

"HONG KONG - 1997"

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Northwestern Lutheran, CCFS, Newsletters, Etc. or any other publications) to avoid embarrassment or difficulties for their local members. They have also asked me to remind the readers of this paper that many of these opinions and ideas have not been researched in great detail and have not been discussed thoroughly. Keeping this in mind we look at what our synod and missionaries are doing to prepare for, 1997.

When referring to Hong Kong it must be understood that Hong Kong consists of three parts. "Hong Kong Island, which is roughly 32 square miles; Kowloon, 3.5 square miles; and the New Territories, 365 square miles--more or less. Over five million people inhabit these three regions. Amazingly 2.4 million live in the little section of Kowloon" (ed. Johne and Hart, 245). Hong Kong is a densely populated city, but it is small in comparison to its neighbor China which grosses 1 billion people.

Hong Kong wasn't always such a populated and thriving city. "In the 1830's, when British ships sailed into Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong was just a small fishing village with fewer than 6,000 inhabitants. The only people who were attracted to this village were fisherman, pirates and opium smugglers." (Time 7).

Opium brought Britain to China. Britain sailed to Hong Kong not to purchase this drug, but to sell it. Britain's opium was wanted by many Chinese people. "China had an estimated two million opium users at the time. Although the opium trade was illegal in China from the very

beginning the laws were never strongly enforced, until China began to see a trading imbalance in the works. For the first time, in the late <sup>1830's</sup> 1930's, the value of imports to China exceeded the value of it's exports. In 1837 Peking decided that it was going to enforce it's century old ban on opium. Because of the ban on opium a brawl broke out in <sup>1839</sup> 1939 between the British and Chinese and the Opium War began" (42).

"By 1841, just 14 months after the opium war started, peace terms were negotiated. Britain came out the victor and made China pay an indemnity of 4.5 million and ceded Hong Kong as a new center of British trade. On June 26, Hong Kong was formally declared a British Colony" (43).

Britain made Hong Kong what it is today. It made Hong Kong a free port, which means that no duties are levied on trade. Because of this in just four years Hong Kong went from a population of 6,000 to 24,000, ~~thousand~~. The population then, as it is today, is made up prodominantly of refugees from China and other neighboring countries such as Vietnam.

Under British control many doors were opened, but none as important as the door to Christianity, which was now opened to this pagan society. Already in 1842 America built its first Christian church in Hong Kong, a small Baptist chapel.

The door was opened, but the culture, the language, and Chinese religion still stood as a great barrier for the

Western missionary. Barriers such as these still face missionaries today. "Hong Kong, which has been under British control for 150 years, has never been greatly influenced by Britain. For instance, after 150 years the people of Hong Kong still speak very little English" (Morris 134). The people of Hong Kong are very Chinese, which means that their language, culture and religions are similar to its neighbor China. Hong Kong has never been greatly effected by Western culture. Even when China leased Hong Kong to Britain in 1898 China still felt that Hong Kong was her own.

Today, China could have Hong Kong back before 1997 if it really wanted it. All China would have to do is cut off Hong Kong's food and water supply. Hong Kong depends on most of its water from China and almost all its food. China could also step in militarily and take control of this colony in a matter of hours. Renowned travel writer Jan Morris makes this observation,

"Reading the history of Hong Kong, I sometimes get the feeling that the colony was ceded to Britain rather as a toy might be handed over to a recalcitrant child, merely to keep it quiet" (304).

China has never interfered with this colony, because it has been in their own best interest not to interfere. "By letting Hong Kong remain a free port China receives a billion dollars a year in foreign exchange. They receive this money through exports, remittances to families in China, banks, shipping companies, insurance firms and

financial institutions" (Time 37). China has also learned Western techniques by not interfering, which has helped them in their own industrial revolution. "China looks to Hong Kong as their model in managerial, constructional, architectual and financial services, but China is still far behind" (Morris 301). For example, there is one car for every 22 people in Hong Kong, and only one car for every 10,220 people in China. This "Pearl of the Orient", as Hong Kong has been called, has been useful for China, and so there is no intention to change the status of this thriving city.

Hong Kong is also very useful to England for its economic value. Hong Kong is a market and outlet for Chinese products. This colony has also been used as an observation post by the British, since the Communist takeover in China in 1949. England uses Hong Kong to keep the rest of the world informed about China, which has isolated itself from the rest of the world since its fall into Communism. Without Hong Kong the world would know very little about China.

Hong Kong is also very important to our synod and missionaries. "The Pearl of the Orient", has opened the door for our missionaries to spread the great pearl of the gospel to millions of Chinese people living in Hong Kong.

