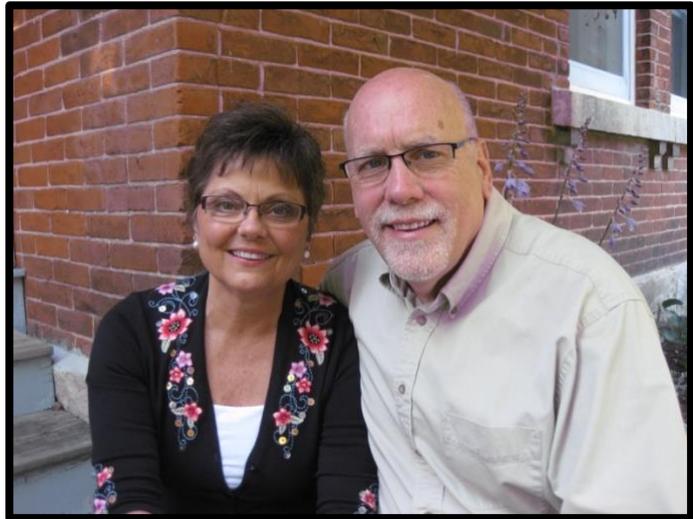


Fred and Gloria Strickert Return Visit to PNG

It is astounding how God calls and uses His people in His global mission here on earth. Fred and Gloria Strickert are an excellent example. Fred and Gloria arrived in Papua New Guinea (PNG) with their two-year old daughter Angela in 1975 to serve the Gutnius Lutheran Church of PNG at Timothy Lutheran Seminary (TLS) Birip. Married in 1970, Gloria had graduated from Concordia University Seward and then served St. John's Lutheran School in St. Louis while Fred studied and graduated from Christ Seminary Seminex, having graduated earlier from Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne. In 1976, while serving at TLS, Fred was ordained by the first National Bishop of the GLC Waima Waesa, along with Marcus Felde, Maniosa Yakasa, and Pausa Chaplain Sommy Setu. He and Gloria had two more children, Ben and Rachel, while they were serving at Birip and then returned to the USA in November of 1981, settling in Iowa.

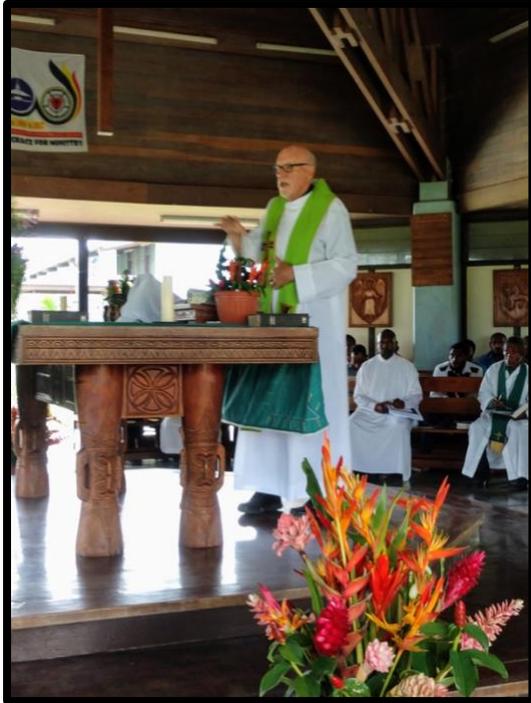


In Iowa, Gloria served in youth ministry at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Iowa City and St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Waverly, Iowa as Fred pursued his doctoral degree at the University of Iowa, after which he served from 1986-2010 as Professor of Religion at Wartburg College in Waverly. During that time Gloria studied Clinical Pastoral Education at the University of Iowa Hospital & Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, graduated from Wartburg Seminary and completed her seminary internship with Rev. Mitri Raheb at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, where Fred was spending his sabbatical. In 1996, Gloria was consecrated as a Deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and then became Hospital Chaplain at Covenant Medical Center, Waterloo, Iowa and later Head Chaplain at Allen Hospital in the same city.

Both Fred and Gloria retired early in 2010 and then went to Jerusalem to serve for three years together as Pastor and Assistant at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. In 2013, they retired to Southport, North Carolina, and since then have also served in India: Fred as Visiting Professor at Gurukul Theological Institute in Chennai, India and Gloria as Chaplain at Padhar Lutheran Hospital in Madya Pradesh, India.

Their most recent service this year at Martin Luther Seminary in Lae brought their wealth of expertise to the Lutheran Churches of Papua New Guinea. Their lives have been truly blessed by God, and they have blessed and been blessed by all of the people they have touched in God's global family.

