Johnson and Elmer and Miriam Yliniemi had not been in vain.

The last time the Foreign Mission sent missionaries to Nigeria was eight years ago. The Nigerian brethren were not willing that we would suffer the violence and terrorism that was happening in their country and insisted that we not come until it subsided. In 2015, the Foreign Mission sent Pastor Frank Famiyeh to attend the ALCN convention which is always held at the end of the second week in December. Pastor Famiyeh had received his Bachelor degree in theology from the Lutheran seminary in Uyo and he was well known and loved in the church there. When they saw him in their midst, they were very surprised and filled with joy.

Last summer, while I was in Ghana, the president of the ALCN telephoned



ALCN youth walking to invite people to attend services and to pass out gospel tracts.

me and invited us to attend the convention in 2016. When we arrived there on this trip, we were literally received with open arms. They turned over the pulpit to us for the convention and the Spirit opened the Word and reached the hearts of the hearers. During the convention, choirs from many parishes, beautifully and with much inspiration, echoed the songs and hymns of Zion. Two seminars were held during the convention. The first given by the National Church President, Elder Ime Isaac Udofia, was on "True Leadership in our Church." The second was presented by Evangelist Aniedi

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From the Foreign Mission Administrator Desk

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BY JOHN RUOTSALA



The Apostolic Lutheran Church in Nairobi, Kenya.



One person from each tribe and country that were represented at the convention in Kenya.

Upcoming Trips:

Haiti (TBA)

West Africa (February 19- March 7)

Guatemala (March - This trip is full)

Russia (August)

We welcome additional people to join board members on most trips. Note: Please act quickly if you are interested in participating in the Russia trip. Visas take time to obtain and planning for this trip needs to proceed! Youth are especially welcomed on the trip to Russia, as it will take place during the summer school vacation months.

Reminders:

- The mission of the Foreign Mission (FM) remains: Endeavoring to be obedient to our Lord when He said: Go ye into all the World and preach the Gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15)
- The FM Administrator keeps a 'Top 5' list for people who desire to support the

humanitarian and physical needs abroad. It is a huge blessing when needs can be met, even if they are only a few of the so many that come before us! All general funds received are used for preaching, so funds are only distributed to other needs when specifically requested by the donor.

- Would you like bookmarks for all of your Sunday School children? They have pictures from different countries that your children could pray for. They also have all the books of the Bible listed in order. I will be most happy to send you one for each student, plus extra for your congregation members!
- Are you a home school mother? We are happy to help you by sharing about people and cultures from around the world!



A young boy retells the story of Jonah after a lesson during the Kenyan convention.

- Remember, we can supply you with the digital file for a wall map of the FM work around the world to hang in your church!
- Information is available for your church's annual meeting. Just email!

Special Thanks!

I want to give a personal thank you, as well as a thank you on behalf of the entire Foreign Mission Board, to **Alvar Helmes**. He has so faithfully served in many capacities in Foreign Mission work over the years. We have now accepted his resignation as co-editor of this newsletter. He has worked so hard and shared so selflessly over the

years. I know that Alvar desires all Glory and Honor go to God. We are so thankful to God for allowing us to know and work with him for these many years. See page 4 for some history of Alvar's efforts with the Foreign Mission and other mission work. May God grant you many restful and peaceful days ahead, Alvar!

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Ekpo and it was on "Kingdom Power." Responses to these seminars were welcomed by those attending and the Lord led me to write down verses of scripture that came to my mind as I was listening. When the time came to respond, I shared those scriptures.

On Saturday, a huge group from the church gathered in an area they call "The Convention Grounds," and a large group of the Church youth, with Carl Aho and ALCN leaders in front of the procession, walked down the edge of one of their main roads in a very organized manner to spread the news in that region that the saints of the ALCN were bringing the message of the Gospel to all people and were inviting all to come. Many from the church were on the road directing traffic to insure the safety of all involved. That evening the Church President asked Carl to deliver the sermon because he had spent a lot of time with the youth and because so many youth were there at the convention.

On Sunday morning, two brothers were ordained into the ministry and many in the ministry were moved to different levels of leadership within the church organization. I was asked to bless them and pray over them. I delivered the Sunday morning message and it was translated. English is spoken



Students reciting at the ALCN Primary School.

by just about everyone but because of the difficulty of accents, it was decided to translate into their native language. After the service, communion was served to over 700 attendees.