"The opportunity for our synod to spread the gospel in this area of the world was first brought to our attention by Peter Chang. Peter Chang, who was later to become the

president of the Christian Chinese Lutheran Mission (CCLM), appealed for our synods help and support in 1960" (Johne and Wendland 248). Since the threat of Communist takeover still seemed rather remote to our synod they saw the need to take advantage of the remaining years of British control.

To understand what could and might take place in Hong Kong I felt it was necessary to give you a little history of Hong Kong. It's not my intention to give you a thorough history of this colony however, or the entire history of our missions in Hong Kong since the time Peter Chang first asked for our help. Instead of looking at the past let's now turn our attention to our missions today. I would like to show how God has blessed our missions over the 34 years leading up to 1997. It is very important to see how established these churches are right now and how that will help in the future. After looking at how God has blessed our missions then we will finally look at how our synod can preserve, or better, how our synod and missionaries are planning to have our missions grow even during possible difficult times to come.

Our missions in Hong Kong, which is called the South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission or (SALEM), have been blessed abundantly by God. By being given the opportunity to spread the gospel to the people of Hong Kong over 400 worshipers gather every Sunday to worship the true God" (Koelpin, LWMS 2). "Salem churches meet in four different types of places every Sunday. The only service that is held

in a traditional church building is at Grace Lutheran church.

"Tai Po Lutheran church meets at Immanuel Lutheran College. This is the middle school of over 1000 students which we operate in Hong Kong's New Territories" (Plath 289). "Teacher Mark Spengler was called to the mission staff as, Director of Outreach through Education, called primarily to develop the evangelism potential offered by the college" (Johne and Wendland 256). The college has been a blessing in itself.

"The third and smallest place of worship is held at a tutorial center. A tutorial center is like a school after school. Tuition pays for rent and operating costs. These are places that the students can come for help in their studies, and then be used as churches on Sundays. Roger Plath, one of the four missionaries in Hong Kong today, says, that these tutorial centers may have the greatest potential for starting more churches in the future" (289 Plath).

"The remainder of our churches meet in study centers on Sunday. Study centers are very important for the young people from late high school through college age. Because of the enormous population in Hong Kong students need a quiet place to study, so in every "housing estate," which are found all over Hong Kong, a study center is furnished for the young people. They are furnished with tables, chairs and a small library" (Johne and Wendland 256). Study centers have proven to be very useful to reach the young



people of Hong Kong with the gospel. They are effective tools for witnessing during the week, and then they are also used as a church on Sunday~~x~~. Thankfully, SALEM has been given the opportunity to supervise five study centers in Kowloon and the New Territories.

What will happen to these places of worship in 1997? God is the only one who truly knows. "If one were to take an educated guess at the present time, then one would have guess that when China takes over Hong Kong again the churches will be placed under the Three Self-Patriotic Church (a church group loyal to and directly controlled by the communist party). Efforts are being made by China to put all churches under the authority of one supervising body, in order to control the churches loyalty and teachings and what they practice. Missionary/teacher Mark Sprengler says, that he and other missionaries have heard and read reports that many church bodies in China, which have tried to deny the authority of the Three Patriotic Church, have confronted persecution and obstruction" (Sprengler 1).

"Sprengler says, that there is no consistency to these clampdowns on Christianity. For ~~E~~<sup>e</sup>xample, in Hebei Province the anti-religious elements are quite strong and active, but rarely receive such reports from other provinces" (1). So once again it is very difficult to give anyone a definite answer to the questions being raised about 1997. "Many believe that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is capable of severe measures especially after the suppression of the

1989 student freedom movement in Teinemann Square. At this time it does not look as though the PRC will allow freedom of expression in schools, missions, universities and civic institutions in Hong Kong" (Koelpin LWMS 1).

"If the worst scenario would occur, then the church undoubtedly would be forced to go underground," says Spengler (2). Some church bodies are already preparing for this. "For example, six to seven years ago the Catholic church conceptualized and began implementaion of 'house churches.' These would be small cells of Catholics operating without a highly visible clergy" (2).

If the worst scenario would occur our own synod might consider removing our highly visible clergy. The PRC knows that missionaries are the strength of the church, so they may try to stomp them out making the church less effective" (2).

In 1997 our synod's mission work may be severely restricted. Our missionaries may even be asked to leave Hong Kong. Even with this threat looming over them are missionaries are confident that SALEM churches will persevere. The missionaries are very confident, because our missions are very strong at this time. SALEM is strong in many ways. "First of all SALEM is self-supporting. Except for occasional capital projects, local offerings pay for all operating expenses. This means that if our missionaries leave, the work will still carry on" (Plath 289).

Our WELS church body is also giving the laity of these churches the opportunity to study many basic Bible courses at our Bible Institute to strengthen the church for 1997.

