Only one in four church buildings belonging to the Indonesian Protestant Church in Donggala (GPID) survived the earthquake and tsunami at the end of September 2018 without any significant damage. Three were totally destroyed or swallowed up by liquefied soil – such as the Jono’oge church centre. In the meantime, many churches have been repaired. But less than eighteen months after the earthquake, many congregations are still celebrating services under plastic tarpaulins and bible studies and other events still take place in tents or in the open air. Almost everywhere communities are working on repairing or rebuilding their churches. Such as here in the Keselamatan (“Salvation”) parish in the village of Mataue, about 30 km south of Palu. Most of the outside walls had to be replaced and the roof structure is almost finished. The roof is the only thing left to do be done.

Since the disaster, almost 450,000 euros have been provided for emergency aid and rebuilding. This money came from many private donors, parishes and EMS member churches who demonstrated an incredible willingness to help. Congregations in the affected region know they are supported by the solidarity of the EMS Fellowship. And this aid is now benefiting the rest of the Indonesian population. For example, in the Palu region, not only have eleven motor boats been donated to fishing families, agricultural equipment, seeds and fertilisers have also been distributed as well as 30 pregnant sows, 100 piglets, 20 goats and about 80,000 young fish to provide adequate incomes for farming families. Over the past few months, the first crops were harvested.

Regina Karasch-Böttcher
In September 2019, EMS Chair Klaus Rieth travelled to South Korea at the invitation of the local EMS member churches there. He took the opportunity to visit the border city of Panmunjom in the communist North of the divided country. The darum-journal asked him about his impressions.

Mr Rieth, what are your thoughts after your visit to North Korea? In my opinion, we should work more intensively on the topic of reunification. As before, there are still many families separated and I think politics should take a more active role. The time is ripe as we need each other. So why not start a new initiative? And the churches could play an important role here too.

What are your impressions of the country? When I was in North Korea a few years ago, it was both moving and depressing for me when I saw how much the people there were suffering. They didn’t have enough to eat and they plucked leaves from the trees. It would be my wish to do something for these people to give them better living conditions, better prospects of education and a better quality of life.

Do you think the people and the church in North Korea want reunification? Definitely. Because they know that they belong together and that the division of their country is artificial and not natural. When you look at the border region of South and North Korea, you can see a common mountain range. You can see paddy fields and villages on both sides. So, what is the point of this border?

What is your wish for North and South Korea, both as church leader and as a person who believes in ecumenism? We have two strong EMS member churches in South Korea – the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). Both are striving for progress in reunification. We should support them to the best of our ability – with our prayers as well as in word and deed.

Are you optimistic that the walls will soon fall in Korea just as they did in Germany? I’m very optimistic. But we must also stay realistic. Our own history clearly shows how long it can take until full reunification becomes reality. It doesn’t happen overnight.

In 2020, German reunification will celebrate its 30th anniversary. What does your heart want to say to the people in Korea? My heart says that reunification is possible if both sides really want it. The Korean peninsula is not an isolated region on our planet. Even we in Europe are affected by this division. This is why it is also our duty to take the initiative there. And the whole thing will come at a cost. But it is well worthwhile to work towards this aim. So, let us start as soon as possible.

Solomon Paul Benjamin conducted the interview. Stefan Schaal was the editor.
The Tamilnadu Theological Seminary is 50 years old!

Three days’ celebrations with many highlights

It was a very special event, the 50th anniversary of the TTS in Madurai, South India at the end of October last year. The celebrations lasted three days. The choreography of the event was very much in harmony with the seminary’s tradition. In 1969, the Church of South India (CSI) – an amalgamation of mainly Anglican, Methodist and Congregationalist and Lutheran Churches – decided to merge their theological training centres to form a single seminary. The emphasis was to be on ecumenism and training to the office of priest would concentrate more strongly on practical aspects. Over the years, the focus gradually shifted to work for marginalised groups, especially the Dalit, and this was noticeable during the anniversary celebrations. For example, the first of the three days of the festival centred on Dalit liturgy within the context of religious fundamentalism and asked the critical question why the CSI and Lutheran churches did not make more frequent use of these very beautiful and meaningful liturgies.

On the second day, there were lectures on the various theological traditions of the college. They were supplemented by empirical reports of students who presented a wide variety of ministry work in social and diaconal institutions, emphasising the highly practical nature of their training.

