

God's Vision for ALC

By Philip W. Gassman

Ideas From Churches, April 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church



Our Mission is to glorify God and to bring people to a full personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.



Ascension Lutheran Church, Ames, IA

God's Vision to Reach the Global Harvest Field

The Lord has challenged Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC) in Ames, IA, with an expanding missions vision over the past two decades. This includes increased support for missionaries/ministries called to various countries, U.S. campus ministry and other mission fields (including local ministries), annual missions conferences and increasing numbers of church members participating in short-term mission trips. We have also found ourselves taking bolder steps recently regarding commitments to missions support that we could not have envisioned earlier in our church history.



Several factors have served as catalysts for ALC missions support, including a core group (Evangelism-Missions (EM) team) committed to developing and maintaining missions/outreach strategies. Other ALC “missions drivers” include:

(1) short-term team mission trips to several countries (e.g., Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti) and domestic locations needing disaster relief support;

Left: ALC short-term missionaries pouring cement for a new house in the Dominican Republic



House project taking shape

(2) additional strategic local outreach manifested in the establishment of the Overflow Thrift Store (OFT), which was co-founded ten years ago by ALC member Cathy Twito (wife of ALC Pastor Roger Twito), and supporting a new initiative in central Iowa called The Well; and (3) two recent five-year strategic plans, the first of which spanned 2017 to 2022 and the second that began in 2023.



New Overflow Thrift Store, Ames, IA

Goals were set in the first strategic plan to increase support of community outreach and support of missionaries/ministries by 50%, which has been more than accomplished. The second strategic plan was initiated in 2023, which builds on the first plan and introduced several new goals including increased outreach to the Ames international community which included 2,878 international students from 116 countries at Iowa State University in Fall 2024.

God's Challenge: Support Large Missions Projects

Another missions catalyst has emerged in the recent past: God's challenge to release greater amounts of financial support for "large mission projects." My wife (Deaconess Brigitte Gassman) could be considered a forerunner of this concept, based on views she has expressed since the early 2000s; i.e., that our church should consider funding the building of a church in an

impoverished nation or something similar (e.g., Samaritan's Purse projects). She was particularly inspired with this conviction due to ALC capital campaigns; in other words, if we can spend money on our own facilities then we should be able to help others accordingly who have considerably fewer resources.

The Lord further got my attention in a more urgent way on August 10, 2022, during an email exchange with Rev. Jon Opgenorth, President of Words of Hope (WOH), when he unexpectedly typed: "Oh yeah, and we have a \$60,000 project for Ascension Lutheran :)". There is a considerable backstory to the relationship between Rev. Opgenorth and the EM team, and ALC more broadly, that can't be shared here. However, it is notable that a \$5,000 offering occurred at an ALC Sunday service in December 2021 to support a WOH outreach in a northwest African country (reported in more depth in Volume 11(1) of the WOH *Wavelength* magazine - view article [here](#)).

Rev. Opgenorth's proposal was simultaneously perplexing, mysterious and challenging to me... but also deeply resonated within me. I shared with EM team members that I sensed the Lord was speaking to us and wanting us to engage in greater levels of missions commitment. We could not see a path forward at that time to establish such a project with WOH within our budgeting structure and strategic plan goals, and thus we did not act on the specific WOH idea (but perhaps it will occur in the future).

Fast forward to March 3, 2023, when another email arrived in my inbox with the subject line: "A Lightning Bolt about Missions", which was sent by ALC member Dr. Dick Gladon to me, Pastor Twito and ALC Council President Mike Dubiel. Dr. Gladon shared a seemingly provocative proposal (although consistent with previous inputs from Deaconess Gassman and Rev. Opgenorth), some of which is repeated here:

"Several days ago, I was sitting in my recliner in my living room resting, and completely out of nowhere an idea was planted in my mind. This providential moment directed me to bring up the following suggestion for Ascension's missions program. We support about 10 missions units, and we need to continue to do that at the same or a somewhat accelerated rate. But... this is what was planted in my mind: Ascension should choose a major missionary unit or program and get behind that unit or program with a commitment of \$25,000 to 50,000 per year every year... At that point, this strong sense of finding and supporting a given mission in an impactful way left me, but gave me a peace of mind that left no doubt who sent the message..."

