

CROSSINGS

Advent 2016 | Vol 124 | From the Crossings Community



is for CINDY,

On Wednesday morning, October 5, 2016, my wife Kelly and I (Steve Kuhl) began a ten-day adventure to do Crossings workshops in Singapore at the invitation of the Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS). As true as the old adage is that “every journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” – and we ended up traveling over 20,000 miles! – in our case, it certainly helped that our journey began with hitching a ride from Milwaukee to Chicago O’Hare International Airport.



Cindy Dobberke

That’s where Cindy Dobberke comes in. She is a longtime friend and Crossings enthusiast. She was first inflicted with Crossings back in 1995 when she, along with 9 others, volunteered to be my

first experiment in doing Crossings in the parish. For ten weeks, those ten studied the Prologue to John’s Gospel, wrote out a tracking of some slice-of-their-own-life, and accepted the challenge of crossing the two. To top it off, Cindy and a couple of others sized down their tracking to the length of a Sunday morning scripture reading that was then read in the

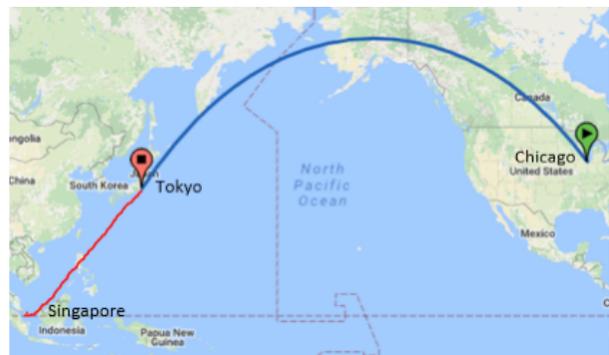
midst of the Biblical readings, whereafter I crossed their story in the sermon on that day. Ever since, “crossing life to the promise of Christ” has been her passion.

The first leg was a 12-hour flight to Tokyo. The second leg was 7 hours to Singapore. Although this journey put more wear and tear on the seat of our pants than the soles of our shoes, we could not but marvel at how far we had traveled in the course of 24 hours. Halfway around the world. In the process we gained a new appreciation for just how big this earth we live on is.



is for RENDEZVOUS

After being up for almost 24 hours, we touched down in Singapore on Thursday, October 6 at 11:15 p.m. Singapore time. The airport was beautiful and getting through customs was a



breeze. Still easier was our rendezvous with Pastors Martin Yee and Eric Chan. As we walked through the airport they spotted us and off we went to our hotel—the Fort Canning YWCA—where we got a good night’s sleep.



Martin is the assistant to the bishop of the Lutheran Church in Singapore. Some of you may know him from his online Erlangen Theology group where he is fostering an online community of devotees to Werner Elert’s reading of Luther’s Law-Gospel distinction as the

key to interpreting Scripture and relating faith and daily life. Of course, those who know about the roots of Crossings also know of its Elert connection.

Eric, who was our driver, is a young, sharp pastor in one of the six Lutheran Congregations in Singapore. Like Martin, he is no stranger to Crossings either. Both have come to St. Louis in the past for Crossings conferences.



The welcome continued on Friday (October 7) as Martin spent the afternoon showing me how to use Singapore’s impressive mass transit system. Singapore is a small island city state of five million people on a circle of land about 40 miles in diameter. I’ll share more about some of the facts and sights of Singapore later.

Then on Saturday night (October 8) Paul and Siok Tambyah took us out for dinner at a beautiful place called the Singapore Botanical Gardens, a research garden set up in 19th Century British Colonial days. Paul is a medical doctor, professor, and researcher in the study of infectious disease at the National University of Singapore. Paul has been a long-time Crossings enthusiast -- ever since Ed Schroeder first introduced Crossings to Singapore in 2004. Paul has come to several Crossings Conferences in St. Louis, and he has sponsored others to come as well.



