

LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR

Missionaries ≈ 165?

Inflating the Numbers. How many missionaries does the ELCA support? About **165**. How can this tiny number be accurate? A 2002 brochure sent to all congregations entitled "Our Congregation's Plan for Mission" claims the ELCA supports **305** missionaries. Even 305 isn't much for a denomination of 5 million with a 90 million dollar budget. Where's the truth?

The multi-color ELCA brochure notes that the 305 includes: "long term missionaries, two-year term missionaries, self-supporting volunteers serving from 3 to 22 months, Global Mission Associates, contract personnel and teachers in China" (p.4).

They're counting whom? Self-supporting volunteers are self-supporting. Two year term English teachers are not trained or employed to evangelize. Global Mission Associates are employed by other organizations. Teachers in China are not employed by the ELCA. So really, how many missionaries does the ELCA support?

Toward Truth in Numbers. The *International Personnel Directory 2001* issued by the ELCA's Division for Global Mission (DGM) is a picture book of mission personnel. A count shows 103 couples and 89 single persons for a grand total of 305. The problem is that among these 305 are many who we usually don't think of as missionaries. For example:

1. The 25 persons serving in Europe. We usually don't count these countries (Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, England) as

places of "foreign mission."

2. The Lutheran World Relief representative in Washington D.C.
3. The 13 "self-supporting" volunteers in Slovakia.
4. The 9 Global Mission Associates employed by other organizations.
5. The 16 "GM-2" personnel who are teaching English for two years.
6. The 5 teachers in China not employed by the ELCA.

Discounting the above categories, the ELCA supports only about 68 couples and 29 single missionaries!

Stuffed With Staff. Finally, the *Directory* also pictures 48 staff personnel. In contrast, under Dr. Rolf Syrdal, prior to the ALC, the ELC had about 600 full time missionaries on the field with about 6 staff members.

To be sure, counting missionary personnel is an imprecise business. No

doubt there are ELCA personnel doing mission work supported by other divisions. And what counts as "mission" is not always clear. Should couples always be counted as "2 missionaries"? Both are often doing mission work, but numbers are imprecise. At the same time, 20 years ago when the number of missionaries was much higher, couples were counted as a single unit.

Still, the approximate number of **165** missionaries comes from a simple analysis of the *International Personnel Directory* issued by ELCA headquarters itself.



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(continued from page 1)

The numbers make quite clear that ELCA mission work is way down from what it was in the ELCA's predecessor church bodies. The overall conclusions are inescapable and sad:

1. Bait and Switch. ELCA leaders inflate mission numbers in fund-raising appeals. For example, Bishop Craig Johnson (Mpls Area Synod) claims the ELCA has 305 missionaries in his pitch to congregations to give more money to the ELCA (10/02, p.2). "Mission" has become a cause like God, motherhood, and apple pie. It carries the aura of piety no one can resist and is applied to everything the church does in order to sell the program.

2. When Everything is Mission, Nothing is Mission. What is "mission"? Is it good works such as building roads and sewers, teaching English, staffing hospitals, etc.? These are important good works. But they are essentially secular good works. The Peace Corps, governments, and other agencies do them, too. What motivates Christians to do this work may be distinctive, but the works themselves are not sanctified or essentially Christian.

Our good works are not a form of "doing the gospel." The distinctive task of Christian mission is to get the gospel out, that is, proclaim Christ crucified. This means preaching, baptizing, and administering communion. This "mission" is not to be confused with the good works we do in response to the gospel: "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5).

3. Designated Giving Doesn't Work. Suppose you decided you wanted to support an ELCA missionary who needs \$30,000 a year. You and several congregations raise this money and send it to Chicago as a designated gift for this missionary. Because the ELCA operates a unified budget, your gift doesn't increase ELCA mission dollars. Rather, the equivalent of your \$30,000 gift is deducted from the budget of the Division for Global Mission. Sadly, you are supporting the whole budget, and you have done nothing special for mission.

4. Home Missions. In 1962-64 the ALC/LCA started 324 new congregations. The ELCA now starts fewer than 25 a year. It has a goal of starting 100 new congregations, but it's counting on congregations actually doing it! If it doesn't happen, it's the people's own fault.

5. Big Bureaucracy. Most of your benevolence dollars are spent maintaining the bureaucracy of the ELCA and its related committees. Anyone who has worked in the national church offices or served on ELCA committees and task forces knows how much it takes to maintain this bureaucracy. A few examples:

- The new ELCA study on worship materials, entitled *Renewing Worship*, has four consultation groups involving a total of 81 participants.
- The 2001 Pre-Assembly Report notes a 10% increase in national staff (323 "executive" staff) since 1998.
- The ELCA supports 20 state political lobbying offices.

How can one be a good steward in this situation?

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| <p>LUTHERAN COMMENTATOR</p> <p style="text-align: right;">October-December 2002 Volume 16, Number 2</p> <p><small>Lutheran Commentator (ISSN: 0894-0304), is published six times a year by Lutheran Commentator, a Minnesota nonprofit corporation, and is supported solely through subscriptions and contributions of our readers.</small></p> <p><small>Address all editorial correspondence to James D. Torgerson, Editor, and all subscriptions, changes of address, etc. to Lutheran Commentator, P.O. Box 103, Maple Plain, MN 55359-0103; Phone 952/442-4134; FAX 480/419-1343 or 952/442-4134.</small></p> <p><small>Unsolicited essays, letters, news and book reviews are welcomed, but cannot be returned unless they are accompanied by a self-addressed envelope, required postage attached. Opinions expressed in articles published do not necessarily represent the views of the officers or directors of Lutheran Commentator.</small></p> | <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Chairman of the Board:</td> <td>Grant Barry Anderson</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Executive Director, Editor:</td> <td>James D. Torgerson</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Webmaster:</td> <td>Philip G. Schoner</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Subscription rates:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">\$12 one year; \$22 two years; \$30 three years;</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">\$10 students and seniors</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Board of Directors, Lutheran Commentator:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Carl K. Albing</td> <td>Jane Hussey Larson</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grant Barry Anderson (<i>Chairman</i>)</td> <td>Robert E. Meyer II</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lyle M. Bohlig (<i>Treasurer</i>)</td> <td>Paul P. Omelianchuk</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elmer A. Hansen</td> <td>Richard L. Peterson</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pastor Mark G. Jamison</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>E-mail address:</td> <td>Website:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>jamestorgerson@aol.com</td> <td>www.luthercomment.org</td> </tr> </table> | Chairman of the Board: | Grant Barry Anderson | Executive Director, Editor: | James D. Torgerson | Webmaster: | Philip G. Schoner | | | Subscription rates: | | \$12 one year; \$22 two years; \$30 three years; | | \$10 students and seniors | | | | Board of Directors, Lutheran Commentator: | | Carl K. Albing | Jane Hussey Larson | Grant Barry Anderson (<i>Chairman</i>) | Robert E. Meyer II | Lyle M. Bohlig (<i>Treasurer</i>) | Paul P. Omelianchuk | Elmer A. Hansen | Richard L. Peterson | Pastor Mark G. Jamison | | | | E-mail address: | Website: | jamestorgerson@aol.com | www.luthercomment.org |
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| jamestorgerson@aol.com | www.luthercomment.org | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |