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James Brandt installed as team leader for the Asia-Oceania Team

The Asia-Oceania Team of WELS World Missions is made up of 17 missionaries serving 18 different countries throughout Asia and Oceania. The missionaries live throughout the region in Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Australia and work collaboratively with one another, national partners, and WELS-affiliated organizations. Their primary role is to find, train, and support a network of leaders who will, in turn, reach out with the gospel in their own countries.

The Asia-Oceania Team, acting on behalf of WELS Board for World Missions, recently called Mr. James Brandt to serve as team leader. He has been led by the Lord to accept that call and has been installed and commissioned for his work.

Brandt will lead and manage team strategy and hold the team accountable for carrying out its plans. He will facilitate good communication and teamwork, coordinate missionary development, and make field visits as necessary. Ultimately, he reports to the Asia-Oceania Team Administrative Committee and to the Board for World Missions.

Brandt and his wife, Kathy, will reside in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Following his graduation from Dr. Martin Luther College in 1985, Brandt served as a teacher in Fond du Lac, Wis.; principal of schools in California and Illinois; administrator for WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools; vice president at Wisconsin Lutheran College; and academic dean at Wisconsin Lutheran High School. He also served World Missions as a member of the administrative committee for India missions.

Please join with us in praying for God's blessings on Brandt's work in this part of the world where God continues to provide us with incredible mission opportunities.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Asia Lutheran Seminary celebrates 20 years of gospel ministry

On June 1, 2025, Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS) celebrated its 20th anniversary with a special worship service and banquet in Hong Kong. The milestone served not only as a look back on two decades of God's grace but also as a testament to ALS' transformation into a regional seminary serving students across Asia and beyond.

ALS officially opened its doors on May 29, 2005, in a service led by Dr. John Lawrenz, its first president. The seminary was created to train Chinese-speaking pastors and evangelists in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and East Asia. Since then, God has used ALS to equip church leaders from a growing list of countries and cultures. Today, the seminary reaches students on four continents and operates out of both Hong Kong and Chiang Mai, Thailand.

"Asia Lutheran Seminary stands as a beacon of theological excellence, rooted in the unchanging truth of God's Word," says Rev. Larry Schlomer, WELS World Missions administrator. "We give thanks for the countless leaders ALS has trained to share the saving message of Jesus Christ. Their work has shaped the church in Asia and inspired our broader mission efforts."

ALS' expansion reflects both strategic planning and a Spirit-led response to change. In 2023, WELS World Missions formed what is now known as the Asia-Oceania Team, bringing all Asia-based missionaries together under one vision: "Grace to all in Asia." ALS was tasked with serving as the regional seminary for this effort, supporting training programs throughout Asia.

The newly formed Regional Theological Education Program, led by ALS professor Dr. Guy Marquardt, now partners with sister churches throughout Asia. In partnership with the Pastoral Studies Institute, this program provides support through curriculum development, visiting instructors, and consultation—helping local theological education efforts become sustainable and confessional.

"It's been incredible to see how the Lord has used ALS to build leaders not only for Hong Kong and Taiwan but now also for Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Nepal, and beyond," notes Dr. Jonathan Bare, ALS president. "Our students now include English and Mandarin speakers, both lay leaders and future pastors."

One indicator of ALS' impact is the growing number of national pastors now serving as faculty. "The best teachers will be local leaders who are fully equipped to serve as confessional Lutheran instructors," says Bare. That vision is becoming a reality. Many adjunct instructors are now ALS graduates, and recent full-time additions include national leaders Dr. Angus Cheung and Rev. William Zhu.

ALS' programs are also evolving. While biblical language courses and advanced degrees like the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Divinity remain central, certificate- and diploma-level programs make theological training accessible to more students, empowering students at all levels to make immediate use of their training in their churches, homes, and the groups they gather. The seminary's online presence has opened doors to a growing Chinese-speaking diaspora, especially in places like New Zealand, Australia, and England.

Additionally, an English-language program has been launched, integrating TELL (Think, Evaluate, Learn, Lead), a curriculum from WELS Multi-Language Productions, into certificate-level training. These efforts allow ALS to serve students across Asia regardless of location or language.

Reflecting on the seminary's history, Missionary Emeritus Rob Siirila, who helped establish ALS, remarks, "God's providence was evident at every step. My greatest blessing has been witnessing his hand at work throughout the process."

As ALS looks ahead, the message that launched its ministry remains just as relevant. "Now is still the time," says Schlomer, echoing the words from ALS' founding passage in 2 Corinthians 6:2. "May God continue to bless this seminary as it trains the next generation of gospel proclaimers."

Read more from Dr. Jonathan Bare, Asia Lutheran Seminary president, in this article from the June 2024 edition of *Forward in Christ* magazine: [forwardinchrist.net/now-is-still-the-time](https://www.forwardinchrist.net/now-is-still-the-time). 

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