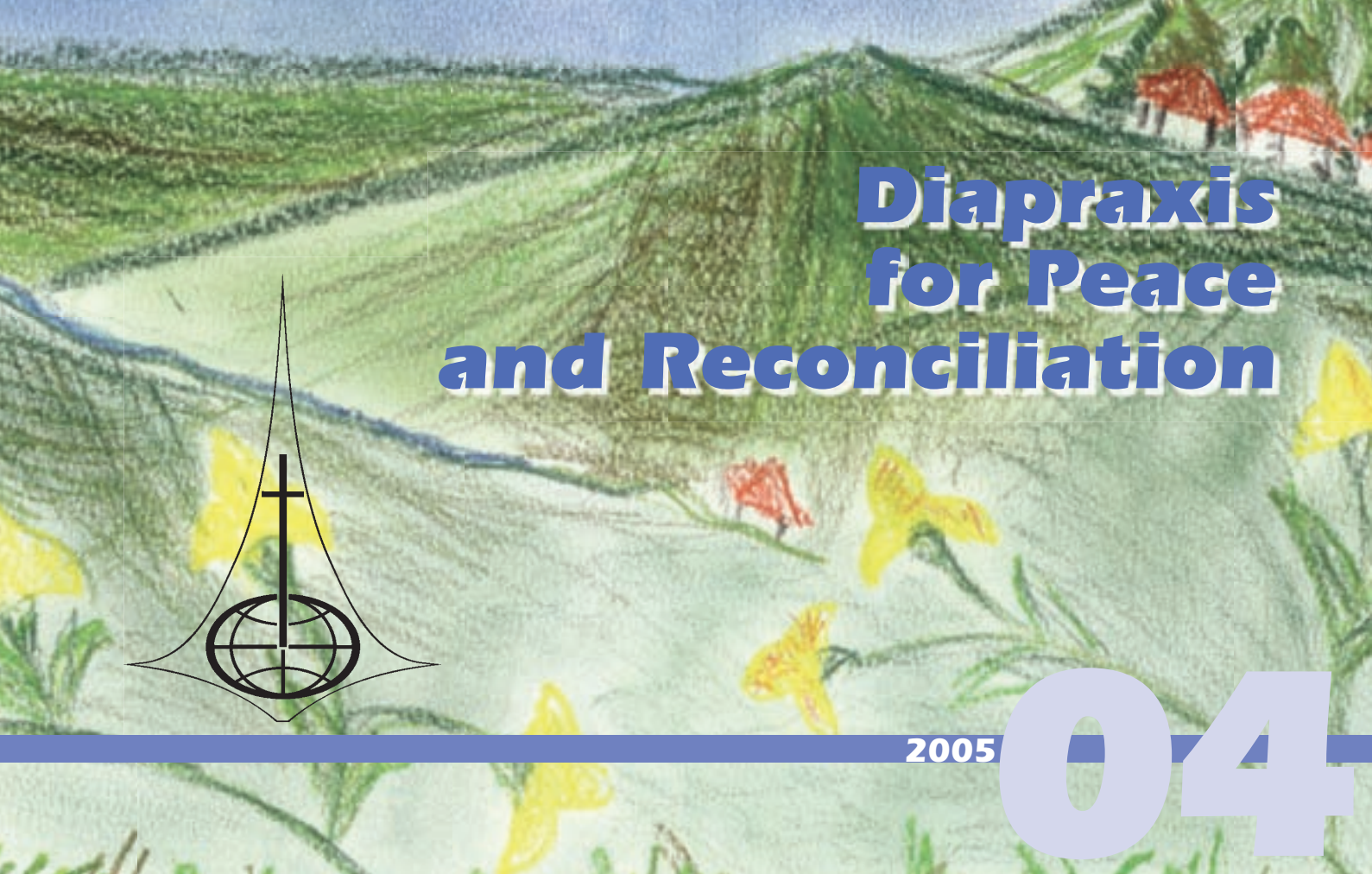




Lutheran World
Information

LWI



**Diapraaxis
for Peace
and Reconciliation**



2005

04

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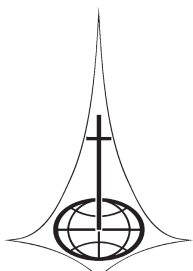
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Cover image – Peace dove, drawn by Dino Cehic in 2000. Twelve-year-old Dino is currently a sixth-grade pupil at the Hasan Kikic School in Sanski Most, Bosnia. In 1992, his family fled to Germany during the Balkans’ crisis and returned home in 1998. © Dino Cehic



This special issue of *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* is a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) contribution to the Second Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) Summit, to be held April 18–25 in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality near Johannesburg, South Africa.

Bearing in mind the theme of this summit, “Working Together for Peace in Africa,” the editorial team responsible for the content of this special *LWI* chose to focus not only on inter-faith dialogue, but also on inter-faith dialogue in action—**diapraxis**. They went further, and sought concrete examples on diapraxis for peace and reconciliation.

This special *LWI* reflects the LWF’s expression and understanding of diapraxis, with emphasis on a contextual approach that is portrayed through the people’s shared struggles and joint efforts for justice, peace and reconciliation.

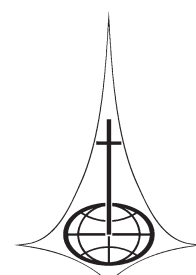
The reports, features and background stories in this special edition illustrate the variety of perspectives and experiences as we travel through the different world regions. They demonstrate the relevance of inter-faith action in each and every context, whether we join our sisters and brothers in Sierra Leone or Kosovo, in Nepal or Brazil.

My deep gratitude to those who so willingly shared their experiences and stories with *LWI* readers. I now invite you to reflect on these inspiring testimonies, as they challenge us to seek in our own contexts opportunities for shared inter-faith commitment to act together for the common good in society.



LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko.
© LWF/H. Putsman

Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation



Diapraxis for Peace and Reconciliation – An LWF Perspective

There is general criticism that more or less the same people are participating in inter-faith dialogue meetings without any connection to the reality of ordinary people's lives. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) sees inter-faith dialogue as rooted in common inter-faith praxis, thus the use of the term "diapraxis."

What Is Diapraxis?

In 1988 Danish Lutheran theologian Lissi Rasmussen proposed the term diapraxis in relation to inter-faith dialogue, stating:

Against the background of my experiences in Africa and Europe, I see dialogue as a living process, a way of living in co-existence and pro-existence. Therefore I want to introduce the term "diapraxis." While dialogue indicates a relationship in which talking together is central, diapraxis indicates a relationship in which common praxis is essential. Thus by diapraxis I do not mean the actual application of dialogue but rather dialogue as action. We need a more anthropological contextual approach to dialogue where we see diapraxis as a meeting between people who try to reveal and transform the reality they share. ¹



Rev. Dr. Ingo Wulffhorst, DTS Study Secretary for the Church and People of other Faiths. © S. Kich

Diapraxis as inter-faith dialogue in action was a major focus of an LWF consultation on Christian-Muslim dialogue in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2002.² The LWF stresses the contextual approach of diapraxis, expressed in the people's shared struggles for survival and their joint work for justice, reconciliation and peace.

