



Rev. Bernice Prema Samuel

Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life

Bernice Prema Samuel was born to Rev. Dr. Prasanna Kumari Samuel and Rev. Dr. Samuel Wilson Meshack at Bangalore, India and was baptized at the Trinity Lutheran Church, Kolar Gold Fields, India, where her father served as pastor for several years. Her sister, Priscilla Samuel and Prema were raised in the campus of Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute where their parents were professors.

Her mother served in various leadership roles in the National Church and as the secretary for Women in Church and Society of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, later as the joint secretary and then as its Executive Secretary. She resigned her position to do her Doctoral studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA in the year 2000. She also served at different capacities in several international organizations, such as the Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Christian Conference of Asia, Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, etc. As a professor at the Lutheran Seminary, Prasanna was instrumental in promoting Feminist Studies in theological education at Senate of Serampore (A Christian Theological University). She was also the first woman to be ordained in the Lutheran Church in India.

Prema's father is an ordained minister of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church and began his ministry as the Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church KGF. He then continued his ministry through service of equipping at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College. He has taught, for several years, as professor of Christian Ethics and introduced Communication as a discipline in theological education and later did his doctoral studies in Communication to start the Department of Communication studies at the Seminary. He was instrumental in starting communication studies at the Senate of Serampore, which has started its doctoral program in Communication Studies at the University. He also served as the Chairman of the Board of Studies for Communication at the University and as a member on the Executive-Committee of the National Council of Churches in India and other secular communication organizations. He served as the principal of Gurukul for 5 years and as the Principal at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Nagarcoil. During his retirement, he now serves as the Chair of World Association for Christian Communication; he also serves as the Vice Chancellor for Martin Luther University, India.

Her sister, Priscilla Priyanka Samuel is an accomplished architect. She lives with her husband, Sandeep and her two-year-old son Sedric Kishore in British Columbia. Priya continues to be Prema's best friend, confidante, and critical voice of reason.

Prema's step-mother, Mrs. Vidhya Rani Samuel, came into their lives as the Women's Desk Director of Church Women's Center, empowering Women and children in the slums. She continues to provide leadership and support to the women at a Program in Concordia Seminary in Nagarcoil, India. She has always been a friend, confidante and now mother. *"We are blessed to have her in our lives."*

Rev. Prema Samuel and Rev. Matthew Lyseng met at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon and married in June of 2005. Pastor Matt currently serves at Peace Lutheran Church in Leduc, AB. He is a very significant part of Prema's life as husband, "better half", and strength, encouraging her and supporting her in this Call to Ministry. Pastors Matt and Prema are proud parents of thirteen-year-old son; Sebastian, nine-year-old daughter, Dhiya Lily and one-year-old son Axan Meshack. Their household would not be complete without mention of two dogs, Josiah & Abigail, who remind them of faithfulness and unconditional love in a tangible way, especially when it is hard to recognize.

Prema began her journey into education to enter into full time ministry of the Word and Sacrament; and to serve God's people and to break the barriers that are hindering particularly the children, youth and women in the Lord's vineyard. Although her informal theological journey began while a child, her formal and academic theological journey began at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Saskatoon in September 2001. She believes that education at the Lutheran Theological Seminary under the blessed guidance and teaching through professors and peers has equipped her with a strong foundation in Lutheran confessions and theology. With her foundation at LTS and prior experience from India she can relate in an ecumenical setting and in articulating faith in the context of people of other faiths. At the same time, having friends from other faiths gives her the opportunity to learn and dialogue in a respectful manner.

Pastor Prema's experience with Clinical Pastoral Education at Evanston Northwestern Health Care in Illinois, in 2004 under the Supervisions of Rev. John Katonah, introduced her to Pastoral Care in the Health Care setting. She witnessed spiritual suffering with death, loneliness, grief & anguish under the same roof as memorable joyous events with the birth of new babies. It was immense blessing to have total strangers open themselves completely in trust. It was also a very humbling experience. Following her Clinical Pastoral Education, she continued her learning while on internship at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Melville, SK under the able supervision and guidance of Rev. Darlene Harrison. Upon completion of her last year at seminary, Prema graduated in 2007 from The Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon with the Master of Divinity degree. The blessing of Ordination took place in April 2013.

Pastor Prema has served as chaplain with The Bethany Group at Rosehaven Care Center, The Good Samaritan Society in Edmonton and Good Shepherd Home in Wetaskiwin, and interim pastor at Armena Lutheran Parish. *"I have been blessed with immense kindness from people throughout the congregation and organizations."*

"Growing up in a place filled with grief and hopelessness, it hurts me to see so much pain and suffering. But as a human being I am always limited to what I can do. I continue God's ministry with words of wisdom that I have learnt from one of my mentors that, we as humans would like 'to do' - to fix, make things right; to be present in suffering and by being present we are called to proclaim God's love and empowerment through that love and grace is what we are called to proclaim. And I feel that this is my calling."