

Asia Ablaze! Newsletter

Asia Workgroup Meeting

Asia Missionaries 'Grow Green'

LCMS World Mission's career missionaries and personnel from across Asia met in Hong Kong February 12-14 for a 'workgroup' meeting. The event was a rare opportunity for the team to recharge and enjoy fellowship with their mission and ministry teammates. More than a retreat, though, the meeting was a time to come together as a unified group to create a clear vision for the future as they strive to cultivate the "green growing edge" of the church in Asia.

The 21 team members in attendance spent much of the

weekend in dialogue with one another and with Asia Regional Director Rev. John Mehl as they worked to shape the new vision for the region. Special guest and organizational change consultant Les Stroh was also in attendance to help the Asia team articulate its vision and bring it to life.

The new vision is rich with imagery and likens the church to a "healthy tree planted by the water" (Psalm 1). It acknowledges that the global mission movement belongs to God and asserts that LCMS missionaries and personnel in Asia are "doing His work as we urgently and intentionally engage the world at the green



LCMS missionaries and personnel meet in Hong Kong

growing edge of the church."
(Continued on page 8)

Philippines Ablaze!

LCP on Track for Establishing 100 New Congregations by 2017

The North Luzon Highland District (NLHD) Board of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP), including LCP President Rev. James Cerdenola, made a visit to congregations in the NLHD from February 23-29. In total, the group visited six NLHD congregations. The con-

gregations were located in remote locations, so travel took anywhere from 4-7 hours per trip. At every stop, food was prepared by the host congregation and was followed with a worship service. After the service, the local pastor and lay leaders (which was often much of the congregation) engaged in discussion with the NLHD Board group. The pastors, lay leaders and church members were so happy to be able to welcome the group and share stories of how their ministries were doing.

One mission station was happy to show the group some of the lumber and iron sheets ready to be used in the upcoming construction of their church building. One lay worker told of his plan to register his mission station at the next NLHD convention this April. Another congregation was in the process of constructing a

larger church building because the old church is too small to accommodate everyone; the old building will become their Sunday School room once the new church building is finished. And still another congregation shared how their laymen walk 3-4 hours in order to share the Gospel. One congregation eagerly told of their mission outreach in three different areas, hoping that each would become a congregation in the next few years. On the final leg of the trip, the NLHD Board installed a pastor at one of its congregations. The installation service was very well attended.

Through the work being done in the

NLHD and elsewhere, it is clear that things are moving in the direction of fulfilling the LCP's goal to establish at least 100 new congregations by the year 2017.



(l-r) Rev. James Cerdenola, Layman Edgar Pasking, & Rev. Philip Echican at a church during a recent trip to the NLHD congregations in February

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Vietnam Ablaze!

Hanoi School Opening Plan

Getting ready to open a new international school in a new country is more an art than a science. Although there are obvious steps to be taken and sophisticated financial planning, the reality is that timing and recognizing opportunities are also a measure of success.

The process for establishing an LCMS international school began in 2006 with visits to Vietnam, conducting a feasibility study, learning the laws and the entry points for getting government approvals. Funding options to have the initial capital investment were explored. In 2008 legal matters were carried out in Hong Kong, the U.S. and in Vietnam while the application documents, curriculum, financial plan and location were being prepared for submission to the government. So far in 2009, the government has provided feedback and preparations are underway to submit a revised application.

A recent meeting was held in Hanoi with key experts from Shanghai, Hong Kong and Hanoi. They met with a Hanoi Attorney to consider the timing given the changes in the world economy, the application procedure and the obtaining of land and a building. Curt Larson (business manager with Concordia International School—Shanghai), Ed Strohschein (business manager with LCMS World Mission Asia in Hong Kong), Ted Engelbrecht (Southeast Asia Facilitator with LCMS World Mission), and Dr. Allan Schmidt (Asia School Developer) met to take all the changes into consideration to revise the business plan and consider funding and land prospects.