Diapraxis for Human Dignity, Justice and Peace

Since its founding in 1947, the LWF has maintained its commitment to alleviating human suffering and poverty by involving people of different faiths. "At the field level, people of different faiths work side by side, supporting emergency and development efforts aimed at improving the quality of life of fellow human beings," asserted Mr Robert Granke, director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS). He cited an example of the LWF-run Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem: "The majority of employees in this

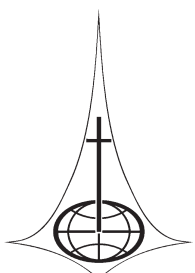
Lutheran institution are Muslims. Together, we work for the common good of people living in the West Bank," he said.

DWS activities worldwide are carried out by more than 5,000 field workers around 40 percent of whom are non-Christian. Granke continued: "DWS is engaged directly in inter-faith peace and reconciliation efforts in most of our field programs around the globe, for example, in Rwanda and Liberia." This focus has gained new impetus from the Inter-faith Action for Peace in Africa, an initiative started by LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko in 2002, to engage religious leaders and inter-faith networks in peace building efforts in Africa.

Theological Studies on Overcoming Conflicts

What is the role of religion in deep-rooted prejudices and conflicts among Christians and Muslims today? How can religion contribute to healing, peaceful coexistence and harmony? These questions have been a major focus of the LWF study program "Inter-faith Dialogue: Conflict and Peace." A cross-cultural Christian-Muslim team with participants from Denmark, Indonesia, Nigeria and the United States of America, undertook case studies in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria.

In the framework of an "experience—reflection—action" approach, the team coordinated by the Study Secretary for Church and People of Other Faiths in the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, received first-hand reports from representatives of the grass roots, and from religious and political leadership. The outcome will be compiled and analyzed in the context of an international consultation for Christian and Muslim leaders, and published early 2006. The process is a Lutheran-Muslim contribution to the World Council of Churches "Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2010): Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace."



Enriched by the “Otherness” of the Other

Diapraxis involves dialogue, thus theological discourse on what is commonly shared as well as the differences in the respective faith traditions can never be excluded, despite the inherent complexities, deep-rooted prejudices and conflicts. By sharing their common pain, people of different faiths are enriched by the “otherness” of the other. The other is no longer a stranger, but a friend and companion struggling for peace and justice in *convivência* (coexistence). *Convivência*, the experience of helping one another, learning from one another, and celebrating together, is not only experienced in Latin America but also worldwide. Emerging theological questions are dealt with mutually because *convivência* is solid ground for real understanding and acceptance.

Human tragedies can open a window for diapraxis and inter-faith dialogue even in a context characterized by prejudice and conflicts. This was evident in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in the aftermath of the devastating tidal waves (*tsunamis*) that struck South East Asia in December 2004. As community members reached out to each other during a time of great need, indeed many Muslims opened their homes to Christians, and vice-versa. Under a shared roof, friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance became an op-

portunity to see the other. It is the beginning of a hopeful and promising diapraxis. (785 words)

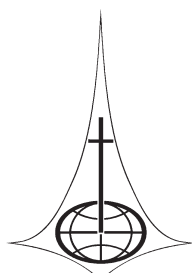
By Rev. Dr Ingo Wulforth, LWF Study Secretary for the Church and People of Other Faiths.

¹ Lissi Rasmussen, “From Diapraxis to Dialogue. Christian-Muslim Relations,” in Lars Thunberg and ally (eds.), *Dialogue in Action*, New Delhi: Prajna Publications 1988), pp. 282.

² Sigvard von Sicard and Ingo Wulforth (eds.), *Diapraxis and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together on the Way*, LWF Studies 01/2003. This book documented the results of the LWF Christian-Muslim dialogue on “diapraxis,” faith and identity, inter-faith marriages, neighbourliness, reconciliation, and friendship at the LWF Christian-Muslim consultation, in 2002.



Diapraxis creates dialogue between religions: A group of religious leaders at the first IFAPA summit in October 2002.
© LWF/P. Weinberg



DIAPRAXIS – TODAY’S CHALLENGES

What are today’s challenges with regard to diapraxis? The editorial team for this special LWI invited a Christian and a Muslim scholar to reflect on current challenges with regard to inter-faith dialogue and action.

Inter-religious Dialogue and the Search for a Social Spirituality

Inter-religious dialogue presupposes three fundamental elements. Firstly, dialogue is between people and not among religions or belief systems. It is people who embody beliefs and give concrete expression to their religious values and convictions in daily living.

Secondly, authentic dialogue happens among people who are committed to specific religious convictions. Inter-religious dialogue therefore is an encounter of commitments shared by people.

Thirdly, dialogue is not merely a “two-way” communication, mutual exchange or conversation, but fundamentally a “*dia*-logue.” The Greek preposition “*dia*” implies a mutual engagement that attempts at “getting across” or “getting through” to one another the divergent commitments that people of different faiths hold and share.

Inter-religious dialogue then, in a true sense, aims at understanding divergent and often mutually exclusive religious commitments of people in search of a shared commitment in community. In most North Atlantic societies, the practical experience of religious plurality is relatively new, thus inter-religious dialogue has tended to focus more on mutual conversations in search of understanding rather than on a shared commitment to act together in society.

Religious Differences Were Transcended in Common Struggle

In traditionally multi-religious societies, especially in Africa and Asia, people of different faiths have always carefully navigated religious differences while sharing the same social space. Religious differences were often transcended in common struggles, for example, against colonial rulers, external aggression, racial apartheid, against poverty and injustice or in nation building efforts. As long as people’s religious identities were not threatened or violated, common secular goals provided the motivation and basis for religious and communal harmony. Seldom did one invoke the necessity for inter-religious dialogue as it happened intuitively in lived praxis and in mutual respect.

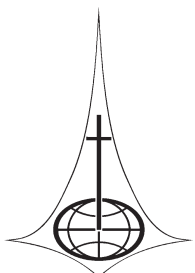


*Prof. Paul Rajashekar at the July 2004 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona, Spain.
© ELCA/ A. Liberman*

This “diapraxis,” as some have labeled it, however, has been disrupted in recent decades in many contexts in view of changing demographics, economic disparity, power struggles, external instigation, aggressive proselytizing, emergence of “fundamentalism,” disintegration of traditional communities brought by forces of globalization, and by ideological forces bent on exploiting religious differences for political purposes. The politicization of religion and ideological exploitation of religious beliefs in many parts of the world have tended to polarize people both within and among religious communities.

Against this background, inter-religious dialogue today must refocus on discovering a shared commitment to common social good and the creation of a “social spirituality” that can help retrieve a sense of community among people of different faiths. Participation in inter-religious demonstrations for peace and against poverty, war and violence, assisting victims of disasters, or joint affirmations of people’s religious rights in society are some acts that can promote a social spirituality. Thus dialogue is more than polite conversations among people of different faiths, rather it is the art and practice of getting through to one another, making us all aware of the mutual interdependence among human communities. (467 words)

Rev. Dr J. Paul Rajashekar is a Luther D. Reed professor of systematic theology and dean of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.



