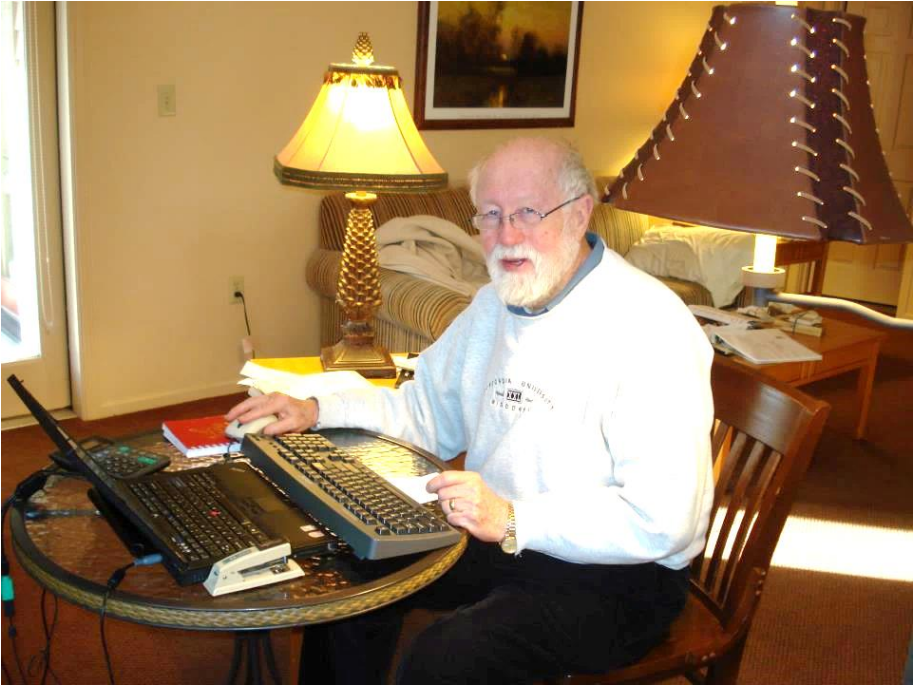


Lutheran Mission Matters

Winner of
Concordia Historical Institute's
2017 Award of Commendation



Volume XXVI, No. 1 (Issue 52) May 2018



Rev. Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske 1935–2018

Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske entered God’s eternal kingdom on March 27, 2018, at age 82. He began his expatriate missionary service as a Bible translator in Nigeria and ended his Africa service as United Bible Societies’ translation consultant for all Africa in 1982. He was then called to Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, where he served as Professor of Missions for twenty years. This was followed by service at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN, where he was instrumental in the development of the Master of Arts in Christian Outreach (MACO) program. He served several terms as a vice president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He was a founding member of the Lutheran Society for Missiology.



Photo courtesy of Paul Mueller collection

Chief Eugene Bunkowske together with his son, Joel, and other chiefs of the Yala people.

Eugene W. Bunkowske: An Encomium

Paul Mueller

Writing a short tribute to Dr. B is an enormous task, for his influence in my life and the lives of hundreds of other missionaries simply cannot be encapsulated in a page or two of remembrances. But let me attempt the impossible.

I remember meeting Dr. B for the first time in 1985 when he had flown to Africa with a stopover in Liberia. We were celebrating the opening of an airfield upcountry in the Liberian bush. I was a brand-new missionary with my wife Joy and son Brandon. I had no idea what it meant to be an African missionary other than the basics—go tell people who didn't know Jesus about the Good News found in His life, death, and resurrection. I was beginning; I had much to learn. But Dr. B had already completed his twenty-two years of boots-on-the-ground African missionary

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work and was engaged in preparing the next generation of missionaries at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Years later, at Dr. B's request, I was completing my doctoral work in missiology under his tutelage at the seminary and asked by him to serve as the first secretary of the LSFM at its charter meeting in 1991. Having served as his graduate assistant for two years, I was heading to my next role—following in the footsteps of my mentor and spiritual advisor Dr. B—to prepare the next generation of missionaries to follow after me.

That is how it was for Dr. B. He was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, intent on his missionary task who then prepared future missionaries to continue that work. And he never imagined his place, position, or vocation—no matter where he was sent or what he was assigned—as void of the missionary privilege and mandate. I remember his comment when he left Concordia Theological Seminary to come to work at Concordia University in St. Paul. He nonchalantly noted that his mission field had simply moved—from Africa to Ft. Wayne, IN, and now to St. Paul, MN. His passion was to share Christ with people, all people. He was always first a missionary of Jesus Christ.

Those are just a few of the very important influential moments Dr. B played in my life as his student, his “employee,” and finally his colleague. Many others have also had similar experiences that have influenced their missionary lives. I asked several to share their heartfelt thoughts. I also listened and found others who wrote graciously and humbly about Dr. B and the impact he had on them and the world. They wrote:

“Gene kept the focus on multiplication. Great-Commission driven. That’s his legacy. While Gene’s voice is no longer there to encourage and teach us, his voice will continue to speak through the many of us who sat at his feet and learned from his teaching, his modeling, his inviting, and welcoming leadership.”

“Gene was not only a beloved professor, but a spiritual father, mentor, disciple-maker and dear friend in Jesus. My spiritual journey was in many ways, shaped and accelerated as I followed him as he followed Jesus.”

“Dr. B was one of the ‘early’ LCMS missionaries who came to understand that translation is not only about words. Dr. B was passionate about others having the Word, too—through their own forms.”

“Dr. Bunkowske was instrumental in my mission formation at the seminary and beyond. He and Bernice reached out to students with a genuine love for them and for sharing the Gospel far and wide.”

“One of the great men of God of our generation, Dr. Eugene Bunkowske influenced me and many other missionaries with his scholarship, friendship, and spiritual example. He loved God’s Word, God’s people, and wanted to see everyone come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord!”

“Dr. B impacted the lives of many in the classroom, in the mission field, and the congregations as God’s people gathered to hear the Gospel.”

“Thank you, Rabbi (teacher & mentor) Dr. Eugene W. Bunkowske (Dr. B), for making me the pastor, teacher, and mentor that I am today.”

“Dr. B’s impact has been felt by individuals, congregations, and entire people-groups. Dr. B’s ministry approach was captivated by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2, ‘You’ve heard my message, and it’s been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to faithful individuals who will be competent to teach others.’ My life and service, like so many others, has been blessed through the touch and teaching of Eugene Bunkowske.”

“Rev. Dr. Eugene Bunkowske taught me how to read the Bible and live a Christian life. He saw me growing up as a young child and guided me. He encouraged me to go to school. He drove me in his car to Maryknoll College on my first day to start secondary school with stern advice on discipline, hard work, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He did a lot for the Yala. He translated the Word of God into our mother tongue and many others. He established scholarships for young children and I am a proud beneficiary.”

Dr. B realized that training the next generation of missionaries was critical. And he poured himself into that task as he not only taught future pastors at the seminary, but developed a PhD program in Missiology at the seminary, transitioned to another university to develop the newly formed Master’s Degree in Christian Outreach, and was constantly sought out by conferences and venues to share his love for Jesus, his passion for telling others about Him, and the missiological insights he learned in order to do that in the most effective way possible. Dr. B’s passion for academic excellence and scholarship was surpassed only by his deep and faithful love for Bernice and his family, centered in a relationship with his Savior Jesus Christ, and a desire that all people have that same personal relationship with Jesus through the disciple-making work He gave to His followers.

Rev. Dr. Eugene Walter Bunkowske was, is, and will continue to be a clear, insightful Lutheran missiological voice speaking into God’s mission endeavors as God continues to work through His *ecclesia*—the Church, the priesthood of all believers. As one of the many people he influenced, I will be forever in debt to him and his willingness to take me under his tutorial wing and help shape and mold me into the person I am today. Dr. B has left behind an army of missionary soldiers well-prepared to face the changing world in which we are now entering and living. May his legacy continue to motivate us to be people of mission action and those voices of Good News proclamation as we “gossip the Gospel.”

