

Live in the freedom of Christ

By Elizabeth A. Eaton



Recently I discovered Google Earth. I know, I'm a little late to the dance. But this is fascinating. You type in an address and up pops a photo. You can zoom in on places all over the world. And you can zoom out for, literally, a 35,000-foot view. I invite you

to give it a try. In fact, this will be a great group activity for all of us in the ELCA.

First, find your congregation. Now expand the field and find other ELCA congregations near you. In some places this will be easy to do. In the "Fertile Crescent" of Lutheranism—the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania—there are more ELCA congregations per square mile than there are gas stations. In other places, ELCA congregations are few and far between. But we're there.

Next, find your synod office. You can see them spread out across the U.S. and the Caribbean.

And the ELCA is not alone in North America. Find the congregations, synods and national office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. We are all over North America.

And now, find all of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). We are all over the world, on every continent except Antarctica. We are 145 member churches in 98 countries. There are 74 million of us. And your congregation is part of this worldwide Lutheran movement.

In May the LWF met in assembly in Windhoek, Namibia. Lutherans from Africa; Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; North America; and Western, Central and Eastern Europe gathered to worship, sing, deliberate, study and dance.


Our contexts are very different. Climate, cuisine and cultures all vary. Our challenges are different. Lutherans in many parts of the world are a minority community, face persecution, contend with war and forced migration, and deal with the devastating effects of climate change. Lutherans in many parts of the world are ministering and serving faithfully in an

increasingly secularized culture, or in parts of the world where the church was suppressed for nearly a century resulting in entire generations that have not heard the gospel. But there is something that we all have in common—our life in Christ.

We have our life in Christ—in the crucified and risen Savior, in the one who poured out his life for us, the one who gave himself away for the life of the world. In baptism we have already experienced the only death that really matters, the death of the power of sin, the death of our death. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Now, go to Google Earth and find St. Petersburg, Russia. At the LWF Assembly a delegate from Russia told this story of freedom in Christ. There used to be a Lutheran church in St. Petersburg. It was a beautiful structure witnessing to the glory of God where the Lutheran immigrants who arrived in the 18th century could worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. It was skillfully crafted out of wood. St. Mary's Lutheran Church still stood in St. Petersburg, renamed Leningrad.

The church was a place of worship and hope during the siege of Leningrad during WWII. But people were freezing and starving to death in Leningrad. There was no wood for heating or cooking. So the Lutherans looked at their beloved church and then looked at the suffering around them. Piece by piece they dismantled their building and gave it away for the life of their community.

This is what being free in Christ looks like. This is part of our Lutheran story. This is part of your congregation's story. We live in the freedom of Christ. 

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: bishop@elca.org.