Siok Tambyah, Kelly & Steve Kuhl, Paul Tambyah

Siok is also a professor at the National University of Singapore in the School of Business where Marketing is her area. Her research interests include “Happiness and Wellbeing research.” (<http://bizfaculty.nus.edu/faculty-profiles/84-siok-kuan>) Crossings would do well to tap into her expertise sometime for tracking and crossing 21st Century consumers. Paul and Siok are active in their local congregation, the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, and the larger work of the Lutheran Church in Singapore.



is for

ONGOING STUDY

One of the patterns of ministry in the Lutheran Church in Singapore is to provide ongoing study for both clergy and laity in sound Lutheran theology. It is in that regard that I was invited to lead two Crossings workshops: a day-long Saturday workshop (October 8) with the laity and a three-day workshop (October 10-12) with pastors and church workers.

Saturday’s Workshop had over 50 lay participants from four of the six congregations spread across Singapore, and there was an energy amongst the group that was exhilarating! As Paul Tambyah said, “I’ve never seen a group of Singaporean Lutherans so talkative and engaged in discussion.” They certainly made my job easy.

The Gospel for Sunday’s liturgy (Luke 17:11-19, the story of the Ten Lepers) set the agenda for discussion. Recall in that story how all ten lepers get “cured” of their leprosy but only one of them, a Samaritan, gets “made well.” The contrasting verbs (what Jesus does!) are significant. What

gets revealed in the story by Jesus is that the lepers' leprosy of the skin and corresponding separation from their social community is but a symptom of a deeper malady that needs healing. Specifically, a leprosy of the heart and its corresponding separation from God. How easy it is for that malady to go undiagnosed—and worse, how tragic, given how eternally fatal it is. Therefore, how fortunate we are that Luke allows us to overhear the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan.

For what gets revealed in that conversation is that Jesus has healing that is more than skin deep, more than a “cure.” He has come to “make us well” (the Greek word literally means “saved”) with God. And what an amazing operation he performs to do this. First, he in his death and resurrection bridges the divide between us and God, then, by the power of the Spirit he turns our hearts toward God in faith and our lives toward one another in love, effectively creating a new community where old legal barriers (like Samaritan and Jew, sick and healthy, insider and outsider) are transcended.

With the Samaritan's story as our “grounding,” we turned our attention next to “tracking” ourselves, asking “what form does ‘leprosy’ take in our lives?” and, finally, to “crossing” those findings with what we heard in the grounding. The general comments were of two types: 1) “we had never before thought about a text so thoroughly or looked at our everyday lives so closely” and 2) “we'd like to have more opportunity to do this.”

The Monday through Wednesday workshop with the clergy was an expanded version of what we did on Saturday. Instead of studying one text, we studied the four Gospel readings for Advent. We also took a stab at tracking and crossing an aspect of the personal life of Paul Tambyah and features



of Singapore public life with a panel that consisted of Martin Yee (with the mike in the photo), Bishop Kee (next to him) and Andrew Thinakaran (far right).

One of the constant struggles expressed was that Crossings is not a mechanical, cookie-cutter process: It entails habits of thought – of thinking with the gospel -- that take practice! Therefore, as we wrapped up our last session together, I was delighted to hear several pastors say they were going to start their own Crossings Text Study Group and practice the Crossings habit of thought.



Pictured here from left to right: Soh Guan Kheng, Richard Chiu, Eric Chan (hidden) and Steve Kuhl in small group discussion programming Mt 1:18-25.

One more “ongoing study” feature of the Lutheran Church in Singapore is worth noting. First, Bishop Terry Kee presented me with a hot-off-the-press copy of a new catechetical resource based on Luther's Small Catechism (called *Growing as God's People*) that the Lutheran Church in Singapore is publishing jointly through Augsburg Press and Concordia to help pastors and lay workers instruct young Singaporean Lutherans in the theology of Luther.

