



This wall hanging, a gift from the *Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile*, incorporates symbols not only of the oppression of the Pinochet reign, but also of the church's core ministries, including public health, care for children and work with people in poverty.

justice; and worked with indigenous, Spanish-speaking people. In 1973-74 this work led to conflict in the church and an eventual split into the IELCH, which continued its work with and on behalf of the oppressed, and the larger Lutheran Church in Chile. Both are Lutheran World Federation members.

Some 3,000 IELCH members are now found in 10 congregations and four mission outposts, spread from the southern tip of Chile to just north of Santiago, the capital and home to the churchwide office. The Rev. Luis Alvarez serves as IELCH pastor president.

The IELCH is active in disaster response, providing preschool ministry for people in poverty, addressing domestic violence, lay evangelists and a rich worship life. It's also engaged in reconciliation and a form of reunification with the Lutheran Church in Chile.

Supporting each other

The Indiana-Kentucky Synod has been in a covenanted companionship with the IELCH since 2000. During that time we have engaged in a wide variety of visits, exchanges, support of one another's ministries and disaster response, especially after the earthquake and tsunami of 2010. Spanish-language hymnals published by Augsburg Fortress even appear in every IELCH congregation thanks to the I-K Synod.

The Western Iowa Synod also began to share companionship with the IELCH in 2012. A contingent from the I-K and Western Iowa synods visited the IELCH in April to explore the next steps in our accompaniment with one another. These will include 1) getting to know one another in some depth through regular communication through the synod's global mission committee leadership and the bishop;

Our partner in Chile

The *Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile* (IELCH, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile) has its roots in German Lutheran missionary work that began in the last half of the 19th century.

During the violent regime of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), many IELCH leaders and members were engaged in support of those who were being oppressed and persecuted; sought universal justice;

2) exploring implications of accompaniment for two synods and a church; 3) praying for one another, facilitated by sharing prayer concerns; and 4) exploring ways in which we can engage in mutual encouragement, relationship building and support of one another's mission through exchanges, visits, Bible study and other forms of accompaniment.

In November 2013, the Revs. Chris Duckworth and Carolyn Lesmeister (see page C) traveled to Bogotá, Colombia, to meet with Lutheran global mission leaders from throughout the Americas, including Carolina Ramirez Silva, IELC treasurer.

"At this gathering we talked about the sustainability of the church and of our global relationships, and we looked forward in hope to how the Spirit will work in our mission partnership," Duckworth said. "The model of our relationship with partners in Chile is one of mutual accompaniment—we walk together in our shared life of faith. As the hymn sings, *Un pueblo que camina por el mundo gritando: '¡Ven, Señor!'*"

The people walk throughout the world together and cry out, 'Come, O Lord!' " (*Un Pueblo Que Camina*, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 706).

Our relationship means that we connect folks of common interest from the churches in Chile and Indonesia and from our synod. The Chilean church is active in ministry with immigrants and with victims of domestic violence, and some congregations even have micro-businesses



Selfie of the Revs. Chris Duckworth and Carolyn Lesmeister with Carolina Ramirez Silva (center), IELC treasurer. They attended the four-day "United in Mission, Transformed by Faith" international consultation in Bogotá, Colombia, in November 2013.

that provide income for members and congregations. Connecting like-minded leaders from the I-K Synod with Chilean leaders, we can grow our global partnership, share wisdom across cultures and miles, and work together for the benefit of Christ's church.

As the synod rebuilds its global mission team, we are looking for folks who are interested in serving with us, particularly people (lay and rostered) who are bilingual in English and Spanish. If that sounds like you or someone you know, contact Duckworth (chris.duckworth@gmail.com) or Lesmeister (rev.carolynlesmeister@gmail.com) for more information. □



Indiana-Kentucky

Companion synod relationships connect global Lutheran churches with ELCA synods as expressions of the communion and fellowship shared among the more than 140 member churches of the Lutheran World Federation. These friendships are rooted in “accompaniment,” which promotes the values of mutual-

ity, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability.

Many of the 65 ELCA synods enjoy a relationship with one or more companion churches to strengthen and share mission with each other through mutual prayer, storytelling, support and friendship. Companion synods bear strong wit-

ness to God’s amazing grace that spans time and space. For centuries God has been gathering people, drawing them into Christ’s death and resurrection, and sending them into the world marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Spirit to share in God’s mission of healing, reconciliation and hope in the world.

