

Strong Pastors, Healthy Churches



From Left to Right: Pastors Mecious Lubaba, Jonathan Kangongo, Eliya Petro, Forward Shamachona, Mascrif Mulonda, Stanley Daile, Alfred Kumchulesi, Ellason Kambalame. Missing: Pastor Enock Mkowasenga.

It is hard to believe that the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) has been running the Greater African Theological Studies Institute (GRATSI) now for almost 9 years. With assistance of visiting professors from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) LCCA pastors from Malawi and Zambia receive further opportunities to obtain advanced degrees in theological studies. The first class called GRATSI 2010 graduated in 2014 and now the second GRATSI class called GRATSI 2014 graduated on July 19, 2019.

The GRATSI 2014 class spent nearly five years meeting two to three times a year in week-long face to face study courses with visiting PSI professors. Class sessions were taught alternatively on the campuses of the Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi and the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka, Zambia. On July 19, nine

LCCA pastors received a Bachelors of Divinity Diploma from visiting Professor Paul Koelpin, who was representing the PSI program of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Over 30 other LCCA pastors were able to take part in the graduation ceremonies as well, because the graduation event coincided with the close of this year's Pastors' Continuing Education course.

The GRATSI program is a work in progress. For the first time, a cohort of four GRATSI 2010 graduates has been formed to pursue a GRATSI Master's Degree. These men have been meeting in several on-line courses, as well as a face to face classes with visiting Professor Paul Koelpin. In an attempt to broaden the GRATSI program beyond the borders of Malawi and Zambia to all of Africa, pastors from other African Synods in our fellowship were invited to attend several sessions of the just concluded GRATSI 2014 cohort. This is in keeping with the GRATSI namesake of the **Greater African** Theological Studies Institute.

But the Lord has blessed One Africa Team with an even broader vision for our efforts to deliver advanced theological training to our partners in Africa. Soon the name "GRATSI" will be changing to "Confessional Lutheran Institute" (CLI). Course work prepared by the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's PSI for the GRATSI program has now also been used in other Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) church bodies outside of Africa. God has blessed WELS with the opportunity to continue advanced training for Lutheran theological workers and pastors not only in Africa, but also throughout the world. May God grant success to our endeavors as we seek to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Acting LCCA Seminary Principal
Philip Birner