You should have seen his face shine as he pointed out to me how the Law-Gospel outlook informs the way the book presents the parts of Luther's Small Catechism, since the primary Christian theological witness that dominates Singapore today has its roots in Charles Finney's Evangelical and Holiness Movement that emerged in 19th Century American Christianity. There is no Lutheran Seminary in Singapore, so most pastors are educated in schools dominated by this “Finneyan” outlook and, therefore, depend on continuing educational events sponsored by the LCS for Lutheran grounding. Crossings welcomes the opportunity of being a supportive partner with the LCS in this effort.

SING is for
SINGAPORE
which means
“Lion” (Sing) “city” (pore)

Once the workshop series was completed, Kelly and I had a couple of days to see some of the sights of Singapore. For much of its modern history Singapore was a colony of Great Britain. A tumultuous and complex history eventually led to the formation of Singapore (in 1965) as an Independent Republic (City State) based on democratic politics, religious and cultural diversity (with English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil as official languages). Kelly and I spent a day in the National Museum of Singapore learning about this history through tour guides and displays.

Our overall impression of Singapore is that it is a modern, economically booming country. Construction is going on everywhere and it has a mass transit system that is incredible. In 10 years the system will be such that with a ten-minute walk you can board the train and travel anywhere in Singapore.

Americans might find some of Singapore’s practices intolerable. But when you see how well they work and the reason they are needed, you might have second thoughts. We did.

For example, because land is so scarce and people so abundant, the government manages all land use by leasing it for a period of 30 to 50 years. You will not find sprawling ranch-style houses in Singapore, only high-rise condo buildings managed by the government. Each condo is about 1100 square feet in size and groups of buildings include parks and playgrounds or other areas for recreational purposes.

Travel would be impossible if every Singaporean owned a car, so the number of car permits are

legally regulated. If you have need for a car you apply for a ten-year permit that will cost you \$50,000. On top of that there are tolls everywhere that change based on the hour of the day to control the flow of traffic. Some of the pastors had cars, some didn’t, and a practice of car-sharing seemed very natural.

As Kelly and I went about, we had the luxury of riding in a car thanks to two gracious hosts who took us around Singapore to see the sights: Pasang Lama who is a youth minister at the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer and Andrew Thinagaran who is soon to be ordained and called to Jurong Christian Church.



Andrew took us to see old city sites and the new church that the Jurong Christian

(Lutheran) Church was building. This project, too, illustrates the Singaporean way of doing things. Because of limited space, not all churches are able to get permits to lease land to build church buildings. Therefore, the government urges

religious cooperation on space issues. The Lutheran Church in Singapore is doing just that by building a Church complex that will house six different Christian traditions. Andrew gave us a tour of the nearly finished facility and it is expansive.



Steve and Kelly at the Merlion

Pasang took us around to see the recreational and public entertainment sites of Singapore. The first of two featured places was Sentosa Island, a Universal Studios Theme Park with lots of attractions.

The second attraction was the famous Merlion that is the symbol of Singapore. From what I can gather, no one really knows for sure the origin of this mythical creature. Some say it is a legendary

beast believed once to have roamed the waters around Singapore; others say it is a contrived marketing ploy. Speculation has it that the fishlike body is meant to symbolize the city's ancient, but humble beginnings as a successful fishing village. The Lion's head is meant to symbolize the original name given to the village ("Sing," which means "lion" in Malay) because of its superior strength and prosperity in the region. The stream of water that traditionally spews forth from the Merlion's mouth (conspicuously absent at Sentosa Park) is meant to amplify this meaning.

The second place Pasang took us became our favorite spot, the Garden by the Bay. There we were entertained by a spectacular light and sound show put on in the Supertrees Grove of Singapore. These huge tree-shaped steel and glass structures, tucked within a lush garden, are solar powered and programmed to dazzle visitors. If you would like to see and hear the show we saw, it is available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpkruNkfQH0>.



S is for your **SUPPORT**,
which is always followed by
our **THANKS**

The opportunity for me to do Crossings in Singapore would not have happened without your support. True, the trip was pure joy for Kelly and me, but it was also an opportunity for you to share the gift of Crossings' law-gospel message with eager friends in Singapore.