The conclusion to the discus-

sions was that the date for opening the school is set for the 2010-2011 academic year. The Head of School Search Committee is moving forward to decide on a short list of candidates and begin on-site interviews. The hope is to have a Head of School on the ground in the middle of 2009 planning the school's opening, calling a faculty and administration, preparing the building, and planning a future campus.

The process is long and not always a straight line. But God is in charge and with the prayers of many will become a reality for service to the people of Vietnam and those foreigners who live and work there with a Christian values based, high quality international school in Hanoi.

Relationship Building Out & About

In February, volunteer English teachers Cana Laska, James Rush, and Amanda Runey had the opportunity to visit Sapa, Vietnam. The city is located in Northern Vietnam atop mountains over 4,000 feet above sea level. Sapa is known for its beautiful mountains, waterfalls, and ethnic minorities. The volunteers went expecting a relaxing weekend and some great pictures. They returned with all that, and more!

While visiting the local market, the three were surrounded by Hmong women selling small handicrafts such as purses and jewelry. It took them nearly an hour to leave the market, but a few women still followed them along the road to their next destination: Cat Cat village. The village was about 3 km away from the market, yet these women walked the whole way with the volunteers. The women asked questions about their names, ages, families, time in Vietnam, home country, jobs, etc. Upon arriving in Cat Cat, the market women had to turn around to go back. After



(l-r) Ed Strohschein, Ted Engelbrecht, & Curt Larson meet in Vietnam to work on new Hanoi school opening

the long walk getting to know each other, the volunteers felt compelled to buy something from the women in return for their interest and company.

This experience illustrates exactly what the volunteers in Vietnam are doing among the Vietnamese people. They are called to teach English as an avenue to building relationships with students and fellow teachers. Using this unique foothold into the culture, volunteers are then able to do activities both inside and outside the classroom, much like the Hmong women walking with the three in Sapa. The volunteers are able to show their love and care for the Vietnamese people during these activities, similar to the many questions asked by the market women. Throughout the journey together a relationship is built. Once the relationship reaches a certain point, the Vietnamese are wondering what it is that makes the volunteers in Vietnam so special; what do they have to offer? The Hmong women had small trinkets, but the volunteers have Good News from the One who sent them.

Visitors Galore and Wanting More!

In recent weeks and months Vietnam has welcomed visitors, and many more are

needed. A family came to attend the opening of a health station they had helped to sponsor, and a group from Hong Kong International School and Church of All Nations in Hong Kong also came for another service trip. At the end of last year, supporters from the U.S. as well as members of the Pastoral Leadership Institute have also made trips.

Currently, Vietnam is specifically looking for volunteers to serve as English teachers at the university level. People from a wide range of backgrounds are encouraged to consider coming to Vietnam to work as relationship builders and English teachers. Groups who have already made the trip have returned upwards of 6 times! This is a great testimony to the commitment and desire to have "meaningful touches" with the people who are served. Whether it is a two week visit, a month of service, or a year of teaching, please consider making a stop in Vietnam.

For more information visit: www.lcmsworldmission.org/searchopps

China Ablaze!

CISS 10-Year Anniversary Celebrations Continue

Celebrating has become almost second nature to the students, faculty and parents from Concordia International School Shanghai (CISS), which began a series of 10-year anniversary celebrations at the start of the school year.

The CISS community was thrilled to learn of yet another reason to celebrate when two of the school's founding faculty, Louise Schini Weber (Elementary School Principal) and Michael Weber (Director of Technology 1998-2008), were awarded the Lutheran Education Association (LEA) International Lutheran Educator Award for 2009.

This prestigious award recognizes the Webers as Lutheran educators who exemplify the ministry to which God has called them and demonstrates their exceptional commitment to their work. For the first time ever, the award was given to dual recipients.

