



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - HONG KONG SYNOD

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Dear Brothers in Ministry,

Attached to this cover letter, you will find several letters and documents related to the sad state of affairs in the relationship between the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) and the administration of Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON.

Briefly you may note these concerns of ours:

(1) Dr. HARRISON's administration continues to defer the transfer of properties to the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod, properties for which the LCMS was trustee and the LCHKS is the beneficiary. This includes instead recent efforts by that administration to sell a property which houses three Gospel ministry activities of the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod.

(2) Without discussion with us, a partner church in ministry, the HARRISON administration has again sold and taken to the US the proceeds, this time, the proceeds of three properties intended for support of Gospel ministry in Hong Kong.

(3) Without significant discussion with us, a partner church in ministry, the HARRISON administration has relocated its OIM regional headquarters to Taiwan. They have disconnected themselves from 99% of the Chinese population, including us as their partner church which preaches the Gospel publicly in the Mainland.



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Rev. Dr. HARRISON indicated in his letter of April 17 his willingness to meet with us in person. Why is it, then, that in his March trip to Asia he made no effort to meet with us?

As your time allows in these difficult days we welcome your attention to these documents and to the possibility to strengthen instead of weaken our partnership with the LCMS in sharing the Gospel among Chinese people.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. God's blessings as you lead His Church.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Allan YUNG

LCHKS President



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Rev. Dr. Allan YUNG

Hong Kong, President

29 April 2019

of the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod

District Presidents and Bishops of

the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)

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A Letter of Concern

Dear Brothers in Ministry,

Ἀδελφοί ἀγαπητοί ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ,

The General Conference (Convention) of the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS), which took place on 27 April (Sat) 2019, mandated me as the LCHKS President to approach you because our Church is deeply concerned about the way in which Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON's administration treats the relationship between the LCMS and the LCHKS. Last year, on 28 April 2018 to be precise, the General Conference took a stance on this issue, so this problematic situation is a continuing challenge to us.

Since our Synod stems from the mission work of the LCMS in China which was later focused on Hong Kong, the General Conference representing the members of our Synod resolved to address you as those who are entrusted with the authority to lead the districts of the LCMS. Therefore, in the light of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 6, we submit this issue for your consideration in the hope of restoring fraternal bonds between our churches for the sake of the unity within the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:3).

On many occasions, the LCHKS Executive Council sought clarification from Dr. HARRISON, as evidenced by



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the letters enclosed, yet we did not receive any positive or reasonable reply from St. Louis. Rather, in his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON ventured to impute "factual inaccuracies" to us and made some outrageous and unfounded allegations against our Synod and my office, yet no supporting documents or testimonies were adduced as proof of his statements.

The concerns of our Synod, which Dr. HARRISON's administration has failed to address properly, can be described in three points.

First, there are still five properties and the Kwun Tong property (2 Horse Shoe Lane) which have been used solely for LCHKS ministries for more than 65 years but owned by the LCMS. In the protocol signed in 1996 by the LCMS and the LCHKS, the LCMS pledged itself to transfer most of the LCMS properties used by the respective LCHKS congregations to our Synod, and to transfer these properties in accordance with the Three Party Agreement (the LCMS, the LCHKS, and the respective LCHKS congregations using these venues) in order to ensure that the transferred properties would be used for Gospel ministry. However, this procedure has not been implemented completely.

The LCHKS was always eager to complete the process of transferring all of the properties in question to the LCHKS but some years ago the LCMS unilaterally suspended or deferred this process without any explanation. In 2010, this unilateral suspension was indicated in the letter of the LCMS legal representative which was sent in response to the letter of the LCHKS legal representative, in which our Synod urged the transfer of the remaining five properties and the Kwun Tong property.

Despite the fact that in his letter dated January 31st, 2019, Dr. HARRISON reaffirmed and solemnly declared that the LCMS was committed to transferring the remaining five properties to the LCHKS, no progress is visible to us in this regard. Rather, we can observe St.



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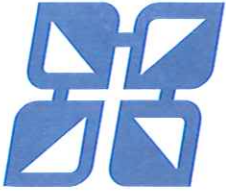
Louis' legal manoeuvres to evade such a transfer which were disclosed in our letter to Dr. HARRISON dated March 25th, 2019. Contrary to Dr. HARRISON's letter dated April 17th, 2019, our legal representative has already clarified with the LCMS legal team that no conflict of interest could have taken place and that he has actually recused himself from further legal proceedings for both parties so that the LCMS legal team could no longer challenge our legal representation.