In the end, the ecumenical guests expressed their thoughts on the challenges they saw in mission in theological training. The Senate of Serampore in Kolkata was also invited since it guaranteed a high standard of theological studies in all seminaries connected to it.

The programme was rounded off by worship services and communal meals. A special highlight was the music group “Casteless Collective” which is well known in Tamilnadu. The group’s socio-critical lyrics drew thousands of visitors to one of the evenings.

The EMS is not unknown to the small TTS community. For many years, we have supported prison ministry and the so-called “Half Campus” programme for undergraduates studying for a Bachelor’s degree. These two projects are directed at living the Christian faith in the complex and increasingly difficult Indian context. We wish the college continued success for the future.

Kerstin Neumann

EMS side notes

Dear Reader,

A really exciting event took place last November when about 25 women and men from Indonesian member churches of the EMS met on Bali with a professional photographer and an EMS co-worker from Germany. The experienced amateurs and young professionals came to learn something about photography from and with one another. But the only thing was that some spoke no Indonesian and the others no German. Not all of them were conversant enough with English as “lingua franca” to simply “switch” from one to the other.

A very special saying could apply to a photo workshop: “A picture is worth a thousand words.” But sometimes words are needed just to understand what is meant. Thank goodness that there was an interpreter present. Putu Chris Susanto, lecturer at the University of Dhyana Pura Bali, not only translated the spoken word from one language into the other but also helped to explain what was not said or what was not possible to say with words.

Communication – according to Wikipedia – is the “act of conveying meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs, symbols and semiotic rules”. But does communication also facilitate understanding? Indeed, this involves not talking but listening. Speaking with one another, not about one another. Listening to the other person instead of just imposing oneself. Being aware of the cultural or geographical background of the other person. And sometimes, it also requires someone who translates.

Regina Karasch-Böttcher

Regina Karasch-Böttcher

EMS
Thank you for your support!

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity would like to express its sincere thanks for the support you gave in 2019.

“The commitment and generosity of our supporters and donors make our work possible in the first place,” says Dr Kerstin Neumann, Acting General Secretary of the EMS. “We sincerely thank all those who have contributed and helped to make the solidarity of our name come true.”

Swift emergency aid and successful rebuilding after disasters

Solidarity was really called for in 2019. The year was not easy at all for some of the EMS member churches. After the disastrous earthquake and tsunami on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi in autumn the previous year, rebuilding work had to forge ahead to provide the inhabitants with a roof over their heads and funds to allow them to earn their livelihood. Financial aid from Germany was channelled quickly and expeditiously through the Regional Forum of the Indonesian churches to the badly hit Indonesian Protestant Church in Donggala (GPID). Heavy monsoon rains also battered the states of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu in South India in 2019 and again flooded houses and roads, leaving people homeless and robbing them of their possessions. Once again, the EMS Fellowship provided disaster relief to the Church of South India (CSI) based in this region.

Shortly before the end of 2018, a major fire gutted the historical centre of the former South African missionary settlement of Wupperthal, including a large number of homes with thatched roofs, the vicarage and the “Red Cedar” rooibos production centre. Many became homeless, mostly poor residents. Last year, the EMS Fellowship responded with unlimited solidarity thanks to numerous donations and was able to assist the affected Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA).

Long-term project monitoring

Regular projects also benefit from your generous donations. Most of the projects involving EMS support are long-term. It is particularly pleasing when the feeling emerges that something has succeeded, things are progressing or that it is the beginning of a better future. When everyone pulls together – from EMS supporters and project managers through to project co-workers in our member churches – lasting success is achieved.

In Ghana, the EMS continued its support in 2019 for the “Poor and Sick Fund” of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG). Over 900 women, men and children who cannot afford treatment in a hospital received free medical care at one of the five PCG district hospitals or health stations. Here the support is especially effective. In Ghana, even small contributions (by European standards) mean the difference
between being sick and being ill, between staying alive and having to die. Roger Wegurih, a hospital pastor, says, “Without the Poor and Sick Fund, many people here would even have to do without vitally needed treatment.”

**Successfully standing on their own feet**

“2020 will be the last year of funding. Our village development project can now stand on its own feet.” The Protestant Church in South East Sulawesi (GEPSULTRA) and the EMS Fellowship cannot imagine a better outcome. The church started the village development programme in 2017 to train farming families to breed and raise pigs in a bid to improve their income. As from 2021, they will be able to continue the programme on their own and need no more financial support.

