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Three Families, Three Generations, Three Continents One Hundred Years Of Augustana Missions

China

Dr. Carl Friberg
& Nellie (Wennerstrom)
1907-1930

Pr. John Lindell
& Selma (Munson)
1914-1930

Selma Munson Lindell
1930-41, 1948-49

Pr. Daniel Friberg
1935-1941

Margaret Friberg (nurse)
& Nellie Friberg
1937-1942
1967-1986

John Friberg
& Joy (Akamine)
1996-present

India

Pr. Thure Holmer
& Celia (Bjork)
1912-1933

Pr. Paul Holmer
& Shirley (Tull)
1946-1958

Paul Lindell
& Margaret (Sovik)
WMPL 1940-1974

Jonathan Lindell
& Evie (Hallquist)
WMPL 1956-1979

Pr. Dave Lindell
1951-1957
& Mary (Sandberg)
1957-1993

Bethany Lindell
WMPL 1984-1992

John Friberg
1984-1996

Africa

Dr. Bertil Friberg
& Eileen (Becklund)
1941-1952

Pr. Daniel Friberg
& Ruth (Holmer)
1945-1979

Margaret Friberg
& Nellie Friberg
1947-1967
1947-1957

Pr. Leslie Peterson
& Ruth (Hedlund)
1948-1972

Pr. Harold Palm
& Evelyn (Peterson)
1948-1977

Pr. Elder Jackson
& Renee (Odeen)
1949-1985

Pr. Dean Peterson
& Elaine (Erickson)
1952-1989

Dr. Steve Friberg
& Bethany (Lindell)
1993-Present

Three Families, Three Generations and Three Continents of Augustana Missions

Thank you for inviting me to make this presentation to the 2010 gathering of the Augustana Heritage Association. Ever since accompanying my parents to the first conference at Chautauqua in 1997, I have valued the many excellent lectures which illustrate and honor the different facets of our Augustana Heritage. It is truly a privilege for me to add this contribution; in which my family represents the foreign mission effort of Augustana.

For 100 years at least one member of my family has been under call from the Augustana Board of Foreign Missions (or its successors). During this century of unimaginable change, including mergers in the church and marriages in the family; there has also been a remarkable constancy for my church and family to heed Christ's call to baptize and make disciples of all nations.

My paternal grandparents went to China in 1907, and remained until 1930. My maternal grandparents went to India in 1912, and remained until 1933. My father went to China in 1935, and remained until 1941. His sister, Margaret went the China in 1937, and remained until 1942. She then served in Tanzania and Taiwan until 1986. His brother, Bert went with his family to Tanganika in 1941, and remained until 1952. My mother went to Tanganika in 1945, met and married my father who arrived there soon after she did, and they remained until 1979. My mother's brother, Paul Holmer went with his family to India in 1946, and remained until 1958. My brother, John went to Nepal in 1982, and has continued with his family in Tibet and China until the present. My brother, Steve and his family have been in Tanzania since 1993. During one hundred and three years, the chain has been broken for only one- the year 1934.

It happens that my brother, Steve, and I each married into families who were also involved in Augustana missions. My wife, Marilyn, is the daughter of Les and Ruth Peterson, who went to Tanganika in 1948 and remained until 1972. Her Uncles and Aunts included the Harold Palms, Elder Jacksons and Dean Petersons who served in Tanzania through the same period. My brother's wife, Bethany, served in Nepal from 1982 until 1990. She is the grand daughter of John and Selma Lindell, who went to China in 1908 and whose sons: Paul, Jonathan and David served in India and Nepal.

Being part of a family where so many served so long and so wide gives me a unique and privileged perspective to reflect on mission body which sent them all- Three families, three generations, three continents of Augustana missions.

One advantage all missionaries enjoyed was the chance to tour the world as they traveled back and forth on furloughs. My parents never failed to stop for about a week in Sweden, to renew relations with their old world family- my father's in Skane and Vastergotland, and my mother's near Goteborg. Dad was especially close to his relatives because as a youth he twice spent half a year with them when his parents divided their furloughs between Sweden and America. Dad never lost his Swedish identity, nor his fluency in the language.