In his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON urged us to be patient and "told" us to be "appreciative" of the fact that the preparations for the transfer of those properties might be long and complex. Since the process of transfer has been unilaterally suspended by the LCMS for the last 9 years, it is not prudent for us to be forbearing any more.

The LCMS unilateral suspension or deferment of the transfer of the remaining properties unfortunately and sadly casts doubt on the sincerity of the LCMS Synodical leadership in this regard. As a matter of fact, if the LCMS followed the procedure defined in the protocol, which was signed in 1996 by the LCMS and the LCHKS, the transfer of the remaining properties and the Kwun Tong property could have been completed long ago.

The LCHKS cannot allow this situation to continue. In December 2018, I was informed that a property in Kwun Tong, of which the LCMS is formally the leaseholder, but which is used by three agencies of the LCHKS for purposes of ministry in the community, was subject to commercial redevelopment plans which might result in the transfer of the lease to another party. Again, I along with three executive officers of the institutions located there (i. e. Holy Trinity Church, Kwun Tong Kindergarten and a unit of Lutheran Social Service) wrote to Dr. HARRISON (our letter dated December 27th, 2018) but no positive reply has been received by us.

Rather, in his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON declared that the Kwun Tong property was never intended to be transferred to the LCHKS in view of the 1996 list of the properties which were to be transferred.



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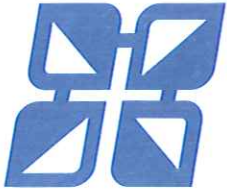
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This is another legal manoeuvre resorted to by Dr. HARRISON's administration. The Kwun Tong property was not included on the list compiled in 1996 because at that time, the LCHKS and the LCMS jointly considered the idea of redeveloping this building, yet that project did not come true for economic reasons.

Moreover, Dr. HARRISON's reference to the two properties (St. Mark's parsonage and CTS professor's apartment) in Kwun Tong, which were transferred to the LCHKS in the past, is misplaced because these two properties were included on the list compiled in 1996 and their transfer shall not be used to deny the transfer of the Kwun Tong property (2 Horse Shoe Lane). On this subject, let me paraphrase James 2:10, saying that whoever is not sincere regarding just one property is not sincere regarding all the properties.

To understand why the LCMS is a trustee of certain properties in Hong Kong it is necessary to view this issue from a historical perspective. The Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod was incorporated in 1977 and prior to the incorporation, no properties could be owned by the LCHKS because it did not exist as a legal entity. Therefore, all the properties which the LCMS purchased for the sake of Gospel ministry in Hong Kong were regarded as properties under the trusteeship of the LCMS, while the LCHKS remains their beneficiary. This is our firm and public stance and it is also applicable to the Kwun Tong property. The transfer of that property is therefore requested and awaited by our Synod.

I hope that you can realise that the evasion on St. Louis' side undermines the confidence in the LCMS among the institutions using the Kwun Tong property and in this way, it actually undermines and endangers the ministry and stability of the LCHKS. In fact, some people may perceive St. Louis' inaction or inattention towards the welfare of the daughter church in Hong Kong as a sort of intimidation or negligence. This cannot be condoned by Hong Kong Chinese Lutherans belonging to the LCHKS. It is difficult for us to interpret such actions as expressive of Christian commitment and care which should define any mission work.



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Second, we tried to seek further clarification concerning three Hong Kong properties which the LCMS intends to sell and one property in Kowloon Tong which was sold by the LCMS approximately ten years ago, but Dr. HARRISON preferred to circumvent this issue as well. From our point of view, all these properties were only under the trusteeship of the LCMS, whereas the LCHKS remains their beneficiary.

Furthermore, we are convinced that honouring the wishes of the donors who funded the purchase of these properties by the LCMS for the sake of Gospel ministry in Hong Kong is a moral and legal imperative to which however Dr. HARRISON is apparently oblivious. Those donors funded the aforementioned purchases solely to support Gospel ministry in Hong Kong, not to enable the LCMS OIM to take hold of the revenue from the sale of those properties and transfer it out of Hong Kong for other purposes unknown to us. Therefore, our Synod reserves the right to consider taking legal actions but given the brotherly relationship between our two Synods in the past, we pray that we would not be compelled to do that. We have every moral and legal right to object to what Dr. HARRISON's administration is doing with the aforementioned three properties which to our bewilderment have recently been sold.

In his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON stated, "I am deeply troubled by the implication that the LCHKS is the beneficiary of these properties [i. e. the three properties which have recently been sold]" and claimed that "there is absolutely no Synod [Synodical] or legal basis for this position [i. e. that the LCHKS is the beneficiary of these properties]". In response to that, let me cite Luther's explanation of the 9th commandment from his Small Catechism:

"We should fear and love God, and so we should not seek by craftiness to gain possession of our neighbour's inheritance or home, nor to obtain them under pretext of legal right, but be of service and help to him so that he may keep what is his".



