



Ambassadors
of
Reconciliation™

Annual Report

2007 Outcomes Report

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, NIV).

The mission of Ambassadors of Reconciliation is equipping Lutherans and their churches for proclaiming, living and cultivating lifestyles of reconciliation. This report describes the outcomes of our work in 2007, which the gifts from our generous donors have helped support.

Cultivating Reconciliation around the World

Ambassadors of Reconciliation provided training and resources to members and guests of The International Lutheran Council, which met in Ghana, Africa last September. Leaders participating represented 35 Lutheran church bodies and six continents.

The week-long conference focused on the theme, "Living as Reconciled Children of God." In addition to five presentations, individuals participated in two cultural discussion groups, engaged in several Bible studies, and meditated on reconciliation in daily devotions. Each participant received a number of resources including presentation manual, brochures and pamphlets for equipping them in reconciliation ministries, and a DVD with some of the stories they heard in the presentations.

In cultural discussion groups, the church leaders from around the world discussed the conflicts that people in their churches experience. Areas of conflict ranged from tribal warfare and AIDS in Africa, to divisions among Lutheran church bodies including violence in Southeast Asia, to a culture of social tolerance which contradicts Christian truth and pressures Christians to compromise their faith in Europe and North American. In Latin American, poverty, aggression, murder and political upheaval affect many countries and impact the churches. Several indicated that forgiveness is foreign to their native cultures.

These Lutheran presidents and bishops were moved to focus on reconciliation work within their church bodies and countries. They desire to better equip their professional church workers and lay leaders to live as reconciled children of God, so that they can give hope to people whose cultures are void of confession, forgiveness, and the saving grace of the Gospel through Jesus Christ.

As a result of our work with international leaders of the Lutheran community, we are expanding work in 2008 and beyond to serve in more countries across the globe.

Serving Different Churches and Ethnic Churches across North America

Over this past year, our work has expanded well beyond serving the churches and leaders of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. In 2007, Ambassadors of Reconciliation served Lutherans from several synods.

While serving North American Lutherans, we worked with individuals from various cross-cultural settings and provided training and services for several ethnic groups. Included were people from Germany, Brazil, Portugal, Canada (English and French speaking), Korea, Ecuador, and Ethiopia.

CrossLife Ministries, the Counseling Center of Ambassadors of Reconciliation

The licensed professionals at CrossLife Ministries provided Christ-centered counseling to individuals and small groups throughout the year. Counseling areas included marriage and family, grief support, addictions, long-term behavioral patterns, and more.

North American Church Bodies Served in 2007

- The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS)
- Lutheran Church – Canada (LCC)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)
- American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC)
- Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ (LCMC)

Although CrossLife Ministries offers its counseling services primarily around southern Indiana, experiences from our counseling center provide insights into other reconciliation work and connection to the counseling world. For example, our recent counseling load has helped us understand the growing need for training and resources on dealing with Internet addictions, including computer gaming, gambling, surfing the net, compulsive buying, and pornography and cybersex.

We have seen that Internet addictions, which are a form of idolatry, are leading to extensive conflicts, resulting in divorces, parent/children struggles, lost jobs, terminated ministries, and broken churches. With research and application, we are developing new resources in 2008 to address these growing needs in our society.

Training and Reconciliation Work

The vast majority of our conciliation work was accomplished through teaching, coaching, and consultation. Through teaching and individual meetings, we encouraged people to take unilateral action to implement biblical peacemaking in their lives.

For example, Vicki*, who struggled with 40 years of hurt and anger, learned to forgive family members and be reconciled.

In another case, Esther* had held a grudge for more than 50 years against Anne, her sister. After attending a two-hour teaching session, she phoned her sister for reconciliation, and they put aside 50 years of hurt and anger. One week later, Esther died following surgery. Anne couldn't thank Esther's pastor enough for bringing peacemaking training to her church.

In another situation, *Dennis confessed his idolatry of Internet pornography in private absolution and learned how to overcome his growing addiction after attending our workshop at his university.

Our mediation services provided more intense assistance for people in conflict. In one case, with the encouragement of their pastors and financial help from the church, Jim* and Nancy* agreed to a custody agreement with the help of a Christian reconciler just one week prior to their court hearing. In a different mediation, a board of elders reconciled with the pastor they were trying to fire, and provided him with a care package which included extended salary and counseling.

Church Consultation and Conciliation

“We've lost about 60% of our members during these past months, but now things have settled down. Those that were causing the problems are now gone, and we're comfortable with that. We don't want to do any work in reconciliation for fear that they might come back.”

This sentiment was expressed by the elders of a congregation that experienced significant conflict over the past three years. Initially resistant to our consultation, they reconsidered their position after being reminded that several of those who have stopped attending worship were not attending church anywhere. In conflicted churches, many become disillusioned about Christ and His church when its members and pastors engage in severe conflict.

Throughout 2007, Ambassadors of Reconciliation and CrossLife ministries provided long-distance and on-site consultation for numerous church leaders and members. Some of the main issues involved included conflicts over authority and control, sexual misconduct by church leaders, financial constraints, misapplication of doctrine in practice, and leadership failures.

Church conflict can be one of the most destructive forces to people's faith, and it restricts the church's ability to give witness to unbelievers. Congregational conflict is not new, as is evidenced in many of Paul's letters to the early Christian churches.

In each situation, however, God's Word was applied and the power of the Gospel was presented to bring hope and healing for hurting people. Several congregations utilized our church conflict intervention services, resulting in miraculous reconciliations among individuals and groups.

For example, Judy* had caused significant anger and bitterness by sending a book and angry letter to 40 staff members and lay leaders of her church, admonishing them to be wary of their senior pastor. Following our reconciliation seminar and hours of coaching, Judy asked for mediation help to meet with the staff and lay leaders to confess her sins. People had been so hurt that at first the elders refused to allow her to meet with them. With some more coaching, the meeting took place, and a miracle of healing began with mutual confession and forgiveness. Most could not believe that such an explosive issue could really be reconciled.

An exciting development arose this year demonstrating a positive move toward a culture of reconciliation. For the first time in 15 years

of staff experience, we saw sister congregations in the same area offer to help a small congregation to afford consultation services. This is significant, since congregations often tend to ignore a neighboring congregation suffering from conflict. In contrast, some nearby congregations encourage members fleeing from the conflicted church to join their church without qualification. It should be noted, however, that the neighboring church leaders in this area have benefited from peacemaking training over several years, which contributed to their unique Christ-like attitude.

Equipping Lutherans in Reconciliation

Our Bible study guides, “Announcing God’s Grace” pamphlets, DVD “Lifestyles of Reconciliation,” and other reconciliation resources were utilized by individuals, congregations, and other organizations, resulting in people cultivating lifestyles of reconciliation. Although our web site is in its early development, many ordered materials on-line for teaching and applying to their own lives.

People from all six inhabited continents are utilizing our resources. Our teaching staff presented numerous seminars and work-shops for lay leaders and professional church workers throughout 2007.

In addition, we have been sponsored by or spoken on campuses of several different Lutheran colleges, universities, and seminaries.

Our premier leadership program, Church Reconciler Training, incorporated several components, preparing church leaders (lay and professional) to establish reconciliation ministries within their congregations and schools. We rejoice that churches are embracing the vision for reconciliation ministries and employing them throughout the world.

For example, in a Colorado church, lay reconcilers led a year-long Bible study on reconciliation, which opened the doors for people seeking their assistance in several family and work-related disputes. In a different place, an intentional interim pastor utilized the training to bring healing to an entire church.

Coordination with Peacemaker Ministries® Continues

The staff of Ambassadors of Reconciliation continues to work closely with our colleagues at Peacemaker Ministries. Peacemaker Ministries, a much larger organization with a longer history, provides peacemaking resources and services to all Christians world-wide, whereas Ambassadors of Reconciliation targets Lutherans for its reconciliation work.

