The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission (MELIM)

Sharing the History of an Untold Chapter in Lutheran Missions

Photographs and primary source documents that chronicle the history of MELIM are in danger of being lost. The window of opportunity for recording the history of those directly involved in MELIM is rapidly closing. More needs to be done to make these historical treasures available to researchers around the world.

Moreover, the costs of actively maintaining (retrieving, cataloging, digitizing, translating and uploading) these historical treasures are substantial. Currently the goal is to increase CHI’s MELIM ONLINE project fund in order to sustain this project for the next 10 years.

Please contact Concordia Historical Institute today to learn how you can help move this important historical archive project forward.

Join us in furthering an appreciation and clearer understanding of an untold chapter in Lutheran missions: the work of MELIM missionaries and their families.

Prayerfully consider a donation that will help MELIM ONLINE preserve and present photos and documents online by retrieving, cataloging and uploading historical treasures that will inform our understanding of Missouri Synod mission work in South India.

Concordia Historical Institute is committed to sharing the history of this important missionary work and the Lutheran pioneers who gave witness to the Gospel of mercy and grace in Christ.

This historically important report from the hand of MELIM missionary Franz Mohn in 1911 is only one of thousands of primary source documents in the Concordia Historical Institute collection being made available for study online.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MISSOURI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN INDIA MISSION (MELIM)

During the 19th century The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) was indirectly involved in mission work in India by supporting the Leipzig Lutheran Mission (LLM).

However, the Leipzig Lutheran Mission dismissed K. G. T. Naether and T. F. Mohn, who were working in the southeast part of Tamil Nadu over their stance on the inspiration of Scripture. Subsequently, Naether and Mohn petitioned the LCMS for direct support of their work in India. The Missouri Synod agreed to their request and in 1895 Naether and Mohn moved to Krishnagiri and Ambur in northern Tamil Nadu to begin a new mission there. Their mission work was carried out under the banner of Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission (MELIM).

Naether continued to sow the seeds of the Gospel until he contracted the plague and died in 1904. Mohn continued missionary work for a few more years.

The outreach of Naether and Mohn was continued by groups of missionaries sent from the LCMS. A number of churches, schools and healthcare ministries in the Ambur-Krishnagiri region were established and expanded.

In 1907 MELIM missionaries began work in Trivandrum (present day Kerela) in 1912. These missionaries in Trivancore and Ambur, along with local pastors and teachers, formed congregations, schools and hospitals for new Tamil and Malayalam-speaking believers in the Gospel. Subsequently, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC) was established in 1958.

The MELIM missionaries, together with IELC pastors, teachers, and lay-workers continued with theological training, strengthening congregations, primary and secondary school instruction, and medical missions. Outreach expanded to Muslims, those in urban settings, women and other socially marginalized groups. Literacy and music programs began as opportunities to share the Christian Gospel.

However, by the one hundredth anniversary of MELIM in 1995, most missionaries had left MELIM and India. The IELC continues to minister, teach and serve tens of thousands of Christians in hundreds of congregations throughout Tamil Nadu, Kerela, and Sri Lanka.