These returns to Sweden every five years always included a tour of people and places, as his cousins graciously carted our family of eight around in their Volvos. I clearly remember a visit in 1978. From the home place farm, near Ulricehamn, we walked some miles up a hill to the Mone parish church, a traditional wood structure, painted white, with ornate stain glass windows, high steeple and pews enough

for perhaps 120 people. Of course, spread out around it was a perfectly tended cemetery. It was here that Grandpa was baptized, and Dad was confirmed in 1919. Dad told us about riding a bicycle to join other students for classes taught by the Parish Pastor. From there Dad also pointed out to us where a nearby parish poor house once stood. For the first time I learned that his grandparents had themselves lived there for a time. Dad explained that his grandfather was “indigent” due to an injury. Next we drove some miles to another gathering place; this time a single story mission hall, large enough to seat perhaps 50 people with moveable wood chairs. This was where Dad’s extended family had gathered for generations with other pious neighbors on Sunday evenings for services with readings, prayers and hymns. They were part of the Forsterlands-Stiftelsen Mission spiritual movement strongly influenced by the preaching of Karl Olaf Rosenius in the mid 1800s. .

These three institutions- the Lutheran state church parish, the locally supported poor house, and the pietist mission hall- each represent an essential and integral influence on the Christian outlook and the mission commitment of my family through three generations. And generally, along with most Swedish Lutherans, we have regarded these different institutions as complementary to each other; not exclusive or competitive against each other.

Most of us have maintained a love and respect for the traditional institution of the church; embodied in all its different expressions- from individuals to congregations to conferences to the national body- and we have valued how each expression balances and holds the others accountable. In the traditional church we have maintained a due respect for the Sacraments, rites, ceremonies and liturgies. We have valued the demand for ordained professionalism among the Pastors and leaders. We have supported, and greatly benefited from the traditional church institutions of learning, social service, home missions, foreign missions and ecumenism. And we have accepted the belief that the church is the body of Christ in the world as it integrates many cultural, political, economical and intellectual elements from the surrounding world.

Likewise, we have continued to reflect the influence of the “mission” pietism which became so strong a spiritual movement throughout Scandinavia in the mid 1800s. By “Pietism” I mean the conviction that Christian discipleship demands a strong individual accountability to God, maintained with a personal love, trust and obedience to Jesus. Each person is to cultivate a feeling of God’s presence in his or her life- including awe, respect, gratitude and affection. Each person is responsible to grow in character qualities and to keep commandments and rules of holiness. Pietism emphasized a strict legalism; but because of this, it also strongly emphasized the grace of God by which an individual is forgiven and saved from guilt. With its emphasis on feeling God’s presence, Pietism insisted that a person should repent from sin by feeling remorse about it. It also promoted a confidence and joy about salvation to eternal life in heaven through Jesus’ resurrection. Of course, this personal faith is maintained through disciplines of regular prayer, reading the Bible and devotional writings, and joining with other believers for fellowship and support, certainly on Sunday but other times also.

Finally, the family has maintained a strong sense of social service; such as was received from the “poor-house” by my great-grandfather and family. There is a joke among us that no Friberg has ever made a dollar of profit from business dealings. That’s mostly true. Definitely, we don’t have the knack; but also we don’t have that much interest in money for money’s sake. Many emigrants from Europe were powerfully motivated by their earlier poverty to use opportunities in the new world to accumulate as much as they could. But others found in the new world opportunities to alleviate want and suffering in general. I’d argue that in my family there has been a consistent commitment that we use our talents in service to others in need. Almost all of us have been in the service professions, mostly employed by Christian

organizations- Pastors, Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Engineers, Administrators, etc. We also tend to harness up with organizations which already exist; rather than creating new ones for ourselves.