Inter-faith dialogue, the aspect of two or more faiths working together to address common concerns, poses a critical global concern in the 21st century.

Dialogue, the face-to-face engagement of people with different persuasions, is not aimed at conversion of the other or winning debate, rather at identifying together areas of mutual understanding. Religious dialogue as used in theological circles may not provide adequate alternatives to socio-economic and political challenges since it subscribes to doctrine, which is not easy to change. Inter-faith action or diapraxis, although hinging on inter-faith dialogue, goes beyond open discussion and allows for common activities.

According to Islamic law (*Sharia*), all human beings share ancestry and originated from one source—Adam and Hawwa. (Qur'an 4:1 “*Oh Mankind fear your Lord who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women*”)

Qur'an 49:13 expounds on the nature of human existence: “*Oh Mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another....*”

Ugandan Islamic theologian, Prof. Mahmood Mamdani echoes these Quranic references in his perception of the genesis of humanity, especially the African triple heritage. (M. Mamdani 2004¹).

East Africans possess a unique phenomenon of homogenous background, according to Kenyan scholar, Prof. Ali A. Mazrui. (A. Mazrui)². They share ancestry as well as religious hegemony. That further explains

Mazrui's “triple heritage” analysis: one person has a heritage of a Muslim (by religion), Ganda (by tribe) and a mixed semi-secular way of life. (A. Mazrui)³.

Islam allows for inter-faith collaboration: [Qur'an 60: 8; “*Allah does not forbid you from (dealing with) those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes...*” indeed Allah loves, those who act justly.]

Irrespective of one's religious affiliation, the unending global challenges, including conflict, diseases and poverty, compel faith-based communities to joint action for the common good. Diapraxis for peace and reconciliation then becomes inevitable and necessary in today's world. (350 words)

By Sheikh Hamid A. Byamugenzi, Uganda

¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, Pantheon Books 2004.

² Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa and Islamic Civilization: The East African Experience* Keynote Address at the International Symposium on “Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa,” Kampala, Uganda, 2003.

³ Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, BBC Publications & Little, Brown and Company.

Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together – An LWF Publication

Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together on the Way is the title of a publication in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Studies series. Published by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS), the book presents the results of an April 2002 LWF-sponsored consultation that brought together Muslim and Christian scholars in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to deliberate common concerns and seek ways of responding together to mutual challenges.

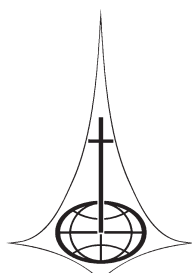
During the meeting at the Duca Wacana University, the 40 participants held frank and open discussions in the awareness that both Christians and Muslims are “people on the way” and that their common journey is spelt out in their respective traditions.

The book seeks to present a new paradigm summarized in the term “diapraxis”—suggesting that the conversation of people in dialogue should lead to joint action for the common good.

Two of the essays highlight the responsibility adherents of the two traditions have in society while other contributions tackle practical and down-to-earth issues such as inter-faith marriages, neighborliness, identity and reconciliation. In each case, the concerns are addressed from a Christian and a Muslim point of view. In order to give a sense of these grass-roots encounters four examples from Indonesia, Nigeria, Germany and England have been included in the volume.

The 177-page book is co-edited by Dr Ingo Wulffhorst, LWF-DTS Study Secretary for Church and People of Other Faiths, and Sigvard von Sicard, professor of Islamic studies at the Department of Theology, University of Birmingham, England.

Copies can be ordered from The Lutheran World Federation, Department for Theology and Studies, 150 Route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Tel. +41/22-791 6111, Fax +41/22-791 6630, E-mail uli@lutheranworld.org. Price CHF 10, EUR 10 or USD 10, plus postage. (304 words)



INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND DIAPRAXIS

Perspectives from the Regions

Experience of religious plurality varies from region to region, from country to country. The editorial team for this special LWI invited religious leaders, parish pastors, lay people and young adults, women and men from various religious backgrounds to share their experiences with regard to inter-faith dialogue and diapraxis.

Despite the diverse contexts in which they live—traditionally multi-religious societies or in societies with relatively recent experience of religious plurality—inter-religious encounter “inspires action for common good.” Diapraxis around a common project creates a “feeling of self-confidence, togetherness and trust,” and builds new bridges across ethnic and religious divide.

Africa

Sudan: Religious Dialogue – A Ray of Hope in Ending Africa’s Longest Civil War

Religion has played both positive and negative roles in Sudan’s history. With the exception of a fragile peace established after negotiations between southern insurgents (the Anya Nya) and the Sudan government in Addis Ababa in 1972, which lasted until the resumption of the conflict in 1983, southern Sudan has been a battlefield. The north-south distinction and the ensuing hostility are based on religious differences and on conflict between peoples of different cultures and languages. The north is mainly Arabic and Islamic, whereas the south has its own diverse, mostly non-Arabic languages and cultures with a predominantly non-Muslim population—mainly adherents of Christian belief or African Traditional Religion.

The brutal civil war for the past 21 years, pitting the northern-based Islamic government’s militias against the south’s Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), and related famine, have killed an estimated two million people. Humanitarian organizations estimate that four million Sudanese have been displaced internally or were forced to leave the country.

During natural and man-made disasters, religious organizations including many church-based international non-governmental organizations have distributed relief assistance to affected populations.



In Bahr-el-Ghazal, Southern Sudan, the LWF/DWS Kenya-Sudan program fosters economic self-reliance through a combination of rehabilitation and development-oriented projects, including blacksmiths’ work. © LWF/ B. Waddell



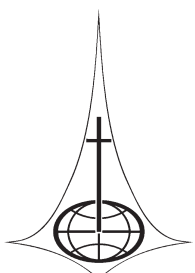
Traces of the civil war in Southern Sudan. © LWF/ B. Waddell

Church groups have been active mediators in peace negotiations between the different SPLM/A factions. Several SPLM/A policy documents over the years have stressed the role of religion in socio-economic and political development. Among the resolutions of the SPLM/A 1997 Kejiko I conference, was a call for the establishment of a liaison office between the movement and faith-based organizations and religious groups. This has resulted in the creation of the SPLM Secretariat for Religious Affairs (SRA), which deals with the registration, licensing and facilitation of the work of faith-based organizations in the south.

It is hoped that the January 2005 comprehensive peace accords signed in Kenya between the Khartoum government and the SPLM/A after nearly three years of negotiations, will end the two-decade long war, the longest in Africa’s history. The SRA hopes to be actively engaged in building a multi-religious society in the Sudan by promoting inter-faith dialogue between the Muslim majority and the minority of Christians and adherents of traditional religion. Such efforts would also go a long way in eliminating the culture of violence, hatred and prejudice.

(370 words)

By Moses Telar Cindut, SPLM/A Secretariat for Religious Affairs.



