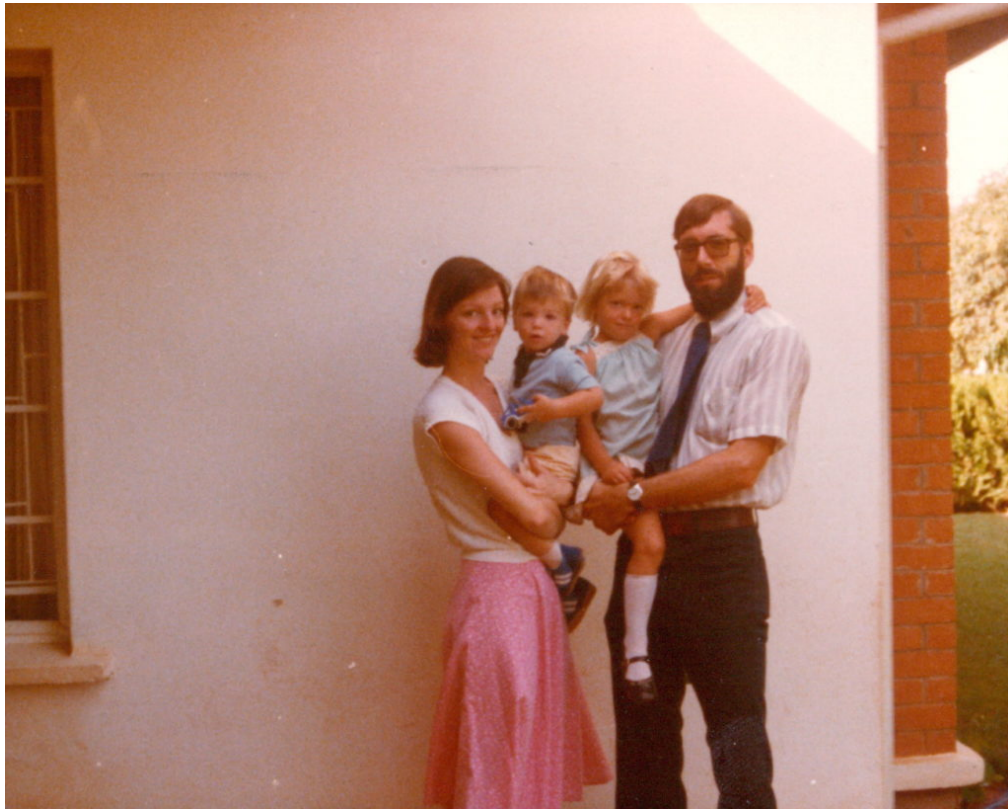


African Homecoming



The Thompson family in Zambia shortly before their departure 35 years ago

On September 24, 1977, my wife Beth and I, married only two months, stepped off a plane in Lusaka, Zambia for the first time. I was four months out of the seminary and was about to begin my ministry by serving as a missionary with the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA). It was a difficult time for the 13-year-old country. Store shelves were all but empty as the import routes were cut off by the violent war of independence taking place on our south in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). But the welcome of the mission staff and especially the warm and cheerful Christians of Zambia helped us quickly make Zambia our first home.

In the six years that followed we were blessed with two healthy children, and we became absorbed in helping the Lutheran Church of Central Africa grow in numbers and spiritual maturity. I oversaw congregations in urban Lusaka and in the rural Eastern Province (a 3-4 day, 1,000-mile round-trip visit each month). I also ran the

Lutheran Press and taught at the Bible Institute and Seminary in Lusaka. Our ministry lasted until 1983, and those six years were formative to our lives and ministries ever since.



Luke Thompson's baptism at St. Matthew's Burma Road 37 years ago

This month, we stepped off the plane in Lusaka again for the first time in 35 years. We knew things would be different, but our 17-day visit truly amazed us. While the country has slowly modernized and improved its economic and educational levels, the changes in the LCCA were even more clearly visible. The three preaching stations I used to visit in the Eastern Province had now multiplied into 35 congregations. The over 50 years of faithful worker training at the Lutheran Bible Institute and the Seminary has resulted in over 50 well-trained African pastors who faithfully preach the Gospel and minister to over 50,000 souls.



Pastors from Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia attended continuing education classes at the Lusaka Seminary

On Easter we worshiped at St. Matthew's Church on Burma Rd. in the Kabwata section of Lusaka. I had served as the pastor there for almost my entire 6 years. We received a joyous reception, with numerous choir songs, and a special luncheon. Especially wonderful was reconnecting with one of the remaining members from those early days. The church we had worshiped in is now a parish hall, and the current worship structure is much larger. Everything indicates God's blessings during the past years when they benefited from having a Zambian as their pastor.



A reunion with 2 of Dr. Thompson's former members at Kaunda Square church in suburban Lusaka. The current pastor, Jonathan Kangongo is on the left.

We had similar Sundays in 2 other churches, and reconnected with other old friends. The greatest joy, however, took place in our classrooms. Beth ran a workshop for the wives of seven pastors, exploring ways to increase literacy in their churches and to use language teaching in congregational outreach. The Christian maturity and zeal for ministry of these women was inspiring. I taught an advanced church history course to 21 pastors from Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, and Cameroon as a part of the Greater Africa Theological Seminary Institute (GRATSI) program. Some were finishing a Bachelors program; others were in a Masters program; the rest came solely to improve their biblical and historical knowledge and to further their knowledge of confessional Lutheran teaching with other African brothers.



Dr. Thompson of Asia Lutheran Seminary recently taught in the Greater Africa Theological Seminary Institute (GRATSI)



Beth Thompson shared her experience as an ESL instructor with the GRATSI pastors' wives

One of my students was the grandson of a pastor I had worked with years ago. Several others were already serving as instructors at the Bible Institute (now located in Malawi) and the Seminary. The educational level had increased substantially in 35

years; and the Christian maturity of these men made it a joy to teach them. Tough times still lay ahead for any church in Africa, but I left knowing that these men will be a strong bulwark for the Lutheran church there. Please keep them and our hard-working missionaries there in your prayers always!



Representatives from the LCMC in Kenya audited the GRATSI classes in Lusaka. The LCMC is in the process of applying for fellowship with the LCCA Zambia

It was good to return “home” to Hong Kong spiritually refreshed. No more quiet starlit nights here, but also no electricity or water outages! Back to finishing out the courses for this semester, and making preparations for the next year. Back to the eager faces of my Chinese students rather than the cheerful faces of Africans. But back to the same work—training pastors who will faithfully preach Law and Gospel to their people, who will always keep Christ at the center of their message, and who will be ready to pass that message to the next generation.



Dr. Ernst Wendland and Dr. Glen Thompson served together as missionaries in Africa 35 years ago. Currently they are preparing future pastors in Lusaka and Hong Kong, respectively

One final highlight. We paused during class one day to allow my African students to meet and talk with our Chinese students via Skype. The African pastors asked about the challenges of outreach in East Asia. The Chinese students asked about ministry in a culture and environment so different from theirs. The few minutes we spent together showed clearly how their Christian faith could create instant bonds across continents and cultures. May God continue to bless our mission seminaries and allow them to continue to be an important tool in expanding His kingdom.

Dr. Glen Thompson, Academic Dean of Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Go to this link to learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts

<https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>