Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Cooperation in Cambodia

The Mekong Region Mission Partners’ Consultation (MMPC) was launched in the year 2000. Partners, which include LWF member churches and mission agencies from Asia and the west, gathered in Bangkok with a three-fold purpose and objective — to gather information about mission activities, to discuss and to consider the possibilities of joint-mission activities, and to consider ways for better coordination of mission activities in the Mekong region.

In celebrating the 10th anniversary of MMPC this year, the Mekong Partners of the MMF-CC are joining hands to establish eventually ONE local Lutheran church in Cambodia with a holistic approach.

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Mission Forum (the action arm of MMPC) met at Tao Fung Shan Hong Kong from April 29-30 2010, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Lutheran Cooperation in Cambodia was signed by five partners to form the Mekong Mission Forum Cambodia Cooperation (MMF-CC):

- The Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong Synod (CRCHKS)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Mission One World)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong (ELCHK)
- Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and
- Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS)

Partners of the MMF-CC are joining hands to establish eventually ONE local Lutheran church in Cambodia with a holistic approach -- the establishment of Christian ministry and diaconal work, incorporating education, health services, livelihood projects and other community-based activities, the establishment of Christian institutions and development of other potential ministries.

MMF-CC does not intend the work in Cambodia to be a hierarchical superstructure. Every member can continue in their distinctive and independent projects, or they can cooperate with other partners to expand and strengthen existing projects in the country. Partners are to assist and cooperate with one other because of the same mission and ministries goals for the Cambodian people and toward the establishment of a Cambodian Lutheran church in the future.

Currently, two projects cooperation are in progress. In Kampong Chnang province, LCS has an outreach programme going on and had also initiated some medical, health care programmes in cooperation with the local authorities. The ELCHK has also established an education and evangelical work in Phnom Penh for the city people. Other partners are supporting and joining in these mission projects to further develop and strengthen these works.

Membership of the MMF-CC is open for other interested Lutheran churches and mission agencies (as already indicated by several) to work together in mission and development programmes/projects for the common good of the local people.

Leon Chau
Executive Secretary, CRCHKS
Chinese Rhenish Church, Hong Kong Synod Ordains Its First Woman

After a relatively long period of deliberation, discussion at different levels, and going through the necessary procedural approval, the Chinese Rhenish Church, Hong Kong Synod (CRCHKS) is now happy to announce May 30, 2010 as the day CRCHKS will ordain its first woman – Ms Siu-ling Ho – a church deaconess who had served in one of the congregations since her graduation from seminary in 1994.

Since missionary days over a century ago, all pastors working with the Chinese Rhenish Church, Hong Kong Synod (CRC HK Synod) have been men, working harmoniously with other church workers and teachers that make up of both men and women. As time passes and with the changes in society, especially when there are more educated/capable women in our churches and with the emphasis on gender equality in church ministry, there is an ever increasing expectation for women to minister as pastors in the congregations.

Though there are still some controversies among different theologians about the ordination of women, the recent consensus from the clergy and church leadership of the CRC HK Synod was in favour to remove the prejudices against women in regard to positions in ministry. Besides, the experiences from other churches in Hong Kong with woman pastors are mostly positive.

Nevertheless, there could still be some misunderstanding and queries among some church members on this issue. Therefore, more explanations are necessary to prepare their hearts.

There is also the need to follow proper procedures stipulated by the Synod regulations, first by making an amendment to the constitution at the General Assembly, followed by the passing of the motion for woman pastors.

Currently, it is a governing principle of the CRC HK Synod that there should be no discrimination against gender for promotion or ordination as a church worker to a pastoral position. The ordination criteria will be based on the in-depth understanding of the Christian Faith (including significance of the Lutheran theology and the structure and traditions of the CRC), performance in church ministry and/or the Synod, besides other recognised merits.

After ordination, Ms Siu-ling Ho’s responsibilities will focus on pastoral work in caring for members and preaching the Gospel.

We are looking forward to having more and more woman pastors ordained in the future.

Leon Chau
Executive Secretary, CRCHKS
Lutheran Distinctive courses are being conducted for pastors and evangelists in Myanmar for a second consecutive year by Rev Wolfgang Grieninger and Rev Dr Philip Tan of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). The venue was at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Myanmar. These courses were conducted with the sponsorship of the Mekong Mission Forum (MMF). By organizing such courses MMF aims at strengthening the Lutheran identity and cooperation among the various Lutheran groups in Myanmar. Twenty-two pastors/evangelists from two Lutheran churches in Myanmar attended - Myanmar Lutheran Church (MLC - Senior Pastor: Rev Andrew Mang Lone) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Myanmar (ELCM - Synod President: Rev Dr Lal Sawi Thanga). The weekend after the seminar, Bishop Philip Lok of LCMS conducted ordination services for three pastors of MLC and one pastor of ELCM. In a way the Lutheran distinctive courses helped to prepare these candidates to be ordained.