The Technical Training Workshop “VTC Tagan” is one the projects of the Toraja Church (GT) in South Sulawesi. For many years, it has trained young adults, often early school leavers, to become car mechanics, mechatronic technicians and heavy machinery drivers as well as IT technicians. The training centre has been extremely successful due to the quality of the material it teaches and because it actively finds jobs for their graduates with expanding Indonesian companies, in particular the construction industry. In 2019, they were justifiably proud when they succeeded in taking part in a national technology competition against competitors from economically stronger islands. Until last year no girls had joined the technical vocations. But in 2019, two young women decided to undergo training as excavator operators. Hopefully, this will start a trend.

**Tasks remain**

On the other hand, there is still many things to do. The number of people infected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa has again risen in the past few years. “The main reason is poor economic growth in the country,” says Nokhanyo Mswewu who heads the “Masangane” project of the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA) in the Eastern Cape. “Many young adults who have no work lack support in their daily lives, so they take drugs. Young girls and women start relationships with older men with good jobs to ensure that they are provided for. Protective measures against HIV/AIDS are then no longer successful. We have achieved a lot through awareness and support but the circumstances at present are not at all favourable.” The Masangane project has long provided support to households affected by HIV/AIDS and to sufferers and their children.

In 2020, greater emphasis will be placed on youth work with sporting activities and information events. Every opportunity will be utilised in the struggle against new infections, especially among young adults. 240 extra care workers have been hired for this. A soup kitchen was set up for needy children and AIDS orphans.

“All in all, we are optimistic about the future,” says Reverend Kerstin Neumann.

“The broad support provided last year has shown how sustainable the basis of the EMS Fellowship is. And we are grateful to all supporters.”

Angelika Jung/Sabine Marschner
Volunteers sent to Ghana

Not merely a guest

Anton and Carolin have been in Ghana for ten months with the EMS Ecumenical Youth Volunteers Programme (EYVP). There they are supporting the social work of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). Anton is assisting at the Ramseyer Vocational Training Institute in Kumasi as a tutor in the ICT department. Carolin is looking after children who are inpatients at the Agogo Hospital. The two volunteers talked to Georg Meyer, Africa Liaison Secretary of the EMS, about their experiences after their first two months in Ghana.

What positive surprises did you have after your arrival in Ghana at the beginning of September 2019?

Carolin: Actually, I had no big expectations before I came to Ghana. But I was very impressed by the friendliness of the people who are providing me with a place to stay. I was also worried I would be so homesick by Christmas that I would be crying my eyes out. But luckily, I got over my homesickness very quickly.

Anton: I thought I would stand out more as a European in Kumasi. But I found that this isn’t the case, even when I take a tro-tro (shared taxi). Before I left, I had a stereotype picture of Ghana that I had gained from many people and even in a lot of the media. But in general, they were all prejudices that focused on poverty, hunger and waste dumps full of electronic scrap. That’s why I was surprised by the wide choice of goods in the shops. A lot of the things I bought at the last minute in Germany I have found in the shops here.

What things do you still find difficult to get used to?

Anton: At the beginning, it was mainly fufu with goat meat. But now I’ve learnt to eat fufu which is a thick mash made of cassava or yams and plantains. I also find it difficult how the people here deal with questions of faith. People often pronounce moral viewpoints or even judge behaviours, for example the use of alcohol, but then they don’t keep to it in their own lives. It’s not easy to live with such contradictions.

Carolin: I also had problems with the food at first. I have personal difficulties with many spicy dishes that are part of everyday life here in Ghana. And I also miss the fact that I can’t drink tap water as we do at home.

What would be a good conclusion for you, a feeling of success that you would wish for yourselves for the year in Ghana?

Anton: I hope that sometime I won’t be treated “only” as a guest any more. Of course, I will never be a part of my host family like the others, but I hope we move from the initial friendship to a deeper relationship where we can be open and honest with one another. My wish is that I am not only included in the beautiful aspects of life but that I get to know the everyday problems and worries of my host family.

Carolin: My wish is that sometime I will feel at home and find Ghanaian friends whom I can spend time with, that I can get to know their daily lives and that their views on particular subjects will open up new perspectives for me.
Bridge between continents

EMS churches in South Africa and South Korea work directly together for the first time

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA) have concluded an agreement on bilateral partnership. As a first step, the cooperation will concentrate on providing support to “Elim Home” in South Africa that looks after children and young adults with disabilities.