Eugene Bunkowske—In Memoriam

Robert Scudieri

To say that Eugene Bunkowske was a giant in the field of Lutheran missiology would be to say what everyone already knows. Many of us got to know Gene as a missionary to Africa, or as the Translations Coordinator for the African Continent for the United Bible Societies, or for the twenty years he spent teaching communications and outreach at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, or as the Feichter Chair Professor at Concordia University, St. Paul, where he gave innumerable students a zeal for mission work. To appreciate him as the gift from God that he was, you had to know Gene as the humble, caring, courageous servant of Christ that he was.

I first met Gene at a meeting of the American Society for Missiology in Techny, IL, in 1991. That year I had finished time at Yale Divinity School as a Research Fellow in missions. While there, I had been asked many times if I knew the great Gene Bunkowske. I did not. The late Jim Phillips at the Overseas Ministries Studies Center suggested that I attend the meeting of the ASM, where I might meet Gene and other important mission thinkers.

Sure enough, Gene was there, and also Professor Robert Newton, another leading mission thinker from the Fort Wayne Seminary. My first meeting with Gene and Bob was in a long line to a dinner buffet. Waiting in line gave us time to talk. Knowing I had recently accepted a call to head national mission work for the Synod, Gene asked me what I saw as my priorities. I do not remember everything I said, but one priority I do remembering sharing was the need for some way for missionaries in the field and those who taught missions to be able to learn from each other.

Gene became excited when someone had an idea that might advance God's mission. He invited me to his table. At our breakfast table the next day, Gene said, "I have it! A Lutheran Society for Missiology." That began a conversation that continued for the next twenty-five years, fueled by a new Lutheran mission journal, *Missio Apostolica*. Many have asked the derivation of the name of the journal. Because the journal became the main tool for promoting conversation between those in the field and those who teach, I need to explain this below.

An organizing meeting for the new society was held in the fall of 1991. I was elected chair of the new society, and an editorial committee was set in place: Missionary Paul Heerboth and I would be on the committee, as would Concordia Seminary Missions Professor Won Yong Ji, as the editor of the new journal. Professor Ji was the natural person to start up the society's periodical, having begun a Christian magazine in Korea called *NEW LIFE*, as well as serving as the editor for a Korean edition of Luther's works. Willard Burce took on the role of book editor.

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Early on, the plan was to begin a mission book series. Sale of the books could be a source of income. To begin the series, I offered the book I had written during my time at Yale, *Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary*. The book traces the history of the Greek term, Αποστολική Εκκλησία, (apostolic church) in the third article of the Creed of Nicaea. The book recovers the missionary emphasis of this term, so that when, in a worship service, we confess our faith in “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” we understand it to mean that we are confessing our faith in a “missionary church.”

I tell you this because missionary Paul Heerboth suggested that the name for the new journal be *Missio Apostolica*. Paul’s thinking was that using Latin and Greek in the name for the journal would signify our desire for the journal to be cross-cultural, not just a journal representing American ideas. The editorial committee would try to involve writers from cultures around the world. The journal attracted many others to the new Lutheran Society for Missiology: laity, pastors, mission professors, and mission executives, as well as missionaries serving around the world. Today we know the journal as *Lutheran Mission Matters*. It all began with an invitation to sit and talk!

Gene was hospitable. Over the years I was invited to the Bunkowske table many times. Whenever I went to the Ft. Wayne Seminary, Gene and Bernice insisted I stay with them. I would be invited for dinner, a glass of wine, and conversation that invariably opened a new door of mind and spirit.

Gene was collegial; he looked for ways to help you. He would begin our conversations after dinner with, “Tell me, Bob, about . . .” I would arrive with some issue about the society or a question about mission that seemed necessary, but difficult. Gene would listen with care and perspicuity and then say, “The Lord will show us the way.” Show *us* the way. More ministries were begun by Gene and others after conversations like that.

He has now been invited to another table, where I am sure he has found others to learn from and advise. I wonder what He and his Lord are discussing at this moment. Whatever it may be, I know it would advance the mission for those of us still at work.