Sierra Leone: Keeping Hope Alive on an Elusive Path to Peace

For decades, Sierra Leone, despite varying political dynamics in the pre and post-independence era enjoyed relative peaceful co-existence among its 13 ethnic groups, adherents of Islam (60 percent), Indigenous beliefs (30 percent) and Christianity (10 percent). Then the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched a bush war against the government in 1991, and the extent of killings, violence and destruction of property and livelihoods that engulfed the small West African country for the next 11 years was unimaginable.



Rev. Marie J. Barnett.
© LWF/H. Putsman

It was simply a reign of terror: the rebel factions' forceful recruitment and drugging of child soldiers; indiscriminate rape of girls and women; chopping off of civilians' limbs; and other forms of torture. Tens of thousands were killed and over one-third of the population was displaced. In 1992 the military National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) took over power promising to crush the RUF, but it turned out to be a ruthless administration.

With a battered public service, and corrupt judicial system, people found strength and hope for the country in the resolve of the Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) to press for peacefully negotiated agreements to end the fighting. The IRCSL women were particularly involved in organizing peace marches, public radio addresses, discussions and so on. After massive street demonstrations led by women in 1995, a National Consultative Conference insisted on elections in 1996, and called for a negotiated settlement between the NPRC and RUF.

However, the armed struggle did not end with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's election. The women were involved in negotiating the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement between the government and the rebels, leading to the elusive peace Sierra Leone currently enjoys.

I pay tribute to my fellow country women and the several organizations they represented. Having lost so much to the senseless war, they still dared to act together for peace.

Nevertheless, the struggle continues as women advocate country-wide for peace building and conflict resolution mechanisms, for human rights, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, and the consolidation of peace within democratic parameters and inter-faith values. (347 words)

By Rev. Marie Jilo Barnett, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation.



Muslims, Christians and adherents of indigenous religions demonstrating for peace. © Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone

Asia

Nepal: Fighting Caste-Based Discrimination, HIV/AIDS with Religious Values

Nepal is the only constitutionally declared Hindu state in the world. Around 86 percent of its 27 million people are Hindus. Buddhists represent eight percent of the population, Muslims four percent, while Christians and the rest comprise about two percent. Religion occupies an integral part of Nepali life and society and includes codes for individual behavior and daily rites of worship.

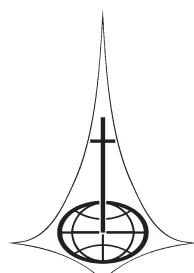
There is a great deal of interaction between Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. In fact, because of dual faith practices or mutual respect for each other's religion, there has been no major overt religious conflict.



Shashi Rijal, Coordinator for Advocacy and Development at LWF/DWS Nepal.
© LWF Nepal

One basic concept of Hinduism is *dharma*, a requirement that individuals play their respective role in society as determined or prescribed by the basic principles of cosmic or individual existence. Other perceptions of Hinduism include *karma* (universal justice); *samsara*—(the indefinitely repeated cycles of birth, misery, and death caused by *karma*); *maya* (illusion or earthly desires); and *moksha* (release from the endless cycle of rebirth).

Buddhism has its origins in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, a prince born in Lumbini, Nepal. The con-





A demonstration by a group of Bhutanese refugees attending the January 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai. One of the LWF seminars focused on the plight of Bhutanese refugees living in refugee camps in Nepal. © LWF/P. Prove

cepts of noble truths in Buddhism lead to the elimination of desire, rebirth and sorrow, and to the attainment of *nirvana* or *nibbana*, a state of bliss and selfless enlightenment. The Hindu *Brahmins* and Buddhist monks, whose main responsibility is to propagate their respective beliefs command much respect in Nepali society. Christianity and Islam are practiced in much the same way as in other countries all over the world.

Hinduism considers the caste system as a dharmic expression. In its activities, the Nepal program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) has mobilized religious leaders to advocate for the rights of the *Dalits* (belonging to

the lower caste, considered impure and un-touchable). LWF/DWS Nepal and its partner organizations successfully worked with Hindu religious leaders to impart virtues such as peace, compassion, equal treatment of all human beings, and the promotion of solidarity toward *Dalits*. With the help of religious teachers, *Dalits* were in many instances allowed to enter public places such as temples, hotels and water collection centers.

The spread of HIV/AIDS and the stigma that it fuels is one of the country's most serious challenges. In view of the trust and authority that the religious leaders enjoy, DWS Nepal engages them actively in bringing about change in people's perceptions, attitudes and behavior in the fight against the pandemic.

Religious leaders at the workshop.

Indeed, these leaders of faith communities can be particularly instrumental in eradicating the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with the disease. (432 words)

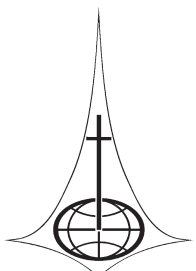
More information on the LWF program's activities can be found under www.azeecon-lwf.com

By Ms Shashi Rijal, coordinator for advocacy and development at LWF/DWS Nepal. A devout Hindu, Rijal was born and raised in a Brahmin family (highest caste in Hinduism) in Nepal.

India – “Peace Among Christians, Hindus and Muslims”



Eleven-year-old Ranjit Samal painted “Peace among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.” Ranjit has four brothers and one sister, and his father is a musician. The family lives in a slum area of Cuttack in Orissa state, northeast India. Through its Urban Development Project in the city, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) India program empowers vulnerable and marginalized families like Ranjit's to enhance their quality of life through sustainable livelihoods, food and security. © LWF/Ranjit Samal, 2003



Building Bridges Across Ethnic, Religious Divide in Kosovo

My name is Rexhep Lushta and I was born in Mitrovica on 18 August 1971. I attended elementary school locally, and completed my secondary school education at the Islamic Alaudin School in Pristina, Kosovo's capital. Between 1992 and 1998, I studied Islamic law at the Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia.

Upon graduation, I returned to Kosovo and was employed by the Council of the Islamic Community in Mitrovica. I have been working as Imam of Mitrovica city since January 1999. Since 2000, I have been involved in the work of the Kosovo Civil Society Foundation, and I am a member of Mitrovica's Community Council for Peace and Tolerance, and of the Civil Society Academy, a group supported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Kosovo is a small region in the Balkans. A province of Serbia, the majority of its population is of Albanian rather than Serb origin. Ninety percent of its two million people are Muslims. The ethnic conflict in the late 1990s not only resulted in unjustified loss of human life, it also led to the destruction of many holy sites. Indeed 218 mosques were burned down and damaged, with eight destroyed in Mitrovica alone.

Despite all this tragedy, leaders of different faith groups made an effort to rebuild a peaceful society. We organized inter-religious meetings supported by the World Vision, local and international non-governmental and governmental organizations, with the aim to re-establish a more tolerant social environment.



Imam Rexhep Lushta (third left) with some members of the "Council for Peace and Tolerance" in Mitrovica. © LWF/DWS Kosovo

We were actively involved in the establishment of the Center for Peace and Tolerance. In its initiatives aimed at promoting a safe and peaceful environment for all ethnic and faith communities, the group, among other activities, facilitates communication and dialogue between the various religious factions and organizes exchange visits.

