

# Partnership Declaration

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of the  
Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam  
(hereafter "GELC" or "Gossner Church")

to strengthen the Partnership with the  
Lippische Landeskirche  
(hereafter "Church of Lippe")

## I. WHO WE ARE

### 1. Gossner Church (GELC) – an Adivasi Church

The Gossner Church is located in the Adivasi regions i.e., North-Central region of India. Hence the majority of faith communities (churches in the region) belong to the Adivasi communities. Due to this belongingness, the churches of the region, is identified as an "Adivasi Church". The Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ and the ministry of the churches are located in soul-soil-society of Adivasi people. Therefore, the "cultural-contexts" of Adivasi people contain their moral agency of life. Originally the gospel was brought to us by missionaries sent by Johannes Evangelista Gossner and they reached Ranchi on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1845.

### 2. (Re)sources of the Gossner Church

At present, the total church members of Gossner Church are ca. 5,00,000 with its ca. 70,000 families. The declaration of the autonomy early as 1919 by the leadership the church was a bold step towards three Self (S3): Self-rule, Self-support, Self-evangelism. In the contexts of church union movements, unity and ecumenism and wider ecumenism, no church can exist by itself. The present time and scenario demand our active participation in unity and ecumenism. Therefore, Gossner church needs to redefine the term "Autonomy" and re-locate its ministry to be relevant. "Autonomy doesn't mean to go/work alone, but, to go/work together". This "togetherness" invites each other to create a room/space for better understanding and engagement in given task. Coming together is a witness.

In the context of coming together and declaring partnership between Gossner Church (GELC) and Lippische Landeskirche, we need to share our witness with witness ( i.e. walk-talk-work with cultural values of each other).

### 3. GELC's calls for mission/ministry

The witnessing Christ must be with culture, only then it will be rooted on the soil and bear fruits. The creation stories of Adivasi people affirm that God created the world and "we" are part of it. Adivasi spirituality begins from the day we are born, and continue in how we live, how we care for our brothers and sisters, how we deal with our extended family, and how we care for God's creation. It is all balanced and cannot be divided. Our Adivasi values are: wisdom, respect for nature, respect for personal freedom, generosity, love, caring, sharing and self-reliance. To this point, the Gossner Church must give a call for new paradigm in ministry, such as:

*Go to the people,  
Live among them,  
Learn from them,  
Serve them,  
Plan with them,  
Start with what they know,  
Build on what they have,  
Not piecemeal, but integrated approach,  
Not show-case, but pattern,  
Not relief, but release,  
Mass education through mass participation,  
Learn by doing, Teach by showing.*

The Gossner church and Lippische Landeskirche can play a major role and contribute much to many people. Let us walk and work together like a Good Samaritan in the Bible who heard and stopped to aid the weaker/needdy. It's a message of protection, support, renouncement of self, and compassion and compensation the others.

### 4. Call not for Competition, but Collaboration

The Adivasis have this aspect of life which can be seen through a story given below:

*A foreign missionary proposed a game to the children of Munda tribe. He put a basket of fruit near a tree and told the kids that the first one to reach the fruit would win them all. When he told them to run, they all took each other hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying the fruits. When he asked why they ran like that, as one could have taken all the fruit for oneself, they said, "Menesa, how can one of us be happy if all others are sad?"<sup>1</sup>*

The above sketching can help us to rediscover our worldviews and to engage in partnership.

## **II. WHAT WE BELIEVE AND WHAT WE WANT TO SHARE WITH THE CHURCH OF LIPPE**

### **1. A new Step to Strengthen the Partnership**

On the occasion of the Centenary Autonomy Jubilee celebration of GELC in 2019, the delegations of Gossner Mission and the Church of Lippe attended and grace the occasion to commemorate our “mutual partnership in mission”. People from numerous parishes and church contexts of Lippe were able to experience beneficial connections with brothers and sisters from the Gossner Church. The Church of Lippe always extends a warm welcome with the effect that this partnership exchange has intensified in recent years. The work of the Gossner Mission, Berlin and of the Lippischer Freundeskreis (regional circle of friends of the Gossner Mission) has contributed significantly to this concern.

Hence both partners (GELC and the Church of Lippe) want to enter into a new era of mutual collaboration in mission.

### **2. A common Belief**

As the Church of Lippe we also want to quote the Confession of Belhar as an expression of our faith:

*We believe, that unity is (...) both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought (...)*

*We believe, that the variety of spiritual gifts, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.*

### **3. Scope of Partnership**

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Menesa pronounced by the kids contains a philosophy of life which can be summed up as "I am because we are." The term "Menesa" is a Mundari term that means "to mingle, to help, to work together, to have fellowship, communion, to reconcile." The meaning of the noun form (Menesa) is “fellowship or communion.”

In the following areas/scope GELC hopes to develop the partnership with the Church of Lippe:

- a. **Visiting to each other:** to maintain partnership, regular contacts and relationship at various levels, including invitations to official events and ecumenical meetings. It will create a space for mutual deliberation about the mission, journey and promise of the church, sharing spiritual experiences, and forms of common celebration as well as various programmes and services.
- b. **Empowering Theological Education:** As theological education plays a vital role in the church ministry as well as in social transformation, so the empowerment of theological education should be a key concern in partnership. To create an ample opportunity for the younger generation, this partnership will be a means and medium to build-up Gossner Theological College (GTC) as a strong theological centre (especially through offering a various programmes). The concerning areas are as follows:
  - *To develop library with good collection of theological books and journals, etc.*
  - *To develop the campus systematic with required infrastructures for the college.*
  - *To support college financially time to time to meet its requirements (for seminars/workshops, publications, faculty and staff up-gradation, etc.)*
  - *To support the short-term exposure and research programmes (in and outside India) for faculty.*
- c. **Exchange Programmes:** To facilitate various exchange programmes for sharing cultural ethos, piety and faith which includes following areas and concerns:
  - *To promote a cross-cultural learning through South-North and North-South Volunteers Exchange Programmes (prefer to theologically qualified young people).*
  - *To share culture for significant learning through theatre, videos, music, food culture, etc.*
  - *To create a space and opportunity for the possibilities of internship programmes (one to two years, etc.) for the qualified church workers (preferably pastors).*

d. **Diakonal Ministry:** to engage in doing holistic ministry/service, a joint-venture of various programmes (e.g. programmes and projects for health & education, specific training programmes for youth & women for their self-employment, etc.) can be taken-up which will also include our integral responsibility/participation for taking care of creation with the concern of climate justice and sustainable development. This could be developed in programs like:

- *To select the areas for tree plantation yearly as an awareness programmes of the issues.*
- *To support the projects for pure drinking water to the selected village.*

In these areas Gossner Mission in Berlin and the Lippischer Freundeskreis will be indispensable supporters and facilitators to strengthen the partnership and provide it with strength and continuity.

**Signature:**



*Rt. Rev. J. Dang*

Rt. Rev. Johan Dang  
Moderator, GELC

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Place: Lippe, Germany

Moderator

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