

**Understanding the Contextual challenges facing pastoral leadership
in an African church today**

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The Church's Role in Society

**“Understanding the Contextual challenges facing pastoral
leadership
in an African church today”**

Kairos Study, as Independent [elective II].
Reflective Paper and a Project Proposal.

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Introduction

One of the ways in which people in Africa have come to understand the church has been a shift from their usual understanding of the church as a place of solace and peace to understand the church as a site of struggle. This version of understanding the church grew out of the South Africa's struggle from oppression and segregation. The church was actively involved in the struggle giving refuge to the victims of the struggle. When one visited the churches, it was like visiting a clinic or a hospital. In 1983 I had the opportunity to visit my friend Rev Soluwane, Dean of the Lutheran Church in Soweto. It was clear that he was viewed by the Government as an enemy because of his involvement in the struggle. Both the personage and the church compound were all full of children who were orphaned by the war of liberation and were involved in throwing stones at the military men who surrounded his house and church with tanks ready to shoot and kill at any time. Fear was the way of life. Anything could happen to anybody at anytime. Many lives were in danger. During the week that I was there I could not believe what I saw with my own eyes. Children who left in the morning to fight for freedom were being returned back to church as dead bodies having been shot dead to be buried at the church compound. Others were being treated of their injuries and needed long term care to heal. The church had indeed become a site of struggle in South Africa. The same would soon be true of former Southwest Africa - now Namibia, Angola and Mozambique. The whole Southern Africa region was suffering. The church was not isolated, it was at the center of the struggle. Today the struggle still continues in whole of the African Continent. The enemy may have changed, but the struggle is still there. The question is how long will the struggle last? When will the children of Africa come to know peace? When shall violence against women and children be stopped?

This reflective paper does not provide the answers to these questions, but rather opens up and facilitates a debate of open discussions on the subject matter. It also lifts for us the challenges that pastoral

leadership faces as it ministers in an African context today. Understanding these challenges helps us to not only appreciate the efforts of those involved, but also invites us to be in social partnerships with others for the sake of the gospel and creation.

Value of the study for the ministry

The study has a dual purpose. It will help both our own pastors to understand how complex their context is for the ministry as well as helping those who are partners with us to begin to understand and appreciate the challenges we face as we minister in the African context today. This will lead to mutual respect and appreciation of the challenges we face together as we carry out Christ's mission in the world today.

Methods used in the study

Mostly consultation and dialogue with a lot of note taking. A list of selected bibliography was provided from which some materials and books were read. Loren Halvorson's own experiences as compiled in his book "Personal and Public- (Spiritual and Social Justice)" served as the main resource book for the study.

Limitation

Africa is a vast continent. The challenges are similar but the orientation and experiences may differ from country to country. The study limited itself to the Southern African region and focused itself on Malawi, a small landlocked country in the Southeastern corner of Africa.

The Context:

1. The Southern African, Malawian Context.

a). The Country Profile.

Geography and Location

Malawi is a small country located in the Southern Eastern part of Africa. It is land-locked with varying terrain across it. Sharing borders with it is Zambia to the West, Tanzania to the North and Mozambique to the East and South. Malawi covers an area of 118,480 sq. km. It's capital is Lilongwe. Malawi's major geographic features are the mountains, rivers, and Lake Malawi, which covers over 1/4 of the country.

People and Economy

Malawi has a population of 10 million with ethnic groupings and languages. More than 80% of the people are Christians comprising of 60% Protestants and 20% Catholics. The remaining 20% comprise 15-18% Muslims and 2-5% belong to traditional indigenous beliefs and other religions.

As a land-locked country, Malawi's economy is predominantly based on agriculture, which accounts for 45% of Gross National Product and more than 90% of the country's export earnings. 80% of the agricultural produce comes from smallholder farmers on customary land. The main crops grown are maize, tobacco, tea, sugarcane, groundnuts, cotton, wheat, coffee, rice, and soybeans. It is important here to note that Malawi is mainly an exporter of primary produce (raw materials) and a net importer of industrial goods (finished products). Malawi therefore is one of the world's poorest countries. The UNDP 1999 Human Development reports per capita income at approximately \$169.00US with more than 60% of the population living below the poverty datum line of about \$40.00 per capital income. Life expectancy is estimated at 45 years and falling. The illiteracy rate is estimated at 56%. Infant mortality is alarmingly high.