In 1901 a small group gathered with Pr. Hultkrans, of Bethlehem Lutheran in Minneapolis to explore expanding the Augustana mission effort. (Before this Augustana restricted its mission effort to supporting established societies, especially that of the General Council in India.) They chartered the Foreign Missionary Society on Sept. 4, 1901, and as the action was promoted by Augustana publications, it soon received wide support. On Jan. 23, 1903, this society called my grandfather, CP Friberg, to go to China as a medical Doctor. They almost immediately postponed his call, however, in order to first send an ordained Pastor. Grandpa instead went with a Swedish mission to Somalia for three years. By the time he returned to America with his new wife, Nellie, the society had sent Pr. AW Edwins, who established the new mission field in Honan. Grandpa and Grandma went to China in 1907, "the first called but the second to go to China." The Mission Society turned this effort over to the Augustana Synod that same year.

Grandpa Friberg started a hospital, Honan Fu, in the ancient capital of Loyang; and for a time he was the only Doctor of western Medicine for that large city. The demands upon him were endless. His son, also a Doctor, wrote of him: "His work disallowed long hours with his family, which would have been ideal if it had been possible" and "Vacations were not restful times, for his interest in people correctly assumes that he sought to be of help wherever possible." In 1924, when he had only 4 native assistants and no other Doctors or nurses, the hospital recorded 34,530 treatments and exams; about 97 a day. This was actually half volume from 8 years earlier, when the hospital charged no fees, and there were about 200 treatments a day. During one 3 month period of nearby military fighting, between 2 and 3 hundred wounded soldiers were brought in each day, including an average of 3 requiring amputations. These were in addition to the regular quota patients! Family lore tells of his also regularly visiting prisoners in the jails, encouraging former patients, to "come into the life and joy of what Jesus had urged Nicodemus to experience, the second birth", and becoming widely recognized in the area as "the Jesus man."

As much as Grandpa and Grandma Friberg were devoted to serving the physical needs of the Chinese; they were primarily concerned with the eternal salvation of their souls. They regarded their medical labor as of one piece together with that of churches, schools and individual service bringing a unified witness to God's love and truth.

It seems, in fact, that Grandpa Friberg was separated from his family for long periods each year; remaining in Loyang while Grandma lived in cooler mountain village of Kingunshan, near the mission school where their three children studied. During one of these separations in 1927, the family left early for America to escape the political unrest, while Grandpa remained behind at the hospital, expecting to join them in two years. But obstacles kept him into a third year, during which he contracted typhus. Within a few days, on Jan. 23, 1930, he died in Loyang, near his hospital. Within days his Augustana associate, Pr. John Lindell was also stricken by this epidemic. They were buried together in the same grave in the Loyang mission compound. My Grandma Nellie, having already lost five children in China, now lost her husband there as well. She would live another 27 years; almost constantly with her daughter, Margaret, on other mission fields.

My Grand father, Thure Holmer, was born in Sweden in 1882. When he was 8 his family emigrated to America and settled in Faulkner, NY, near Jamestown, a center of Swedish settlement. The family brought with them the same combination of Lutheran church loyalty and pietistic dedication as described above; and this was fervently transferred into the Augustana congregation where they were active. In the course of his youth grandpa Thure was influenced by his father and congregation to become a Pastor; as

was his older brother, Carl; and they both attended Augustana College and Seminary. At some point he was inspired by the Augustana mission work in India; and his first call was to serve parish and evangelism efforts in the area of Rajahmundry. Upon receiving his call, he was ordained on June 16th, 1912, in Chicago.

One month after his ordination, Grandpa Thure married Celia Bjork. Her parents had immigrated to America before she was born. The family farmed near Frewsburg, near Jamestown; and their social and spiritual life also was nurtured by the local Augustana congregation. Thure and Celia met at one of the frequent church youth gatherings, and courted for several years, including the year Celia attended Augustana College to study music while Thure was in the Seminary. The marriage was in Frewsburg, but they shipped off almost immediately for India. The first of their five children was born 11 months later. Along with furloughs they would serve in India for 21 years, until 1933. At that point Grandpa reluctantly resigned, accepting that, with Depression era cutbacks, the Board could not support them. Instead he accepted a call to a congregation in Dubois, PA; the first of three over 32 more years.