In collaboration with the Balkans program of the Lutheran World Federation Department for World Service, we have organized several meetings between multi-ethnic youth groups in Kosovo.

As religious leaders, we remain committed to our work, and sincerely hope that Kosovo will soon regain peace and mutual tolerance to enable its population to coexist harmoniously. (354 words)

By Imam Rexhep Lushta, Mitrovica, Kosovo.

Christians and Muslims Build Relationships in Denmark

When the Lutheran World Federation Christian-Muslim study team carried out its first case study in Denmark in November 2003, team members voiced concern about an atmosphere of 'Islamic phobia' in the country. This became manifest, especially when the group met one Member of Parliament from the extreme nationalistic Danish People's Party, which constitutes the re-elected neo-liberal government. Instead of focusing on overcoming the fear of Islam and "foreigners," the party uses the faith aspect to gain votes, portraying Muslims as a problem to be dealt with.

One local analysis indicates that 80 percent of Danes have never talked to an immigrant. The *major-*

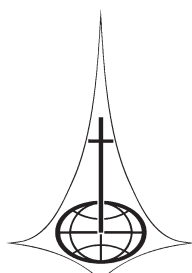


Prof. Lissi Rasmussen, Director of the Islamic-Christian Study Center in Copenhagen. © Private

ity and *minorities* learn about each other normally from the media which often give a one-sided negative image of Islam and Muslims. Myths and prejudices on both sides are easily created.

The Islamic-Christian Study Center was started jointly by Christians and Muslims together in 1996. Its objective is to build relationships between both sides through information sharing, dialogue, studies, debates, guidance and practical cooperation on an equal footing in view of the difficulties and challenges faced by Danes.

An example of such cooperation is a pioneer project started in 2004 among Muslim and Christian



ethnic minorities in hospitals. It involves courses for health workers, whereby 70 Christians and Muslims from minority ethnic backgrounds are being trained to visit hospitals to counsel patients and their relatives from similar settings. They also assist lonely people in old people's homes, prisons, asylum centers and private homes. The tutors are Christian pastors and Muslim medical doctors with both the theoretical and practical experience.

This type of diapraxis around a common project has created a feeling of self-confidence, togetherness and trust among the Christian and Muslim participants. They not only have a realistic picture of each other, they can also reflect theologically on their responsibility as believers, and the purpose of counseling.

Denmark is predominantly Christian with 95 percent of the country's 5.4 million people belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Ro-



Youth dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Denmark.
© Private

man Catholics and other Protestants make up three percent while Muslims represent two percent of the population. (354 words)

By Rev. Dr Lissi Rasmussen, Director of the Islamic-Christian Study Center in Copenhagen.

North America

North American Youth Inspired to Act Across Faith Boundaries

On April 9 and 10 this year, thousands of young people from different religious backgrounds will gather to fight homelessness and hunger in the United States of America, and build understanding across their traditions. The 2005 National Day of Inter-faith Youth Service will be marked in more than 50 cities and campuses, in partnership with organizations such as America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network and Habitat for Humanity.



April Kunze, director of National Programs for the Inter-faith Youth Core. © Private

The event is organized by the Inter-faith Youth Core (IFYC), a Chicago-based organization whose aim is to generate an international movement in which religious young people come together across faith boundaries to strengthen their own faith identities, build understanding across traditions and cooperate to serve the common good. IFYC was inspired by two critical realities: young people are at the front lines in religious conflicts around the world and many of history's greatest peace and justice movements were led by young people of faith. American civil rights advocate, Dr Martin Luther King Jr., was 26 when he led the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama; German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was 27 when he first publicly spoke out against Adolf Hitler's totalitarian-

ism within Germany at the time; and Indian legal practitioner Mahatma Gandhi was 24 when he launched the nonviolent resistance to racist laws in South Africa.

The three basic pedagogic goals of the IFYC are to: strengthen the religious identities of youth by requiring them to explore the teachings and applications of their faith; build understanding across traditions by asking youth to dialogue about how their religion inspires them to live out moral values; and encourage action for the common good by engaging youth in values-based community service projects.

As young people of faith build houses, collect food donations and tutor children this April, they will be taking the first steps toward creating model inter-faith youth cities and campuses. Many will go on to deepen and broaden their impact by creating inter-faith youth councils and service partnerships, outreach education programs and many other activities that further engage communities of faith in the pursuit of understanding and justice. (351 words)

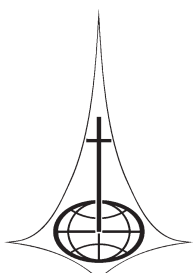
April Kunze is the director of National Programs for the Inter-faith Youth Core.

More information about IFYC at www.ifyc.org

New York's Pain, Anguish, Became a Bedrock of Faith Expression

On 11 September 2001 we watched the towers fall from our sixteenth floor windows of the Interchurch Center

on Riverside Drive, New York. At noon hundreds of us in the building gathered to pray. It was an inter-faith



gathering. In the part that I led, after speaking Psalm 23, I asked everyone present, as our prayer, to say before God the names of those downtown whose fate we did not know.

To hear those names in strangled voices of anguish, and to add my own, became the bedrock of a spiritual communal expression over the next months. In our most vulnerable and compassionate space, people's names became an expression of our various faith traditions.

The following evening at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, one image was often repeated: imams, pastors, rabbis and lay leaders together in prayer—expressions of faith as vehicles to a deep human longing.

The prayers grew legs. Where the windows of an Arab or Muslim building were broken, there appeared a hundred flowers. The Unity Task force in Brooklyn, a neighborhood inter-faith group founded by Arab Lutherans after the second *intifada*, became the architect of a safe space in the ensuing weeks. Jews, Muslims, Christians, linked with local political and law enforcement leaders held meetings, seminars, events in schools, community wide efforts to help us claim the spiritual solidarity humanness.



In front of New York City Hall: LDRNY Executive Director, Dr. John Scibilia, at microphone, advocates for marginalized victims of 9/11. © LDRNY

Today, Lutheran Disaster Response of New York (LDRNY) continues to play a vital role in the long-term recovery efforts in the wake of September 11. LDRNY served as a lead agency among all faith-based disaster response organizations, bringing together resources and opportunities for mission which could not be realized individually. It is a founding member of New York Disaster Inter-faith Services (NYDIS), set up to develop and lead faith-based

disaster readiness, response and recovery services for the metropolis. NYDIS membership includes Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim and Sikh disaster response organizations, with additional representation from the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities.