Peacemaker Ministries celebrated 25 years of ministry in 2007. Their long-term track record has resulted in a reputation of being uniquely biblical, offering training and resources that equip Christians and their churches for responding to conflict biblically. In addition, Peacemaker Ministries manages a respected certification program. All of the executive staff of Ambassadors of Reconciliation maintain status as Certified Christian Conciliators™ with Peacemaker Ministries.

In 2004, Ambassadors of Reconciliation spun off from Peacemaker Ministries (with its blessing) to specialize in working with Lutherans. Although our two organizations share much in common, the focused work of Ambassadors of Reconciliation allows us to produce resources and training that reflects the theology, polity and culture of the Lutheran community.

Both organizations refer clients to the other, based on their unique mission foci. In teaching and reconciliation, both ministries contract each other’s instructors and conciliators to meet particular clients’ needs. Since Ambassadors of Reconciliation was formed in 2004, Peacemaker Ministries has invited the teaching staff of Ambassadors of Reconciliation to serve as instructors in their well-attended annual conferences.

The coordinated work of these two distinct but related organizations has often surprised people, because of the potential for competition. But our two ministries intentionally work together, recognizing our distinct differences and celebrating our common goals, to serve our Lord well in biblical peacemaking.

Funding the Mission

The work of equipping, resourcing and assisting Lutherans is funded through multiple means. Sales of resources pays for most of the materials distributed. Training fees support the work of our instructors and speakers. Those who benefit from counseling, mediation, and consultation pay for the services they receive.

Lutheran Institutions of Higher Education Served

- Concordia University-College of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta)
- Concordia Seminary (Edmonton, Alberta)
- Concordia University (Portland, OR)
- Trinity Lutheran College (Issaquah, WA)
- Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, WA)
- Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, MO)

But the resources distributed and the services provided are often utilized by individuals or organizations with low incomes or financial strains. Donor contributions help keep prices and service fees reasonable. Some services, such as counseling and reconciliation services, are charged on a sliding scale based on income or financial ability to pay.

As a non-profit organization, we lack the investment capital to fund research and development for new products and training services. Financial support from donors and granting organizations is crucial for the research and writing of new books and Bible studies and for producing new resources.

Initial coaching and consultation work is provided by phone and email, often with little cost to the person seeking help. Donor contributions help provide staff and office equipment necessary to provide initial assistance to people who otherwise have no place to turn.

In 2008, our capital needs include \$11,000 for replacing aging computers and updating our international web site and \$35,000 necessary to finish producing two new Bible studies and DVD.

Challenges during 2007

At Ambassadors of Reconciliation, we praise God for the wonderful opportunities He gave us this past year for equipping and assisting people in reconciliation through counseling and conciliation. Although the work load has been heavy, the results have been exhilarating.

At times, we are overwhelmed with ministry opportunities and unable to respond. In addition, financial resources have not kept up with demand, and we were unable to pay all our salaries for our executive staff in 2007.

For 2008, we have lowered salaries and cut budgets in order to remain fiscally responsible. As revenues grow, we plan to reinvest in our staff and new resources for equipping more people across the world in reconciliation.

What's Ahead for 2008

More of the same! We plan to continue our counseling ministry, our reconciliation services, and our training for equipping the saints. Three week-long Church Reconciler Training events have already been scheduled, and more are planned, for equipping leaders in churches and schools for establishing reconciliation ministries.

Our international work is expanding as we have been invited to teach and consult in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and Australia. Inquiries have also been received from Africa, the Philippines and Korea.

Congregations and schools have already scheduled for our assistance in early 2008 for helping them reconcile significant conflicts. Synodical leaders (such as District Presidents) are encouraging congregations and schools to seek assistance from both Ambassadors of Reconciliation and CrossLife Ministries.

New opportunities! For the first time, a Doctor of Ministry course in reconciliation is being taught through a Lutheran seminary. In 2008, a new Bible study entitled *Getting to the Heart of Conflict* will provide people with insights to their own hearts while offering hope through the Gospel. Another Bible study with an accompanying DVD will equip teens and adults for addressing conflict caused by Internet pornography and cybersex. By year end, Concordia Publishing House will publish a book by our staff member Bruce Zagel on Biblical counseling.

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