On Tuesday we were invited to attend a program specially performed for us at the ALCN kindergarten to fifth grade primary school. There are about 60 students and 8 teachers in this school. In the past, there were many more students but the numbers have dwindled because of economic recession, other churches starting schools and the very bad facilities at this school. The continued use of the former mission house was totally inadequate

and even unsafe. A new concrete brick building has been constructed and is being used. Even though none of the windows or doors or other finishes are there, it is far superior to what they had. They have been praying for the Lord to provide. At the program, we sat there in total awe with our mouths open with what we heard and saw. A nine year old boy spoke to us of how the Bible is divided into varying parts from the first five books of Moses to the prophetic book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ and about all between. He listed every book of scripture included in the Old and New Testaments. He spoke totally from memory for over ten minutes and did not stumble once. These young ones are being highly trained to be able to go forth equipped with God's Word to bring the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in Nigeria, other parts of the world and maybe even to the United States.

We found the Central Board and the leadership to be very highly organized. We can learn so much from them and they from us. That is how the body of Christ, the world wide church, is made up; where all the God-given gifts can be utilized so the church moves forward in union with Christ, with one purpose: to bring the reconciling Word to the whole world. May God continue to bless us to that end.



Head Teacher (far right) with the other ALCN Primary School teachers.

Alvar Helmes Retires from Co-Editor Position

BY LIISA SEPPANEN

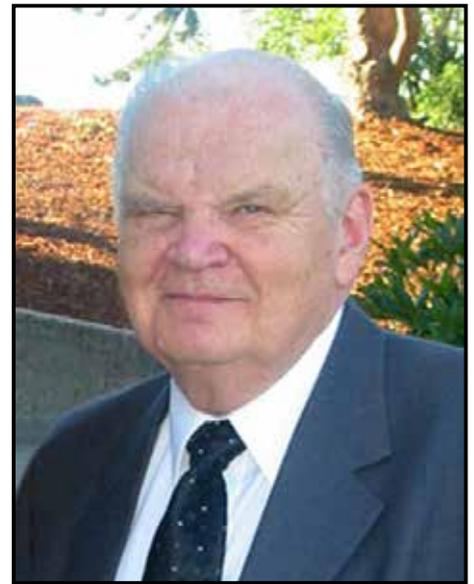
Earning a "D" in English in high school is not a promising start to a career in publications. God had plans for Alvar, though, and led him in his secular career as a technical writer as well as in God's work through religious publications. He first became involved in religious publications in 1975 when he became the editor of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America (ALCA) Christian Monthly periodical, a position that he held for 20 years. He later assumed the additional position of Manager of the Book Concern and held both of these positions until 1995.

During this time Alvar participated in his first mission trip, a weekend trip from Finland to Latvia in 1990. Latvia was about to come out from under the domination of the USSR at this time, and Christian literature and teachings were limited. The Latvian people had asked for Sunday school material and Alvar brought a suitcase full. He remembers that the Latvian Sunday School Superintendent cried when she saw the material. The kindergarten material that was brought was translated and copied for use by the time they left two days later.

Their hunger for the Word left an imprint on Alvar. In addition to Latvia, he has made a trip to Russia and three trips to India. In India, he and his family helped Dr. K. Syam Kumar start a Free Medical Clinic in 1998 and then a 70-bed Mission Hospital in the year 2000. The work then expanded to the spreading of the Gospel and the planting of churches by Dr. Kumar and his staff of pastors, educating illiterate children in the villages and

tribal areas, and digging bore wells to provide clean drinking water. The work in India is done with support from people in Finland, led by Ann-Mari Maenpaa of Helsinki.

In 1999, the ALCA formed a Foreign Mission Board, and Alvar was elected Chairman. That same year he published the first issue of this newsletter, *Where He Leads*. The goal of this newsletter has been to inform people about the mission work that is occurring and encourage people to contribute to this work. The first issue covered the ALCA churches in Nigeria and Guatemala, the Apostolic Life Ministries and Free Medical Clinic in India, and a mission trip to Benin, W. Africa. It was printed in black on white with a blue color highlighting certain text. It later grew from four



Alvar Helmes

pages to eight and became printed in full color as the foreign mission work increased. The current circulation is 1500 copies and is sent to people in the USA and 13 foreign countries.

Alvar held the Foreign Mission Board Chairman position until 2007, but continued to help edit *Where He Leads* until now. While the staff of this newsletter will miss his 'eagle eye,' his attention to the details that made the newsletter more professional, and his heart for the Lords' work. We are thankful to know that he will be continuing to support mission efforts. He is still involved in supporting the Mission Hospital in India and their work with orphans and abandoned children. We wish Alvar well as he continues with his work.



The first issue of *Where He Leads* was edited by Alvar in 1999.