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As a matter of fact, the revenue from the sale of the Kowloon Tong property, which occurred approximately ten years ago, was used by the LCMS to expand and to advance its international schools in Asia, particularly in Shanghai and in Hanoi. Although our Synod is engaged in international education in Hong Kong (Concordia International School) and in the Mainland (Buena Vista Concordia International School), the LCMS international schools, especially Concordia International School Shanghai (CISS), would not acknowledge our schools as partners but rather would deny publicly any connexion between them and our schools. I wonder how it is possible that the international schools operated by the LCMS can disown the schools run by the LCHKS in the light of the partnership between the two Synods which is nominally claimed by the LCMS but denied repeatedly by the actions undertaken by the LCMS OIM and the LCMS international schools in Asia.

In his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON made some unsubstantiated and potentially defaming allegations concerning our incomplete school project in Xiamen. It should be noted that the project of the international school in Xiamen could not be brought to fruition primarily because the LCMS OIM and Concordia International School Shanghai publicly denied any connexion between the LCMS educational system and our network of international schools.

Contrary to Dr. HARRISON's unfounded statements made in his letter dated April 17th, 2019, I never portrayed myself as "head of LCMS Concordias in Asia" but rather I humbly represented the international and local schools operated by the LCHKS under the brand "Concordia" which has been officially registered as a trademark by our Synod in Hong Kong.

In our educational ministry, we always act with sincerity, integrity and transparency. In fact, this is recognised and applauded by the local governments of the PRC provinces where we serve in the field of international education. If there has ever been any



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misperception regarding the relationship between our international schools and those of the LCMS, it was never caused by us but rather it might have arisen from insufficient insights into the history of the LCHKS in our local partners or government agencies.

We, on the one hand, acknowledge and admit that both groups of schools are distinct and are operated by different legal entities. On the other hand, we assert that our schools and those of the LCMS are partner schools by virtue of the partnership between the LCMS and the LCHKS.

It is clear to us that if any partnership between the LCHKS and the LCMS is to be upheld in the future, such behaviour on the LCMS side cannot be tolerated because partnership between church bodies entails partnership between schools operated by them. The insistence of Dr. HARRISON's administration on excluding schools from any partnership is unintelligible to us provided that according to the Memorandum of Association of the LCHKS (\$ 3k), establishing and maintaining schools, both local and international, constituted one of the core objectives of the Synod. In other words, we cannot think of the LCHKS ministry without serving the community through our schools. This is an integral and indispensable part of our ministry in the Chinese context.

Third, we believe that the relocation of the LCMS OIM regional headquarters from Hong Kong to the Taiwan Province [臺灣省] of the People's Republic of China (PRC) actually reflected a shift in the mission direction of the LCMS OIM in Asia, particularly with respect to Greater China. None of the explanations of the relocation offered by the LCMS is convincing or appealing to us. The LCMS OIM decision to leave Hong Kong has never been discussed with the LCHKS and was apparently reached unilaterally by the LCMS to the exclusion of its partner church in Hong Kong, that is, to the exclusion of the LCHKS.



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It grieves and embarrasses us to read an official statement on the LCMS website that says, "the relocation of the LCMS Office of International Mission's (OIM) Asia-region base from Hong Kong to Taiwan >has been excellent<".¹ The LCMS OIM action of abandoning its long-term Asian headquarters in Hong Kong disconnected the LCMS OIM from the LCHKS and therefore, cannot be applauded by us even if Dr. HARRISON's administration ventured to depict it as "excellent". To us, it rather looks like a mark of short-sighted, if not biased, strategy and evidence of poor stewardship. In our opinion, the decision to sell the aforementioned properties also caused the LCMS OIM to forfeit its convenient and cost-effective base for housing missionaries in Hong Kong. In his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON alleged that the sale of the three properties in Hong Kong was "in furtherance of the mission of the LCMS". It is difficult for us to understand how such an action, which actually deprived the LCMS OIM of its venues in Hong Kong, might have advanced the proclamation of the Gospel in China.

Currently, the operation of the LCMS OIM in the People's Republic of China is confined to Taiwan, while the Mainland, Hong Kong (SAR of the PRC) and Macau (SAR of the PRC) are bypassed by the LCMS OIM in terms of vision and long-term strategy. Needless to say, the LCHKS will neither accept nor tolerate such an approach to Gospel ministry in China on the LCMS OIM side. As long as the partnership between the LCHKS and the LCMS is claimed, both Synods must be aligned with one another in mission for the sake of Gospel ministry and for the sake of coherent service and witness to the community which should be delivered by the LCHKS and the LCMS in harmony and in mutual respect.