Malaria kills most children below the age of 5 years while HIV/AIDS has taken its toll on the productive middle ages.

b). Profile of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM).

Historical Background - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi was founded November 21, 1982 by lay people who had become Lutherans while working in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Finding little comfort in the existing Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia and Malawi), the mission field of the conservative Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), they longed for the Lutheranism they were used to in those countries. 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 30,000 members in more than 160 congregations with nearly thirty pastors serving 26 parishes scattered throughout the country. ELCM elected its first Bishop in 1995 and is governed by the church-wide assembly, which elects church officers and a church council empowered to set policy and make decisions between the assembly meetings. The church's officers are in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. Evangelism and lay leadership training is top priority for the ELCM. Backbone to these activities is its string of women's group and youth's groups as pioneers of the outreach program based on Bible studies and songs (music). Each congregation has its own outreach program. Women groups lead the church effort in alms giving and caring for the sick and the needy. The youth on the other hand are responsible for work among Sunday school children. Because of its background as indicated above, ELCM's self understanding as dominantly a lay

people's church is clearly manifested in all its undertakings. The most of its congregations are led by lay leadership. The clergy are secondary visiting congregations may once in six weeks for sacraments. Lay people both male and female, young and old, involve themselves in every aspect of church leadership. They are very independent and also willing to learn more skills about what the church is all about.

Right from its inception, ELCM took social improvement as it's prime concern. Parallel with preaching and teaching the gospel, ELCM has been deeply involved in the social well being of its members and the citizens of Malawi. A small rapidly growing church, the ELCM is an active member of various ecumenical organizations both locally and internationally to the point that it's impact has been felt as a partner in the gospel and a counterpart on the effort to bring about peace with justice in the suffering world today. The creation of the Office of the Bishop in 1995 has strengthened the unity of the ELCM and its growth throughout Malawi. The Bishop's major responsibilities in the church are those of visiting parishes to offer support and encouragement the parish pastors and their parishioners.

The Context

The context as described above provides the opportunity for the ELCM's ministry to be holistic in nature. Most of its members live in rural areas and are generally poor. The situation has been worsened by the presence of the killer diseases such as HIV/AIDS which is killing mostly productive middle aged people, and Malaria which kills mostly children under the age of 5 years. In addition to the primary responsibility of preaching the word of God, the ELCM can also be described as the voice of the voiceless and an advocate of change for the betterment of those marginalised in society- the poor (usually orphans). In this regard, and for the sake of these young children, the church feels compelled to operate hope projects such as: feeding

centers for Aids orphans and small scale income generating projects for widows.

Other projects include:

- ~ Adult education for women and men who cannot read and write
- ~ Provision for clean water wells in villages
- ~ HIV/AIDS care and prevention messages for all ages especially the youth (both girls and boys)
- ~ Skill training for women and young people
- ~ Feeding centers for under-nourished children (orphans) and the needy children in general
- ~ Primary schools and the Girls Secondary school in Bwengu
- ~ Home economics for women and primary health care in general
- ~ Family health care and education on family planning
- ~ Care practices and many others such life improving projects. The mobile clinics will strengthen these services in all of the three regions of Malawi.

The Challenge

The ELCM position is that as long as Africa and its countries remain economically poor, the challenges will remain and will grow. Churches and governments must continue their efforts to make life bearable for the poor, but the answer is a collective one. The whole international community needs to join hands in the battle to fight poverty and systems of economic injustice that continue to make poor countries poorer and rich countries richer, and thereby also widening the growing gap between the rich and the poor. We need to work for justice dealings in international trade and fight corruption that robs people of their justly deserved resources at all levels. The role of the church in it's prophetic ministry needs to be revived and even emphasized, naming sin by its name, and pointing to the will of God for all his people in all countries of the world. The ELCM like other African churches will need to provide leadership in this effort as they