Free in Christ

BY JEREMY SYRJANEN

Three days before I was to leave to Kenya for my first mission trip, I found myself in the home of a woman from India. This woman attends the same church as I do in Minnesota, and also rides the same bus to work as I do. She comes from a strong Christian background; definitely rare for someone from India. She had invited me over to spend the evening with her family and friends because her cousin, who is a missionary in India, was visiting and leading a Bible study that night. It was a great evening of Christian fellowship as her cousin spoke of what the Lord is doing in Northern India and we studied Psalm 91.

While these times of fellowship among believers are needed and refreshing, we are also called to “Go” (Mark 16:15) and walk among this world that is in bondage. There is an abundance of hurt and sin in the world. No one is immune. The great news is that there is an answer. Jesus Christ has lifted our chains and He wants to lift the chains of those still walking apart from Him. One of my favorite moments while in Kenya, and there were many, illustrated this point.

At the beginning of our second full day, at a large gathering near Kakamega, our first stop on the trip, we had the opportunity to perform a skit before the



When buildings don't fit the large attendance, services are held outdoors.



Listening intently.

morning church service. There were no words to this skit. Only actions played out accompanied by music. The song, “No Longer Slaves”, fit the story perfectly.

What was portrayed was someone walking with Jesus, but then slowly stepping away from Him as the things of this world began to entice. One by one people stepped in and encouraged her to live different sins. Throughout this, her eyes met Jesus and the pain of the chains she was now bearing was evident, but she wasn't ready to repent. The tension grew as those that had aided in her going astray pushed her until she was on the ground. Even then, they would not relent. It was at this point, as the lyrics, “You split the sea so I could walk right through”, played, that Jesus stepped in, and in one motion, cleared away those that had pushed her to the ground. This allowed her to repent and walk again with Jesus.

This was indeed a powerful moment, partly because the audience was very engrossed in the story unfolding before them, but more importantly, because of the truth that the skit shows. Immediately after

the skit, John 8:36 was read: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”. By the grace of Jesus, we are no longer slaves, we are free in Christ. Although this skit was aimed at those that are not yet free, we that are free, both here and in Kenya, can take instruction from it. We still face trials and temptations in this life but we can continue to look to Him and say, “He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” (Psalm 91:2).

My experience with believers before going to Kenya revealed to me the need to be rejuvenated by fellowship with Christians. My experience in Kenya confirmed this, but also showed me the need to obey the command to “Go” into this world and walk as lights that demonstrate freedom in Christ, whether on the other side of the world or living as Christ's ambassadors right where we are.

Thank you to the people who faithfully prayed for us while we were in Kenya. Please join me in praying that we can all keep our focus on Jesus, that He used our time in Kenya to sow His seeds, and that the Kenyan believers would be given strength to continue to spread seeds as well. However, it is God who will reap the harvest at the proper time and it is Jesus who will “split the sea” so people can “walk right through” to Him.

Culture Shock or Opportunity

A journey from shock to long-lasting, life-changing commitment

BY ALVAR HELMES

A simple definition of culture shock from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is: A feeling of confusion, doubt, or nervousness caused by being in a place (such as a foreign country), that is very different from what you are used to. When first going to a third world country or to a country that has extreme poverty, a person is first confronted by this culture shock. Coming from a rich Western country it is hard to fathom the extreme poverty, illnesses, and destitute conditions of so many of the people. Thus, time is spent on your first trip in absorbing and pondering on the conditions in which the poor people are forced to live.

My first foreign mission trip to India was in 1998 when I went as an observer on an ALCA preaching and fact-finding mission trip. This was followed by two more trips later. India is a dichotomy of people in terms of the classes of people. Eighty percent of the people would be considered very poor by our standards, but there are also the very wealthy and highly educated people. Of the top doctors in the world, it is said that 10 percent of them are from India. Also, the people are very good at computer programming, and many of them work for Western computer and software companies. Thus, you will find a great financial chasm between the rich and poor.

I still remember much of my first trip to India – families living in pup tents, people wandering the streets as they have no work or food, the numerous beggars, the Hindu temples and shrines on the city streets and alongside the roads in the countryside. The list could go on and on. We visited a slum area where the sewer was a ditch in front of the shacks in which they lived. The slum was alongside a polluted river, from which they get their drinking water. The river is also used for bathing and laundry duties, and the shoreline is often used by the people for toilet duties. Of course, many people get sick from drinking the water from the river and suffer with gastrointestinal diseases. This is typical of most or all of the rivers in India.

