

Journal of Mission



MISSION OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES

(Bleckmar Mission) Association not for Gain



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Mission Director
Edmund Hohls

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Ms. Sigrig Weber, our colleague in Durban, South Africa, runs the Lutheran Church Kindergarten there, which is home to 64 children. Every week, she and other staff members tell the children a new Bible story. These days, the children are also learning about the upcoming Easter celebration, when Christians around the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and children search for chocolate Easter eggs. The chicken egg represents the new life of Jesus, in which we also share through holy baptism. Let us rejoice that this little girl in Kindergarten is also learning that Jesus loves her infinitely. How could the joy of new life through Jesus Christ be expressed more convincingly?

We have reason to thank God again and again for continuing his mission and using people for it. That is why we are happy to share with you our joy at the very good development of donations in 2025. Our treasurer, Mr. Ulrich Schroeder, has written a beautiful article on this, in my opinion: "With gratitude into the new year".

I would also like to thank the many congregations that took our Christmas star campaign as an opportunity to contact a current or former employee. Pastor Markus Büttner reports on such an encounter in his congregation of St. Marien, Berlin-Zehlendorf. In this and subsequent issues, we will also share with you reports that Ms. Margot Behn has compiled for this purpose.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all the congregations that responded to our call to collect Christmas offerings for the LKM. However, I would also like to apologize

to many other congregations in this context, because I did not sufficiently consider that in many congregations of our church, Christmas offerings are traditionally collected for "Brot für die Welt" (Bread for the World). Various critical inquiries from our church brought this to my attention. I did not in any way want to question the work of the Evangelical Agency for Diakonia and Development, as I consider it to be very important and worthy of support.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) celebrated its 25th anniversary in the capital of South Africa. During this time, it has trained countless students in Evangelical Lutheran theology and prepared them for service in one of the many countries of Africa. It is therefore fitting that we have two lecturers from the LTS visiting Germany this summer. Read the article by Rev. Dr. P. Ntsimane about the history of the LTS.

Even older is the Mission of Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches (MELF), an association of former Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches, in which they agreed to cooperate in the Bleckmar Mission as a church mission even before the SELK was founded in 1972.

Prof. Dr. Werner Klän recalls this period in the history of our church in a very informative article. Unfortunately, we are unable to publish the article in its entirety in this issue because there are many other current events that are also worthy of reporting. We are also taking the occasion of 75 years of joint church missionary work to search for former employees whom we would also like to honor with a picture in the Bleckmar Ancestral Gallery.

I am thinking in particular of the many nurses who served sick people in South Africa until the early 1980s. Please help us to find these deserving employees. We have already been able to establish contact with a few of them.

There are other anniversaries to consider as well. If our treasurer in South Africa, Dr. Gunter Rencken, did not perform his work on a voluntary basis, we could be talking about his 20th anniversary of service. Since he, like many others, performs his work on a voluntary basis, we are all the more grateful to him for his 20 years of service in the mission.

Peter and Simone Weber are also celebrating their 25th anniversary of service in the mission work of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA). They are now ending their service and are expected in Germany in mid-March, where, according to an agreement between the SELK and LKM, they will have until the end of July to adjust to new living conditions and a ministry in a SELK congregation. "God has used them in various roles in his church and mission: in the diocesan council, as creators of WhatsApp devotions in isiZulu, English, and German, as mission representatives,

organists, and members of the trombone choir, to name but a few. We praise Him for this and thank them for their commitment," wrote missionary Thomas Beneke, representative of the Lutheran Church Mission in South Africa.

In the previous issue (No. 6, Dec. 25 - Feb. 26), I made a mistake, the cause of which I cannot understand, but the effect of which I can clearly see. Unfortunately, during the preparation of the print template, the second paragraph of the tribute to the life and work of Marie-Charlotte Bente fell by the wayside without me noticing it in time. We are making up for this in this issue by printing the first three paragraphs in full and inviting you to continue reading in issue No. 6, December 25 - February 26, on page 14, starting with paragraph 3. This will give you a more complete picture. Which reminds me: Who can paint a complete picture of the long life of a colleague who lived so passionately for the mission?

Yours sincerely



Edmund Hohls

FOR JOY

You should be joyful- that's what it says in the Bible - in astonishingly clear terms: "You shall rejoice in all the good things that the Lord your God has given you and your household" (Deuteronomy 26,11).

That means you and your family. In my meditation, I add: be joyful about my church community and - who would have thought - our mission. A "thou shalt" sounds cumbersome. You cannot command joy. As if joy were like a light switch that you can turn on or off. Being joyful is more like a response to what God gives us in our lives.

The verse speaks of "all that is good." Not of "everything" that happens in the world. That is important. The Bible does not invite us to sugarcoat things. Our lives are mixed, light and dark at the same time. Not everything succeeds in church or mission work. But through the Word of God, our eyes are trained. Where is the good - food, relationships, opportunities for mission, a little peace?

It reminds me of a visit in 1997 to members of the LCSA church in Tshing (Ventersdorp) - here to a former „student" in the trombone choir I supervised from 1978 to 1983. 'Sesie' is the name of this fun-lo-

ving woman. There was nothing „spectacular" about this visit. Lots of dust. An unpaved road. Children everywhere, even on the street. Everyday life. A new house is being built - a door frame, a wheelbarrow, something in the making. Relaxed living in simple circumstances. „Everything isn't finished yet," she says, „but we are building with confidence." We are invited in for tea in the living room next door. Shared happiness. I sit quietly, composed, next to me a green potted plant, a rubber tree. I notice that here, in the warm light of the sun outside and the slight coolness, I feel contentment. Carefreeness as an expression of joy. Trust in the midst of unfinished business. A place where you can sit and chat - about the good things in the family, what it was like in the trombone choir „back then" and how life has continued since then. Happiness was not „made" there, but rather made possible. Sometimes happiness apparently needs a very specific place for this: a

living room. Rooibos tea and cold "Plaatkoekies" (a delicacy!). Happiness does not remain private. It grows when it is shared. We were honored by this.

