

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi was founded November 21, 1982 by lay people who had become Lutheran while working in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The group, led by Mr. Gilbert Msuku who had been in Tanzania for over twenty years, founded the ELCM. The church, which began without any pastors or missionaries, grew so rapidly that it had to request pastoral leadership from those churches in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. These arrangements continued until 1987 when the ELCM ordained its first three pastors. Currently the church has approximately 40,000 members in more than 200 congregations, which form 34 parishes, served by 25 pastors.

The relationship between the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi began in 1991 when the then Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, Joseph P. Bvumbwe, came to America to study for a masters degree in theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

While in America, Pastor Bvumbwe met Pastor Harold and Kathy Oelschlager, who visited the ELCM in 1996. Pastor Bvumbwe had been elected bishop of the ELCM in 1995.

Bishop Berg and the church council decided to invite Bishop Bvumbwe to speak at the 1997 synod assembly and to devote the assembly offering for construction of a chapel somewhere in the ELCM. In 1998, Bishop Berg and the synod church council applied to the ELCA Division of Global Missions for a second companion synod, namely, the ELCM. In 1999, the application was granted.

The companion relationship was furthered in 2000 when the Rev. James Magelssen, assistant bishop for Northwest Synod, headed a delegation of eight to the ELCM.

On February 16th and May 11th, 2002, Bishop Berg and Bishop Bvumbwe led workshops to guide congregations from the synod who were being matched with a parish in Malawi. A similar workshop was held in Malawi with pastors and church leaders. Over 49 congregations are now building relationships with a **sister parish** in Malawi.

Reported by:

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