Horas (hello) from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan

DANIELLE BURRIS



The HKBP *ephorus* (bishop) gave this traditional Batak lute to Bishop Bill Gafkjen as a gift because he saw a YouTube video of him playing the ukulele. The ulos cloth, a sign of welcome and love from the community, is a traditional gift in Batak culture. It’s often presented with a little dance by two people, each holding an end, who come around the recipient to place it over her or his shoulders.

Tracking its founding to the arrival of missionary Ludwig Nommensen in 1863, the 151-year-old *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* (HKBP; pronounced “hah-kah-báy-pay”; translation: Christian Batak Protestant Church) now has about 4.5 million members. It’s the largest Protestant denomination in Indonesia, a country whose population is about 85 percent Muslim, 11 percent Christian, and 4 percent traditional religion or other religious perspective such as Buddhist or Confucian (www.embassyofindonesia.org/about/people.htm).

The church has more than 2,600 congregations, organized into *ressorts* (collections of congregations served by a team of ministers) that are arranged into districts (similar to ELCA synods). The HKBP’s national leader (presiding bishop) is called the “*ephorus*.” And a “*praeses*,” similar to a synod bishop, leads each district.

The Indiana-Kentucky Synod has been in covenanted companionship with the HKBP, particularly District V Sumatra Timur, since 2003. District V’s newly appointed *praeses* is the Rev. Viktor Sihotang. This district is in the north-central part of the island of Sumatra; the district office is in Pematangsiantar.

The HKBP has a strong commitment to education, care for creation, interfaith respect and cooperation, and moving deeper into its own identity and vocation as a Lutheran body. It has two radio stations, a publishing house, four seminaries (one for each of their four rosters), and a university with two campuses (Nommensen University). The HKBP’s church-wide theme for 2014 is “Blessed to be a Blessing.”

An I-K Synod contingent traveled to Sumatra in December 2013 to re-establish our companionship with the HKBP and District V.

As with our companion in Chile (see page D), the next steps in this relationship are to 1) get to know one another in some depth through regular communication through the synod’s global mission committee leadership and the bishop; 2) pray for one another, facilitated by sharing concerns; and 3) begin to explore ways in which we can engage in mutual encouragement, relationship-building, and support of one another’s mission through exchanges, visits, Bible study and other forms of accompaniment. □

BIMEN LIMBONG



Indiana-Kentucky Synod visitors hold the communion set given to the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* by our synod when we were just entering into our companionship. The set is on display in the *ephorus*’ office. From left are: the Rev. Marolop Sinaga (head of the Marturia Department); the Rev. Mori Sihombing (HKBP general secretary); I-K Synod Bishop Bill Gafkjen; Liz and Terry Michael; the Rev. Bimen Limbong; the Rev. Willem TP Simarmata (HKBP *ephorus*); and the Rev. Welman Tampubolon (head of the Koinonia Department).



Bishop Bill Gafkjen greets eager children at an Advent celebration in Balige, Sumatra. More than 6,000 children attended this daylong gathering that included worship, dancing, dramatic presentations and speeches.

shared a Scripture passage about God's presence sustaining those who journey. With their heavenly harmonies gently ringing in my ears and heart, I sat in the now candlelit darkness of my room overwhelmed with a sense of Emmanuel's good and gracious presence and promise. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not, cannot, overcome it.

Thank you, dear deaconesses, for shining with the light of Jesus.

'Weaving gifts together'

The November visit to the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* wasn't the first for Bishop Bill Gafkjen. In 2002 he accompanied Bishop Emeritus Jim Stuck on a visit to get to know the people, land and church, and to explore what shape the partnership would take.

Since that first visit, the Indiana-Kentucky Synod has walked with the Batak people through a tsunami and its aftermath, offering funds for food, clothing, shelter and new ways of making a living. The synod has welcomed HKBP visitors to the U.S. to build relationships, worship and support one another's mission. It also sent folks to Indonesia to help HKBP English teachers sharpen their speaking and teaching skills.

For the "Weaving Gifts Together" blog, Gafkjen wrote: 5 a.m. Sunday morning in Balige, Sumatra, I was awakened by beautiful singing. In my post-arrival fog I thought it might be the TV left on ... when I fell asleep. Nope. Was it someone else's music being played loudly in the next room? Nope. I laid in bed surrounded by the indescribable harmony of the voices of women singing a hymn. It sounded like it was right outside my door. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by a memory of my first trip to Sumatra 11 years ago. It had to be HKBP deaconesses. But at 5 [a.m.] outside my hotel door?