Perhaps this is an attitude that the verse invites us to adopt: Pro joy. Pro gratitude. Pro carefreeness. Also in terms of missionary work on site or elsewhere. Because God gives much good, because Christ bears our cares and God's Spirit accompanies life. No matter where: at my home. In my church. In the mission, then as now.

Perhaps that is 'missionary' cheerfulness: a joy that makes room for hospitality - at the table, in conversation, in the church. A joy that does not first ask, „Did everything go well?," but rather, „Where has God given us good things?" So I want to name the good things at my own table, in my own church - from our mission - and give God the glory.

Markus Nietzsche



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PRESERVING AN HONORABLE MEMORY

we are looking for you / them!

Dear former and current employees of the Lutheran Church Mission, dear relatives of former employees,

Perhaps you have noticed the illustrated family tree in the large conference room during a visit to the mission house in Bleckmar? There are many pictures of missionaries who were sent on mission service from 1953 onwards.

However, we have noticed that there is a large gap in this ancestral gallery: pictures and names of employees who worked or are working in social-diaconal missionary service for the Lutheran Church Mission, as well as those who held or hold positions of responsibility in administration in Germany and South Africa and as housekeepers in Bleckmar, are unfortunately completely missing. We would like to fill this gap with your help, because we all know how important social-diaconal service has always been in the history of the church and remains to this day, and without good administration, nothing works. Mr. Hanns Gnauk, whom I asked for help, has so far compiled no fewer than 51 names. They all deserve to be honored and remembered!

May I therefore ask you to support us with the following information:

- Please provide us with the surname, first name, and maiden name of the employee or deceased relative.
- Please briefly describe what job he or she did (e.g., nurse in Itshelajuba, Dirkiesdorp, or Botshabelo; administrative manager in Enhlanhleni, Johannesburg, Bleckmar; housekeeper in Bleckmar, etc.)
- Please tell us the (approximate) year(s) of employment

We would also be very grateful if you could provide us with a photo, which we would like to hang in the "ancestral gallery." It can be a photo from the time of service. By sending us a photo, we assume that you agree to it being displayed in a public space such as the mission house.

If you can help, please write to me or call me:

Mail: missionsdirektor@selk.de
Mobile: +49 152 38 93 27 171

We look forward to hearing from you!
Edmund Hohls

STARTING THE NEW YEAR WITH GRATITUDE

The treasurer of the Lutheran Church Mission, Ulrich Schroeder (Dresden), is starting the new year with gratitude, as the general donations, used to finance the LKM's costs, have even slightly exceeded the very pleasing donations of 2024. This is despite the fact that general donations from congregations were 6% below 2024 levels, while individual donors increased by 8%. The 2025 appeal letter received a very positive response. The number of general individual donors increased from around 800 to a good 1,000 in 2025.

The earmarked donations for the floods in Brazil were quite high in 2024, but understandably declined in 2025. However, earmarked donations from the congregations continued to rise.

Another reason to be thankful: the Lutheran Church Mission's equity is now expected to recover somewhat after drastic declines until 2023 and stabilization in 2024.
Ulrich Schroeder



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20 YEARS OF VOLUNTEER WORK

This year marks the 20th anniversary of our treasurer's dedicated service in South Africa: Dr. Gunter Rencken, Johannesburg, has been performing the official duties of the Mission of Lutheran Churches on a voluntary basis since 2005. He brings not only his expertise and wealth of experience to the role, but also a great love for the mission and a keen eye for financial planning. He has thus become an in-

dispensable pillar for the operation of our church mission and its proper administration. The mission leadership of the Mission of Lutheran Churches (Bleckmar Mission - Association not for Gain) thanks him wholeheartedly and profoundly for his dedicated service and hopes that he will be able to continue this work for many years to come.
Edmund Hohls



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ORDINATION

The Christuskirche congregation in Wiesbaden cordially invites you to the ordination of vicars Dr. Tobias Schütze and Benjamin Schütze on Sunday, Judika, March 22, 2026, at Daimlerstr. 38 in Wiesbaden, where Vicar Benjamin Schütze completed his vicarage with Pastor Michael Ahlers. The service starts at 3:00 p.m.

Following the service, there will be a reception with refreshments in the parish hall, to which everyone is also cordially invited. The ordinations of the vicars are subject to their passing the Second Theological Examination and the approval of the College of Superintendents.

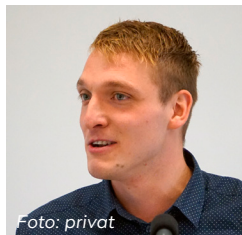


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75 YEARS OF THE MISSION OF EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN FREE CHURCHES (BLECKMAR MISSION)

The individual references for quotations and literature can be found in the extended version of the article in “Lutherische Theologie und Kirche” 3/2025.

1. An anniversary

75 years ago, on November 1, 1950, the formation of the “Mission of Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches (Bleckmar Mission)” was announced. [1] It was emphasized that its predecessor, the Mission of the Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church [2], saw itself as a “church mission,” “i.e., a mission that is responsibly carried out by the entire church, its congregations, pastors, and church leadership.” [3] Previously, it had also been supported by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Hessian Lands and the Renitent Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, as well as by the congregations of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa. Now the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church joined in this work. [4] Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf was initially entrusted with “part of the tasks incumbent upon the

mission leadership.” He was soon to replace the previous mission inspector, Adolf Blanke. Regulations for the reorganization of the mission leadership and the training of missionaries were also announced.