Advocating for the marginalized as a result of 9/11 has been an important unified effort, and has created assistance for victims who would not otherwise have received the helping hand they desperately needed. We have discovered in New York that inter-faith engagement begins with faith. By listening and acting we have found comfort and renewal in the metropolis. (392 words)

By Bishop Stephen P. Bouman, Metropolitan New York Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Latin America and the Caribbean

A Dialogue with Deni Indians in the Northwest Amazon Region

The colonization of Brazil brought about a clash of cultures that was disastrous for the country's Indigenous population, and which resulted in its decimation. Even the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) shares responsibility in this devastating colonization history, as its members were settled as immigrants in territories that were home to Indigenous people. This same conflict occurred repeatedly and is still occurring with the internal migration of IECLB members.

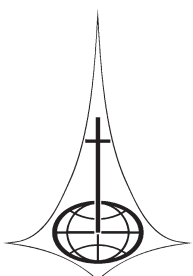


Rev. Walter Sass, Brazil. © elm/ E.-A. Lüdemann

The IECLB has meanwhile made a public statement recognizing its guilt in view of the Indigenous population (XXIV General Council in São Leopoldo, 16 October 2004). Particularly in the last 30 years, the church has called upon theologians and professionals with expertise in this area, to commit themselves to ensuring that the Indigenous people's rights with respect to their land, culture, traditions and religions are protected.

An example of this commitment is the work being carried out among the Deni Indians living near the Juruá River in the northwestern Amazon region. Work among the Deni started in 1998 when an IECLB staff person was sent to live among them, and to learn their language and culture. Initially, this was a process of listening to a population with a rich culture that is, unfortunately, only recognized by a few other people. The church called for a survey of land inhabited by the Deni. Indigenous teachers, teaching in both Portuguese and Deni language, and health care assistants, applying both

modern medical practices and traditional methods based on shamanism* and the use of medicinal plants, are now being encouraged. For the first time in Brazil, The IECLB Indian Council published a literary booklet and a collection of Deni mythologies, which reflect this Indigenous group's religious beliefs.



The Deni Indians, currently numbering a total of 900, first came into contact with rubber planters when the latter forced their way into their territory some 80 years ago. This resulted in open war, slavery, epidemics, and the destruction of the social structures. The Deni were met by people who officially called themselves Christians, but who wielded death and destruction instead of bringing a message of hope. Although the Indigenous people were baptized by Roman Catholic priests, Adventist and Pentecostal ministers on several occasions, no Christian congregation ever emerged. Bibles have been distributed among the Deni, and are read with interest, yet the people remain open to other religious approaches.

Both the land and life have religious meaning for the Deni, and nature's divine powers are closely linked to people's lives. Inter-religious dialogue is necessary, and both sides can learn from each other. According to Deni Indian mythology, the world was once upon a time a paradise. But the people defied Sinukari, the creator, and a great flood followed, destroying humanity. But two shaman brothers, Tamaku and Kira managed to save their lives in a canoe, and were thus able to create a new world.

If we are to start inter-religious dialogue, we need to bear in mind that the Holy Trinity, the Creator, who cast a rainbow after the flood as a sign of blessing for all peoples in the world, his son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in forgiveness and peace for all, and the Holy Spirit, who enabled all to communicate then and now, and who is present among all peoples, came to the peoples before the missionaries reached them (an interpretation of John 8:58).



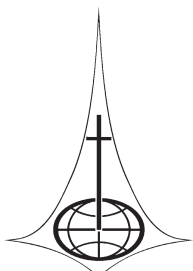
Saravi Deni. © H. Trein



Deni women and children wash household utensils at a stream.
© H. Trein

In February 2005, the secretary of the Lutheran Indigenous Council, Hans Trein, and IECLEB Amazon Synod pastor, Élio Scheffler, visited the Deni Indians. During this visit and in the presence of Indigenous teachers and a shaman, Saravi Deni, head of the village and health care assistant, made a statement regarding inter-religious dialogue. "The arrival of the rubber planters in our territory resulted in war and many deaths. Life changed drastically. There was no more celebration, no time to cultivate the fields; there was only hard work. Deni children grew up in the houses of the rubber planters, and were discriminated against as scroungers. We were exploited by the rubber planters, who did not pay us adequately for our work. The traders cheated us. At the beginning of the world, when darkness enveloped everything, there were neither wars nor conflicts. Wars and conflicts came into the world when day and night came about with the two sisters, Zumeniru and Vesheniru. Roman Catholic priests, who came to the Deni territory 30 years ago to baptize the people helped somewhat in alleviating the conflict."

Asked whether the encounter with other religions is an advantage or disadvantage, Saravi answered: "Religion which imposes itself, like in the case of one pastor who banned many things including our snuff, and eating the flesh of certain animals such as the Brazilian tapir, wild pigs, tortoises, some types of fish, or singing, dancing, and certain sexual practices, is annoying. Some of the Deni people complied with the new behavioral rules of the pastor and were bap-



tized, but they were permanently hungry. Those who refused did not suffer hunger. I asked the pastor why we had to live this way, and he responded 'so that we would be saved.' If we did not abide by the commandments, we would be living as sinners. I told him that we all die and so would he. Neither you or I have seen God, God has only appeared in my dreams."

Saravi continued: "Only our shamans have direct access to divine revelations. I do not know what a sin is. Sniffing snuff and eating animals' meat is no sin. God has created everything. You can live according to your commandments in the cities, but this does not work here. When I later met the pastor in Manaus once again, he asked me whether I was still a believer. I told him no, because I have eaten the meat of all kinds of animals. This is an inter-religious dialogue of a kind that we do not wish to have. There is only one God. We want our traditions, our culture, our religion, and our shamans to be respected. We will not give up our culture, our religion, and our mythology. Those who request us to do this will not be successful with us. God is the source of all religions. One religion can destroy the other, or can also be beneficial. Religion is important for peace. Everything in this world would have been destroyed by now if there had been no spiritual leaders. There are good and bad people among priests and ministers, and the same applies to shamans."

The religious dialogue started by the IECLB has made Deni Indians more aware of their own religion and culture, and has enabled the non-Indigenous population to get an insight into their way of life. This has helped to break down old prejudices about the Indians. (1,157 words)

By IECLB pastor Rev. Walter Sass and Deni leader, Saravi Deni.

Rev. Walter Sass, 55, was born in Wolfsburg, Germany. He has been working as a pastor of the IECLB in the new settlement areas in the Amazon region. He was actively involved with the Kulina Indians for seven years, and has been with the Deni since 1998. He is the deputy pastor of the IECLB Amazon Synod.

Saravi Deni, age 39, is a village head and health care assistant. In 2004 he was elected as deputy Member of Parliament for Itamarati district, Amazonas State, Brazil. He is the first Indigenous people's representative in the district's history.

* Shamanism: Religious practice by Indigenous people under the leadership of shamans (priests) who contact spirits and ancestors for the purpose of divining, healing and controlling events.

LWF Publications on Inter-faith Dialogue

In recent years, inter-faith dialogue has become an increasingly important aspect of the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) with many initiatives being taken in the quest for greater inter-faith understanding and co-existence.

Three new books represent the culmination of a considerable amount of work that has been underway in the office for the Church and People of Other Faiths, LWF Department for Theology and Studies. Further work, especially in the areas of Christian-Muslim dialogue and spiritualistic movements will be forthcoming from this office.