History of the Lutheran Church was one of the subjects taught where the era of the Reformation was emphasized. Students also learned about the global spread of the Lutheran Church by migration and mission and the Lutheran fellowship of churches as organized in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Apart from the historical course of events, there was also a focus on central theological ideas and used pictures (woodcuts and paintings) of the Reformation era. Participants enjoyed these illustrations very much despite being from a different culture and era.

Practical subject on "Leadership from the Inside Out" was also taught. Instead of dwelling on the "skill" part of Christian leadership, emphasis was placed more on character building and the pitfalls in leadership. Participants also explored the "dark side" of the soul and its repercussion on Christian leadership and found the subject very relevant to their setting and many questions were raised and discussed.

In addition to the lectures in the morning and afternoon, the group of MLC participants were repeating and discussing the subjects in the evening among themselves. They also intend to duplicate the courses they have learned to share with others who could not attend the training. One of the objectives of the courses was to have participants pass on what they have learned to their co-workers and parishes.

Dr Philip Tan, LCMS
During the period of the seminar, pastors of both Lutheran groups were able to foster a closer relationship with each other. The overall aim of strengthening the Lutheran identity and fostering a closer familiarity among Lutheran pastors of the various groups in Myanmar was achieved during this seminar. Considering such positive impact on the participants and the general need of training, such courses need to be continued.

Participants had expressed keen interest on other theological topics such as “doctrine of the Trinity” and “the person and works of the Holy Spirit” for future seminars. Practical subject such as “pastoral counselling” and “church management” were also mentioned. Apart from general pastoral training, the rural pastors wished to get trained holistically for their mission work and enquired if issues of education and agriculture could be included in future courses. The latter subject (agriculture) goes beyond our scope, but seems to be essential for pastors and their families in their context. Many have to support themselves by farming due to the modest allowance provided by the church. The location for such a training, however, should be in the rural area of the north rather than in urban Yangon, and the training itself must be conducted by a qualified person.

The fellowship and hospitality were warm, the discussions and worship were very enriching. We thank God for the experiences and safe travel of all.

Rev Dr Philip Tan
Mission Director, LCMS

Three Lutheran churches in Myanmar, including MLC & ELCM, have applied for membership with the LWF and will be recommended for acceptance during the LWF Assembly this Stuttgart, July 2010 - Ed

CCA’s First Woman General Secretary

CCA’s first woman General Secretary! Rev Dr Henriette Tabita Hutabarat Lebang from Sulawesi, Indonesia made history when she was elected as the new General Secretary during the 13th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from April 15-22. She is the first woman to be elected to this position since CCA was founded at the Malayan capital in 1959.

The Christian Conference of Asia is a regional ecumenical organisation representing 16 National Councils and over 100 churches/denominations in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

Dr Hutabarat will succeed Dr Prawate Khid-arn, whose term ends in October 2010. Besides being the former associate general secretary of the CCA, the new General Secretary was also the former vice president of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. She has a doctorate in education and was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1992 and served as the vice-moderator of the Toraja Church in Indonesia and other senior positions internationally.

Reverend Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), said that her election was “another milestone in the ecumenical movement”.

The new general secretary is also a member of the committee coordinating relations between the WCC and the Vatican.

Among the many objectives of the CCA are the promotion and strengthening of the unity of the Asian churches, and the development and promotion of relationships with people of other faiths in the region.

“As brothers and sisters in such a time as this, we are called to prophesy, reconcile and heal,” said Dr Hutabara, referring to the theme of the church grouping’s 13th general assembly.
The memorial service marking the celebration of life, faith and commitment of Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam was held at the Ziegenbalg Auditorium, Gurukul, Chennai on April 10, 2010. Hundreds of people from many parts of the country and continents representing various churches, organizations, educational institutions – theological and secular, ecumenical and people’s movements, resource agencies and non-governmental organizations paid homage to the ‘leader’.

Rev Dr Phil Baker, representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in his homily comforted the bereaved through the words of Paul, “neither death, nor life, …, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 38,39). He repeatedly uttered “Death can have no power over you [Rajaratnam]. You are mine [Christ’s].”

Church leaders around the world recognized the contributions of Rajaratnam. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Deputy General Secretary Rev Chandran Paul Martin in his tribute mentioned that many in the LWF communion and in the secretariat, marking special attention to the LWF President Bishop Mark Hanson and the General Secretary Dr Ishmael Noko, sent their love and grief. “This [Ziegenbalg] auditorium reverberates many of his dreams and visions,” said Rev Martin. “It will not be an exaggeration to say that most of his initiatives were born, designed and graduated here.” Dr Rajaratnam championed the cause of the needy and the oppressed – the dalits, adivasis and women.

