

Letters from Crackpots



Rev. E. Eshiett

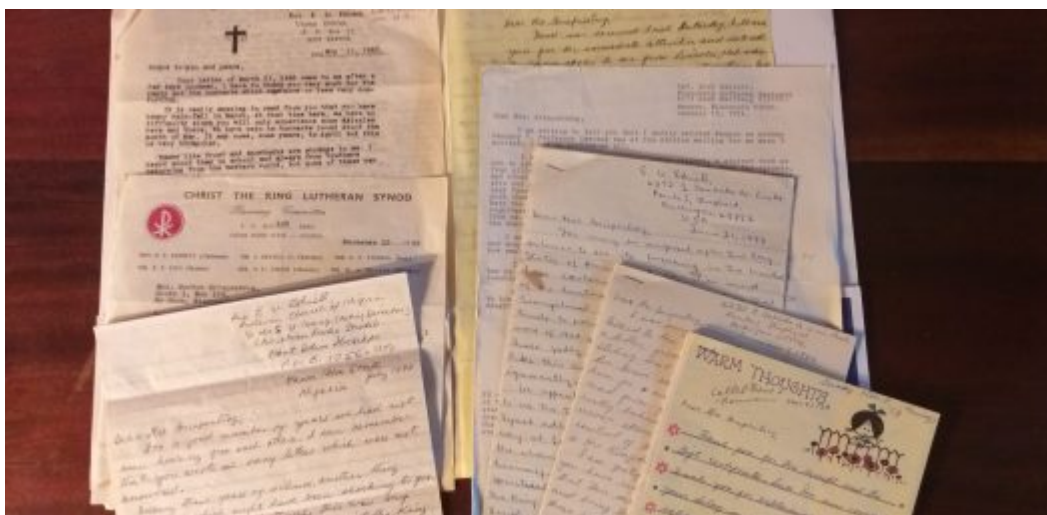
My wife's parents were dairy farmers from Wisconsin whose lives revolved around the family, farm, and church. They had a great love for Jesus and his Great Commission. In 1963 my mother-in-law read a story in the Green Bay Press-Gazette about a Nigerian pastor who wanted to know about Christianity in the United States. That article prompted her to raise money in her congregation to purchase a bicycle for his ministry, and later she sent him some clothes. In a letter he replied, "I am really fat and would need to reduce if it was within my capacity. The raincoat did not fit me. It is still very needful since my wife has begun to use it." Over the next three decades she maintained correspondence with Rev. E. Eshiett, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nigeria.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nigeria came into existence in the 1930's following contacts between a Nigerians from the Ibesikpo tribe and representatives from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The Ibesikpos had been part of a Presbyterian church body dominated by people of the Qua Iboe tribe, but did not feel

that they were being treated fairly. The Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod partnered to support missionaries in Nigeria under the supervision of the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference.

After the breakup of the Synodical Conference in 1961, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nigeria remained in fellowship with the Missouri Synod. However, the Lutheran members of another Nigerian tribe, the Annang people, felt that they were receiving second-class treatment in the Ibesikpo-dominated church body. In 1960's, several Annang Lutherans traveled to the United States to search for a new Lutheran partner. In 1969 the Lutherans living in the Annang majority territory of Abiaokpo established their own church body, Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria.

As the only ordained pastor in the new church body, Rev. Eshiett was sent to the United States to pursue contacts with the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation in 1971. Eventually Rev. Eshiett reached out to Rev. Edward Greve, a former WELS missionary who had taught in the Synodical Conference's Nigerian seminary. It was decided that he should attend classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for a short time. While he was there, Eshiett was able to meet my wife's parents and see their dairy farm in person. He wrote, "Farmers [in the USA] themselves are very rich." When my mother-in-law responded that American farmers have to pay mortgages he wrote, "I did not know that these men are debtors. However, it is always good to be a good debtor, although debt can disunite men with Christ." He also asked my mother-in-law about her newborn calves and yearling steer.



In 1981, WELS and CKLCN declared fellowship. Over the next decade, WELS sent missionaries on short-term teaching trips to prepare pastors for Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Rev. Eshiett helped train seminary students - and then in 1986 he resigned from his post and left CKLCN. In his last letter to my mother-in-law he wrote, "How are you faring with your farm? Every moment of my life I feel I am nearer eternity than before...I need your prayers daily." He was a broken clay pot with Christ's treasure in his heart (2 Cor. 4:7).

It is a testimony to God's power and grace that he uses flawed humans - pastors, missionaries and laypeople - to build up his church. We stumble in our mission strategy, we make short-sighted decisions, and sometimes our helping hurts others. In spite of all our missteps God pours living water on his church and it blooms with the fragrant aroma of the Gospel. God used Rev. Eshiett to lay the foundation for his church in Nigeria, and he used my mother-in-law's letters to strengthen him in his ministry. And God is using cracked pots like you and me to build up his church all over the world!

Missionary John Roebke lives in Malawi

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>