"Examples of courses include: Christian Counselling, Law and Gospel, Evangelism and Worship" (Spengler 2). A lay person can study up to two years at the Bible Institute and become a well trained lay worker capable of becoming an evangelist. An evangelist in Salem would typically work as a supervisor in a study center, making contacts, leading people to take Bible classes, and eventually lead them to becoming church members.

Our missions in Hong Kong now have four lay evangelists that will continue to spread the Gospel if the church would go underground and our missionaries would have to leave.

"The latest ordained evangelist from our Salem churches is Tse Tat Chiv, who was ordained October 31, of 1993. His picture and an article about this man can be found in the March, 1994, <sup>edition</sup> addition of the Northwestern Lutheran, which was written by missionary Gary Schroeder" (Northwestern Lutheran 98).

Without the use of visible clergy our synod and missionaries are considering other ways to reach the people of Hong Kong and the people of China. One way in which we may be able to reach people with the Gospel is through the "English Language Institute-China" (ELIC), or some other similar organization. "The proposal is to find a way to encourage WELS lay people and especially WELS teachers who

meet the requirements for a ELIC senior teacher to go to China as an English teacher through ELIC" (Koelpin, Letter 1). There are organizations such as ELIC out there right now because of the current need of good English teachers in China. ELIC presently has more than 100 teachers in China and has hopes of doubling that amount in the immediate future.

"The opportunity is there even though the Chinese know that these teachers are Christian. But as long as this is not stressed or publicly touted, it is not an embarrassment for China, so it is allowed. Dan Koelpin thinks our synod may be able to utilize this system for our own outreach of the gospel" (1). "The idea is to recruit our own teachers for this program. Recruitment for such a program should be done with low-profile and no widespread publicly disseminated publicity material" (1). It would be the synods responsibility to teach these teachers to witness of course, but to do so with sensitivity and discretion. Koelpin has this to say about ELIC,

"While this is only one method, ELIC had proved it is possible to maintain a Christian witness in countries where entrance can not be obtained by a man with Rev. before his name and who wishes to enter on a missionary visa. (1).

There is also another method being looked at right now by our synod and missionaries called the "Mission/Ministry Proposal For Degree-Qualified Rev.'s or C.R.M.'s". "The intention of this proposal is to take degree qualified,

theologically trained people from within the WELS and use them to fill the self-percieved and valid needs of the Chinese education system, (i.e. schools for educationally handicapped, English language institutes, educational consultants, etc.) and when training the nationals share God's Word with them" (2). In this these men are asked not to emphasize their ordained standing in the church and cease to use their titles as ministers in China or have their titles on their visas, which would describe their work. It is resolved in this proposal that,

"The Executive Committee for Southeast Asian Missions facilitate the establishment of a private philanthropic charitable educational foundation with absolutely no visible ties to the WELS, its schools or the Executive Committee for Southeast Asian Missions and be it further, that the said educational foundation establish its objectives and purposes with a world wide view and humanitarian (as opposed to humanistic) emphasis. The Executive Committee for Southeast Asian Missions will also encourage a culturally sensitive, educational qualified committed layman with a love for people, missions, and proven administrative ability: to establish, organize and serve as executive secretary of the said educational foundation and its board of directors" (2).

Further in his letter Pastor Koelpin spells out the requirements that would be made of the executive secretary. At this time I don't feel that all the requirements need to be spelled out, since this is just a proposal. The ELIC and the Mission/Ministry Proposals are the two significant proposals that will be looked at thoroughly before any attempt is made by our synod to implement them in South East Asia. Many proposals have been made by Pastor Koelpin and

our missionaries, but these too I feel are not worth mentioning at this time because they are unrefined. Most of the other proposals look at accessing less accessible markets.

What will the future bring for the churches in Hong Kong? Pastor Koelpin says,

"As we ponder the future of Hong Kong, we can be assured that the Lord will always direct events in the best interest of his church. We must acknowledge, however, that his plans may be different from ours. To some of us it might seem horrible if the Hong Kong church were to be suddenly cut off from our missionaries and all western ties, yet God could use those very circumstances to strengthen this church and make it an even more effective tool with the Chinese people" (Koelpin LWMS 2).

Only time will tell what the will of God truly is for our missions in Hong Kong. As 1997 approaches all Christians are encouraged to pray for the missionaries of Hong Kong. To pray that God will give them the strength and determination to carry on their work and make preparations that will truly glorify God in the days to come. And pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in Hong Kong. Pray that they remain faithful and strong today and in the years following 1997. But above all Pastor Koelpin reminds us, "To pray that God's will be done and his kingdom come to one of the most populous nations of earth" (2).

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