Michael and Louise began their international school careers in 1982 at CISS's sister school, the renowned Hong Kong International School (HKIS), where they witnessed the growth of the school and served until 1998, when they left to become founding faculty of CISS. Louis began her 11th year at CISS this school year, and Michael, who retired as CISS's Director of Technology at the end of the 2007-08 school year following a 10-year tenure, is now an educational consultant for international schools in the Asia-Pacific region.

With the 2008-09 school year already half completed, CISS still has much to look forward to. On Wednesday, January 21, the community came together to welcome the Chinese New Year of the Ox in combination with the school's Civil Cere-

mony for the 10-year anniversary.

Distinguished guests invited to the event included local Shanghai, Pudong government officials, heads of other international and neighboring Shanghai schools, and visitors from LCMS World Mission in Hong Kong. CISS's Head of School, Dr. James Koerschen, read official congratulatory notes from both U.S. Consul General in Shanghai, Ms. Beatrice Camp, and Head of Hong Kong International School, Mr. Richard Mueller.

The community will come together again later in the school year for a gala evening at the Shangri-La Hotel on Saturday, April 25. The elegant evening for 500 attendees will include live and silent auctions in support of CISS's flagship charity, the Yunnan Education Project <http://www.ciiss.com.cn/Activities/YEP>.

While celebrating the 10 years that now lie behind CISS, there is also ongoing planning for future growth and development.

This school year CISS became a member of APAC (Asia Pacific Activities Conference). Composed of only 11 schools throughout Asia, APAC adds a new dimension of competition and travel to our High School athletics and fine arts programs.

With a graduating class of 40 students in June 2009, and 32 graduates from the Class of 2008 securely placed in renowned universities and colleges worldwide – including Stanford University, Carnegie Mellon University, Northwestern University and the University of Southern California, these results speak volumes for CISS's High School program.

"We are proud of our students and their teachers" said CISS High School Principal, David Harris. "The gifted students



Louise Schini Weber, CISS Elementary School Principal, and Michael Weber, former CISS Director of Technology

that we assist to highly selective universities work exceptionally hard for such recognition. Additionally, we also take great pride in guiding all of our students towards post-secondary education that is best suited to each child. It is this care and attention for the individual at CISS that makes all the difference."

In addition, construction of a purpose-built High School facility began in June 2008 with completion slated for the start of the 2009-2010 school year. This expansion completes the original strategic plan for CISS and ensures that its educational goals are met for many more years to come.

CISS's Phase IV development will feature state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories, an additional gymnasium with new locker room facilities, a dance studio, weight training facilities, and tumbling areas. Also included in the structure, which will range from two to six stories, is new and expanded space for the administration, a world languages lab and a high-tech corridor. Another highlight will be a new library on the "bridge" between the existing and new high school buildings. The construction project also in-

cludes the remodeling of some parts of the current high school/administration building, which will expand the kitchen and cafeteria and enhance the middle school program with new labs and classrooms.

CISS has come a long way since its opening in 1998 when it was founded by the LCMS to serve students and families in the Shanghai community with a school of high standards and based upon Christian values.

Louise and Michael Weber were part of the founding group of 14 faculty and 10 administrative support staff who helped to open the school in September 1998 with only 22 students. CISS now offers its American based curriculum to 50 times that number of students with 1,100 total representing nearly 30 different passports. In addition, today's 122 teachers are a talented and dedicated faculty, with four of those original 14 providing the foundation from preschool through grade 12.

India & Sri Lanka Ablaze!

Long-Term Volunteers Arrive

Beth and Dave Hoeppner arrived in India to begin service as long-term volunteers, after serving for 13 years with Hong Kong International School. They will be educational consultants to the India Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Lanka Lutheran Church in Sri Lanka, particularly on developing a curriculum for Bible Study teaching in the schools. Area Facilitator, Herb Hoefler, took them on a 5-week tour of the churches and schools in January and February. They will be residing in Nagercoil, South India.