2. Background

The end of World War II not only changed the political situation in Germany and Europe, but also brought about major changes in the ecclesiastical and church political framework. This applies not least to the independent Evangelical Lutheran churches in Germany. With the occupation of the eastern territories of Germany and the flight and expulsion of its inhabitants, the oldest and largest of these churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia, lost its core areas. The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church also suffered major losses. The damage was less severe for those independent Evangelical Lutheran churches that were mainly located in

western Germany; These included the Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Hermannsburg-Hamburg Free Church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hesse, and, in southwestern Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baden. [9]

The outcome of World War II brought considerable change to the relationships between the previously separate independent Evangelical Lutheran churches. [10] The founding of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the affiliation of all Lutheran territorial churches (Landeskirchen) to it ultimately prompted the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia in 1947 to terminate the church fellowship with the latter despite the formation of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany [11]; Other independent Evangelical Lutheran churches that had emerged in

the area of Lutheran territorial churches, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Hermannsburg-Hamburg Free Church, had never had this connection; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baden was associated with the mission in Neuendettelsau.

While the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia had been associated with the Leipzig Mission from the earliest days [12] – based on the principle that mission was “a matter for the church as such” [13] – the Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, which had initially supported the Hermannsburg Mission [14], decided in 1892 to establish its own mission [15] because it saw the Hermannsburg Mission in danger of “deviating from the Lutheran confession” [16]; in doing so, it established the principle: “The Lutheran Church can only conduct Lutheran missions, and Lutheran missions can only be conducted by a Lutheran Church.” [17]

The ecclesiastical rapprochement among the independent Evangelical Lutheran churches since the end of World War II logically also had an impact on the structure of church

missionary work and its organization. Of course, the path to this point was not without difficulties.

In view of the divisions, which are closely related not least to the question of the ecclesiastical orientation of the Hermannsburg Mission and the founding of the Bleckmar Mission [18], it is not surprising that the merger to form the (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1947 included, now as dioceses, a church that had continued to support the Hermannsburg Mission despite its intermediate position between the territorial church (Landeskirche) and the free church – the Evangelical Lutheran Hermannsburg-Hamburg Free Church – while the other had gone its own way due to the unresolved question of church fellowship and had consequently established its own mission institution – the Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church – led to considerable irritation in the mission field in South Africa. For in the meantime, the two missions had also given rise to two mission churches that were not in pulpit and altar fellowship.

The connection between the Hermannsburg-Hamburg diocese and the Hermanns-

burg Mission – and thus to the Hanover Territorial Church (Hannoversche Landeskirche) – remained a difficulty for years. A solution emerged in the course of the following period when, in negotiations between the (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, it was proposed that the Hermannsburg-Hamburg diocese should “fight” to preserve the Lutheran character of the Hermannsburg Mission.

3. The founding of the Mission of Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches

On January 11, 1950, the Mission Committee of the former Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, now the Hanover Diocese of the (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, finally sent a letter to the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Pastor Heinrich Petersen, and to the Church Council (Oberkirchenkollegium) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia, in which the establishment of church fellowship between (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church was welcomed and the wish was expressed that “the Evangelical Lutheran Church in former Old Prussia and the

Evangelical Lutheran Free Church would like to participate in the joint work of the mission of our free Lutheran churches.”[19]

The Mission Committee then met again on May 24, 1950, in the presence of Church Councilor (Oberkirchenrat) Dr. Walter Günther and Pastor Rudolf Hein, to set the start of the reorganization of the Bleckmar Mission for June 1, 1950. [20] The minutes noted: “The leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in former Old Prussia and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church have decided, subject to the approval of their synods, to participate in our Bleckmar Mission. The Mission Committee of the Bleckmar Mission has joyfully agreed to this.”[21]

An extraordinary synod of the Diocese of Hanover finally convened in Uelzen on September 26, 1950. The synod members unanimously reaffirmed the character of their church mission, welcomed the willingness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church to cooperate, and spoke out in favor of continuing the work as a “mission of Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches”; with ten abstentions, they also voted to appoint Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf.

In fact, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf took over the publication of the mission newsletter in January 1951. [22] On December 1, 1950, he sent a circular letter to the pastors of the allied independent Evangelical Lutheran churches. He asked for donations, as it was now possible again to “support the missionary work in South Africa financially from Germany.” [23]

In a further statement, Hopf provided details on the reorganization of the

training of future missionaries.[24] In it, he urged that the cooperation of the various independent Evangelical Lutheran churches in the mission be taken seriously. He also advocated for missionaries and pastors in South Africa to have a say in the matter.

4. Crises and consolidation of the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches

In view of the still unresolved situation between the (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Hermannsburg Mission, the Mission Committee demanded that, first, “its cooperation in a mission can only be officially recognized if this mission fundamentally and practically shares the confessional position of the allied Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches.” Second, it demanded that “Hermannsburg-Hamburg Diocese, in accordance with its repeated promises, should also repeatedly testify openly before its congregations that its own confession compels it to fight decisively against the Hermannsburg Mission’s ties to the territorial churches.”

Church Councilor (Oberkirchenrat) Dr. Walter Günther saw a similar problem for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia: Although it had separated from the Leipzig Mission, this had created “a certain rift in the pastorate” that also affected the congregations; as a result, it was possible that “the East would not be able to participate in the Bleckmar Mission.” Here, the political changes in postwar Germany with the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic had an impact on church policy.

On June 29, 1951, the mission leadership and the mission council finally

convened for their first joint meeting. [25] Superintendent Jakob Böttcher was confirmed as chairman until his retirement, and the designated superintendent Wilhelm Rothfuchs was elected as his successor, as were Pastor Rudolf Hein as deputy and an accountant.

At the beginning of 1952, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf presented a paper entitled: “What follows from the Bleckmar Mission’s position on the confessional for church decisions in Germany and South Africa?”[26] In it, he stated: “The boundary of church fellowship that exists with regard to the Territorial Church (Landeskirche) for the sake of the Lutheran confession separates the Hanover Free Church from the Hermannsburg Mission at home and abroad.”[27]

In order to reach a clarification, the church leaders of the allied churches decided in March 1952 that “the mission issue should first be clarified within the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church.”[28] But it was not until the beginning of 1953 that the issue was back on the agenda. The disputes were finally brought to a certain conclusion by the “Declaration on the Question of Cooperation between Lutheran Missions in South Africa” of July 8, 1953, signed by the Mission Council and Mission Leadership of the Mission of Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches and the Conference of Missionaries, as well as the pastors of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa. [29] The motto was programmatically emphasized: “The Lutheran Church can only carry out Lutheran missions!” And: “Lutheran missions can only be carried out by the Lutheran Church.”[30] For South Africa, it was determined that the

missions there “lack the indispensable prerequisites for true and full church fellowship and for cooperation based on it.” [31] This was attributed either to different confessional commitments or to different answers to the “question of the limits of church fellowship.”

However, the “fact of the responsible cooperation of the Hermannsburg-Hamburgers in their mission” remained. Clarification of this issue was to be “postponed for the time being.” But it also had to be said: “This does not, however, solve the overall problem of the Hermannsburg Mission.” It should continue to be discussed among all the churches involved in the MELF.

The (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church had meanwhile made it clear that “there is no pulpit and altar fellowship between the Hermannsburg Mission Church on the one hand and all dioceses of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church” on the other. [33] At the beginning of February 1954, the mission leadership, like the pastors of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa and the missionaries of the Bleckmar Mission, expressed their joy at the changed situation...

To be Continued...



Foto: privat

ONCE AGAIN: MARIE-CHARLOTTE BENTE

Due to an error in the previous issue, we are reprinting the first three paragraphs about the life and work of Marie-Charlotte Bente and invite you to continue reading the obituary in the previous issue (No. 6, Dec. 25 Feb. 26), page 14, starting with paragraph 3.

On October 26, nurse and midwife Marie-Charlotte Bente passed away in Berlin at the age of 92. As a “nurse in the medical service” in South Africa, she worked for the mission in various locations for many years.

Born in Strasbourg in Alsace, her German-French family came to Germany in 1944 due to the turmoil of war, where her father Wilhelm Bente worked as a pastor in various congregations, which meant that Marie-Charlotte had to change schools several times. When Pastor Bente was called to Kiel, Marie-Charlotte left high school with the goal of becoming a

nurse. Her thirst for adventure was already evident when she went to England (United Kingdom) for her training. From 1953 to 1957, Marie-Charlotte studied and worked in West Middlesex, Leeds, and Uxbridge, returning to Germany as a trained nurse and midwife.

She worked as a nurse at the University Hospital in Kiel and then at the American Hospital in Paris until she was called to missionary service by missionary Friedrich Dierks.

Ruth Keidel und Edmund Hohls

“HELLO PASTOR THOMAS!” – “Hello Cami!”

This is how our brief encounters over the garden fence begin almost every day. For me, they are one of the bright spots in my daily routine.

Cami is 21 years old and has Down syndrome. She has been a member of our congregation for several years. This year, she was confirmed together with her sister and four other young people. She has been working as an assistant at St. Martin's Village for over a year.

There she helps get the older children, who are already ready for kindergarten, ready for the day. Then, with the children in tow, she walks 200 meters across the street and past our house. She either has a beaming smile on her face or a serious expression—because

she takes her duties very seriously.

At the kindergarten on the church grounds, she especially supports the younger children and lovingly cares for those who are sad or need special attention.

At lunchtime, she brings the children back to St. Martin's Home, plays with them, and looks after them until her father picks them up at 3:00 p.m.

I thank God that Cami fits in so well here and can contribute her gifts in such a wonderful way. *Thomas Beneke*



“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world,” former South African President Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying. It has long been known in Germany that children from poorer families do not have the same educational opportunities as children from wealthy parents. The same is true for children in rural areas around Lüneburg in South Africa – with one exception.

They are delighted to show us their school, where 258 children are taught in attractively designed classrooms in three preschool classes and grades 1-7. Walter and Ruth Beneke are among those who want to help alleviate the great educational needs in South Africa, so a few years ago they decided to build a school on their farm. It started with two preschool classes in 2017, and since then the school has continued to grow by one class each year until, at the end of 2024, it was able to send off its first seventh graders – a long journey, but one that has been worthwhile in every respect. The school grounds themselves also testify to the love that has been poured into this educational institution. The farm is located about 15 km from the Lüneburg community and 70 km from the nearest small town, Vryheid.

How wonderful when responsible Evangelical Lutheran Christians ask how they can use the gifts entrusted to them in such a way that many people benefit from them. To ensure the long-term maintenance of the school, they have planted a kiwi orchard. In the coming years, this plantation is expected to secure the school's financing in a sustainable and long-term manner. At the same time, it also creates jobs for many people, as such a facility can only be operated in a very labor-intensive manner. School education can be offered here because others, possibly including the parents and siblings of the children who receive an education here, are trained in agriculture and gain experience in this field. I am grateful to note that this is a wonderfully complementary undertaking as we continue our journey to the small town in question in the afternoon.

Edmund Hohls

REVIEW OF HOLY CHRISTMAS: BE A GUIDING STAR FOR OTHERS!

Pastor Markus Büttner, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Berlin-Zehlendorf and also Deputy Mission Director, reports on the star campaign we launched for the Advent season and points out how the Gospel guides us to Jesus Christ.

The Advent season prepares us for the birth of Jesus Christ. Among other things, we used the four Sundays of Advent to learn about the work of the Lutheran Church Mission in Brazil. This was done via an internet-based video conference with Andrea Riemann, an employee of our Lutheran Church Mission. On the four evenings, she reported on her work in the children's and senior citizens' home in Moreira, the "Sunbeam" project in the "Three Schools of the Poor" in Canoas, and her start-up activities at children's Bible weeks in northern Brazil. "How can we be a star pointing to Jesus?" asked Andrea Riemann, drawing attention to the child in the manger on the fourth Sunday of Advent. We Christians are called upon to show people the way to the manger.

Many families with their children, but also grandparents and many other people, were drawn to

the nativity play service. After many beautiful Christmas carols and the Gospel reading from a children's Bible, Pastor Markus Büttner gave a children's sermon. He explored the question of how to find Jesus, since the stable in Bethlehem has no address. Nevertheless, shepherds and wise men from the East found their way to the stable. God sent them signs. The wise men were given a star, and the shepherds were told by the angel: You will find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Even though many children are wrapped in swaddling clothes, they do not usually lie in a manger. "Finding Jesus! That's what Christmas is all about," says pastor Büttner. "Does he have an address today, a street with a house number? No, of course not. Jesus is in heaven, but he is also among us here on earth. When we hear his word, read the Bible, believe in him, pray—also with other

Christians, for example in the family—then he is there. He listens to us when we talk to him. He comes to us in Holy Communion." Finally, Pastor Büttner pointed out that the wrapping paper reminds us that Jesus is wrapped in swaddling clothes and that we receive him as the greatest gift in our lives. "When you unwrap your presents later, remember Jesus, the child in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Let's unwrap Jesus. He brings us the joy of Christmas."

Markus Büttner



Foto: privat

MEMORIES OF A MISSIONARIES LIFE

among Indians in South Africa: 1979–2000

Ms. Margot Behn was invited to share her story with the Bethlehem congregation in Hanover. We are happy to publish her contributions in no particular order. She writes:

„Let's see what springs to mind. Our work began with the dedication for missionary service in the Große Kreuzkirche in Hermannsburg. I remember well that I was called three times to come forward to receive the blessing. It was not easy for me to say goodbye to my family, friends, and familiar surroundings.

We flew to South Africa in April, and since it was still quite cold in Germany at the time, I was wearing a gray wool skirt. I immediately started sweating when we got off the plane, because the temperature was much higher than at home, as was the humidity. I was carrying our 9-month-old daughter Christiane in my arms, who had a lot of fun during the flight when I felt sick during the turbulence.

A small delegation was waiting for us at the airport. Several pastors and church members had gathered to wel-

come us. The first question I was asked was (in English, of course): "How do you cook your curry?" I wasn't prepared for this question, so it had to be repeated. I replied that we don't cook curry at all, but at most use it as a spice for a certain type of sausage. Great astonishment: What would we eat then? "Potatoes," I said, and the Indian killed himself with laughter. He had never heard that before.

Johannes naturally held the first service in the congregation in English. An English course was part of the preparation for missionary service. Afterwards, he asked the congregation how they had found the sermon. They replied in unison: "Wonderful, Pastor, really wonderful!" Then he asked: "Did you understand anything?" The congregation replied, "No, nothing, but it was wonderful!"

It was a wonderful experience: to be appreciated simply for being there! I have never forgotten how generously and lovingly we were welcomed.

Margot Behn



Foto: privat

25 YEARS OF LTS IN PRETORIA

With the graduation ceremony on 28 November 2025, the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tshwane (LTS) completed its 25th academic year on its current campus in Pretoria. But where did it all start? LTS, as we know it today, is preceded by three initiatives. It started with a catechist institution at the mission station in Etshondo (Goede Hoop) and was led by Mission Superintendent Heinrich Prigge (1906 - 1908). It was followed by the Salem Catechist School (1940 - 1954) led by Mission Superintendent Christoph Johannes and his successor Karl Meister. The seminary closed when Mesiter retired in 1954.

The third initiative came about as a result of the donation of land by the Schroeders for the use of the mission work in the then Natal Province. So the seminary moved to Enhlanhleni in 1955 under the leadership of Dr. Johannes Schroeder and Missionary Gottfried Stallmann and Teacher Lukas Lefete. Admission requirement for students was 8 to 12 years of schooling. Principal Schoeder reported that: "we expect from this seminary to graduate men who will be leaders of the indigenous church."

The donated farm was ideal for two reasons: There was a large house which was used by the magistrate in the area and there was an existing building which was originally a prison for the small magistracy. One

part of the large house was occupied by Dr. Schoeder and his wife and the other part by the Stallmann's family. The prison was turned into the hostel for students. Three rondavels were built near the hostel to house the growing student body as time went by.

Later George Schulz came down from Salem to join the teaching staff in Enhlanhleni and Gottfried Stallman replaced him in Salem. Similar to his predecessors in the Superintendency of Bleckmar Mission, Schulz also became seminary teacher. The seminary in Enhlanhleni did not really attract many candidates with Standard 6 and 8. Many did not even fulfil this requirement.

The late Dr. Wilhelm Weber included in the curriculum the Greek and Hebrew from very early. He insisted that if the study of the Biblical Languages was deemed important for students in Germany, they were important for students of the LCSA. He prepared in IsiZulu the text book for teaching of the Hebrew language. In fact, the teaching and learning was done in IsiZulu except for Greek and Church History. It is possible that the inclusion of these languages in the curriculum paved the way for LTS students to be accepted in Fort Wayne seminary of the LC-MS. That acceptance of our students in Fort Wayne was an affirmation of the good work the LTS lecturers did to prepare students.

The work of seminary went beyond training future pastors. The seminary lecturers played an important role in the life of the church by doing by leading presentations at conferences, the translation and writing of books by Dr. W. Weber, and the training of laity, especially teachers.

From early 1980s, the LCSA students in Enhlanhleni and those of FELSISA in Pretoria Arcadia, alternated visiting one campus one year and another the following year. The purpose for such visits was to make future church leaders to know each other with the hope that they will work together in the future. Students prayed together, attended classes together, ate together and played together. Lasting friendships were kindled and the opportunities for future co-operation between the potential church leaders were increased. Around this time, the FELSISA took a major decision to not restart their seminary training, unless it is done in collaboration with the LCSA.

Also in the 1980s, lecturers from the LCMS started teaching at the Enhlanhleni Seminary. When the long-serving rector Dr. Wilhelm Weber and LCMS lecturer David Schneider who succeeded Daniel Mattson were not far from retirement, the LCSA was about to make a major decision regarding the staff. New lecturers needed to be recruited. A few potential

lecturers from among the missionaries were approached but they were not willing to move to the rural Enhlanhleni because they would have needed to send their children to school away from home, and there were no suitable employment opportunities for their wives. Students from other African countries like Liberia and Botswana who were already there at Enhlanhleni faced a similar challenge. They needed good schools for their children and jobs for their wives. The language issue also became more prevalent.

Language also proved to be a challenge. The language of instruction at Enhlanhleni was largely IsiZulu, forcing Setswana-speaking students to learn the Zulu language in order to study. While Zulu speakers learnt Setswana, the results show that the efforts were not balanced. The fact that almost all subjects were taught in IsiZulu except for the New Testament use of a textbook, Lefoko la Morena le a Gola (The Word of the Lord Grows) of Martin Frantzmann, translated from English. As a result, there were in the LCSA for a long time more Setswana-speaking pastors proficient in IsiZulu than Zulu-speakers proficiency in Setswana.

The admission of two students of Indian origin at Enhlanhleni in the early 1980s indicated that the seminary needed to change if it was going to provide training to the LCSA at large. The Bleckmar Mission had extended its work to people of Indian origin and two congregations in Phoenix and Chartsworths near Durban produced three candidates to train in Enhlanhleni. Unfortunately, none of them completed the course.

Because of students who did not speak isiZulu and Setswana joining the seminary, and some prospective lecturers unable to speak these languages, the language of instruction changed to English.

I joined the teaching staff in 1994 and succeeded Weber as the rector in 1998. Soon after I became the rector, someone discovered that the Afrikaans Baptist Church was selling their building in Arcadia, Pretoria. The wish of the teaching staff and learners to collaborate with the universities in Pretoria made a move to Pretoria attractive. But we did not know how a move would be financed.

When we least expected it, we were informed that someone has paid for the procurement of the church.



At the end of 2000, the LTS relocated to Arcadia with three members of the faculty: Ntsimane, Nathan Mntambo and Rev. Weber from Wittenberg, FELSISA.

With the move to Pretoria, the seminary wished to get accredited. At the time, a Joint Board of Theology existed, and LTS hoped to offer an accredited diploma through the Joint Board. Unfortunately, the arrival in Pretoria coincided with government cracking down on the fly-by-night schools proliferating especially in the cities. All seminaries and colleges belonging to the Joint Board of Theology had to register their seminaries individually. A number of conditions were put forward before formal registration and accreditation:

- Proper buildings
- Library with new books and journals
- Qualified faculty
- Local Financial support

I relocated to KZN in 2004. Dr. Wilhelm Weber junior succeeded me as the rector. The LTS was a very important player in Theological training in Africa. Students were admitted from Liberia, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi and Congo and other African countries. Women students started taking Deaconess Courses and graduated.

The LTS in Pretoria at first operated with visiting lecturers as was the case with Enhlanhleni. There were regulars from the LCMS and Selbständige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche (SELK) in Germany.

The quest for accreditation did not die. The qualified full-time and part-time faculty grew. The properties of the seminary increased to house both staff and students. The number of books in the library increased. The seminary opened its doors to non-LCSA students. Rev. Walter Winterle became the rector of the seminary in 2018, and he was succeeded by Dr. Heinz Hiestermann in 2021.

Through the efforts of many partners, the board of this seminary, the two churches FELSISA, LCSA and the third partner the MLC, the accreditation dream finally came true in 2025. The accreditation allows students to continue their studies at any university in South Africa, even internationally. It also makes it easier for students from other countries to get visas to study in South Africa.

While we today acknowledge the shoulders we are standing upon, for the milestone of formal accreditation to offer the Diploma in Theology, we also thank God for sustaining the focus and energies of those with responsibility for this seminary.

Those who study the past are interested in the future. When the history of the LTS, not of the last 25 years, but of the next 25 years is written, we shall one more time remember that the Lord of the church has done it. Honour and Glory to God alone.

Philipp Ntsimane

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (LTS)

in Pretoria/Tshwane receives accreditation and extension

On January 12, the first working Monday after the traditional closure of all construction companies in South Africa, Kurt Paul, Panbult, was on site at the LTS seminary in Pretoria/Tshwane. He is overseeing the urgently needed extension on the LTS site in the east of the city, close to the University of Pretoria. He had waited two years for the city administration to approve the construction plans. It is a great pleasure to talk to him, because you can sense his great commitment to the LTS as a whole and his enthusiasm for this extension, which would hardly have been able to start this Monday without his efforts. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the LTS, the highest governing body of the Lutheran Theological Training Center.

For many years, there has been a steady increase in student numbers at the LTS and an equally high demand from many African countries that would like to send their students to study at the LTS. Unfortunately, the LTS has not been able to accommodate all requests so far. The extension will create additional dormitories and three classrooms, as well as a dining room and a modern kitchen, so that once completed, 40 students will be able to study and be accommodated at the seminary. The completion of the new premises, which is planned for October, is therefore an important milestone.

Another very important milestone was reached in October 2025, when, thanks to the persistent efforts of

the rector, Prof. Dr. Heinz Hiestermann, the LTS finally received the long-awaited accreditation from the responsible Ministry of Culture. This gave it the right to award a recognized degree, enabling graduates to continue their studies at another college or university without any problems. The Lutheran Church Mission is a co-owner and co-sponsor of the LTS. For many years, teachers from our church have been helping out as guest lecturers at the LTS, such as Prof. Dr. Werner Klän, Lübeck, and other lecturers from Oberursel.

Kurt Paul is a member of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA). His church is also a co-owner and co-sponsor of the LTS, as is our other local partner church, the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA), which holds the majority stake in the LTS. He is therefore very pleased that his church will finance a place at the seminary this year for a student from the LCSA, who will begin his studies more or less at the same time as the start of the extension work. In this way, the church is growing both internally and externally.

Kurt Paul will be on the seminary grounds one to two days each week to assess the progress of the construction. To do so, he travels a good 300 km from his home to the capital of South Africa. And I think: Only someone who is passionate and convinced that they are contributing to a very important project can make such a commitment.

Edmund Hohls





PICKED UP

Wolf Warncke, Tarmstedt, recalls historical connections and draws attention to an article in "Lutherische Theologie und Kirche" (Lutheran Theology and Church), 4/2013, in which the secretary, Dr. Achim Behrens, introduces:

„Werner Klän introduces us to a completely different, but even more existential area of tension in contemporary church history when he commemorates the 75th anniversary of the Reichspogromnacht (Night of Broken Glass) in 1938 on November 9, 2013. In doing so, he highlights the varying degrees of involvement of the Lutheran (free) churches in the racial ideology and anti-Semitism of Nazism. This is an era of history that still awaits scholarly examination by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church. Werner Klän's contribution also introduces a sermon by Friedrich-Wilhelm Hopf from May 6, 1945, in which, just two days before the final surrender of the German Reich, he already addresses the guilt

of the church - also and especially with regard to November 9, 1938. In the sermon, one senses the preacher's struggle for words in the face of crisis and collapse, and at the same time one senses that he is gradually growing into the criteriological function of the Lutheran confession with regard to the course of events.“

“Forty years after the pogrom night in November 1938, Friedrich-Wilhelm Hopf wrote to his 'dear fellow believers in Mühlhausen' in 1978, recalling everything that had happened in our village at that time and which has weighed on us ever since as an unresolved past.”¹

Werner Klän - Friedrich-Wilhelm Hopf

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf: Critical Perspectives for the Present. A Lutheran Theologian in the Church Struggle of the Third Reich, on his Confessional Struggle after 1945 and the Controversy over his Position on Apartheid. Edited by Markus Büttner and Werner Klän (Oberurseler Hefte Supplement 11), Göttingen 2012, 380-383.

TWO TEACHERS FROM LTS

This coming season we are expecting two pastors from the Lutheran Theological Seminary Pretoria/Tshwane (LTS) in Germany

Rev. Mintesinot Hanfato will be in Germany from May 23 to June 21, and Rev. Dr. Heinz Hiesteremann will follow seamlessly with his visit from June 27 to July 19. While Rev. Hanfato teaches at the seminary and performs important duties as registrar, Rev. Dr. Hiesteremann heads the LTS and also teaches students at this theological educational institution, which is becoming increasingly important for Africa.

Rev. Hanfato also leads a congregation in Diepkloof, Soweto. Unfortunately, this huge residential area, located southwest of Johannesburg, has a very high unemployment rate, which particularly affects young people. The Diepkloof Evangelical-Lutheran Church would like to remedy this situation and increase job opportunities for young people by setting up a PC school where they can learn how to use digital technology. To do this, we need your help to realize this three-year project from 2027 to 2029. A professional fundraiser, Ms. Ilona Freudenreich, is helping us to set up our advertising for this project in such a way that we can also reach foundations and companies and ask them for financial support.

From the very beginning, the Bleckmar Mission has been committed not only to passing on theological knowledge, but also to providing targeted theological training to members of the congregation. This year, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the LTS in the national capital of Pretoria/Tshwane, which is undergoing a much-needed expansion starting in January of this year. The LTS has already trained students from a dozen African countries in Evangelical Lutheran theology and is receiving more and more inquiries from churches that also want to send their students there for training. Rev. Dr. Hiesteremann will tell you many interesting facts about the LTS and its special challenges.

My heartfelt request to all congregations of our church: Please invite our two staff members and stay up to date with developments in Diepkloof/Soweto and at LTS Pretoria/Tshwane. Please contact us now to arrange dates for one of our staff members to visit your congregation in the summer so that you will not be disappointed. Thank you very much for your support of our church's missionary work!

Edmund Hohls



Foto: privat



Foto: privat

VISITING GERMANY IN 2026

Pastor Mintesinot Hanfato is still available on the following Sundays: May 31; June 14; June 21. There are still many dates available during the week!

Pastor Dr. Heinz Hiesteremann is happy to visit you on weekdays between: June 29 and July 18, 2026

During these periods, both missionaries can be reached at: +49 176 560 114 59

NOVEMBER 2025 TO JANUARY 2026

Kirchenbezirk Niedersachsen Ost	3.622,86
Hamburg (Dreieinigkei)	6.836,43
Hamburg (Zion)	3.000,00
Hohenwestedt	150,00
Gistenbeck	540,00
Kiel	3.898,00
Nettelkamp	1.731,82
Stelle	4.085,00
Bad Schwartau	1.226,00
Rendsburg	300,00
Sottdorf	398,90
Wriedel	220,00
Kirchenbezirk Niedersachsen-West	60,00
Bremen	718,00
Bleckmar	178,00
Farven	765,00
Hermannsburg Kl. Kreuzk.	442,20
Hesel	752,76
Oldenburg	305,00
Rotenburg/W.	342,00
Sottrum	11.849,90
Tamstedt	2.229,00
Verden	8.095,81
Bremerhaven	90,00
Sittensen	2.115,00
Kirchenbezirk Niedersachsen-Süd	
Alfeld	267,00
Braunschweig	903,50
Celle	420,00
Groß Oesingen	10.795,00
Gifhorn	92,00
Göttingen	1.019,20
Hannover St. Petri	4.331,80
Hannover Bethlehem	5.445,65
Hildesheim	405,00
Lachendorf	2.694,02
Lage	1.134,25
Rodenberg	625,00
Rotenhagen	162,50
Seershausen	1.143,00
Veltheim	560,00
Wittingen	399,70
Rabber	770,00
Talle	820,60
Wolfsburg	1.227,00

Kirchenbezirk Sachsen-Thüringen	
Weißenfels	805,00
Sangerhausen	100,00
Steinbach-Hallenberg	400,00
Kirchenbezirk Lausitz	
Döbbrick	693,50
Dresden	1.264,70
Guben	2.779,00
Klitten	1.257,00
Weigersdorf	2.130,00

Kirchenbezirk Rheinland-Westfalen	
Duisburg	127,50
Borghorst	240,00
Düsseldorf	2.756,76
Münster/Gronau	90,00
Siegen	324,15
Dortmund	555,00
Köln	624,25
Radevormwald	911,70
Wuppertal-Barmen	183,20

Kirchenbezirk Hessen-Nord	
Balhorn	1.746,70
Korbach	1.565,90
Sachsenberg	209,83
Widdershausen	375,00
Altenstädt	460,50
Bergheim	320,00
Dreihausen	700,00
Homberg	257,00
Melsungen	105,00
Usenborn	362,89
Warzenbach	60,00

Kirchenbezirk Hessen-Süd	
Allendorf/Ulm	1.943,50
Grünberg	150,00
Steeden	149,00
Allendorf/Lumda	3.240,00
Limburg	540,00
Gemünden	555,00
Oberursel	1.815,20
Wiesbaden	700,00

Kirchenbezirk Süddeutschland	
Kaiserslautern	75,00
Stuttgart	750,00

Crailsheim	410,00
Fürth/Saar	442,50
Konstanz	50,00
Landau	155,00
Memmingen	162,00
München	3.480,67
Nürnberg	713,70
Sperlingshof	425,00
Tübingen	90,20
Walpershofen	75,00

Kirchenbezirk Berlin-Brandenburg	
Berlin-Neukölln	1.545,87
Berlin-Wilmersdorf	818,38
Berlin-Weddingen	238,65
Berlin-Zehlendorf	4.914,40
Jabel	300,00
Neuruppin	970,07
Greifswald	438,00

Spenden nach Heimgängen	
Christa Graßau	450,00
Wilfried Tiedge	2.190,00
Marie-Charlotte Bente	955,00
Elisabeth Schulz	925,00
Annemarie Storm	1.235,00
Luise Schnellenpfeil	1.020,00
Walter Eckhardt	200,00
Hanna Dittmer	2.160,00
Elli Jung	195,00

Missionsfeste	
Fürth	653,50
Dreihausen	700,00
Verden (Nachtrag)	50,00

Spenden zu besonderen Anlässen	
Geburtstag Bettina Rath	600,00
Geburtstag Ilona Salzmann	1.885,00
Diam. Hochzeit - Klasen (Tarmstedt)	1.500,00

Aktion Briefmarken und Münzen	1.524,60
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Ausland	
Einzelspende	1.117,34
EV.Kulmisszioei Egyesulet, Budapest	857,49
International Lutheran Council	126,35

Einzelspender	117.175,79
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Bank details Europa

Lutherische Kirchenmission
(Bleckmarer Mission) e.V.
IBAN: DE09 2579 1635 0100 4239 00
BIC: GENODEF1HMN

Bank details Südafrika

Mission of Lutheran Churches
Konto: 1913-137-538
Swiftcode: NEDSZAJJ

Special Projects

Leipzig „Die Brücke“	5.793,20
Berlin: Jugendmissionsprojekt	150,00
Umlazi (Südafrika)	75,00
Thuthukani / Megan du Plessis	210,00
St. Martin's Village (Südafrika)	3.504,50
Newcastle (Südafrika)	725,00
Lutherkirche Durban (Südafrika)	500,00
Macadamia-Plantage	100,00
Mosambik	3.470,50
Canoas (Brasilien)	36.449,03
Moreira (Brasilien)	54.354,48

Overview 2025 | General Gifts

Monat	Soll (rund)	Ist
Januar	55.000,00	48.335,58
Februar	55.000,00	74.581,62
März	55.000,00	17.147,67
April	55.000,00	38.797,48
Mai	55.000,00	37.829,24
Juni	55.000,00	38.426,82
Juli	55.000,00	28.670,73
August	55.000,00	27.955,66
September	55.000,00	23.334,04
Oktober	55.000,00	30.418,06
November	55.000,00	34.218,98
Dezember	193.000,00	49.643,82
Jahressumme	743.000,00	449.359,70

DONATION

Lutherische Kirchenmission Bleckmarer Mission e.V.

IBAN: DE09 2579 1635 0100 4239 00

BIC: GENODEF1HMMN

Donations for South Africa

Mission of Lutheran Churches

Konto: 1913-137-538

Swiftcode: NEDSZAJJ

UPCOMING MISSION FESTIVALS

- 25th May: Mission Festival Berlin-Wilmersdorf - Pfr. Hanfato
7th June: Mission Festival Weigersdorf - Pfr. Markus Büttner
Mission Festival Melsungen - Pfr. Hanfato
28th June: Mission Festival Brunsbrock - Pfr. Lippa
(Bremen-Brunsbrock-Stellenfelde und Verden-Rotenburg)
Mission Festival Hamburg - Dr. H.Hiestermann
5th July: Mission Festival Groß Oesingen - Dr. H.Hiestermann
12th July: Mission Festival Bleckmar - Dr. H.Hiestermann
19th July: Mission Festival Gistenbeck - Dr. H.Hiestermann
19th July: Mission Festival Stuttgart - Hohls
20th Sep.: Mission Festival Edertal-Mehlen (Berghem) Hessen-Nord - Hohls

Find out more about the work of the Lutheran Church Mission (Bleckmarer Mission) e.V. on the following channels:

Germany:

LKM



Subscribe to our newsletter:
missionsdirektor@selk.de,
NL in the subject line

South Africa:

Mission of Lutheran Churches (MLC):



“Die Brücke” (The Bridge):



Be sure to bookmark the page below! This will give you access to a new video filmed and posted every week by our staff in Leipzig. Missionary Hugo Gevers and his team provide inspiration, present thought-provoking ideas, and allow us to participate in their very important work there. Feel free to check back regularly. The videos are always uploaded on Saturdays at 6 p.m. It's worth it! Subscribe to the page so you don't miss anything:

Brazil:

The Instituto Santíssima Trindade children's and retirement home in Moreira, Brazil, publishes a newsletter every three months. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact us at the following address: kontakt@isstrindade.org.br

Information about the work of the three “schools for the poor” and the Sonnenstrahl project is available from our colleague Andrea Riemann: lkm-riemann@selk.de