

Press Forward



A flash flood provided a little extra excitement to a recent publications meeting in Lusaka

Stuck. In. The. Mud. It happens (often) during the rainy season. There's no point in kicking yourself for venturing out on dicey roads or blaming the road engineers who built the road, or shaking your fist at God for sending so much rain. When you're stuck, you've only got one option - you've got to get unstuck.

Stuck. It happens (often) in church work. Endless committee meetings become a quagmire for decision making. Miscommunication between Gospel partners ensures zero progress on projects. A change in leadership paralyzes those who are comfortable with the status quo. But when you're stuck, you don't point fingers or pass judgment on others. You get unstuck.

I recently travelled to Zambia to meet with members of the two committees responsible for publications work in the Lutheran Church of Central Africa - Zambia Synod. Publications work has been at a standstill for some time. At one time, the Lutheran Press of Lusaka was cranking out tracts, hymnals, sermon books, Sunday school materials and worker training manuals for use in both Zambia and Malawi. In the 1970s and '80s, missionaries and national workers operated printing equipment on the campus of the Lutheran Seminary because there wasn't anyone else in town who get the work done. For many years faithful servants of the church produced

printed materials that are still in use 40 years later, albeit a bit dated in appearance.



Lusaka has seen remarkable development in the last 20 years. Large publishing houses offer their services at a competitive price

But the times have changed, and Lusaka has seen explosive growth in the last two decades. Shopping malls, movie theaters, expressways and traffic jams are now part of everyday life. The technology of printing has changed rapidly too. Lusaka has several printing houses staffed with talented layout artists who paint on monitors with the flick of a mouse. Computers keep an electric eye on paper streaming and ink flowing through giant Heidelberg presses. Bookbinding machines fuse glue, pages and cover on a smoothly moving production line.

It takes an army of workers and a sharp business plan to operate a modern printing operation today. It takes an army of church workers and careful stewardship to deliver the Gospel to today's audiences. It is a blessing that the LCCA-ZS can partner with WELS Multi-Language Publications and local printing houses to obtain printed products that are cheaper and of a much higher quality than anything they could make themselves.

There are obstacles of course because this is sub-Saharan Africa. A sudden downpour flooded the Lutheran Seminary campus the day of our meeting in Lusaka, so after removing my shoes and socks and rolling up my pant legs I waded my way to work. Delivering printed products to remote congregations is a huge challenge that is overcome by using a delivery network of mini-buses, motorcycles and

bicycles. And even the best written printed materials with an attractively designed cover have to compete with whatever's flashing on your phone's screen.



These reprints of the WELS Catechism were made in Malawi

Nevertheless, the LCCA-ZS publications program is moving forward again like a Landcruiser in creeper gear. "The good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it" (Luke 16:16). It is time to press forward.

Missionary John Roebke is the Communications Director for One Africa Team and lives in Malawi.