In-Service Training

Rev. Bill Meyer and Deaconess Marie Meyer, along with Rev. and Mrs. Carlton Riemer, led 2-day in-service training programs in all three Synods of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) this past February. Rev. Meyer presented on lay-leadership training and Rev. Riemer on outreach to Muslims. Deaconess Meyer held a separate training with the IELC deaconesses.

Cows for Widows

With donations from Ascension Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon, milking cows were dis-

tributed to seven widows in the India Evangelical Lutheran Church. The program focuses on young widows with school-aged children, enabling the widow to keep her children in school.

Mass Baptism

God has been bringing hundreds to faith in the Pernambut area of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church in recent years. On February 22, there was another mass baptism of 147 new believers.

Incomplete Chapels

As God brings continued growth to the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), many of the congregations have had to rebuild and expand their facilities. The practice has been for the congregation to construct its new facility up to the roof level, and then the IELC helps with the completion of the chapel at a cost of around \$2000. There are currently an estimated 60 such incomplete chapels. Through the Fan into Flame program, funds are now being raised to meet this urgent need.

India Summit

On January 15-17, there was a gathering of around 80 participants at an India Summit, held



An Indian woman is baptized at a recent mass baptism

in St. Louis. The purpose was for the 5 leaders from the India Evangelical Lutheran Church to present the vision of the church and for partners to network and plan together.

House Churches

The eight probationers (three years of church-planting ministry after seminary graduation) of the Lanka Lutheran Church in Sri Lanka focus on planting house churches. Because of this focus, several congregations have now grown to the

point where they need a chapel.

Mission Stations

The Lanka Lutheran Church in Sri Lanka needs to construct Mission Stations at a cost of around \$15,000 per station on each of the remote tea plantations where the probationers are serving. Funds have now been given by Texas congregations through the Fan into Flame program for the first Mission Station.

Taiwan Ablaze!

Our Only Aim is Jesus

An English workshop was recently held at one of the public high schools in Taiwan. On the last day of the workshop, Joyce Huang, a Taiwan national and former Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) student, and Petrea Schwahn, an LCMS missionary currently serving in Taiwan and CUW alumnus, were asked to lead. They used their time to teach about American culture and topics commonly covered in Bible studies.

Joyce and Petrea were encouraged by the enthusiasm demonstrated by the 50 students who participated in the workshop. While just one of the students in attendance was Christian, God's love was evident to everyone as the Gospel message was shared through a variety of activities and experiences throughout the day. Please continue to pray for these students and the people of Taiwan, that they would continue to draw nearer to Jesus each day.



LCMS missionary Petrea Schwahn with students at a recent English workshop in Taiwan

Korea Ablaze!

Retreat for Lutheran Lay Members from Gyeonggi Province and Incheon City

On January 18, about 200 church members from Gyeonggi Province and Incheon City met at Central Lutheran Church in Seoul for their annual retreat. The retreat consisted of three parts. It started with a worship service, followed by a special lecture, and ended with a dinner. The lecture was given by Rev. Choong-Goo Byun (pastor of Church for the World and principal of Jesus Christ Academy) about "Christians realizing their dreams and visions". The retreat is organized every January for the purpose of faith education and the promotion of unity among church members from various congregations.

Retreat for Lutheran Evangelists and Pastors in Training

In mid-December last year, the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) organized a retreat on the West Coast of South Korea for its future ministers. A total of 40 people participated, most of whom are students at the Graduate School of Theology at Luther University/Seminary, while a smaller number consists of pastors-in-training who, after graduation, receive a practical education in ministry in a local congregation. The General Assembly organizes this retreat each year for the theological and



Participants at the recent Continuing Education Seminar for pastors held at Luther University in Korea

spiritual development of the evangelists and pastors-in-training and on that occasion announces the new congregations in which the young theological trainees will receive their education.

