



GLOBAL HUNGER AND DEVELOPMENT APPEAL
 Oral Report Given at the
 2006 Synod of Alberta and the Territories Convention - June 9, 2006
 By: *The Rev. Paul N. Johnson, Coordinator, GHDA-ELCIC*

Jesus calls us, to be in mission for others, through the critical ministry we share in the Global Hunger and Development Appeal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Our Lord talked more than anything else about the Kingdom of God, the shape of God's reign not only in the life to come, not only in the world beyond, but in this life, a gift from God, in this world for which Christ died, in this world which God so loved and loves still, in ways beyond our imagining.

After the Kingdom of God, what Jesus spoke about most was money: What it represents and what we do with it, or don't do with it. Very often, he spoke of both things together, over and over again, in fact: money and the Kingdom, the Kingdom and money. If you weren't careful, you might get the idea that Jesus actually thought what we do with what we mistakenly call 'our' money had something to do with our life as disciples, people who want to live in the Reign of God, who want life as God offers it in Christ Jesus, life abundant.

Last July, some of you were at the National Convention in Winnipeg when I said that I believed this church, moved by the Holy Spirit to truly be in mission for others, was capable of a million dollar year for GHDA. That had never happened before, but it happened in 2005. Total giving to GHDA by folks across our whole church, in all five synods, was over 1.1 million dollars... More than \$600,000 was given to special appeals, including the Tsunami, and 100% of that was passed on to CLWR as our main partner for overseas aid and development, or to Lutheran Disaster Response in the States, in the case of Hurricane Katrina.

Our special appeal total for last year was almost six times the total given in 2004, and our regular GHDA offerings were up slightly also, even with that beautiful increase in special gifts, and 70% of regular offerings were passed on to CLWR, with a good chunk of the rest going to KAIROS, and 9% of the total regular giving going back to synods for local work. You may be interested to know that in 2005 the Synod of Alberta and the Territories received back a little over \$5300 for local work within the synod; the Eastern Synod, while only half again as large, received back more than \$27,000 for work within that synod. Both synods received back 9% of what they had forwarded in general giving to GHDA.

What is most important is that across our church many gave generously; total GHDA giving in 2005 was almost double what it was in 2004. I believe firmly that what we did together in 2005 is closer to our true potential.

I've got a hunch many of you know what Jesus said in Matthew 25: "As you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it also to me..."

You gave me food, says Jesus: Grain, oil, milk, these are gifts we give through GHDA, through its partners, including CLWR, and so the Canadian Food Grains Bank, Action by Churches Together, Lutheran World Service, and others as well.

You gave me something to drink, says our Lord: The cup of cold water is a powerful symbol and a more powerful invitation from our Lord to give to relief and development work through GHDA, and its partners, including CLWR, in a world where two billion people have no safe drinking water.

You welcomed me when I was a stranger, says the one who became a refugee soon after his birth: Working for justice for aboriginal people in Canada, too often strangers in their own land, working for refugee and immigrant rights here at home, providing care for refugees in other lands, people we may never see, but all of them loved by God. All this is work you accomplish

through GHDA and its partners, including CLWR, and ecumenically through KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

You clothed me when I was naked, says the one who hung stripped upon the tree of the cross, for love of all the world and everyone in it, even those who hate us, even those who disagree with us on every point of the Gospel: Working for economic justice in Canada and around the world, working to provide homes for the homeless, even the poor and the homeless among us in this richest of provinces, working to protect people from the horrors of war, which strips humanity from them, and from all of us. These, and more, are things we can do together through GHDA, and through KAIROS and Project Ploughshares, partners of GHDA.

You took care of me when I was sick, says Christ the healer, who spent his whole life sharing God's healing and God's desire for abundant life for people and for all creation: Again, working through GHDA, and its partners, especially KAIROS, but also CLWR and the Lutheran World Federation internationally, we can make a difference together, as we work for a world in which all people have access to healthcare and medicine, whether they can afford it or not, simply because it is God's desire revealed through the life and healing ministry of our Saviour.