From what I understand, Grandpa Thure's ministry in the Rajahmundry area was to be active in the many different institutions and programs that had taken shape during the 60 years of Lutheran General Council presence. Augustana missionaries had joined this work beginning with Pr. A.B. Carlson; in 1878. But Grandpa Thure's primary ministry was to maintain the evangelistic outreach by establishing preaching points in the many surrounding villages. He mentored and paid local evangelists to serve each one. He himself also circulated among these sites; spending a day or two at each, where he shared fellowship, worship and instruction. His family often traveled with him, both by car and also houseboat along the wide Godavari river. My mother's personal memoir includes many stories about these travels; especially on houseboat.

My grandparents actually lived a few miles out from Rajahmundry, at Dowlaiswaram, in a comfortable, airy house typical of colonial ex-patriots. As with the Fribergs in China; the Holmer children attended a boarding school in the cool hill country- Kodaikanal. It required two days of train travel either direction; and they returned home three times a year for month long vacations. A major part of the Holmers' routine; as also with the Fribergs, was to maintain a regular discipline of devotional worship. At breakfast the family paused for someone to read scripture and pray. After supper the family gathered for a longer period of reading a devotional reflection, scripture, prayer and extended time of singing hymns accompanied by grandma on the piano shipped out from New York.

A second generation of service with the Augustana Board of Missions began in 1935, when my father was sent as a Pastor to China. He was at Seminary in Rock Island when word arrived of his father's death. Following ordination in 1933, he served for two years at Hector, MN. He then accepted the call to China, his intent from the start; and he served there for 6 years. His first two years he spent in language study in Shanghai; primarily learning to write since he was fluent from childhood. (We were told that his dialect was so natural that when natives heard him before seeing him, they were surprised that he was foreign. Incidentally, Dad eventually was fluent in Swedish, Chinese, English and Swahili; and literate in German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew- the last two which he taught at Seminary.) Then he was assigned a position in Honan, coordinating the ministry of the local Pastors and evangelists in that well established Augustana mission field. (He told us that once he walked 45 miles in one day to reach one of his appointments.) My impression is that there was extensive cooperation between mission societies in China during this period; and perhaps the easy, respectful fellowship he shared across denominational lines developed during this time. I also understand that missionaries during these years tended toward the revivalist emphasis on

individual, personal salvation- with an insistence on repentance of sin; change and development of character; and a clear sense of the penalties of hell and the rewards of heaven. Dad very much shared this orientation, and also the methods of evangelistic outreach through personal witness and public meetings. Dad left China in 1941, with his furlough long past due, and the Japanese advancing toward Honan. He avoided them by traveling the Burma Road, south and west, riding trucks. His sister, who had returned to serve as a nurse with her mother, did not. Along with many other Americans in areas of China occupied by Japan, they were detained after the US declared war following Pearl Harbor. My Grandma and Aunt were interred at the Shantung Compound prisoner of war camp for about a year. They would be released in a prisoner exchange; having experienced relatively humane care during the internment.

When he returned back from China to America, by father spent the next years, 1942 to 1944, studying first at Harvard and then at U of Chicago, to earn his PhD. During that time he was Assistant Pastor at Austin Messiah, in Chicago.

With PhD. in hand Dad joined a flood of other Augustana professionals sent to Tanganika to fill positions vacated by German Lutheran missionaries. He arrived in 1945; and after 3 months of language study assumed an almost unbelievable burden of responsibilities. He was first appointed Superintendent of the large eastern district; and to this was soon added the task of establishing the first Seminary. My brother has written of this time: "It was a most busy time. Besides teaching all of the seminary courses such as Doctrine, Church History, New Testament and Greek; Dad was also responsible for procuring food and other supplies for the students. At the same time, he was still acting mission superintendent and in charge of paying salaries to teachers and church workers. Dad would teach during the week and travel on the weekends. Within a year, fortunately, Walden Hedman arrived from America to take over the synod responsibilities, and Pastor Herbert Uhlin came out from Sweden to assist at the seminary. The first class of 58 students would graduate in 1949." This kind of dedication and energy is characteristic of all the 33 years Dad served with my mother, a nurse, in Tanzania. They moved with the Seminary to Makumira for about 10 years; and then to Arusha and Tanga where Dad was active in ELCT evangelistic programs. They retired to Minneapolis in 1979.