Korea Lutheran Hour Distributes Lenten Meditations Booklet

On Ash Wednesday, the Korea Lutheran Hour started distributing its 2009 Lenten Meditations (written by Dough Wisely and translated by Ji-Sung Lee) under the title "Sitting in Lumps of Dust and Ash." Such meditations are published and distributed annually with financial mission support from

the International Lutheran Hour in the United States.

Every year the publication of these meditations by Korea Lutheran Hour receives wide interest from Christians throughout South Korea. Korea Lutheran Hour's mission is financially supported by the General Assembly of the Lutheran Church in Korea and strives for financial independence through various programs. It also operates a Christian Art Center, where gifts, church paraments, and Christian articles of all kinds are exhibited and sold. The Korea Lutheran Hour also carries out various media mission programs. It serves not only Lutheran pastors, but also all Christians in South Korea. For more information, visit www.lutheranhour.co.kr.

2009 Continuing Education Seminar for Pastors

From February 23 to 26, 2009, the Committee for Education of Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) held a Seminar for the continuing education of pastors at Luther University (LTU). Such seminars are held annually for Lutheran pastors for their theological development. This year, pas-

tors were introduced to the leadership-program of "Stephen's Care" by "Korea Stephen's Care Institute." About 25 pastors and their wives attended the seminar. The General Assembly has decided to upgrade its continuing education for pastors and has asked LTU to do research on the program development. It plans to establish an even closer cooperation between LCK and LTU and develop a "system for research on cooperation."

Thanksgiving Worship Marks Relocation of Seoul Creation Church

In December 2008, a new Lutheran congregation in Seoul came into existence. The congregation had previously been located in Gyeonggi Province under a different name for 10 years, before making the move to the capital city of Seoul where its name was changed to "Seoul Creation Lutheran Church." The move was organized by the congregation and supported by the LCK General Assembly. Some 100 Lutheran pastors and church members attended the worship service. The church plans to serve the citizens through cultural mission.



Pastors in attendance at the recent worship service marking the relocation of Seoul Creation Church

Japan Ablaze!

JLTS Hosts 43rd Pastoral Theology Seminar

In the third of three sessions devoted to evangelism in the church, Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary (JLTS) hosted the 43rd Pastoral Theology Seminar this year from February 16-19. The seminar is a yearly event and is attended by representatives of the four major Lutheran bodies in Japan. The topic this year was evangelism from the perspective of "living with people of our community." Seminary president Dr. Naozumi Etoha opened the event by delivering a foundational lecture with a focus on Lutheran missiology, 2-kingdom theology, and Gospel witness in word and deed by Christians in contact with their local communities.

This was followed by presentations from various guest speakers. Old Testament professor Ohgushi and New Testament professor Blanke took turns preparing morning Bible studies for the group. Among guest speakers, the most talked about presentation was delivered by Father Masahide Haresaku, from Kichijohji Catholic Church and author of several recently published books. Father Haresaku talked about how easy it is for pastors and laypeople to get into the habit of "explaining" the Gospel when what is really needed is Gospel "announcement." He gave several examples about how Gospel announcement can occur in everyday, one-on-one encounters with people in the local community, and how his church was linking these contacts with classes that they held in baptism preparation. In breakout sessions, pastors discussed ways that the specifics of what they heard could be applied in their own local contexts.



The Valentine's Day "Dress Up Coffeehouse" event was enjoyed by all

Five JLTS Graduates to Begin Service

In addition to 125 Japan Lutheran College (JLC) graduates (from graduate and undergraduate programs), the year ended for Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary (JLTS) with the graduation of 5 students, including Japan Lutheran Church (NRK) seminarian Ippei Morimoto. Ippei will be honored in a special baccalaureate service of the NRK on March 15 and ordained at his new congregation (yet to be officially announced) in April. Mr. Itsuhide Kitagawa, a 2008 JLTS college graduate from the JLC Christian Studies program, will be entering the seminary as an NRK seminarian in April. Itsuhide was first baptized at NRK congregation Sugunami Lutheran Church while a student in the Christian Studies program, and has been actively serving NRK congregations ever since.