You visited me when I was in prison, says Jesus, the one falsely charged, arrested without benefit of any legal counsel, cruelly tortured, and then wrongfully executed by a system quite willing to risk capital punishment and a little collateral damage in the interests of law and order: Through GHDA and KAIROS and the Church Council on Justice and Corrections in Canada, and through Fundacion Quetzalcoatl and the ministry of Pastor Brian Rude in El Salvador, we can work together for a more just society, remembering that none of us gets what we deserve from God, that all of us who name ourselves disciples are called to a higher level of justice, one based on grace and mercy and forgiveness, and the miraculous possibility for new life.

We take a risk, of course, in doing any of this. Look where it got our Lord; you know how he ended up. And in the story from Matthew, the ones who are blessed are also surprised;

they didn't realize what they were doing, when they were doing good. They just went ahead and did it. They weren't into scorekeeping; they were into service. They understood perfectly the theme of your convention – Jesus calls us: In Mission for Others.

Jesus calls us to be in mission for others, through the Global Hunger and Development Appeal of this church. Many of you give money regularly directly to GHDA; others give it directly to CLWR. Keep giving; Christians need to give money away, just as we need to give ourselves away. If you give regularly, pray about giving more. If you give once in awhile, commit yourself to giving regularly. If you aren't yet giving anything, pray about that, and then see what God calls you to do. *The need is there; the call is real.*

GHDA, in partnership with CLWR and KAIROS and all five synods of this church, is one way that we can be in mission for others, not only with money, but also with ourselves. If you don't know what else you can do to be involved with GHDA, talk to Joyce Zutter and Robin Krause; they are your synodical GHDA committee, and I know they'd love to talk to you.

A final word about the partnership between GHDA and CLWR: I regret that the new Executive Director of CLWR couldn't be here with us today; he's in India this week. But many of you already know Bob Granke. He has worked for CLWR before. He also served on national staff as the secretary of the ELCIC from '97 to '01, and then he was the Executive Director of Lutheran World Service in Geneva, until he took the job with CLWR earlier this year. Bob is eminently qualified to serve CLWR and the two Lutheran churches in Canada; he brings a depth of experience which will benefit all of us.

It's a strong partnership, and I believe that, with Bob in the office, the partnership between CLWR and the ELCIC, through GHDA, will grow even stronger. We are committed to that. There are some things that CLWR can't do, and that's one reason GHDA exists: the work of advocacy and education in certain areas is not within the mandate of CLWR, which can only

work in the international arena. That's where GHDA, in partnership with KAIROS and others, offers us a gift.

In the wider world, it is through CLWR and its international partners, in Indonesia, for instance, Action by Churches Together, that we can respond quickly to disasters, such as the recent earthquake on the island of Java. CLWR is also working closely with us to respond to the critical situation at Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, a LWF hospital – your hospital, our hospital – for more than fifty years, where the ministry to cancer patients needing treatment and kids needing dialysis is threatened because of the current political situation and because Canada and the United States and the European Union have all cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority. The people we serve at Augusta Victoria, are they not some of the little ones of whom Jesus spoke? The helpless victims of larger political machinery and religious zealotry, rather like Jesus himself? It is hoped, and we are working hard at this, that a way can be found for aid to be delivered where it is needed most, without risk of supporting violent regimes of any stripe.

Sisters and brothers, I'm pretty sure that this side of heaven we will never all agree on everything, whether in theology or politics. But I hope that we can find a way, because we must find a way, to live together as disciples of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, who calls us, daily, together, to be in mission for others. *This is not an option.* It is the life of the disciple. It is also our joy and our reason for being. I pray, I believe, I know, that the Global Hunger and Development Appeal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is one way for us as a church to be a people together following Jesus, responding to his call to be in mission for others, across the street and around the world.

Thank you for your partnership; God bless you with joy in your generosity.