themselves carry most of the burden and have to live with these burdens in their daily ministry. The word of God and his promises remain the source of hope for those who live in poverty and injustice. The church must remain strong in its ministry based on the knowledge that God has promised to be always present with it up to the end. We should not allow sin and persistent sufferings of human life to become the stumbling block to the gospel message of our Lord Jesus. We have the opportunity to join hands and give hope to the world. As you will have noted from above, the African continent is a suffering continent. It is there that the Lutheran Church in Malawi is witnessing and growing. As already pointed out, the context has a lot to do with how the church perceives itself and its mission. Here unlike elsewhere the church is preoccupied with giving hope to the hopeless and giving life to the dying. Spiritually the people are very much alive, but physically they are dying and don't understand the reasons behind continued suffering. The pastors, of which the bishop is one among others, are constantly engaged in theological reflection and lead the people on a theological journey to find meaning to life in the midst of suffering, to find life in the midst of death, to find light in the midst of darkness. This is done together in small group Bible studies. Each person is taken seriously and so are their contributions to the life and ministry of ELCM.

Pastoral Visits

Bishops are regularly required to visit pastors in order to provide encouragement. Most of the pastors find themselves serving in very difficult situations, far from everybody else. Here the bishop will visit and offer encouragement. This is important for the pastor who must in turn offer encouragement to his parishioners. The bishop's visitation program is a time of revival and renewal. It is also a time of witnessing to a wider community through evangelism. During these visits hope is offered through life giving sermons that the bishop must deliver to his flock. The sermons are expected to be spiritually

powerful and life giving.

For example it is common knowledge that when I am visiting the parishes during the bishop's yearly visit, the services will be long, normally between three to four hours long. This is not so because people have nothing to do, or time to waste, it is so for a number of reasons. They tell me that: -

- a). It is good to be in the house of God and they are pleased when someone tells them 'lets go to the house of the Lord'. They wait for these days to come. They want to hear what God wants to say through his messenger. "It is good for us to be here" is a commonly shared experience during these visits.
- b). Their presence at the church with the bishop unites them with many other fellow members of the church. It is time of Bible studies and Theological reflection on what is happening in general.
- c). The message being shared has been shared with others like them in the church elsewhere. Through it they find hope and a purpose for living. Here serious challenges e.g. HIV/AIDS is openly discussed helping with advice.
- d). In addition to celebrating sacraments they may witness dedication of their new church or ordination of their new pastor; and many more. Above all, it is time for groups e.g. youth and women to meet the Bishop and discuss matters that affect them in the church.

You can therefore see that the visits are part of the church's journey and celebrated with a lot of anticipation. They form one of the church's major activities, the Bishops visits bring them the wider fellowship of the church. Even Christians of other denominations join in with them during such visits. Our work in ecumenism is strengthened, witnessing together as Christians. We speak more of what unites us than what separates us. Our congregations learn to work and cooperate with other denominations because the people they serve come from the same families. Pastors will usually cover a number of Congregations that are lead by our lay leaders. These lay

leaders who are both male and female expects regular pastoral visits from their pastor.

Pastoral visits aims at giving hope. This is one of the fundamental roles of the church in society. We see this throughout history and it ought to be so even today as we face our contemporary challenges. There are so many difficulties that we easily become overwhelmed and heartbroken. Our nations are very unstable. We fear our political people are easily intimidated, so just like the rats we ask each other “who will hang the bell on the neck of the cat”. No one is courageous enough to carry out such risky task fearing that they may not come back alive. Our Politicians have been known for their readiness to kill those who may oppose them. Speaking of HIV/AIDS, we don’t know what to say or what to do. The pandemic is like nothing we have seen before. It is a real killer. It kills mostly our adults, while Malaria continues to kill children especially children under five years of age. This challenges us and remind us to implement all our work as wholistically as possible thereby not by passing the challenges we face on dairy basis.

When Church and Society is Threatened

On Ash Wednesday 2002, my lecturer wrote to me and informed me that in 1973 Klepas Dumeni, then assistant to Bishop Aula of Ovambokavango church in Namibia who later became Bishop, sat with him in their kitchen in Geneva, Switzerland and asked him a very difficult question. “How can I, as a leader of the church stand up against the South African Government without hatred”? He continued to inform me that “as a white American who did not know the reality out of which he spoke, I did not answer him. Nearly thirty years later you raise a similar question about your role as a leader of the church and as an important voice in your nation”, he concluded. Yes thirty years later the same questions that others before us have raised are still being raised by some of us today. There are no easy answers to these questions. “We are indeed living in uncharted territory for which there are no detailed road maps available”, writes

Loren Halvorson. There are certainly serious questions to be faced here. Some of the serious questions for me are to do with the length of time. "Thirty years later the same questions are still being asked". How long will the African Continent suffer? Children are born and die before reaching the age of five. Those who survive to reach the age of thirty, then all they know is suffering. For how long will this situation remain before it can distort the true grace and love of God for all human beings in Africa. Here the insights given by Lowell are helpful. Theologically, we know that evil and sin is at the center of human suffering in the world. We also know that there are parts of the world where they know very little about suffering especially suffering due to poverty. Why does God allow such wide gaps between the poor and the rich? Why do the rich become richer and the poor become poorer? Poverty in my view rooted in greed and sin by human beings is the root cause of so many human sufferings in the world today. I agree with most of the points Halvorson lifted out for us in his book. I would however add that before we can think of ways and means by which the poor can look to God to work everything good for all we believe in him, we must name sin by its name and prophetically condemn it and those who oppress others both locally and internationally, so that they may know that God provided enough resources for all of us under the globe to live on. However, greed by the rich has a lot in promoting poverty in poor countries as we see it in the world today. Worse still some leaders of these countries also exploit the few available resources all by themselves making it very difficult for the majority to make a living, and for governments to run. For example, the USA with less than 5% of the world population still consumes more than a 1/3 of world resources.

Poverty and Diseases

Over the years, I have tried hard to study the close link between poverty and disease. My suspicion was confirmed through one of my

research projects during the current study program. I was not surprised to discover the two sides of injustice: namely poverty and disease. The study showed that there is a very close association or link between poverty and diseases including HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS has been acknowledged as the greatest health threat facing the world today especially the Sub-Saharan Africa, with the rate of infection reported to be the highest. Its impact has left no person unfelt. Individual, families and communities have all been impacted one way or the other. The number of orphans related to HIV/AIDS deaths is currently estimated to be over 12.1 million in Africa. Africa is said to have over 75% of the world HIV/AIDS cases. As already pointed out, the number is still on the rise. My project attempts proposals on how the churches can move to suggest how we can begin to reverse the trend. A number of ways have been suggested for the church involvement as well as the role of families and society. As pointed out, I share the view that the family would be a good starting point in order to succeed, then move to the small village groups. This is where power is and it is right in the small group where success can be achieved. We will have to work hard to equip the small group's within our youth's and women's work.

Looking at Western Europe and North America, the project also takes seriously the use of all the resources including monetary resources that must be put to use in order to fight poverty which has made Africa to become a bleeding ground for HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases. Here again the role of partnership cannot be over emphasized. This together with all other disciplines, faith, prayer and service to one

another would make a positive impact. I am more than convinced that we will have to use all resources at our disposal to deal with HIV/AIDS. We must leave no stone unturned. “Even the pulpit must be used to alert the people of the dangers of this killer disease.

Poverty and Disease as a Stumbling Block to the Gospel

As much as there is evidence that there is both spiritual and numerical growth when the church is persecuted, it is also true that continued suffering, death and disease is and can be a threat to the life and ministry of the church. That’s why history has taught us to be partners in fighting poverty and disease. In so doing the church has always understood itself as a partner with Government in the work of promoting human well-being. Health people work hard and are able to support themselves. However, the partnership between church and state have always been one of sensitivity. This is usually so especially when State and Politics threaten the

well being of the people. Let alone when they are persecuted. The church must provide hope in the midst of suffering. Beyond this, we need to learn from others before us. Theologians such as Karl Barth and Jurgen Moltmann; their leadership and action left a lot for us to learn from. Here we learn through history that the church must always be on the side of the society. There have been regrettable historical events where the church and State jointly persecuted the people. We must learn from those events and do better in the future. It is in this connection that the questions of how can leaders in church speak for the people who suffer without being hated. A number of points were discussed some of which I would like to underline. It became quite clear that my gifts and abilities fall in the category of a “diplomat” (CF pg. 94 in the Personal and Public. It is also clear that most of the category involves “risk taking” but in a wise manner. It requires skills to do this effectively. Some of the important skills will be those of identifying gifts that are available in the church. To let them all be a

