



Thanks be to God for the Shepherds!

"...I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me"
(Matthew 25:36).

Thanks be to God for the Shepherds, a group of specially consecrated Christian lay men and women who visit Tsiafahy Prison every Tuesday. This maximum-security prison is located in an isolated area, about an hour's drive from Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city. I accompanied the Shepherds on their visit the Tuesday after Christmas Day.

The Shepherds are steeped in prayer. They pray before, during and after each visit to the prison. The Shepherds conduct worship from behind a protective wall while armed guards stand overhead, alert and watching.

On this visit the Shepherds prepared a meal of rice, beans and beef for the 500 prisoners. Usually, the prisoners' one meal each day consists only of manioc (cassava), a root-vegetable similar to a potato. It's likely that the Shepherds prepared the most nutritious meal the prisoners ate in a year.

As a special treat, each prisoner also received a packet of cookies. When it was discovered that we were one packet short, one of the prisoners—a Christian leader—immediately handed over his packet to be given to someone else. I will always remember his witness of generosity.

As we dished the food into cracked and chipped bowls—and even plastic bags—we determined that one of our mission projects would be to purchase bowls for the prisoners.

Thanks be to God for the Shepherds who visit Tsiafahy and other prisons, bringing the word of God in spirit and in truth. We covet your prayers for this prison ministry.

ELCA missionary Patricia Bentsen, a nurse serving in Madagascar, works with the Lutheran nursing school (SEFAM), the rural health clinic program, the prison ministry, and the Lutheran Health Department (SALFA).



Patricia Bentsen (left) and the Shepherds, outside Tsiafahy Prison.

101 long-term missionaries and other answers

Q: How many ELCA missionaries are there?

A: Around 250 ELCA missionaries in 50 countries work hand-in-hand with churches and other companions teaching, preaching, healing, nurturing, building and growing. In January 2010 this included 101 long-term missionaries, 49 Young Adults in Global Mission, 47 volunteers, 23 two-year missionaries, and 36 "others," including four pastoral interns.

Q: How is ELCA Global Mission funded?

A: The 2010 ELCA Global Mission budget anticipates \$9.4 million (33.5 percent) from general offerings given to the congregation and through the synod. Another \$13.2 million (46.8 percent) is expected from gifts to ELCA World Hunger and \$4 million (14.2 percent) is generated by gifts for ELCA Missionary Sponsorship. Designated and restricted funds account for another \$1.6 million (5.5 percent) in the budget.

Q: How do I become an ELCA missionary sponsor?

A: You may donate to ELCA Missionary Sponsorship through your congregation or directly through Global Mission Support. See the "How to give" box on the reverse side. All donations (100 percent)

given for ELCA Missionary Sponsorship are used to support our global personnel. Covenant sponsors commit to provide prayer, communication and financial support for a specific missionary or for missionaries "where needed most." Learn more at www.elca.org/missionarysponsorship.

Q: How can I get involved in Operation Thanks-Giving (OT-G)?

A: In September, congregations will be invited to make greeting cards for ELCA missionaries and members of the military. Cards are mailed directly to personnel connected to the congregation and "random act of thankfulness" cards are sent to Global Mission Support to be distributed to ELCA missionaries. Cards will be mailed in November, December and January. To find OT-G stories and pictures, visit <http://blogs.elca.org/handinhand>.

Q: When will the new Global Mission annual be available?

The 2010–2011 *Global Mission Support and Service Annual (GMS Annual)* will be available in October. All covenant sponsors will receive the *GMS Annual*. To reserve a copy, call 800-638-3522 or e-mail globalmissionsupport@elca.org.

A USEFUL URL

Find Lenten devotions, prayer petitions, soup recipes and worship ideas offered by ELCA missionaries at www.elca.org/globalmission/lent.



A visit with the Rev. John Lunn, medical missionary

During a four-day stay at Phebe Hospital in Bong, Liberia, I became personally acquainted with the austere conditions in which some missionaries work. The electricity had been out for days; the hospital was running on a single generator. The water system was entirely disrupted.

More than a little travel weary, I pressed, "How does one run a hospital with only intermittent electricity and no water?"

Both an ELCA pastor and a registered nurse, missionary John Lunn said, "Well, some days it's two steps forward and three steps back. Other days, it's simply three steps back."

Pastor Lunn was invited by the Lutheran Church in Liberia to help restore this world-renowned medical ministry to its status before Liberia's civil war. At the time of my visit he served as Phebe's hospital administrator. Despite the sometimes severe circumstances, progress is evident: nurses are trained, babies are delivered and new surgical procedures are learned.



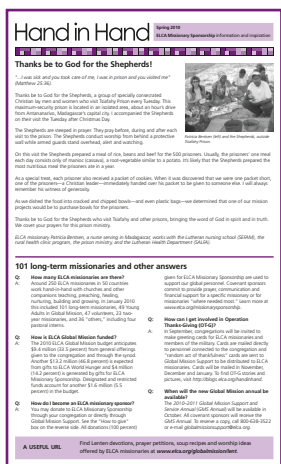
The Rev. John Lunn

"Yes," Pastor Lunn reflected, "the challenges are daunting, but the people are resilient. On a Sunday morning in Liberia, when the worship begins, no one walks...everyone dances!"

Today, Pastor John Lunn serves as a medical missionary in Southern India. He builds cooperative learning opportunities in palliative care between Phebe Hospital in Bong, Liberia, and Christian Medical College in Vellore, India.

The Rev. Twila Schock is director for ELCA Global Mission Support.

Two handy ways to share the story



The Hand in Hand blog digest and the *Hand in Hand* newsletter make it easy to find and share stories about ELCA missionaries and ELCA Global Mission.

1. Hand in Hand blog digest (<http://blogs.elca.org/handinhand>)

Between its debut in early April and December 31, 2009, almost 2,500 readers visited the blog digest more than 4,000 times. Visitors came from 86 countries and territories, and from all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

You are welcome to widely share blog-digest stories! It's free and easy to join the 96 subscribers and receive new posts by e-mail. There's even a Hand in Hand badge for linking the blog digest to your Web site.

2. Hand in Hand newsletter (www.elca.org/handinhand)

Visit the newsletter online and find articles and devotions in reproducible formats (e.g., bulletin inserts). Consider distributing copies of the *Hand in Hand* newsletter in your congregation, at synod assemblies and other events. The Global Mission Support team is happy to send you as many copies of the current issue as you can use.

HOW TO GIVE

1. Give through your congregation. Write "ELCA Missionary Sponsorship" on the check's memo line.
2. With a credit card, give online (www.elca.org/giving) or call 800-638-3522.
3. Make your check out to "ELCA Missionary Sponsorship" and mail to:
ELCA Global Mission Support, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4101

DID YOU KNOW?

It's estimated that one cent of every offering dollar helps fund ELCA Global Mission. Those pennies add up and make a world of difference. Thank you!