I opened the door just wide enough to stick out my bed-head. There they were, deaconesses and students from the deaconess school, candlelit faces singing hymns in the darkness, welcoming me, blessing me, calling me into this Advent day. Before moving on they handed me a lighted candle and

Later that morning Gafkjen preached at an Advent celebration culminating a yearlong focus of honoring children and caring for creation. More than 10,000 people attended this daylong celebration that included worship, dancing, dramatic presentations, speeches and some 6,000 children. Similar, though smaller, regional celebrations had occurred throughout the previous year as a response to the tragic deaths of three children at a HKBP church in November 2012.

Gafkjen blogged: *The daylong event began with hundreds of children processing for more than a mile through the streets wearing masks and carrying trees as silent protest against air pollution and deforestation ... traditional Batak dancers welcoming us at the gate of the church and dancing us in ... planting of trees (mine were a mango and a durian) ... vigorous worship ... children singing and dancing ... swarms of children asking for our autographs and for a photo with each of us (we are probably already tagged on Facebook!) ... warm hospitality and gift-giving ... civic authorities speaking about the HKBP's commitment to children and to the community ... an anti-bullying puppet show ... children everywhere, happy and engaged ... and did I mention the singing and dancing?*

Because the HKBP has such a strong presence in North Sumatra, the media took great interest in this visit. Gafkjen and crew showed up all over the local and national news. I-K Synod pastor Bimen Limbong translated for a live interview of the bishop on HKBP radio. There was even standing-room only for the Sunday worship for which Gafkjen preached. This congregation, Kampun Kristen in Siantar, has a thriving ministry that takes Sunday school into surrounding communities rather than just waiting for the folks to show up at church. Children were all over the place! □

United in mission

The Revs. Carolyn Lesmeister and Chris Duckworth attended the four-day “United in Mission, Transformed by Faith” international consultation in Bogotá, Colombia, on behalf of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to discuss ways to strengthen and renew companion partnerships in order to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

They met in November 2013 with leaders from churches throughout Central and South America, and the Caribbean, including Carolina Ramirez Silva, treasurer of the *Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile*, one of our companion churches. ELCA Global Mission staff led the consultation. Attendees participated with the help of headphones that provided simultaneous translation into Spanish and English.

The goal was for participants to learn how their church’s respective partnerships fulfill the promise of accompaniment, consider the reality of the partnership, and plan ways to sustain the relationship in the future.

All of the following observations were made by leaders from churches throughout Central and South America, who gathered with representatives from their ELCA companion synods at the consultation:

- “We used to have full-time pastors who did everything, but now we can’t afford that. We are trying to figure out how to do effective ministry with our congregations and in our



communities using part-time pastoral leadership, which means we’re having to train and develop a lot of strong lay leaders. Many of our pastors need to be bi-vocational.”

- “A lot of our congregations are very small. They feel isolated.”
- “We have a traditional worship service one Sunday a month with the choir and the organ. We have a contemporary service one Sunday a month with a praise band. The other Sundays we try to do a combination; it’s a challenge, but we’re trying to keep everyone happy.”
- “We’re struggling to reach out to young people.”

Do any of these concerns sound familiar to you? Have you been part of similar conversations with people in your congregation or with colleagues in the ministry?

“While the details of our contexts are different, we were surprised to learn how much we have in common, and how many similar challenges and opportunities we face,” Lesmeister said. “We quickly realized that we could all benefit from in-depth conversations and brainstorming around how we are addressing these matters in our respective contexts. Who knows how the Holy Spirit might work through such interactions?” □

Walking with our partners

We walk together in this relationship of faith. We walk together as a church. Hand in hand. United in faith. Sisters and brothers. With much to learn from each other, and much to give to one another. We are partners and companions in mission. We are one body of Christ.

There are five values at the core of a relationship of mutual accompaniment: mutuality, interdependence, empowerment, vulnerability and sustainability. As we walk together in faith in our renewed relationship with the churches in Indonesia and Chile, we seek a mutual and interdependent

partnership that empowers each other, that allows for us to be vulnerable with each other, and which is sustainable into the long arc of God’s promised future.

What does this mean?

It means that we spend time together in prayer, study and conversation—in person when possible, but more often using online video chatting platforms such as Skype, Facetime and Google Hangout.

We’re seeking to set up opportunities for online prayer, Bible study and even worship, perhaps monthly, between groups in Indonesia and Chile

and here in Indiana and Kentucky.

It means that when we do send delegations to travel to to these two countries, we send them ready to learn from, and to walk alongside of, our Indonesian and Chilean sisters and brothers in their God-given mission, expecting to see God at work in their churches and communities.

We share our challenges. We share our joys. We expect to learn from one another. □

Submitted by the Rev. Chris Duckworth of First Trinity Lutheran Church, Indianapolis.