That dedication and energy was characteristic of the entire generation sent by the Augustana mission during that period- my family and many others. I will briefly summarize their stories.

My uncle Bertil Friberg intended to return with his wife Eileen to China on completing Medical School, in 1941. The Augustana Mission persuaded them to serve instead in Tanganika at the Kiomboi hospital. They were there for two terms, until 1952. My uncle has written a book "Mercy In The Bush" describing that rich, rewarding period. My aunt's severe malaria prevented them from returning for a third term, and they settled in Minneapolis where my uncle maintained his practice another 50 years.

As noted above, my Aunt Margaret returned in 1938 to China with my Grandmother, Nellie, to serve as a nurse. They were in Peking at first, but then, after Pearl Harbor, interred for about a year at Shantung. In 1946 they were sent to Tanganika; where my Aunt would be the "Matron" nurse at two different mission hospitals- Machame and Bumbuli- for the next 21 years. I remember her telling me that, in one of her duties as midwife, she delivered 12,000 babies during that period; and that she had it arranged so that when awakened by the native nurse, she could leave her bed, attend a birth and return to her sleep in 15 minutes. When she resisted growing corruption by hospital officials, she was not invited to return following a furlough in 1967. Instead she was sent by the LCA to the mission hospital in Chiayi, Taiwan,

where she served 20 more years until 1986. By all accounts, she was a remarkable woman- personally and professionally.

My mother, Ruth Holmer Friberg, attended Johns Hopkins nursing school fully intending to return to India. The mission board persuaded her to go instead to Tanganika, where in 1945 she arrived to serve at the same Kiomboi hospital where my Uncle and Aunt were. Within half a year my father was wooing her. This required persistence, partly because he was 10 years older; but he was rewarded and they married early in 1947. For the next 32 years Mom served primarily by supporting Dad's work in countless ways; including raising 6 children. My brother has written how he remembers that Mom served dinner for visiting guests on every day of a month while he was home from school on a vacation. Such constant hospitality was standard. I clearly remember her treating a woman after snake bite, including making an incision at the bite and sucking out the poison with her mouth. Most treatments at her seminary clinic were not so critical

My mother's brother, Paul Holmer, immediately after his ordination in 1946, was sent with his wife Shirley to India; where they were assigned to the same area near Rajahmundry where his parents had served. For the first six years they lived in the village of Bhimavaram. From there, Uncle Paul served as Pastor of a parish with about 30 congregations in villages around; visiting each about four times a year. For each site he employed and supervised local catechists and teachers who used the church owned facility for worship, classes and other activities. The second period of their time in India was near Guntur, living in the village of Sattanapalli. There Uncle Paul took on responsibility for a wide spread evangelistic effort; travelling with an indigenous evangelist to present meetings and classes in various villages. On top of this, he was responsible for employing 200 teachers, and took on the role of "builder" for the area; erecting or maintaining church property as needed. In connection with this, he supervised technical classes for carpentry and mechanics. Aunt Shirley maintained their home, assisted with the programs and hosted a constant stream of visitors. They reluctantly left India in 1958 when their son, Matt, contracted polio and needed better health care. Uncle Paul accepted a call to rural Illinois and later to Galveston, TX, where they retired.

