

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia
Bishop's Address
58th Diocesan Assembly
18th December 2021
Lutheran Hall, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur

Introduction

1. Dear delegates, welcome to the 58th Triennial Diocesan Assembly and Advent greetings to all of you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the head of the Church. He leads His Church, through His Lordship, through His perfect life, and His compelling love. The true model of love and service to humanity.
2. I count it a privilege to be able to address all of you, dearly beloved, during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since January 2020, we have been facing the challenges and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic here in Malaysia. In response to the surge of Covid-19 cases in March 2020, the Malaysian government led by Prime Minister Mahiaddin Yassin imposed a nationwide lockdown known as the Movement Control Order (MCO), which came into effect on 18 March 2020.
3. The 'normal' lifestyle as we knew changed drastically, and it has affected our communal living as believers in the saving grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We need to rethink how do we bear witness to our Lord's ministry of love and service to a wounded world.
4. Fear of the other person is a reality today, fear of being infected by the Covid-19 virus. Unconsciously, this fear, which is so real, dictates how we conduct our regular Divine Services, ministerial acts and determines the terms of engagement with our local communities.

Vision – Let us Arise and Build

5. *“And I told them how the hand of my God had been favourable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.” (Nehemiah 2: 18)*
6. Amidst the current crisis or challenges, our Lord has called us to work with Him to build ELCM. As I said last year, “where there is an owned vision and mission, differences will be set aside.”

7. Our calling as a church is to "arise and build," meaning we need to put aside our differences of opinion and work with one another as disciples of Jesus Christ, and this is possible if we understand our shared values as members of ELCM. Three common shared values are dominant and evident in ELCM.

Our Values – Embrace, Encourage & Empower (3E)

8. The first value is embrace. ELCM has always been a place that embraces others. As recipients of the love of God, He has taught us this value of embracing one another. We need to embrace the impact and change brought upon us as a church and our neighbours by the Covid-19 pandemic.
9. The second value is to encourage. We are to encourage one another as God has given us equal opportunity to grow and not discourage one another. Our mutual growth will be a great blessing, primarily because encouragement is necessary to our walk-in faith.
10. The third and last value is to empower. We need to empower the next generation who will inherit and shape the future of ELCM. In ensuring the continuity of our Lutheran teachings and traditions, we need to invest our God-given time, talent and treasure in the next generation.

Our Mission - Reconciliation, Rebuilding & Reaching-out (3R).

11. Reconciliation - We know that conflict is a product of human relationships and an inevitable and integral part of human life. Internal conflicts within our local congregations have caused a decline in membership. Its ever-present nature within our congregations makes it a serious concern for us. To manage internal conflicts Biblically, we need various creative responses to its management, regulation, resolution and transformation to achieve a sustainable reconciliation.
12. Rebuilding - We need to identify, review & revitalise our present auxiliary and Diakonia ministries to engage with the local community to remain relevant to the call of God in proclaiming the Good News to all people, both young and old. Local congregations need to identify and spearhead community-based initiatives and assist the urban poor and poorer communities in the sub-urban and rural areas by creating sustainable economic opportunities.

13. Reaching out - We need to focus our ministry in cities and townships due to the migration from rural to suburban and urban areas. We need to train mission-minded pastors, evangelists, deacons and deaconesses who understand the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of the Indian community in Malaysia. Besides that, pastors and church workers need to be competent in an additional language (besides Tamil, English & Bahasa Malaysia) or local dialect, which will create an opportunity to minister to a larger group in Malaysia.

Way Forward

14. The years 2020 - 2021 have brought numerous challenges to ELCM. However, the call to arise and build during a crisis is apt and relevant. We need to move forward as a church. Therefore, I am proposing a 10-year strategy for ELCM (Let us Arise and Build - 2022 - 2032).
15. Our priority is for ELCM's Vision & Mission to be owned by every stakeholder, both clergy and laity, young and old alike.
16. The proposal is for the Pastors & Church Workers Conference, scheduled from 15th – 17th February 2022, to deliberate on the first draft of ELCM's 10-year strategy. The second draft will be read and reviewed by the Diocesan Assembly delegates. We will adopt the final proposal during the Diocesan Assembly in September 2022.

Concluding Remarks

17. God, through Christ our Lord, has entrusted ELCM to us. As ordained pastors, elected leaders and representatives, we need to manage the God-given resources that we have inherited for the extension of God's Kingdom.
18. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are declared righteous by God through what Christ has done for us on the Cross, not by our works.
19. We need to invest in the lives of our younger generation for the continuity of God's work. We cannot allow our differences to deter God's work in their lives.
20. In conclusion, may our good Lord, Jesus Christ, continue to guide each of us to serve Him faithfully as stewards, acknowledging that what we have and who we are is because of Christ alone, therefore let us arise and build. Amen.

Rt. Rev. Steven Lawrence
Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia

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