church wherever they may be and in every organization they may work, they also as members represent the church. In this way the church is not simply pastors and Bishops, but all the people of God wherever they are. This has tremendous advantages in that it does not only motivates the members but it does say who the church is, all the baptized members are ministers and must be involved prophetically in the church according to their gifts and abilities. While the leaders may still have the platform to address major issues facing the church, their primary responsibilities will be those of equipping all the saints for the holistic ministry of the church. Together we will need to stand our position condemning systems of injustice both at the local and international level. We need to point out the evils of human rights violation at all levels. Our church in Malawi is a signature to the document, “churches say no to violence against women”. What does this mean? I like the approach made in Loren’s book, “Spirituality and social justice” and other articles related to it. This has been one of

our biggest failure in Africa. Like everywhere else, Africa is taking time to realize the gifts that God gave us altogether men and women as created in Gods image. Women are still oppressed and abused in most of our society. Illiteracy is still highest among women and the trend is far from reversing. How can we best overcome this problem?

Whatever solution we come up with, the church will have to play a leading role and itself setting the example for others to follow -in small groups and the family as the first starting point. I agree with Loren “the primary group for shaping the moral life of the individual is the family”. Also the fact that “the male/female relationship is also the most primary one”. It is here that partnership starts and from this point it can find its way elsewhere. Our communities must learn partnerships where it begins. “Male and female partnerships”.

We will have to learn to treat women as equal partners in society. We will have to stop underestimating what they can do and stop violence against women and children in society. Moreover

it is said that “Educating a woman is educating the society”. Is this really the moment to stop, look (both ways) and listen? Yes, because “ The desert has been a place where we lose our facades and come face to face with ourselves and with God who calls us with a gentle voice that can only be heard in solitude. This time produces a clear set of priorities (commandments) not only for them, but for all humanity.” Spirituality and S.C. Page 9. Until we do this, we are doomed to fail in every way. However, in view of what is facing us in this continent, I do not believe that we can waste any more time. We need to work hard and cannot manage to fail. We need to succeed.

Conclusion

Faced with all these challenges, the church will have to utilize all its resources available. Having equipped all the saints, they will have to go with their gifts and use them as God and the Spirit would enable them. We would ask those who are Doctors and nurses to help us address issues of HIV/

AIDS. Those equipped with diplomatic gifts will help us take up issues of poverty and economic injustices as may be experienced locally by our politicians and internationally by the global community. Those with prophetic gifts will also have a lot to do as they carry out the prophetic role of the church. These gifts are found in all people of God. Male and female, young and old, all are invited to this partnership and all have a role to play. In this way we can answer the question how can we as leaders of the church stand our Governments without hatred. The answer is “involve all the people of God” when you do so, you may speak as a church and be hated together. In every case the risks will remain, but the advantages will be that you can all go to hang the bell around the neck of the cat, taking the risk together and being a church together, and ‘to behold, I am with you unto the end of times” Matt 28:28.

Actions speak louder than words- Project Proposal.

There has been a general criticism of the church as an institution that wants to point out ills in Government and Politics while it, the church sits behind with its alms folded. As a church we must be partners in promoting the well being of the people we serve. This participation will not only reduce the criticism we face but also fulfill our mandates as given by Christ to be the light of the world, Matt 5:12-14. The last section of this paper is a project proposal that will go out to our partners in Mission to help make life bearable for the so many orphans resulting from so many killer diseases particularly HIV/AIDS. My idea for this project is to make it both practical and viable as a hope life saving project. The orphans will be the primary beneficiaries of the project especially those that are five years and younger. Along with them will be women (particularly widows and other such needy vulnerable groups). This project will be submitted to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - Division for Global Mission separately after consulting coworkers in ELC-

Malawi. The aim is to put into practice some of the reflection covered in the paper.

The project has a dual objective.

1. To respond and intervene to the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, reducing its impact.
2. To operate mobile clinics offering medical services to the orphans and widows.

The project will aim at both care for the sick (orphans through feeding) and sensitization and awareness building of the community about the dangers of HI V/AIDS.

**The Feeding Programme/
Mobile Clinic for HIV/AIDS of
Orphans 2003-2005.**

Currently the programme is not linked to the ELDP (Evangelical Lutheran Development Programme). This will be done sometime after transition of ELDP in 2003. ELDP is involved in public awareness for HIV prevention. This is the effort that would be combined with that of the church and carried side by side with the feeding programme.