The LCMS OIM decision to abandon its headquarters in Hong Kong, to separate physically from the LCHKS and to retreat to Taiwan, conveys a message not only to LCHKS members but also to the community and to Chinese people around the globe. It should be noted that Taiwan

¹ <https://blogs.lcms.org/2019/bod-business-includes-budget-convention-prep/> [Accessed on 11 April 2019].



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香港路德會

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HONG KONG LUTHERAN FEDERATION

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represents not more than one percent of the population of the People's Republic of China and still awaits full integration into our country. It is evident to us that by choosing Taiwan and by not contributing to the life and development of the Christian Church in China at large which is institutionally recognised by our central government, the LCMS OIM may deprive itself of the opportunity of future involvement in Gospel ministry on Chinese soil. Thus, I wonder whether the LCMS OIM choice to serve one percent of the population of the People's Republic of China instead of serving the ninety nine percent of the population of our country reflects good stewardship of the precious human and financial resources of the LCMS.

Instead of looking to the LCHKS for direction and partnering with us, the LCMS OIM tends to replicate an outdated mission strategy in Taiwan. Actually, our Synod not only delivers excellent international education in the Mainland but also cooperates with the China Christian Council [中国基督教协会] and the Three Self-Patriotic Movement [三自爱国教会] by arranging two English-speaking church services in Shenzhen. Thus, every Sunday more than 500 people can attend public and officially recognised worship services in the main city churches of Shenzhen and hear the Lutheran message in the Chinese context there. The LCMS decision to move its headquarters to Taiwan has put our opportunities in jeopardy.

In his letter dated April 17th, 2019, Dr. HARRISON indicated that the move to Taiwan was motivated by "religious freedom" as if there were no freedom of religion in China. Such insinuations about our country are absolutely unacceptable to us because in the People's Republic of China, religion can be practised freely within the law. Our robust ministry in Shenzhen confirms that. Obviously, no sovereign and stable country in the world can permit any subversive or collusive activities perpetrated under the pretext of religious freedom. The constitution of the People's Republic of China (§ 36) stipulates:



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"Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination."²

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Thus, Dr. HARRISON's administration should consider following our example of harmonious collaboration with the China Christian Council and the Three Self-Patriotic Movement. The LCHKS as a church body, which is not foreign to China but rather which is a part of the religious fabric of our country, can offer guidance and direction to the LCMS as far as ministry on Chinese soil is concerned.

Moreover, in the same letter, Dr. HARRISON mentioned "the only Mandarin-speaking Lutheran Seminary" located in Taiwan as one of the factors precipitating the move of the LCMS OIM regional headquarters there. It seems to us that the school of theology referred to by Dr. HARRISON is a pan-Lutheran, unionistic enterprise which is alienated from the development of our country and which is not attuned to the religious policy thereof.

On the other hand, our Synod runs and supports Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) in Hong Kong which also has its own campus. Although CTS is not a big institution, it is operated solely by the LCHKS and it is staffed with qualified professors who fully embrace a firm sense of the Lutheran identity and the core values of our Synod (Commitment - Compassion - Community) and who are supportive of the society of Hong Kong and affirmative of our country. Moreover, Dr. HARRISON's emphasis on the use of Mandarin does not accord with our Chinese context because both in Hong Kong, SAR of the

² <http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html> [Accessed on 20 April 2019].



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PRC, and in Taiwan, traditional Chinese characters [繁体字] are used.

We do not intend to be engaged in internal political discussions within the LCMS, yet since partnership between the LCMS and the LCHKS is at stake, we believe that you should be aware of our predicament. Finally, let me appeal to you, brothers in ministry, to consider whether the treatment which our Synod receives at the hands of Dr. HARRISON's administration reflects sacred and fraternal bonds which shall unite us for Christ's sake and in the furtherance of the Gospel.

Peace to all of you in Christ,

Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν πᾶσιν ἐν Χριστῷ,

Rev. Dr. Allan YUNG

LCHKS President

ENCLOSURES:

- 1) LCHKS General Conference (Convention), Proceedings Pertinent to the LCMS dated April 28th, 2018.
- 2) LCHKS letter to Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON dated January 4th, 2018.
- 3) LCHKS letter to Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON dated December 27th, 2018.
- 4) LCHKS letter to Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON dated February 4th, 2019.
- 5) LCHKS letter to Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON dated March 25th, 2019.
- 6) Rev. Dr. Matthew HARRISON's letter to the LCHKS dated April 17th, 2019.