

# Learning about Lutheranism in Indonesia

Every evening, a group of about 50 Indonesians pick up their cell phones to discuss Lutheran theology. They share videos of sermons, discuss book reviews and articles, and ask questions about everything from tithing to Law and Gospel to the real presence in Holy Communion.

The discussions are held through WhatsApp, a messaging app that is used by 2 billion people around the world. Many of the participants are Lutherans — pastors, seminary students and laypeople — but a few are just there to learn more. The Rev. Matthew Wood, who serves with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Indonesia and works alongside the Indonesian Christian Lutheran Church (GKLI), was also invited to join the WhatsApp group.

“It’s interesting because they ask for clarification, and we are recognized as a traditional, confessional Lutheran church.

They will ask, ‘What does the LCMS think?’” says Wood. “Sometimes they ask because they trust that we’ll have a faithful stance. Sometimes they ask because they are checking to see if we have a faithful stance.”

On Saturdays, the group sometimes also meets over Zoom. Recently, pastors from the GKLI led a series on the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism. Wood is working with Indonesian church leaders to plan another course that will provide an introduction of confessional Lutheranism.

“People are very interested,” Wood says. “They feel as though it’s at their fingertips, but the resources available in Indonesian are like diving into a kiddie pool. They are yearning for resources and opportunities to go deeper.”



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— Rev. Matthew Wood (pictured with his wife and children)

For Wood, the group has been an important way to keep in contact with people in Indonesia during the pandemic. Due to disruptions in visa processing services, he is currently in the United States awaiting the renewal of his family’s visas.

“Historically, Lutheranism in Indonesia has been understood as a Batak tradition,” Wood says, noting that a majority of GKLI congregations are located on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. “What I’m seeing with this group is that the interest is really going beyond the tribe now and landing with a variety of people in Indonesia, and that’s exciting.”

# Give God Glory...

... for *MinistryFOCUS*, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) that helps LCMS pastors and other called workers reduce and eliminate the burden of educational debt. Originally called the Foundation for Called Workers, the organization is committed to helping ministry leaders focus more on spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and less on their personal debt. To learn more or apply for financial assistance, visit [ministryfocus.org](http://ministryfocus.org).

... for Mark and Megan Mantey, LCMS career missionaries in Uganda. Mark serves as project manager for the Ugandan seminary. Megan, who is a director of Christian education with a master’s degree in counseling, teaches classes related to those fields. Megan also serves as coordinator for Member Care for the region’s missionary families. Both are involved in the local community and with the Lutheran

Church of Uganda (LCU). Through these interactions, they build partnerships that assist the LCU in sharing the love of Christ and proclaiming the Gospel. Learn more about the Mantey’s at [lcms.org/mantey](http://lcms.org/mantey).

... for the people, congregations and Recognized Service Organizations of the LCMS that provide baby items for families in need, serve people with developmental disabilities, volunteer with adoption and foster care agencies, and more. The January issue of *Sharing* announced the launch of the LCMS Million Dollar Life Match, and more information is now available at [lcms.org/life-grant](http://lcms.org/life-grant). This exciting program is made possible by your support.



Nyia Harrell helps her children brush their teeth at A Place of Refuge in Milwaukee in 2015.

One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

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**You Make the Difference through LCMS World Relief and Human Care**

You make the ministry described in this newsletter possible! Your prayers and contributions to World Relief and Human Care “Where Needed Most” help deliver our Savior’s mercy to people in need. You bolster tightly restricted donations from others to help fully fund important mercy projects, allowing us to report here the impact you are making in Christ’s name. The courtesy envelope in this issue allows you to send a future contribution as the Holy Spirit leads, when He leads.





Deaconess Ellee Mietzner (right) chats with a fellow mother as they sort through infant and toddler clothing at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska.

# Loving and Serving People in Alaska

**D**eaconesses care for the physical and spiritual needs of others. This job description may seem simple, yet it encompasses a huge number of tasks — with all different groups, including women, youth, older adults, and those with disabilities or addictions.

“You have to choose because there are so many things you can do. It’s a constant job,” says Deaconess Ellee Mietzner, who serves as a parish deaconess at Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska. “It’s always changing with the people, with the needs of the community, with the needs of the church, and I get to be there for it all.”

Ellee serves part time alongside her husband, the Rev. Kyle Mietzner. While Kyle focuses on Word and Sacrament ministry, Ellee looks for ways to help people in other areas, whether that’s teaching Sunday school, helping to prepare meals for the homeless, assisting with Christian fellowship events at a local nursing home, collaborating with the local pregnancy resource center, or managing the church’s outreach to families with small children.

Sometimes she also serves as a substitute teacher at nearby Anchor Lutheran School.

“The wonderful thing about having Ellee as the deaconess here is that there is a whole other dimension to the work of the ministry that she brings. It’s not that I’m incapable of being the pastor to women, but ... it’s just another



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— Rev. Kyle Mietzner, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Anchorage, pictured here with his wife, Deaconess Ellee Mietzner

dimension,” says Kyle. “It does not take away from anything I do. Instead, it sort of multiplies the work here at Zion.”

Ellee recently befriended Shine, a mother from the neighborhood who had just moved to Alaska from the Philippines and was pregnant with her second child. Shine visited the church

with her young daughter and has regularly attended worship and Bible study ever since. She was grateful when Ellee invited her to take some of the baby items that church members have been collecting to donate.

Church member Jahna Pollock notes that Ellee has helped the congregation engage in

meaningful opportunities to share Christ’s mercy with their neighbors, while also enriching the church’s Christian education programs for members of all ages. “I knew very little about deaconesses before the Mietznors were called to serve at Zion,” she says. “Now I can’t imagine NOT having a deaconess.”

## Showing the Compassion of Christ

**J**esus dares to touch the untouchable. Leprosy was horrid business — it was extremely contagious and led to a slow, rotting death in absolute isolation. People with leprosy received no touch from family, loved ones or friends. Yet Jesus’ compassion drives Him to touch. “I will; be clean!” He says to the leper in Matthew 8.

In our church, deaconesses focus us on Jesus’ physical ministrations of mercy. Deaconesses force us to quit preaching Platonic sermons about Jesus’ healing miracles and concern about physical needs, reducing them to mere signs of spiritual healing, as though Jesus had no concern for soul and *body*. The apostles carried a bag of money for alms — and not merely so that Judas might show himself a thief. Walther, Loehe and Gerhard all see this as proof that concern for the physical needs of others is part of the mandate of the apostolic office. Deaconesses force us to come face to face with Acts 6 and its careful organization of a system to care for the needy as a direct result of the church’s fellowship (*koinonia*) in Christ. Deaconesses force our congregations, our circuits, our districts and our Synod to

recall that all the great stewardship passages we love so much in St. Paul (2 Cor. 8 and 9) have to do directly with the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Deaconesses must have a *diakonia* of touch, just as Christ did.

What does a deaconess do? She serves. She does what needs to be done. She shows the compassion, mercy, love and instruction of Christ. Where Christ says “no” to women’s service at one place, He and His church say a round, hearty and full-bodied “YES! And more!” in a thousand places limited only by need and gifts. Let’s get on with saying “YES!” and continue to open doors and dream about possibilities and rejoice when possibilities become reality — to go, to proclaim the Good News, to have compassion and to touch the untouchable. “Let us go” (Mark 1:38).

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

