

Ndine Mlendo M'dziko Lachildendo



Ernie & Margie Wendland have been living in Africa for half a century
the title of this post means "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land" (Ex. 2:22 ESV)

The 1960's was a decade of worldwide social and political upheaval. It was the era of MLK and the Civil Rights movement, and African independence from the French and British colonial empires. In 1968 a young graduate from a small Midwestern pastor-training college joined his father and a small team of missionaries in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia to lend a hand teaching students in the Lutheran Bible Institute. That young man's name was Ernst Richard Wendland, and 52 years later he is still serving the WELS as a missionary in Africa.



Lusaka Lutheran Seminary faculty, 1969 (L-R): Orlin Wraalstad, E.H. Wendland, Don Fastenau, E.R. Wendland, Richard Mueller

In 1953 WELS missionaries first arrived in what was then called Northern Rhodesia, a protectorate of the British Empire. The next decade saw slow, painstaking gains for the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) as the missionaries preached sermons, performed baptisms and instructed new members, often with the help of African “evangelists.” By the mid-1960’s the LCCA had established its worker training program on a 40 acre property in the Lusaka suburb of Chelston under the direction of Missionary Ernst H. Wendland. This development coincided with the world’s recognition of Zambia as an independent country, and the expansion of WELS mission work to the neighboring country of Malawi. The 1960’s also saw the construction of a Lutheran health clinic in the rural district of Mwembezhi, staffed by a constant rotation of nurses from the United States. One of them in 1969 was a young RN from Michigan named Margaret Westendorf, who became Ernst’s indispensable life-partner through marriage in 1971.



Ernie & Margie were married in St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in South Haven, MI. The world has witnessed unimaginable changes over the last half-century. In 1965 Lusaka was a small town of 160,000 inhabitants. Today, Lusaka is an urban center of over 3 million people with ever-present traffic jams and pollution. The LCCA is now an independent church body of over 10,000 souls. Zambian national pastors and lay leaders serve all 113 of the congregations situated in many different areas of the country. As for the Wendlands, God blessed them with four children - Rob, Joel, Stephen, and Naomi - who, even today, sometimes feel more at "home" in Zambia than in the USA.



(L-R) Naomi, Rob, Joel, Margaret, Ernst, Steve Wendland

Missionary Wendland has had a front row seat to all of these changes and many more. He is a living bridge between the earliest days of WELS mission work in Central Africa and the LCCA's ongoing work today. From his perspective, "the aims of the early WELS missionaries have been achieved and valued by most nationals—namely, to establish a confessional, evangelical, Lutheran church body in an area of Africa where none existed before, and to partner with national leaders and trained pastors so that they would progressively take over the work that missionaries had done before to found the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." The backbone of that mission strategy was and still is the thorough training of men who will serve as the shepherds of God's flock. Candidates for the program first receive training through a program called Theological Education by Extension (see <https://welsfriendsof africa.com/t-e-e-ing-up-students-for-success/>), then enter a two-tiered school of the Lutheran Bible Institute and Lutheran Seminary. Missionary Wendland has taught various classes at both the Bible Institute and Seminary level, including biblical language and exegetical courses, plus hermeneutics, communication & translation, English, African traditional religion and independent local churches.



T.E.E. class in the Chongwe, Zambia area in 1985

Upon graduation and ordination, pastors continue to benefit from ongoing educational programs. Missionary Wendland helped originate and facilitate the original Greater Africa Theological Studies Institute (GRATSI), a program of post-graduate studies offering both Bachelors of Divinity and Masters of Theology degrees to qualified pastors from Zambia and Malawi. These post-seminary programs have now been incorporated into the Confessional Lutheran Institute (CLI) which will help coordinate all of the pastoral enrichment programs that WELS has to offer its partners in Africa. What is truly exciting is that some of the Zambian students that were trained in the LBI and Seminary are now co-teachers with their former instructors at the Lutheran Seminary. God deserves the glory for development of the LCCA into a mature church body, and we thank God for using Missionary Wendland and many other faithful missionaries to realize this goal.

Over that time he has enjoyed strong working relationships with Zambian colleagues in ministry. He says, "This has always been a mutually educative and supportive relationship. There are certain things that I could teach my fellow pastors and teachers, while on the other hand, there are many things that they have taught me over the years—right up to the present day, especially in the area of language, culture, and a different world-view perspective on the Scriptures. I could not have carried out, let alone prospered, in my various mission-related endeavors without

the essential guidance, correction, and encouragement provided by my national brothers in Christ.”



Mambwe-Lungu (NE Zambia) translation team, with Salimo Hachibamba, working on the New Testament

Having attended a translators' workshop led by Missionary Wendland, it was immediately clear to me that God has given him a deep appreciation for the culture and language of the Bantu peoples. Missionary Wendland's linguistic talents have served him well in his duties as the Language Coordinator for LCCA Publications, a post he has held since 1972. In addition, he has served the United Bible Societies as a language consultant for 40 years working in Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Botswana. His guiding philosophy in translating theological texts is to render them both accurately and idiomatically. Many older translations use a literal, word-for-word approach that do not communicate the meaning of the original text. Wendland's goal has always been "to identify and train national pastors who have the double gift of understanding English well coupled with the ability of translating our publications (textbooks, tracts, hymns, liturgies, Bible studies, etc.) competently in the natural style of a local Bantu language." While there are electronic tools available today to help check spelling, grammar and punctuation, Google Translate is not adequate to the task of checking the accuracy and style of a translation. It is important that translators not only have a good understanding of English but are also native speakers of the language they are translating the text into. Over the last

half-century the work of translating the Bible into different native languages has flourished all over the world, and study Bibles are available in many African tongues. In addition to teaching students at the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka, Missionary Wendland has shared his extensive experience in translation work with students in South Africa, Israel and Hong Kong.

The Wendlands have followed a very different path through life than their fellow WELS members, as God has blessed them with the opportunity to spend two-thirds of their lifetime in Africa. Missionary Wendland expresses his gratitude to the WELS for their generous support for so many years. He also underscores his admiration for “the friendly, helpful nature of the various African peoples in this part of the world—their desire to learn more about God’s Word and how to apply it in their lives, including certain social settings that present many challenges and tests of faith like warfare, disease, droughts, and economic downturns.” As we continue to be tested by the COVID19 outbreak, may God also help us to cling to his promises and apply his Word to our lives.

Written by Missionary John Roebke, Director of Communications for One Africa Team.

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>