Hance A. O. Mwakabana (ed.), *Multifaith Challenges Facing the Americas...and Beyond* (LWF Studies 01/2002), 160 pp., USD 10, CHF 16 or EUR 10.50 – This collection of essays provides a glimpse into the enormously rich fabric of multi-faith realities in what constitutes North, Central and South America. The contributions include provocative theological reflections on the implications of religious pluralism in the Americas for the witness of the church there and elsewhere. Concrete examples show what could be done in meaningful ways to share the different faith experiences and underline the need for continued inter-faith dialogue.

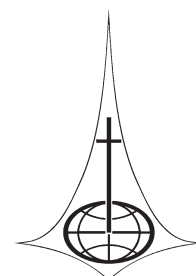
Hance A. O. Mwakabana (ed.), *Crises of Life in African Religion and Christianity* (LWF Studies 02/2002), 145 pp., USD 10, CHF 16 or EUR 10.50 – In this book, writers from Christian and African religious traditions share their respective theological/spiritual perspectives regarding rituals

related to death, as well as the strong African sense of life beyond all human suffering and death. This is an important area of dialogue between African Religion and Christianity.

The authors provide reasons for why Africans have managed, to this day, to nurture an incredible sense of hope in spite of the shadows and stark reality of death. Furthermore, there are reflections comparing African and biblical/theological understandings on health, sickness and healing, and rituals carried out in families and communities.

Theodore Ludwig and Hance A. O. Mwakabana (eds.), *Explorations of Love and Wisdom: Christians and Buddhists in Conversation* (LWF Studies 03/2002), 226 pp., USD 10, CHF 16 or EUR 10.50 – Christians and Buddhists in dialogue realize the relevance of each other's spiritual resources and practices as they seek to bring fuller peace and wholeness to human communities. In this book Christians and Buddhists reflect on spiritual practices as a resource of life and how Buddhists and Christians are caring for people in their daily concerns and crises. Besides the "dialogue of life," and thinking and working together on common concerns and problems, there are theological, practical and historical perspectives on Christian relations with Buddhists.

The books may be ordered from The Lutheran World Federation, Department for Theology and Studies, 150 Route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. E-mail uli@lutheranworld.org. (453 words)



DIAPRAXIS FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION
A Youth Perspective

Toward Tolerance and Respect, Not Uniformity

I am a 25-year-old Muslim woman. A graduate in legal studies, I work in a multi-faith organization where the majority of employees are Christians. Being in a Christian environment has not adversely affected my relations with my fellow colleagues. We have, however, all accepted that although we come from different faiths, we can actually live together peacefully.



Mwanakitina Saggaff.
 © Private

Although it has not always been easy dealing with various issues, I particularly try to be tolerant and patient with my col-

leagues. My aim is to accommodate and respect everyone for who they are and what they believe in.

In conclusion, the most important thing one has to bear in mind is that we are all different and we cannot strive for uniformity especially when we come from different faiths. Once we accept this, observe tolerance, and have respect toward one another, only then will we be able to co-exist peacefully. (154 words)

By Mwanakitina Saggaff, 25, from Kenya.

Come and See: A Response to Claims that Religions Cannot Coexist Peacefully

A Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, and a Baha’i, are sitting at a dinner table. In the past, this alone would signal the start of a comedy routine. However, in today’s integrated world, contact with various religions is increasingly becoming a daily reality for millions of people.



Babak Mostaghimi.
 © Private

My name is Babak Mostaghimi and I am a Baha’i. As a Baha’i, I have been taught to revere the different religions to which other people belong. The above scenario at a dinner table depicts the variety of friends that I have made through inter-faith work. Each week, a group of us gathers to discuss our faith traditions and our inter-faith activities. Through our dialogue and service, we have all understood, that in spite of our differences, we share a common humanity. Each night, I watch

the news and am shocked by the bloody religious conflicts and claims that religions cannot coexist peacefully. My response to these allegations is: come to Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and see how people of all religions serve humanity together. Inter-faith work creates peace by overcoming ignorance and showing everyone that we are all bound by our common humanity and by countless unexplored ties. (208 words)

By Babak Mostaghimi, president of JHU Baha’i Club, and member of the university’s Inter-faith Council. Mostaghimi, 21, is a third-year student of International Relations and Economics at the JHU in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He is currently an intern at the JHU Bunting-Meyerhoff Inter-faith and Community Center.

Geneva Inter-Religious Youth Platform Promotes Encounters That Present ‘The Other’

There are different factors that transform and develop our identity and human consciousness. Being in contact with the other, who has a different horizon, a different experience of life, is one of these principal factors. Through dialogue, we learn not only about the other but also about ourselves. We confront our own identity to the richness of other people. Within that framework, I have participated in meetings of the inter-religious youth platform, “Plateforme interreligieuse jeunesse,” a forum that brings together young people from all religions in Geneva. Our activities have mainly included dialogues and discussions that are built around different topics, enabling us to discover various ways of interpreting certain subjects according to our diverse backgrounds and religions.

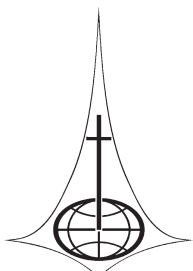


Arielle Herzog.
 © Private

Discovering our respective religious and cultural environments promotes better understanding of each other. We therefore plan to set up inter-religious events when the different faith communities mark special occasions. The first one would be organized around the Jewish traditional meals of Shabbat, the weekly resting day in the Jewish faith. We hope that this meal would allow each participant to discover the richness and depth of this holy day within Judaism.

Through such encounters between minorities and people of different faiths, we are able to build bridges that promote tolerance among individuals. (220 words)

By Arielle Herzog. Herzog, 25, is a member of the Plateforme interreligieuse jeunesse in Geneva, Switzerland. She is Jewish.



Challenging, Changing Each Other in the Cradle of Monotheistic Religions

The Holy Land has endured a long history of suffering and unrest. Circumstances surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have now reached dangerous points, and the highly militarized and politicized situation has taken its toll on ordinary people on many fronts. This unrest takes away from us valuable resources that should otherwise be allocated toward social welfare. Instead, such wealth goes to service a military machine that is ever hungry for more, and that denies ordinary people their humanity.

But whatever the outcome of the events now taking place in an effort to resolve the conflict, I believe there is something in the long history of this region that will continue to influence the lives of its inhabitants. I believe that people change and that daily, new experiences prompt us to new understandings and



Annaliza Younan.
© Private

decisions because the grace of God is powerfully at work in each of our lives.

As people of faith, belonging to the three monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism—we ought to challenge and change each other with these questions: How can we be so merciless and unforgiving regarding other persons? How can we be illogical when dealing with issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

We should be guided by the right logic when dealing with other people, Palestinian or Israeli; Christian, Jewish or Muslim. (227 words)

By Annaliza Younan. Younan, 23, is a Palestinian, and a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land. A business graduate of Bethlehem University, she currently works as a project manager assistant with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bethlehem.

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND DIAPRAXIS...