VYM Missionaries Meet in Tokyo

LCMS missionaries serving with the Volunteer Youth

Ministry (VYM) Program in Japan met in Tokyo the last weekend of February for their business meeting and recognition dinner. This annual gathering provides an opportunity to gather together to share about individual ministries, give updates on outreach events, and reflect on the challenges and joys of serving the Lord in Japan. Four missionaries, Haidee Kuehne, Katrina Schaff, Amber Stephens, and Becky Raatz will be concluding their terms of service; while four new missionaries, Justin Kumfer, Lauren Davis, Kim Sherwin, and Matt Hass will be completing their six month orientation and departing for their new sites to serve alongside the Japan Lutheran Church.

Congratulations to Becky Raatz for her upcoming transition from serving the Lord with the Volunteer Youth Ministry (VYM) Program in Japan to becoming a full-time English teacher at partner school Urawa Lutheran School in Saitama City (near Tokyo). Becky came to Japan in October of 2005 and ex-

tended her term of service once, having accrued three and a half years of ministry in Japan. May the Lord bless her in this new ministry.

God's Love Revealed on Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day at Nazomi Lutheran Church in Niigata, Japan brought a special "Dress Up Coffeehouse" event based on the theme of "This is Love" from 1 John. One of the purposes of the event was to create an atmosphere of love that emphasized relational love for everyone, not just young couples. There was a short message and a Japanese song about God's love. A few weeks later, with tears flowing, one of the ladies there that night shared to a large group of church members how she has learned and experienced what God's love is. Her son started English classes in January, and they started attending worship soon after. She has also recently asked to be baptized along with her 8 year old son, who prompted her when he said he wanted to be a Christian.

Cambodia Ablaze!

The Written Word Ablaze!

It is great to start a fire, but the blaze must be continued and fueled. Sithon Chin, a Cambodian Christian, and Jeanette Groth, an LCMS missionary, are working together to train Cambodian Christians to write their own devotions. They have been working on the writing process with eight prospective authors in the Battambang area. The first session was a three-day workshop, and consecutive sessions follow one day per month for five months. The goal is to have Cambodians write devotional materials that are relevant to the daily life of Cambodian Christians. These authors are committed to giving depth to the understanding of God's Word in the hearts and lives of the Cambodian people. The aim is to publish devotional materials that can be used to witness to God's power and share the message of salvation.

Translating to Share God's Word

Three Cambodian Christian leaders, LCMS administrative assistant Phan Narit, Srung Chivan and Min Sariai, participated in a translation workshop in Phnom Penh hosted by Christian publisher Fount of Wisdom. The workshop pro-

vided attendees the opportunity to meet with other Christians doing translation work, as well as exchange contact information so that they would be able to better work together, particularly when translation challenges arise. They learned two ways of translating: formal, which is to translate the original meaning of the words, and dynamic, which simplifies the words and makes them more easily understood. Workshop participants practiced translation in both forms.

They were also given assignments that workshop leaders will evaluate at the next workshop to help improve their translating capabilities. When asked how this workshop

helped the sharing of Jesus in Cambodia Phan Narit said, "We don't have a lot of Christian materials in Cambodia. By translating Christian materials into Khmer we can make God's message understandable to more people."

Team of Taiwan Teachers Visit Cambodia

From January 14-24, a group of teachers from Concordia Middle School in Taiwan traveled to Battambang, Cambodia. The team of volunteers included five LCMS long-term missionaries and two Taiwanese national teachers. They worked with Seth and Shannon Hoepfner, long-term missionaries in Battambang, and Trinity Lutheran Church,

to prepare and teach a week of English lessons at Trinity's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) school. About 80 elementary and junior high age students attended classes for four days. Lessons focused on basic English and Bible stories, and the week-long workshop provided students and teachers the opportunity to practice English with native speakers, as well as share Bible songs and stories in both English and Khmer. The Taiwan team also enjoyed spending time with the Cambodian teachers at Trinity and learning more about LCMS ministries in Cambodia.



