



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

November 2021

Dear friends and partners in ministry,

When I last wrote, we were just starting our first semester at the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) here in Kingston, Jamaica. So much has happened since then! Now the semester is almost over. Let me share with you what has been one of its highlights for me.

As I wrote in my first newsletter, I am what is called the “Lutheran warden”, which means that I am responsible for the care of all people and things Lutheran at UTCWI. The Baptists, Methodists, Moravians, Anglicans, and the United Church community also have wardens in this ecumenical place, and we are all busy on Monday mornings from 8-10 as we hold our “denominational classes”. The



Lutheran denominational class has one student in it, the only Lutheran student currently on campus, Rafael van Ommeren, who is here with his wife, Lucille, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Suriname, a country on the northeastern coast of South America. This course has been a joy for me to teach, especially since some of you have taken up my invitation to join the class online from time to time and to participate in our discussions.

Rafael is studying for a Master's degree in Contextual Ministry in preparation for ordination as a pastor in his church. In his denominational class this year we are reading and

Map Source: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Global Mission, 1995.

discussing the *Book of Concord*, the collection of foundational Lutheran confessional documents. This past week our topic was articles V-VIII of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which define the church and its ministry, and what a timely topic it was in relation to events rocking the churches of Jamaica in the last few weeks.

Here is what happened. On October 18, 2021, a distraught member of a church called the Pathways International Kingdom Restoration Ministries in Montego Bay, Jamaica, called the police to come to her church because people were being killed in the worship service. The police arrived to find more than 100 members in attendance, including children, and two people dead in front of the congregation because the pastor had ordered that their throats be cut. A week later, while in police custody, the pastor and a police officer were killed in a car crash involving the police vehicle they were in, which has made the case even more difficult and complex.

The Jamaica Council of Churches responded immediately to the news of the killings with a statement upholding the freedom of religious expression except when it involves harmful abuse and crime, as in this case (<http://www.facebook.com/JamaicaCouncilofChurches/>). As we talked about these

events in our class on the *Book of Concord* Rafael and I took note that in the Augsburg Confession the church's ministry is clearly laid out: to preach about how Jesus, as true human and true Son of God, lived his life on our behalf, giving us the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper so that we may participate in his life, and sending us the Holy Spirit so that we may grow closer to God in faith and to our neighbors in love. Thus, the church consists "of people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, in the *Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 175). In a beautiful sermon that Rafael preached on October 26 during the chapel service on campus, he challenged the churches to engage more with people who desperately need to be part of a caring community in which they are met by the real, life-giving God in whom to put their trust and hope so that they do not become victims of false hopes and promises, such as those extended to people by the Pathways International Kingdom Restoration Ministries.

Some of you may have joined us online and heard that sermon as we worshiped together the last week of October, a week in which the Lutheran community at UTCWI was responsible for leading the daily chapel services. We are very grateful for your presence with us. Other partnerships for which we are grateful include that of the Anglican community on campus, which loaned us a cruet to use during the mid-week communion liturgy that week, and Trinity Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin, which sent us 30 glass cups for that communion liturgy. Such companionship is a wonderful, living expression of that church that consists of "people scattered throughout the entire world who agree on the gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments."



Rafael and Lucille van Ommeren

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P.S. In addition to prayer, here are ways to support us financially.

1. To become a covenant congregation, download the form at ELCA.org/covenant form or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2820.
2. Make an individual gift by check payable to "ELCA Missionaries" with "Carolyn Schneider (GCS2016)" in the memo line and mail your check to:
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