

A TRIBUTE FOR REV. DR. CHARLES EVANSON

by Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.

Editors' note: The Rev. Dr. Charles Evanson served 15 years overseas, first as a deployed staff from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and then later after 2010 as a contract worker for the LCMS Office of International Mission in the area of theological education. In May 2015, Dr. Evanson served as the worship planner and chaplain for the International Conference on Confession Leadership (ICCL) in Wittenberg, Germany. This conference is the source of the papers in this issue of the Journal of Lutheran Mission. After assisting with the ICCL in Wittenberg, Dr. Evanson returned to Lithuania to pack his belongings so that he could return to the United States for retirement after many faithful years of service.

IN AN EMAIL OF APRIL 2000, the Rev. Dr. Charles Evanson reported to Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSEW) that he was teaching elementary Hebrew, homiletics, God and creation, eschatology and New Testament theology at the University of Klaipeda in Lithuania. As he noted, "It is quite a mixture, and it makes for an interesting week of classes."

That "interesting week" has now stretched beyond a decade and a half, and Dr. Evanson's ongoing, stellar service has cemented the strong relationship between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Lietuvos Evangelikų Liuteronų Bažnyčia (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania).

Called by CTSEW in 1999 as deployed staff, Evanson brought a unique resumé to the work outlined for him. Undergraduate work at Valparaiso University was followed by seminary and graduate studies at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary (Maywood, Ill.), Union Theological Seminary (New York City), the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and Concordia Seminary (Saint Louis). He was ordained in November 1964 and colloquized into the ministerium of the LCMS through CTSEW, then located in Springfield, Ill. After serving as a missionary and pastor in both Canada and the United States, Dr. Evanson settled into his long and fruitful pastorate at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind. (1975–2000).

It is most rewarding to see a person's unique gifts matched to particular situation with the result that all involved grow and are blessed. That has been the situation with Dr. Evanson and his service in Lithuania. Working with the Rev. Dr. Darius Petkūnis, pastor of the Palanga Lutheran Church, Evanson played a significant role in the development of the Lithuanian hymnal and agenda. In

2012, Bishop Midaugus Sabutis honored Dr. Evanson by counting him among the Lithuanian clergy.

Always aware of the unique moment in which he worked, in 2010 Dr. Evanson noted: "The door which had been closed for so many years is once again open and the church has mobilized itself to learn once again to become a mission-minded church in the highly secularized, post-Soviet, European Union environment."¹

And the Lord has blessed that work. In May 2003, Dr. Evanson could report: "We have good evidence that our work here is bearing good fruit. I think that you too are able to bear testimony to the renewed interest in Confessional Lutheran Theology and its practical application that is evident here. Of course, there is an old saying that were God build His Church, the devil builds a chapel next door ... In short, the Church in Lithuania continues to need our continuing educational work, and the faithful prayers of Lutherans all over the world."

And so even as we give thanks for Dr. Evanson's service, we continue to pray for our fellow Christians and co-workers in Christ's mission in Lithuania.

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to earth to destroy the devil's works. You have conquered sin, death, and hell and have brought life and immortality to light. We give you thanks for the faithful work of your servant, Charles and pray that you will continue to send faithful laborers into your harvest. Grant us conviction and courage to continue the work entrusted to us — daily to struggle against the devil's dominion and daily to strive to extend your kingdom.

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¹ Charles J. Evanson, "Christ's Servants in Lithuania," *For the Life of the World* 14 (November 2010): 10.