



On November 11th, 2025 Rev. Jennifer Jackson of First Lutheran Church, Topeka, KS., Rev. Janice Hawley, retired of Lawrence, KS., Julie Carlson of Wichita, KS., and I left to visit our companion Christians in Papua New Guinea. The women's organization of the Kote District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea was celebrating the 60th anniversary of its founding. The organization is called, "Yaung Ngokac" which means "Hospitable or Gracious Women" in their native Kote language.

We quickly learned how hospitable and gracious they were. Before we could even get out of the boat that brought us to Finschhafen, we were welcomed with a shower of flower petals. When we arrived at the district headquarters we were led to the guest house with prayer, singing, dancing and drumming.

The first day and a half of the celebration was about as one would expect. There was worship, preaching, singing and the giving and receiving of gifts. The morning of the second day concluded with the dedication of a memorial to the Yaung Ngokac and a women's diaconal training school located a short distance from the district headquarters.

But it was the afternoon of the last day of the celebration that I will always remember. We were told that the afternoon would be spent in "Thanksgiving." I expected us to gather again for speakers and some form of thanksgiving liturgy. However, what happened is that hundreds of women who came from the 8 circuits throughout the district, dressed in bright colored clothes and flowers and waving palm fronds danced and drummed and sang their way all around the church grounds and into the conference center in an overwhelming display of joy and, yes, "thanksgiving."



They didn't just speak words of thanksgiving. It was even more than singing songs of thanksgiving. They "embodied" thanksgiving. It reminded me of some sections of the "enthronement Psalms," such as Psalm 98: 4-6.

*⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.*

*⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.*

*⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.*

Rev. Gary Teske, Companion Synod Team Chair