At first glance, the two men seem to be very different. This is no wonder as the places where they live are over 13,000 kilometres apart. Jae-Cheon LEE is General Secretary of the PROK and Godfrey Cunningham is President of the MCSA. One argues based on theology and politics and the other describes pragmatically what he thinks. But despite their differences, what connects the two pastors and church leaders is one common aim. They want to build bridges – between continents, between their churches and between people.

On 25 September 2019, they achieved an important milestone on this path. On that day, Cunningham and LEE both signed an agreement on a partnership between the PROK and the MCSA. In so doing, it was the first time in the history of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) that two members have entered into a direct partnership without the involvement of one of the German churches. The EMS Secretariat in Stuttgart merely played the role of mediator.

When the first container with relief supplies from South Korean parishes finally arrived at Elim Home in South Africa on 16 October 2019, people realised something that Jae-Cheon LEE expresses in this way: “Geographically we live on two continents but spiritually on one.” Godfrey Cunningham was delighted that the internationalisation of the EMS has become more tangible as the result of this partnership: “It’s time that partners start connecting up with one another directly.”

And that is exactly what has happened now. For many years, support for Elim Home came exclusively through the EMS. Now for the first time, it comes directly from an international member church. Elim Home is an institution of the MCSA where 50 children and young adults with physical and mental disabilities are looked after with loving care and each receives special treatment. Even now, there are still too few centres of this kind in South Africa, which means that young adults with disabilities come to the home from a radius of several hundred kilometres.

Bed linen, medical equipment and other relief supplies are welcome items there. Everybody’s joy about the human and material support was already visible as they were unloading the container. But it should not be a one-way street. “We are considering the exchange of co-workers and intend to develop joint programmes and projects,” says Cunningham, outlining the next steps. His wish is for this commitment to spread to other EMS members. “We hope that we give others an impulse and inspiration.”

Jae-Cheon LEE agrees with him and can very well imagine more direct partnerships within the EMS. He is certain of one thing: “The difference between active givers and passive receivers, as has been the case for a long time in the area of mission, is no longer an up-to-date model. Today, it is a question of mutual trust and the search for the possibilities of cooperation on an equal footing – because everyone has abilities that he or she can provide for the good of all.”

Jörg Conzelmann
Thoughts of a retiring college principal

Theological training in India was always faced by enormous challenges. Christians are a small minority in a highly colourful diversity of cultural and religious groupings.

Since its beginnings in 1969, one of the visions of the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (TTS) in Madurai, South India has been to promote the use of the regional language of Tamil as a teaching language in schools and educational establishments – it would set a clear signal for democratic federalism. In the past, and even more so today, the central government is attempting to enforce Hindi as the national language. The present Hindu fundamentalist government also encourages nationalism, e.g. through the new Citizen Amendment Act (CAA), which discriminates against Muslims and is in contravention of the Indian constitution. There is no more social justice or involvement of disadvantaged groups in political decisions. Instead, the society is becoming increasingly fragmented and is ensnared in identity politics and makes each group want to safeguard only its own interests. Corruption and economic crises result in an increasing criminalisation of politics.

Besides the use of the regional language in school and church services, the TTS has placed the focus of training on practical solidarity with the oppressed. Students learn to translate the secular nature of the Indian constitution into a practice of interreligious friendship and into a commitment for oppressed ethnic groups. The academic subjects of Social Analysis and Communication were started to teach methods on better understanding the politico-economic and cultural religious environment. They form the basis of contextual theology which is the mainstay of the TTS.

At a practical level, exchange is constantly sought with people from diverse contexts. As a result, second-year Bachelor students live in the slums of Madurai instead of in the students’ hostel at the college to learn about and better understand the needs and joys of their neighbours. Whether their neighbours are Hindus, Muslims or Christians loses its meaning during the year that they live there. This experience of highly practical and humanitarian solidarity is a decisive learning factor compared to all the religious arguments of identity politics.

Today, it appears more important than ever before to tread new ways in secular ecumenism and theology that is dedicated to the Creation as a whole and to all life. It is certain that the TTS will receive recognition for this approach to theological training in India in the future. Its theological orientation based on “Faith, Hope and Love” will help to fulfil the mission.

J. David Rajendran