Finally, in this generation, I might mention that my father and mother in law, Les and Ruth Peterson, went to Tanganika in 1947; following his ordination the same year. Through the Augustana St. Joseph's congregation in Rosholt, SD, Les and his extended family were highly influenced toward mission service; as various Pastors, youth conventions and periodicals challenged them. Soon, a brother, brother in law, cousin, and school mate, all from the same congregation, would join him in Tanganika with their families; and each would remain at least 25 years. For the first 15 years Les served at three different stations; maintaining his own Pastoral duties at the central church, but also supervising about 20 teams of evangelists and teachers who were posted in surrounding villages to develop chapels and schools there. But the variety of necessary tasks was almost unlimited- including hunting wild meat to supply the nearby leper colony, trekking to inaccessible tribes, providing transport, and maintaining buildings and equipment. During this period Les built 3 permanent church buildings; the largest of them a structure 100'X30', seating 1,000. He saw it recently, on a trip back with his five grand daughters, and was proud to find that the walls and rafters remain sound, the rail benches still in place and, best of all, the sanctuary overflowing each week at worship. For his final 8 years he taught at the Ihanga Bible School; part of a faculty of 6 with about 100 students. All these years his wife Ruth, of course, was active with her own projects, including hosting a constant stream of visitors, developing SS materials and teaching courses at the Bible School. In 1972, after 25 years, my parents in law left their mission work and accepted a call to a congregation in rural Minnesota.

A third generation of my family has shared the Augustana missionary tradition since 1984. This was the year my brother, John Friberg, with engineering degree from U of Minnesota, was sent by the American Lutheran Church to work with the United Mission to Nepal coalition building hydroelectric dams, bridges, and other projects; working both in office and out at the construction sites. During this time he was part of a fairly deep tradition of dedicated missionaries working together in well established institutions of education, medicine, evangelism, construction and the like. From early on, however, he was drawn toward the unevangelized people of Tibet. In 1996 he arranged that the ELCA should second him to World Concern, with whom he could do similar engineering work in Tibet itself. For 13 years he then followed a general pattern of staying in Lhasa during the winter, living in a sparse apartment and working at the office; and then spending the warmer months at construction sites in remote and even higher elevations. John met his wife, Joy, when she came as a World Concern missionary to teach in a summer project he had organized at one of these remote villages. They married in 1998 and have one child. Joy has been a homemaker, of course; but also serves with teaching, office work and medical training. In 2009 the Chinese government restricted work permits for foreigners in Tibet. At that point John and Joy were seconded to a small society "Plateau Perspectives"; and moved to Xining, in the northwest province of Qinghai; where John lectures in engineering at the university and Joy teaches in a small school for children of ex-patriots. As an example of their interconnection with many forms of service; they were kept extremely busy in early 2010, joining the relief effort after the earthquake in Yushu, about 200 miles away. John and Joy have one son.

Finally, the ELCA sent my brother, Steve, to Tanzania in 1993, soon after he received his medical degree from the U. of Minnesota. Just before this he married Bethany Lindell, daughter of Jon and Evie Lindell, of World Mission Prayer League in Nepal; and granddaughter of John and Selma Lindell in China. For eight years before their marriage she had been office manager for the United Mission to Nepal. For the first four years in Tanzania they were at Selian hospital, near Arusha; and for a short time at Haydom hospital. For the eleven years since then they have been at Kitumbeini, a remote village among the Maasai. Steve has revived a network of 12 clinics spread across about 200 miles of wilderness. They'd been established mainly by a German Lutheran deaconess 30 years earlier, but lately had pretty much shut down. With his supervision, including establishing competent local staff, controlling finances and visiting each twice a month, the clinics have thrived. The ministry has also benefited greatly from a government sponsored programs against HIV and Malarial diseases. Bethany has been active in education, self-sufficiency and stock breeding programs; especially among the women. The Lutheran church is well established in the area; and the Masai tribe has been enthusiastically receptive to Christian discipleship; unlike in earlier decades. Steve and Bethany have three children.

I am tempted to explore how my family's motivation and involvement in mission has been affected by the decades. One pursuit would be to note the tendency for different individuals to reject one or another of the three expressions in the earlier spirituality- institutional, piety or social service. Another might be to note the influence of passing social, cultural and theological movements; such as: prohibition, women's suffrage & feminism, civil rights, millennialism, fundamentalism, liberalism, social gospel, charismatic movement, political quietism or activism, environmentalism, etc. A third might be to trace how members returned from their unique and special vocation on the mission field; and settled instead into different vocations in the church and society which sent them. It is enough now to let my family be a

representation of Augustana's extensive commitment to mission; and the marvelous support and freedom it provided to those missionaries that it called.