

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia
Bishop's Address
60th Triennial Diocesan Assembly
25th - 26th August 2023
Grand Kampar Hotel, Kampar, Perak

Introduction

1. Dear delegates welcome to the 60th Triennial Diocesan Assembly. I greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12: 2).
2. In 2022, we as a church returned to “normality” with a new normal, where online meetings and hybrid Divine Service are a norm, and due to the existence of digital media facilities like social media, our members have access to a plethora of new forms of worship, liturgical practices and preaching.
3. While we need to accept the use of technology in God's mission to communicate the Gospel, we need to be mindful of the teachings our members are exposing themselves, which influences and moulds their expression of faith and, at times, lack of involvement in a local congregation.
4. I am proposing ELCM's Three-Year Strategy (2023-2025 - Year of Reconciliation) with six strategic priorities/objectives that will contribute to the relevance and growth of our congregations in Malaysia. The strategic priorities are structured to motivate our congregation members to be disciples in the community in which we live, strategically to reconcile and build relationships.

Six Strategic Priorities/Objectives

5. **Discipleship** – Membership in ELCM is voluntary, but not discipleship. In and through baptism, we are disciples of Christ, called to “make disciples” (Matthew 28: 19-20) who will actively participate in ELCM's ministry and not passive consumers.

6. Thus, there is an ongoing need to educate congregation members (disciples) in our Mission area – Reconciliation (2023-2025 - Year of Reconciliation), and we will focus on preaching, teaching and organising retreats to train and educate clergy and laity.
7. **Language** - Learn or improve a language or local dialect(s) – Pastors, church workers, and congregation members are encouraged to be competent in Bahasa Malaysia/Bahasa Melayu, Tamil, English, and an additional language/local dialect.
8. Speaking in a language that a person understands enables us to communicate our thoughts, burdens, ideas and feelings effectively and creates an opportunity to minister to a larger group in Malaysia.
9. **Capacity Development** – As the need grows for us to expand in the area of our mission focus - Reconciliation, we need to identify and train candidates for pastoral and Diakonia ministry in Lutheran distinctives (e.g. The 5 Solas, Law and Gospel, The Means of Grace, The Book of Concord and the Small Catechism).
10. Ongoing seminars in Lutheran Distinctives will encourage and equip leaders in local congregations to develop their capacity to serve in local congregations and communities with a clearer understanding.
11. **Policies and procedures** are a vital part of any organisation. Together, policies and procedures provide a road map for day-to-day operations. They ensure compliance with the laws and regulations of our country and guide decision-making.
12. While we are aware and acknowledge that some members are divisive, unrepentant and theologically misguided, we need to study and review our present policies and procedures on Church discipline and recommend mechanisms to restore and reconcile.
13. **Community-Based Initiatives** - Local congregations must identify and spearhead community-based initiatives or projects. Our calling is not to reconcile only within ELCM but also with members of the forgotten communities, like people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV), the homeless and others who are in dire need. These are present-day realities, but the church's involvement is not encouraging.

14. Such initiatives will create a new opportunity to engage with PLHIV and those at risk, as an increasing number of young people are vulnerable to HIV. ELCM's role as a faith-based organisation is vital to address HIV-related stigma and discrimination.
15. **Church Development** - As I mentioned in the Bishop's Address in 2021, 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 makes it a serious concern for us.
16. To manage internal conflicts Biblically, we need various creative responses to its management, regulation, resolution and transformation to achieve a sustainable reconciliation. As such, there is an urgent need to train Pastors, church workers and local lay leaders to handle internal conflict(s) and work towards reconciliation.
17. The Six-Strategies are not to extend our power or authority but to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a political move. It is with a desire to be faithful to our calling as disciples of Christ.
18. In and through all our struggles, I am convinced clergy and lay members of ELCM understand the need to reconcile with one's neighbour, be it on a personal level or in the congregation or the community.

Concluding Remarks

19. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Pastors and Church Workers conference met from the 8th – 10th of February 2023 and the 25th – 26th of July 2023 to relook and redraft the ELCM Three-Year Strategy for the Year of Reconciliation (2023-2025) for implementation throughout the diocese. I encourage the Diocesan Assembly for the new Triennium to adopt the ELCM Three-Year Strategy for the Year of Reconciliation (2023-2025) and implement it.
20. Under the leadership of the district pastors, we drafted a district-level Three-Year Strategy for the Year of Reconciliation (2023-2025) to complement ELCM's Three-Year Strategy for the Year of Reconciliation (2023-2025). The district pastors will organise a one-day meeting to introduce and share the

district-level Three-Year Strategy with pastors and the various local council leaders in their respective districts in September or October 2023.

21. The ELCM Three-Year Strategy (Year of Reconciliation 2023-2025) will guide us to focus on our Mission area – **Reconciliation**. The success of this strategy is dependent on all of us, on our commitment as individual delegates and local congregation leaders.
22. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminded us in Mark 3: 24-25, *“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”* If we remain divided, we will not progress as a Church. Eventually, we will fail as disciples of Christ.
23. In conclusion, may God the Holy Spirit counsel us, deal with our differences and work in us to change our hearts and minds so that we will work together heartily to **Arise and Build** ELCM. Amen.

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

25th August 2023