Fred writes the following about their recent PNG experience at Martin Luther Seminary in Lae.



Thirty-eight years after leaving Papua New Guinea, after our six years term of service at Timothy Seminary, Birip, we had the privilege of returning to PNG from January to March, 2020. Thanks to an invitation from Principal Michael Wan Rupulga through ELCA Global Mission we were able to teach at Martin Luther Seminary during the first term of this academic year. Gloria taught “Theology of Pastoral Care” to third year students and Fred taught “The Acts of the Apostles” and “The Intertestamental Period: History and Literature” as elective courses. We also had the opportunity to lead worship, to mentor students one on one, and to participate in the full life of the seminary community. We were impressed by the sacrifices that so many of the students had made to attend seminary, as also their vocational commitment and eagerness to learn and to experience spiritual growth. We especially enjoyed getting to know the students from Enga and to recall pleasant memories whenever each of them would

mention the name of his “as ples.”

During this term, the seminary initiated their first four students in the M.Th. program. The students began with a two-week on-campus course on research methodology and they will return to campus later in the year for a course on academic writing. The bulk of their work will take place through distance learning. Each student is paired up with a mentor who will stay in contact through email and skype. The mentors include three former PNG missionaries in Adelaide and myself (Fred). The goal is that each student will complete their program over a two-year period.

Unfortunately, our time at MLS was under the cloud of the global coronavirus pandemic. Students, who are already preoccupied with malaria and other tropical diseases, quickly became educated in what seemed at first like a far-off disaster. At the beginning of February, the principal brought in a public health nurse and an internal medicine physician to present an information session for the MLS community. The good news was that the government had already put restrictions on incoming ships--a major concern for the port of Lae—with ships (many from China) required to anchor off shore for two weeks before docking and unloading. Likewise, health personnel were meeting each arriving plane in Port Moresby to monitor incoming passengers. By mid-March we lead another community presentation concerning the growth of the pandemic with Fred describing how churches throughout the world had already been affected (shut down of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, Pope Francis walking through the empty streets of Rome praying for victims in Italy, and plans unfolding for empty churches in the States on Easter). Gloria followed with guidelines for how students and faculty might offer pastoral care appropriate in this situation and then with guidelines for social distancing (a difficult task for a society used to shaking hands and sitting crowded together in the pew).

Papua New Guinea seemed to escape the virus until Friday March 20, when a Spanish worker arrived back from Spain to Lae showing symptoms but testing negative before a positive test. Health personnel acted quickly to isolate him and send him to a hospital in Australia, and there was no spread of the virus. We were impressed that the workers at the Lae airport wore masks and gloves. On Tuesday March 24 an emergency order went into effect grounding all domestic flights and banning all PMVs between provinces. Students at MLS and other education institutions were sent home until after the Easter holiday break. During Holy Week, a second case was detected in East New Britain. Then on April 17, five more cases were announced (3 residents along the western border with Indonesia and 2 from Port Moresby including a government worker). So, the number of cases has now reached seven as we write. We pray they can keep the virus contained.



Our biggest regret is that we had to leave early. We had booked our tickets to stay through Easter. However, by mid-March airlines were cutting back on their flights. Qantas contacted us on March 19 notifying us that they would discontinue international flights within the next week and that we needed to reschedule. So, we ended up finishing our classes, saying goodbyes, and packing in just 36 hours. The big surprise was that on our March 21 arrival in Moresby after our early morning flight from Lae, we were informed that Australia had closed its borders to Americans. As a result, we ended up spending four days in the POM airport check-in area, filling out a series of applications to Australia for an exemption to transit through the Brisbane airport and waiting patiently. The good news was that we did not wait alone. There were about twenty other Americans connected with various PNG mission organizations. Best of all, we recognized the couple two places ahead of us in line, Roy and Judy Schache, which led to a pleasant reunion and mutual encouragement. And through the Schaches, a visit from Dr. Timothy and Jennifer who spent a whole day sitting and waiting with us. Fortunately, our eldest daughter has a friend in the Washington, D.C. Australian Embassy who was willing to advocate for us and cut through the red tape so that we—along with the other 20 Americans-- were able to fly out of Port Moresby on March 24 on the last Qantas flight out of PNG, and then continue on the last trans-Pacific Qantas flight from Brisbane to Los Angeles, and then home to North Carolina. Our two weeks of quarantine were filled with thanksgiving that we had been blessed by our acceptance into the MLS community and blessed by accompanying angels all the way home.