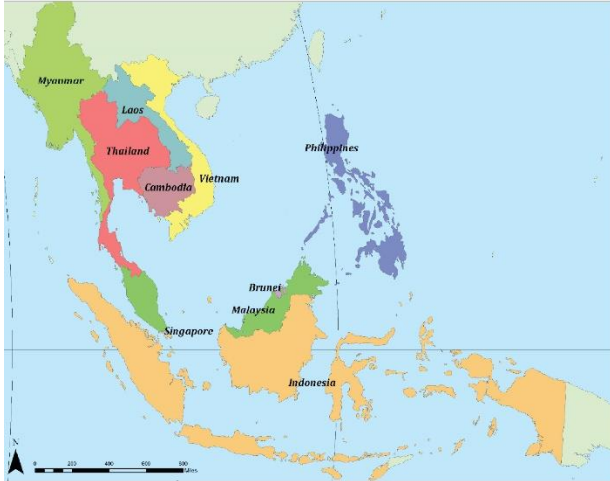
I responded to Dr. Gladon's email, with key thoughts copied here: "...In general, what Dick shared here definitely resonates with me. I have had a sense for a while that the Lord is challenging us to embrace an "order-of-magnitude" increase in our missions' impact. Exactly how that will come about is a matter of much prayer I think... Focusing on funding projects is probably the most realistic goal in the near-term...". Some short email exchanges then occurred in which I questioned if it was too soon to share Dr. Gladon's proposal with the ALC council. However, President Dubiel and Pastor Twito thought it would be OK to present the large missions project idea to the council. That decision to present the concept to the council ultimately charted a new missions trajectory at ALC.

The ALC council discussed the proposed large mission project at their next meeting and reacted favorably to the concept. Further discussions occurred over a period of months, which led to a proposal from the EM team that I presented to the council in the summer of 2023, focused on raising \$25,000 to \$36,000 for equipment needed for a mission eye clinic in Africa. The project was an initiative of Global Eye Mission, led by ALC members Dr. Steve Anderson and his wife Carol, and several partner ministries. The council approved the proposed campaign, but the effort was paused within a few weeks in August 2023 due to political unrest in that specific area of Africa. Global Eye Mission continued to seek the Lord about needed funds to complete the project. All of the funds were ultimately received by Global Eye Mission from other various partners (including Samaritan's Purse) and the mission eye clinic was completed in April 2024 in spite of the political unrest.

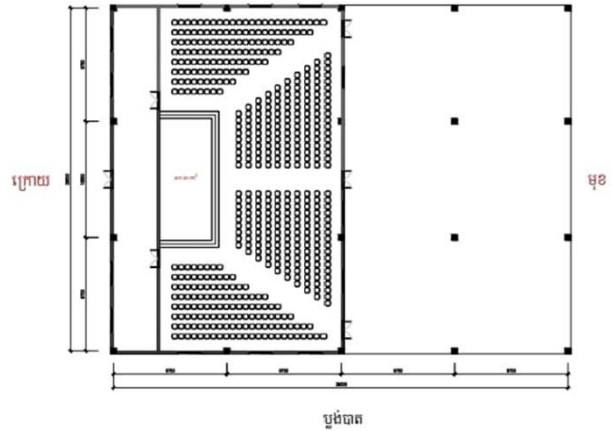
Cambodia Ministry Project

EM members then pursued the Lord's direction regarding a different ministry project He would want us to pursue. During this period, we learned from Pastor Bill Moberly about the vision that his partner Pastor Sam Chim, of Awakening Lives for World Missions (ALWM) in Cambodia, had for building a ministry center in the Province of Preh Vihear in north-central Cambodia.

The proposed ministry center will consist of three buildings located on 5 acres, including two dorms (1,730 sq. ft. each) that will both house 50 people (one for men and one for women) and a larger conference center (6,400 sq. ft.) that will be able to host up to 800 people for various types of ministry conferences including youth gatherings.



Cambodia and surrounding countries map. Public Domain, courtesy of USDA Economic Research Service.