Rajaratnam was the LWF Asia Secretary and the Executive Secretary of the LWF National Committee in India. “We’ve all lost a friend, a champion, a visionary and a good human being,” said Rev Martin.

Bishop Hanson on Rajaratnam: “Your prophetic leadership has challenged the church in India, the churches of the LWF and the World Council of Churches (WCC) to make Dalit liberation a primary missionary objective.”

“Many of the unique firsts and fruits of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) can be attributed to the leadership of Dr K Rajaratnam,” opined Rev Asir Ebenezer, the NCCI Officiating General Secretary. Rajaratnam was the President of the NCCI. “The first ever ecumenical HIV/AIDS initiative of the NCCI, programme for the North East..."
India concerns, among others, can in part or whole be attributed to the vision and tireless efforts of the genius," added Asir. The ability to sight and train young leadership in the fields of church and ecumenism, and the courage to trust mission and movement in untested potential anew bear witness to the faith that Dr Rajaratnam had in people as co-workers of God.

The Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) President Rev Dr Suneel Bhanu earlier referred to Rajaratnam as the 'Moses of the contemporary world'.

"A leader," remarked the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) Executive Secretary Rev Dr Augustine Jeyakumar, "is one who fights for and defends each individual's rights in the midst of colossal structures of oppression and perfidy. Dr Rajaratnam is one such leader." At 89, he had been at the helm of affairs in the UELCI for more than four decades where he had served the communion as the Executive Secretary.

"He was a man of faith and action," noted Church of South India (CSI) Karnataka South Diocese Bishop J S Sadananda, the successor of Rajaratnam as Master, Council of Serampore College (Dr Rajaratnam stepped down as the Master on March 26, 2010) in his tribute. "He challenged the church to rethink its mission and witness," he added. He made theological education a part of the church's agenda and building Gurukul, though named Lutheran College, as an ecumenical centre of learning.

Gurukul Principal Rev Dr Samuel Meshack emphasized Dr Rajaratnam's relentless struggle to make theological education relevant and to move towards a bold theological vision. Rajaratnam had been the Director of Gurukul for many years.

Member of the Parliament in the Lok Sabha and a Dalit activist Dr Thirumavalavan earlier said, "He showed us by doing God's work one can love people and by doing people's work one can realize God." 'Serving the poor and the underprivileged is doing God's ministry.' "Dr Rajaratnam exhibited this to us in his life time," he added. "He was a light-house" that brought the marginalized and the under-privileged to safer shores from the sea of oppression.

He was the founder Director of the Centre for Research on New International Economic Order (CReNIEO), an organization that is committed to the total development of the socially and economically weaker sections of the Indian society with focus on women and children of the Fisherfolk, Dalit and Tribal communities. He was also the Chairperson of the Orissa Development Action Forum, a conglomeration of 12 NGOs in Orissa.

He will be missed by many around the world and especially in the Indian Lutheran fraternity. His absence will leave a yawning space in the fields that he had set foot in. It is prayed that God will bestow the church and the family 'with a blessing – a blessing to capture, culture and continue the vision and mission of Dr K Rajaratnam which will further the legacy and heritage of God that we have inherited in him.'

Rajaratnam's last wish was fulfilled as he was laid to rest on April 10, 2010 at the CReNIEO office in Mutukadu, Chennai. He is survived by his four children, seven grandchildren and a great grandchild.

Timothy Melvyn
Communication Officer, UELCI

Rev Dr Phil Baker ... in his homily comforted the bereaved through the words of Paul, “neither death, nor life, ..., nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ... Death can have no power over you [Rajaratnam]. You are mine [Christ's]”
It is with great sadness to be informed of the passing away of our former colleague and profound leader Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam on April 7, 2010. We are indeed sad but also with a deep sense of gratitude for his life, his witness and his service. We give thanks to God for his dedicated friendship, his commitment to prophetic leadership, reconciliation, peace and unity. We also thank God for his known contributions to the LWF member churches in Asia and ecumenical movements.

On behalf of the Asia Desk and Regional Office of the Lutheran World Federation – Department for Mission and Development, I would like to express our deep sympathy and heartfelt condolences and we send our special prayers to the bereaved family, Lutheran Churches in India, and all friends in the UELCI.

We give thanks to God for his dedicated friendship, his commitment to prophetic leadership, reconciliation, peace and unity

Trusting in the love of our resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, who can do more than we can think in bringing consolation, I am sharing these living words with the bereaved family:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11: 25-26). “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have died. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:14 and 18).

