

# May newsletter

**Richard Ondicho's Newsletter 3/2025**  
**21.5.2025**



By God's grace, we at International Lutheran Congregation experienced a wonderful series of Holy Week services. We also gathered on Good Friday, the central moment of our Christian faith — remembering the suffering of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Lately, I have been reflecting on the resurrection and realizing that it is not only a moment of celebration. More importantly, the resurrection calls us to action. It empowers us to live out the Great Commission: to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them about the kingdom of God.

In His grace, God has opened a new dimension of international ministry for us at Luther-Kirkko by bringing people from Buddhist backgrounds. This is an area I previously knew little about, but I have chosen to embrace this opportunity as it comes. I recognize it will take time and thoughtful approach. Before Easter, I had the great honour of baptizing a Buddhist individual after two months of instruction in the Small Catechism. Others have since come to us for various reasons. Seemingly, this group of Buddhists is not widely recognized in Finland, making it an important area of missionary opportunity. We now have three people playing music with us; however, only one man and his wife, who are from Sri Lanka, were already Christians.

*"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15, NIV)*

In today's increasingly globalized and religiously diverse context, the Christian mission is called to engage with people of all faiths in a manner that is both deeply respectful and firmly grounded in biblical truth. Among the major religious traditions, we encounter is Buddhism — a non-theistic

faith founded by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in the 5th or 6th century BCE, now followed by over 500 million adherents worldwide, particularly in Asia and increasingly in the West.

My purpose in addressing this topic is to raise awareness within the Christian, and specifically Lutheran, community in Finland regarding the essential beliefs and practices of Buddhism, and to offer thoughtful, culturally sensitive strategies for mission outreach among Buddhist individuals and communities.

I have come to understand that effective mission work among Buddhists requires a careful balance of truth and grace, of conviction and compassion. At Luther-Kirkko, we are reminded that evangelism is not about winning arguments or proving points, but about faithfully bearing witness to the love, hope, and salvation found in Jesus Christ. By approaching this work with humility, cultural sensitivity, deep respect, and spiritual preparation, we may serve as Christ's ambassadors, offering His good news to the Buddhist world in a way that honours both their dignity and the truth of the Gospel.

In Buddhist teaching, the Four Noble Truths are central: First, that life is marked by suffering (dukkha); second, that suffering arises from desire and attachment (tanha); third, that there is a way to end suffering; and fourth, that the path to end suffering is the Eightfold Path. While these teachings are taken seriously by Buddhists around the world, it is important for us as Christians to remember that their understanding of suffering and salvation differs fundamentally from the Christian message. Through my studies and conversations with Buddhists, I have come to recognize their deep commitment to their faith, yet I also see the need for clear theological distinction when sharing the Gospel.

As we engage with Buddhism, we must be mindful that its teachings and Christian doctrine are not the same. Buddhism presents a path of self-liberation through enlightenment, whereas Christianity teaches that salvation is a gift from God, received by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Theologically, the central message of Buddhism — striving to overcome suffering through personal effort — is incompatible with the Christian teaching that salvation comes solely

through the grace of God, given through Jesus' death and resurrection. It is crucial to acknowledge these fundamental differences so that we do not mistakenly equate Buddhist beliefs with the truth of the Gospel.

In our mission to Buddhists, we must engage with respect and cultural sensitivity, but always with the theological clarity that comes from the truth of the Gospel. Our task is not to compromise or adapt Christian beliefs to fit Buddhist views, but to share the love of Jesus Christ in a way that is understandable, while upholding the truth of God's Word. We are called to offer the Gospel with compassion and humility, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide our efforts, but always staying rooted in the truth of Christ's saving work.

Jesus commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations — including Buddhists. Many Buddhists live with a strong sense of moral integrity and spiritual longing, yet their search for

peace and liberation falls short of the true hope found in the Gospel. The Christian message offers what Buddhism cannot: a restored relationship with the Creator through Jesus Christ and the eternal hope of life with Him.

It is also important to remember that this mission is not just the responsibility of international Lutheran congregations. Local congregations, too, have the opportunity and responsibility to engage with those from Buddhist backgrounds. While international communities may present particular opportunities, every congregation is called to be a witness to the truth of Christ, reaching out with the love and truth of the Gospel wherever God places us.

Dear friends in Christ, I am truly grateful for your faithful prayers and generous support over the years. Your partnership in the Gospel has been a great encouragement to me in this calling. I continue to humbly ask for your prayers as I seek God's guidance in reaching out to immigrants in Helsinki—particularly those from Buddhist backgrounds and others who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

By God's providence, I have opportunity to meet regularly with members of the Sri Lankan community and others from different faith traditions. My desire is to gently and faithfully share the Gospel of our Lord, trusting that the Holy Spirit will open hearts to receive the truth. This mission requires time, sacrifice, and patient love—but I am confident that the Lord, who began this work, will also sustain it.

In all of this, I am reminded that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. It is not by our effort, but by His grace alone that hearts are turned, and lives are changed. Thank you for walking alongside me in this work—for your prayers, your support, and your encouragement. May God bless you richly, and may He use us all to make Christ known, for the glory of His name and the expansion of His Kingdom.

In Christ I remain His servant and yours

***Riku***

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