As we approach the end of the year, many people count their blessings and pray about how to end the year on a note of generosity by giving to a cause they think important. I know Crossings is such a cause for you. So please consider a gift to Crossings.

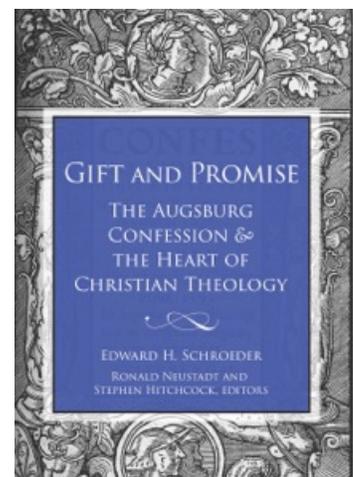
If you are a regular contributor to Crossings, we thank you for your continuing support. If this is your first contribution, we not only thank you, but rejoice that you see value in what we do. A reply form and return envelope are enclosed for your convenience. Steven Kuhl

GIFT AND PROMISE Books Still Available!

This book shows how the theology of the Augsburg Confession is a gift for the world today. In the first three chapters, Edward Schroeder traces the "hub" of the Augsburg Confession - the promise of justification by faith alone - to its source in Luther's theology of the cross. The subsequent nine chapters demonstrate how that central hub is articulated in the various articles of faith that comprise the Augsburg Confession.

Paperback: \$39.00 Published by Fortress Press: August 1, 2016

Free copies of GIFT AND PROMISE are sent as a thank you in response to contributions of \$25 or more to Crossings, PO Box 7011, Chesterfield, MO





So Where Is God Now?

Tracking and Crossing Our World After November 8, 2016

A Crossings Training Seminar

January 22-24, 2017

Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center
Belleville, IL (near St. Louis)

An election happened in the U.S. on November 8. Some people rejoiced at the outcome. Others mourned. This mixed reaction surfaced also among Christians, including readers of this newsletter.

Whether mourning or rejoicing, these Christians have been asking the same question. “Where is God in all this?” Or more sharply, “What is God up to in this current American moment?” More sharply still, “What is God asking *of me* right now?”

This seminar aims to tackle these questions head-on. To that end, Steve Kuhl will lead a classic Crossings workshop that 1) “grounds” our thinking in the Epiphany texts from the Sermon on the Mount, 2) “tracks” the present set of issues these texts are driving us to face, and 3) “crosses” those issues with the word and promise of Christ crucified.

We think you’ll find this of tremendous help as you continue in coming months to respond to the election and its aftermath. Respond we must, whether we’re thrilled by the outcome or still in shock over it. Again the question: “How do we respond faithfully, in a way that is true to the God-in-Christ we all happen to trust?”

We hope to see you in Belleville, where we’ll be glad for your insights. Spread the word. Bring a friend.

**To register: go to <https://www.crossings.org/event/so-where-is-god-now/>
Or call: 314-576-7357, or 314-479-2893, or email: cathylessmann@gmail.com**

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Sunday Evening, January 22: Dinner and Session 1:
Tracking Our Post-November 8 World.

Monday, January 23

Session 2: Back Tracking: “Crossing Life with the
Promise of Christ.”

Session 3: Grounding: What does this Scripture Mean?
Interpreting the Texts for
Epiphany Using the Crossings
Template

Session 4: Crossing: First attempt to connect the two
stories, Our Post-November 8 World and
God’s Word. (Steve Kuhl, Mike Hoy, and
Jerry Burce)

Tuesday, January 24

Session 5: What have we learned? Table discussion and
report to the plenary group.

Session 6: Discipleship in a Post-November 8 World.
Lunch and Departure

Sunday, January 22, 8:00 pm: Evening Prayer and Special Reception with book signing by Edward Schroeder. Visitors are welcome.