But like every foreign mission trip, in spite of the culture shock, there is the “opportunity” to be of service, both spiritually and in a secular manner. The secular opportunities in the medical field are endless, and fully 80 to 85% of the conversions to Christianity in the areas we work in are due to the medical care provided for the population at the Mission Hospital and at Medical Camps conducted in the poor and destitute villages. One women patient at a Medical Camp asked me: “Why do you come here and help us with our medical problems?” meaning that being from another country we

did not have an obligation to do so. The answer given to her through translation was that the love of God that has been instilled in our hearts is being shown through our efforts. In this manner the people are thereby encouraged to seek more about the God that we serve, and the Gospel is thus introduced to them.

On the last day of our first trip, Dr. Syam Kumar approached me about starting a “free” medical clinic for the poor and destitute people. He

was a doctor in a Government Hospital but had a passion to serve the poor and destitute. Health service is unavailable to most of these people as they don't have the money for visits to a doctor, or the money to pay for needed medicine. Funds were found for opening the Free Medical Clinic, and the clinic was opened in May 1998 in the city of Tuni.

After a year, a Mission Hospital was built in Rajahmundry, which has a much larger population than Tuni. The hospital is 3 stories and has 70 beds in wards. As of today, about 2 million people have made use of the services of the hospital. Some of the most common conditions treated are TB, malaria, and typhoid/respiratory diseases. The backlog for surgeries is more than 1000.

However, because of economic considerations here in America at the time, the work of the Mission Hospital had to be curtailed because of the lack of funds for replacement of expensive equipment and the inability to stock medicines in the quantities needed. But an “opportunity” opened up for using some of the hospital space for caring for orphans and abandoned homeless children. In the Indian cities there are thousands of “street children.” Most of them are orphans or come from dysfunctional families where the parents no longer want to take care of them. Thus, the hospital was opened up to 160 of these children. At the hospital, the children (both boys and girls) are given two meals a day (they sleep on the floor). But more importantly, they are given a Christian education by our pastors and a secular education in the public schools. If these children were left on the streets, the girls could have been kidnapped, raped, and forced into sex trafficking; many of the boys most likely would have been led into a life of crime.

Perhaps there are readers of this newsletter who would like to get involved in a special need that you (and possibly friends) would like to support. The spiritual and secular needs are great in all of the countries in which we are working.



Dr. Kumar gives food to orphans.

Peace in the Storm

BY JENIKA LAUKKA



A peaceful moment of reflection at the end of a long day.

Traveling from St. John's Children's Home in "the bush" back to Kiisi, Kenya, Jenika Laukka recalls how mission trips, although they can be rewarding, also cause people to become weary. Perhaps all of life is much like that travel from "the bush" to Kiisi.

The rain was slapping the windows of the Toyota van as it tumbled over the rocky roads. Inside the van, the passengers were quiet. There was some tension in the air as their bodies jerked for the 100th time in the last mile. "When were they going to reach their destination?" The question lingered between them, unspoken. The reflection of headlights flashed over them through the misty windows. Motor bikes and people skirted around them with agility and left them lumbering in the mud. In the dark shadows, luggage rocked with them.

"We're lost." The words reached their ears and shoulders slumped. The weight of the day was heavy and these passengers were far from home. Hungry, tired, and sunburnt, they struggled to trust their leader. Just when it was becoming unbearable, a voice spoke from the back.

"We should sing a song," a girl murmured, unsure if the others would agree. Receiving no opposition, she picked a familiar tune.

"Precious Lord, take my hand," The others joined in, "Lead me on, help me stand. I am tired,

I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home. When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near; when my life is almost gone, hear my cry hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home." Smiles illuminated the dark as peace settled in their hearts.

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3:15-17)

When God calls us, it isn't always to comfortable places. The walk we're on in this life can become dark and stormy. Sometimes, we will turn our eyes downward and lose sight of our Heavenly Father's hand. Do not become discouraged. Reach out to Jesus. Wherever you find yourself in this world, He is there. "Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through!"

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- Specially Earmarked Funds such as:
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 - Church Building Fund
 - Bicycles for poor pastors (\$85)
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 - Mission Hospital in India
- Other Funding Ideas:
 - Memorial Funds
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 - Top five current specific needs list (available by emailing: foreignmission@comcast.net)

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On check, write: Apostolic Lutheran Church Foreign Mission. Donations can be earmarked to support any of the areas identified.

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Learning among the cows.

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Greetings from India

BY DR. K. SYAM KUMAR

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to our brothers and sisters in faith in America. God is using us to preach and reach many youth leaders and many in the Evangelical Lutheran Churches through English services. This is one of the two churches where I speak regularly every Sunday in English. Thanks to God that we are being used in His mighty hands to serve Him and touch many souls with prayers and encouragement.