Our plans are to finally have at least nine mobile clinics throughout the country, three in each region. As you will have noticed, the programme started without any vehicles. As the church fed the orphans, it also became aware of the need to include both prevention messages as well as treatment of the undernourished sick children (orphans). The plan is to indeed start with three vehicles in 2002-2003, then move to six vehicles in 2003-2004 and hopefully nine in 2004-2005. This is planned so because, sadly, the problem of orphans is a rapidly growing challenge. It was only two years ago we were planning on numbers that have grown from less than 400,000 to now 800,000 double in less than two years. You can therefore see why we are dreaming in this way. Our opinion is therefore for at least 6 to 9 mobile clinics, three in each region. Malawi is approximately 120,000 square KM and a region is more than 400 KM long and between 150-300 KM wide covering a wide area and a number of feeding centres would be served by mobile clinic. The

mobile clinic services will also be open to serve the growing needs of women especially the widows, poor women and children in general. In order to do this, nine vehicles would be more realistic.

It is the church's intention to include a prevention component in the project. The plan is to utilize the centres for feeding as it is the case now, and with this project add elements of vaccination of the orphans as well as treatment of some sicknesses, especially malaria parasites, in both children and adults. At the same time as this is being done, the nurses shall conduct HIV/AIDS awareness care and prevention. The HIV/AIDS children who are very sick would then be transported by the vehicles to a nearby clinic for a more comprehensive treatment. This would also be done for needy women especially widows.

We encourage our orphans to live with the extended family. The extended family then cares for them while the project helps to feed them. The feeding is done by the women's prayer group. They

do this two or three times a week voluntary at the feeding centre in order to reduce malnutrition among children of five years and under which is the major cause of death among children especially orphans in Malawi and Africa as a whole.

We think that this the right approach because we have seen success. As you may know, we are not embarking on this project now. We started more than two years ago and we have been successful. We are adding the element of awareness and treatment to this project in order to have a lasting impact in what we are doing. We are also aware of our limited resources as well as issues of self sustenance of these projects. This is why the orphans are encouraged to remain with the extended family. We are there to help the family with feeding at least three times a week and now we would hopefully assist with treatment. The projects have had very positive results where we have witnessed underweight children gain the necessary nutrition that helps their body to fight sicknesses. Changes can

easily be noticed in one month of visiting the feeding centres. We therefore understand this project as a life saving project for children. Its strength is found in the women who volunteer care for the orphans. The mobile clinics are needed in order to intensify our work in fighting against the killer disease, and in order to reach out to a wider community.

The project's goal is to reach mostly orphans. However, other poor undernourished children five years and under do also qualify for the feeding programme of ELCM. Some of the children do test HIV positive while others do not. We aim at all of them and the same will be true of treatment. The limiting factor will always be the limited resources we have. Hence the need to expand the project now and include prevention measures and awareness building on caring for AIDS patients.

Local Contribution

Once every year, all ELCM congregations take an offering

towards the Bishop's charity fund which is partly our local contribution to this programme. As already indicated, the women's group of ELCM is involved in cooking the meals while the youth gather firewood for cooking the nutritious porridge for the orphans. We will try to give the cost breakdown for all these services that form our local contribution to this project. The Evangelical Lutheran Mission ELM-Germany has been coordinating individual and other contributions to this project over the past two years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) did donate US\$ 15,000 for the feeding centres which is currently in use. The first two or three mobile clinic vehicles have been requested from the ELCA and are expected in the next feeding season starting Sept 2002. We have also requested various medical tools and equipments from Lutheran Global Health ministries here in Minneapolis for use with the mobile clinics.

Footnote

(There is no longer solitude at the church, I do hear some noise).

(ELCM's understanding of lay people is rooted in the early church understanding of the lay, being the people of God baptised and equipped with gifts and skills to perform their responsibilities in the church).

(60% of the African people still live on less than one dollar a day, and loses a child every three seconds due to poverty and disease).

(Recent research conducted by Markinor, a respected research institute, in South Africa found that poverty and malnutrition are the major contributors to the spread and aggravation of AIDS. Persistent poverty and disease in society forms what can be described as a stumbling block to the gospel and to peace with justice).

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