Ginda P Harahap
LWF Asia Secretary

We have a feeling of great loss and void when we heard of the passing away of Dr Rajaratnam and we miss him. As a mark of respect to him the Martin Luther Christian University held a condolence meeting on Friday the 9th April 2010 in the MLCU Hall at 10 am. The meeting was also attended by local Christian leaders. Even though Dr Rajaratnam is not with us anymore, he has left behind his rich legacy in higher education, church and social work, and his handiwork remains. For this we are grateful.

He is remembered as a prophet for the rights of Tribals, Dalits and the less-privileged of society. He was a great teacher, writer and educator, and his contribution to education and social change is felt all over the country and beyond.

As a founding member of the Martin Luther Christian University, and a member of the Board of Governors and Board of Management MLCU, Dr Rajaratnam was instrumental in bringing together the resources and commitment of the two sponsors of our University, and has contributed so much to give direction and guidance to MLCU. As a person, he was very warm and gracious, and we miss his matured leadership.

On behalf of the MLCU family as a whole, my wife and son, and my own behalf, I convey our condolences and our deepest sympathy to the family, and all those who are close and dear to Dr Rajaratnam – whom we all respect and love. May the warm memories of his life soothe you at this difficult time and give you comfort and peace. It is our prayers that God will help you as a family with his continued presence and guidance that you may be able to trust in His will.

Rev Edwin H Kharkongor
Registrar, Martin Luther Christian University

He is remembered as a prophet for the rights of Tribals, Dalits and the less-privileged of society. He was a great teacher, writer and educator, and his contribution to education and social change is felt all over the country and beyond.
GENEVA, 10 April 2010 - LWF General Secretary Rev Dr Ishmael Noko paid tribute to Rajaratnam as a leader who “challenged his colleagues to redefine partnership in mission”.

“He was forthright in his views and seldom compromised his commitments to justice and fairness. He did not mince his words and when necessary he spoke in capital letters,” said Noko in a statement issued at the LWF headquarters in Geneva.

“Yet, even on those occasions, those of us who knew him well realized that deep down in his personality there was a softness that made him likeable,” he noted.

The general secretary said that in Rajaratnam’s death, Lutherans and the ecumenical movement have lost “a voice in pursuit of justice.”

Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, a layman who served the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) for over four decades, and was formerly Asian region secretary for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), died on 7 April at his home in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, southern India, at the age of 89. He was director emeritus of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute.

A former president of the National Council of Churches in India, Rajaratnam was a leader who “challenged not only the church in India but the global ecumenical church to make Dalit liberation a primary missionary objective,” said Rev A G Augustine Jeyakumar, UELCI executive secretary.

Rajaratnam held various positions in his church and was leader of the Gurukul college beginning in 1971.

From 1975 to 1979 he was the secretary for Asia in the then LWF Department of Church Cooperation and was a member of the LWF Executive Committee from 1985 until 1990.


He had been executive secretary of the UELCI - which brings together 11 Lutheran churches - until 2002 and was formerly chief editor of its magazine, The Indian Lutheran.
Reiniscing the past during the 50th anniversary of the Asia Church Leadership Conference, Lund 2006

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With Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land during LWF Council Meeting in Jerusalem, 2005

Dr Raja greeted warmly by members during the UELC I 25th Triennial Conference & “Festival of Faith” in Chennai, 2002

With Rev Chandran P Martin, Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations, 2006

Reminiscing the past during the 50th anniversary of the Asia Church Leadership Conference, Lund 2006
Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations, 2006

LWF Assembly, Winnipeg, 2003

Dr Raja with other Asian church leaders at the LWF Council meeting in Lund, 2006

With Rev Rafael Malpica, ELCA Executive Director for Global Mission, Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations, 2006
The Evangelical Lutheran Church – Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG) website has been upgraded and some advanced features have been added.

The previous website http://www.elcpng.org.pg will be cancelled due to inconsistencies with the hosting server to handle advanced internet features.

The new ELC-PNG website is: http://www.elcpng.org

What is interesting on this new site

- latest news and events of ELC-PNG posted on the news blog page
- users can update information on this website anywhere in the world (text and images)
- user can add comments to news articles or other articles published on the site
- user can participate in Live Chat, chat live with other fellow Lutherans and readers online
- Forums to discuss sensitive issues affecting the Church, three topics have already been added. Homosexual in Church, Women Ordination. You can share your opinion with other fellow ELC-PNG and Christian members online
- Online Bible, read and study the bible online through the ELC-PNG website
- download Church newsletter publications in PDF format
- download radio programmes in audio file format
- download Bible tracts in PDF format
- Liturgical calendar that reminds you of significant Religious dates in 2010
- Bible verse of the day that is posted daily

There are more to be added to the site. Click this link to register an account and find out more http://www.elcpng.org

Many wonderful and good things are going on in ELC-PNG. Log into their new website and find out more - Ed