Proposed Conference Center

The conference center will also have three smaller rooms that could be used for ministry/training purposes for 20 to 30 people. The ministry center will support ministry needs of both the Cambodian church, and pastors and others from Vietnam, Laos and other neighboring countries, some of whom are experiencing intense persecution and have limited resources for ministry training/support in their respective countries. The total estimated cost for the ministry center was \$211,000 at the end of 2024, with \$29,000 needed for the land and \$182,000 required to construct the buildings.



Teens praying during Cambodia Youth Conference

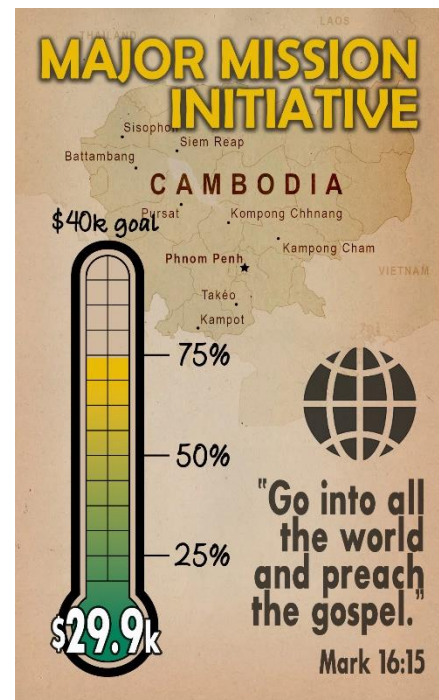
Cambodia Youth Conference attendees





Group at Cambodia Youth Conference

After further discussion and prayer, the EM team concluded that we should initiate a campaign to raise \$40,000 to help support the Cambodia ministry project. The ALC council approved this plan, which was called the Cambodia Major Missions Initiative (MMI) and launched in September 2024. The MMI was structured external to the ALC budget, thus the funds raised through the MMI are in addition to giving needed to maintain the church's budget. As of late March, over \$30,000 has been raised for the MMI (nearly 76% of the final goal), which includes two large gifts of \$10,000 each. These funds are being regularly released to ALWM Cambodia as the money is received, to help the ministry project move forward as quickly as possible. To date, the land for the ministry center has been paid for and some additional funds (\$13,000) have been received toward constructing the buildings. But considerably more funds are needed to complete the ministry center.



Write the Vision

The Lord has also moved on the hearts of ALC members to bless a variety of other ministry efforts with giving outside of our regular budget, especially in the past few years, including some of the largest offerings and single gifts that have occurred in our history (including a \$55,000+ offering for the

American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) in 2024).

On a final note: it is encouraging to reflect on a component of our first strategic plan, which was a bold vision to increase the annual budget by 50% to over \$1,000,000, of which 50% of that total would be allocated to community outreach and missions (“outflow”). The Lord has not blessed us with achieving this goal yet, but by God’s grace we were able to release about 32% toward outflow of nearly \$850,000 given in 2024.

Our experience to date would seem to be at least a partial fulfillment of Habakkuk 2.2: “And the Lord answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.” We trust that God will continue to impart grace to us to yield to greater financial releases and other commitments to advance His kingdom in the future.



Dr. Philip W. Gassman is an Environmental Scientist at Iowa State University, Ames, IA, and a 24-year member of Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC). He has been involved with the ALC Evangelism and Missions team for nearly 15 years and currently is ALC’s Evangelism/Missions (EM) team leader.

Contact Phil at: pwgassman@gmail.com

Links:

ALC: <https://www.alcames.org/>

Dominican Republic: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dominican-Republic>

Guatemala: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guatemala>

Haiti: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Haiti>

Overflow Thrift Store: <https://www.overflowthriftstore.org/>

The Well: <https://thewelliowa.org/>

Students: <https://www.registrar.iastate.edu/resources/enrollment-statistics>

Samaritan’s Purse: <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/construction/>

WOH: <https://www.woh.org/>

here: https://www.cgmmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/WOH-Wavelength-ALC_GEM-article-March_2022.pdf

Pastor Bill Moberly: <https://www.alwm.org/whoweaare>

Pastor Sam Chim: <https://www.alwm.org/cambodia>

ALWM: <https://www.alwm.org/>

ALTS: <https://www.alts.edu/>

Cambodia map: https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/laserfiche/Charts/100313/AW-Feb2021-Dairy-Exports_Fig1.png?v=13555