Trinity Lutheran pastor (far right) with the Hoepfners (back center), Cambodian teachers (left) & Taiwan team members

Macau Ablaze!

Jesus is the Reason

The Christmas season was a time of great joy and activity at the Concordia English Center in Macau. Activities included baking Christmas cookies, singing carols, helping an orphanage, preparing a Christmas pageant, and gradually unfolding the story of Jesus coming to save all people. On Christmas Eve, St. Paul's Lutheran church was filled to capacity. For several students, it was their first time to attend a Christian worship service.

Some were excitedly taking pictures, others had lots of questions about baptism and communion, and still others said they felt a peacefulness and closeness with God that night. Immanuel!

Short-Term Team Visits Bear Fruit

An increase in the number of short-term teams visiting Macau since the beginning of the year has allowed for additional programming with the local partner church, St. Paul's Lutheran Church. In

January, a short term team from California and a singing group called New Dawn both hosted evangelistic programs at St. Paul's, and several church members attended. After Chinese New Year, the Friday night bilingual Bible study began a new curriculum which introduces Christianity. Church members have supported by attending and participating, and some students from the English center who had never been to a church have been coming as well.

Please pray for St. Paul members as they continue to build friendships and share their faith with English students in their mother tongue.

CEC Welcomes New Short-Term Teachers

This quarter Concordia English Center (CEC) welcomed three new short-term teachers: Del Mahn and Rev. Milton and Aida Popp. These volunteers teach English and Bible classes, as well as share their faith informally with students.

Asia Workgroup Meeting

(Continued from page 1)

In recent years, there has been a transition in the roles of LCMS World Mission career missionaries and personnel. Today's career missionaries in Asia serve in strategic roles primarily as theological trainers and as mission developers. LCMS missionaries sometimes serve where evangelism takes place on the green edge of the church, but often they serve as the 'branches', providing support and nourishment for evangelists and church planters of LCMS partners in Asia.

For many of those in attendance, working together with their fellow teammates to de-

velop this new vision was refreshing and served to encourage them in their respective areas of work.

"Many of us are working solo in our countries, so the opportunity to gather together with fellow missionaries was a real blessing," shared South Korea missionary Rev. Patrick O'Neal.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Blanke, a professor at Japan Lutheran College and Seminary in Tokyo, was impressed with the collaborative nature of the visioning process.

In addition to the development of the new vision, the workgroup meeting was a time to address organizational questions and

concerns, brainstorm new ideas, share successes, collaborate with co-workers, and share time as fellow Christians in Bible study, worship, conversation, and fun.

DCE Sharon Owens, who manages EFL (English as a Foreign Language) centers in Macau and Hong Kong, shared: "It was really beneficial for me to network with my teammates. It's exciting to find ways that we can work together and add capacity to our efforts."

"I like to think of it as 'missions without borders,'" added East Asia Area Facilitator Rev. Carl Hanson, echoing the importance of collabora-

tion with fellow missionaries.

John Mehl summed up the weekend this way: "A meeting like the Asia workgroup meeting unifies missionaries and personnel in their focus, stimulates collaboration and shared resources, and provides spiritual nourishment from God's Word for service in His mission."

The Asia team members returned to their respective fields refreshed, re-energized, and with a new vision to carry on God's mission of developing the "green growing edge" of the church in Asia.



Adelina & Edgar "Jiggs" Balunsat

It is with sadness that we report the passing on February 25 of Edgar "Jiggs" Balunsat, husband of Asia *Ablaze!* Newsletter database administrator Adelina Balunsat. Jiggs worked as a driver for the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) and was loved by many for his friendly nature, wit, and servant heart. We give thanks for Jiggs' life, his faith, and for his faithful service to his Lord, his church - the LCP, LCMS World Mission, and his family and community. Our prayers and sympathies are with Adelina and her family.

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