The last chapter of this LWI special assembles feature and background stories. It looks more closely at the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) and at the role of women in peace building. It introduces the work of LWF Department for World Service program in Mauritania.

IFAPA: Making People of Different Faiths “Become Friends”

Peace is a basic element in every religion. Despite our religious diversity, we all preach the same values of morality, solidarity, forgiveness and love. These commonly shared values are necessary to combat violence and conflict in all its forms, and as catalysts to greater cooperation between faith communities.

However, the lack of genuine dialogue remains a major obstacle in the search for genuine inter-religious collaboration and understanding. It involves not

only a mere acceptance and respect of each other’s beliefs but also the desire for better understanding of the ‘other’s’ faith.

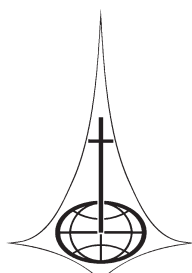
Genuine dialogue from my point of view starts from the grassroots—our daily lives within our respective communities. It is not sufficient to simply accept one’s African Traditional Religion, Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish or Muslim neighbors. Indeed, it is crucial to get to know them and interact with them in order to eliminate mutual stereotypes and prejudicial images about each other.

Unfortunately, religious diversity has also been used for political and other purposes, which all the more emphasizes the need for inter-faith cooperation. This is the vision of the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), a process initiated by the Lutheran World Federation with the aim of enabling religious communities across Africa to work together to promote peace on the continent.

Over the past three years, IFAPA has been active in the implementation of its Johannesburg Plan of Action, which includes religious leaders’ commitments to peace building initiatives in Africa. Participants in the process have witnessed the positive impact of inter-faith cooperation as people get to know each other, live together, and share routine aspects of life.



A delegation of the Inter-faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) on a solidarity visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2004.
© IFAPA



Undoubtedly, we have succeeded in making people of different faiths “become friends.”

When human beings come together in mutual respect for each other, many positive things can happen, even spontaneously. Regardless of one’s religion, harmony and friendships have been established. People of different faiths have shared rooms, exchanged gifts, grieved with each other in sorrow, and celebrated in moments of happiness like a child’s birth. I must admit, for all this to have happened in such a short time, was

beyond the expectations of many people involved in this process. These and other examples of practical inter-faith dialogue experienced at grassroots level throughout IFAPA’s journey indicate that genuine di-apraxis, or dialogue, at grassroots level is crucial in overcoming religious differences. (397 words)

By Sheikh Saliou Mbacké, coordinator of the Nairobi (Kenya)-based IFAPA. Mbacké is a member of the Mourid Community, a Muslim Sufi order founded in Touba, Senegal in 1888.

West African Women Build Peace Across Religious Divide

There is a saying in Nigeria that “*When Kaduna State sneezes, the whole country gets a cold,*” This was indeed the situation during what became known as the Shariah conflict in Kaduna. Once a peaceful haven and microcosm of Nigeria, Kaduna State is now identified as a hotbed of inter-religious violence. The Shariah conflict of 2000, polarized the state along religious lines, and built a tangible dichotomy between Christians and Muslims characterized by a high level of mutual mistrust and suspicion.



Thelma Ekiyor at the first IFAPA Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, October 2002. © LWF/ G. Wulfsohn

In this context, the prospect for peace was far fetched but the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) saw an opportunity for Christian and Muslim women in Kaduna to bridge the gap and begin the process of rebuilding relationships. WIPNET, a member of the the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), brought women together for peacebuilding training workshops. Through a strategic exercise of conflict analysis, both sides realized that the conflict affected them equally. As one woman put it, “the gun did not ask us if we were Christian or Muslim before it shot.” Both sides had faced the same loss, dehumanization and fear, and now had the same level of distrust of the other side. Using an exercise where scriptures from both the Bible and Qua’ran were analyzed, women noted that both religions preach peace highly value the role of women.

Further analysis revealed that women have faced widespread discrimination and exclusion in both religions, and that by uniting and working together, they could use build peace in Kaduna, rather than be divided by a conflict that was targeting everyone in the State.

In 2001 establishment Kaduna State chapter of WIPNET was established. In 2002, the group lobbied the state government and organized a women’s inter-faith peace event. At this landmark gathering the women issued a peace declaration, which among other aspects acknowledged women as natural instruments for peace building.

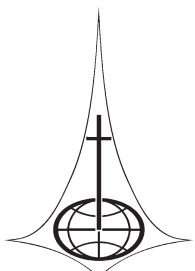
Kaduna have shown Nigeria and indeed the rest of Africa that religion can be used as an ally for peace. WIPNET Kaduna is currently using individual and collective commitment to foster peace in the state, and to condemn all forms of violence and gender discrimination. The aim is to get women to read and study religious literature for themselves, and identify what roles they can play in promoting peace and social justice. (389 words)

By Thelma Ekiyor, WANEP Director of Programs. Ekiyor is a founder of WIPNET. She served as co-ordinator for the West African region. Among other engagements in peace building initiatives, she worked as a consultant to the United Nations, and was part of a team of experts who designed conflict resolution and early warning modules for Africa.

The Time to Start Is Now—Engaging South Africa’s Young People in Peace Initiatives

On 20 March 2000, a youth peace conference was held for representatives from many schools in the greater Durban area, South Africa. During the interactive program, young graduates from the University of Natal gave their input as to what young men and women

could do in dealing with issues such as HIV/AIDS, peace, gender, human rights and domestic violence. The KZN Youth Peace Forum is now an ongoing event, involving some 40 schools with 80 to 100 students participating in various workshops.





International Day of Peace: High school students bring their creativity to a peace workshop in South Africa. © WCRP-South Africa

The forum is one of the initiatives that grew out of a 1997 partnership between the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) and the Council of KZN Jewry Human Rights Forum with a focus on educational activities that provide a perspective on human rights, peace education, prejudice and gender equality. There are diverse programs involving students in high schools, teachers, inter-faith youth, religious leaders and inter-faith women's organizations.

"When Racism Becomes Law," is another program targeted at schools. It is a travelling exhibition that includes a 20-poster display on the Holocaust, another 20 posters on the apartheid era, and a brief look at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The exhibit also highlights the influence of people like

Anne Frank (Jewish victim of Nazi persecution during World War II, whose diary has been published in several languages); apartheid struggle icons, Nelson Mandela (South Africa) and Mahatma Gandhi (India) on South Africa's peace process.

"The Peace Quilt Project," is a favorite among young people. Through this program, a number of schools each year create beautiful peace quilts to commemorate International Day of Peace while learning about peace and human rights. These quilts are distributed to babies living with HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable children. As many as 150 quilts have been created by students.

Our Jewish values and ethics state clearly that we must face the world and its suffering head-on, exhorting us to engage in study and moral debate. We are urged to raise questions about our world and ourselves, and affirm that we as Jews are here to enhance life, to struggle and repair this broken and incomplete world in which we live.

As the guardians of moral values, religious leaders have an obligation to speak out at all times about the sanctity of all life and the importance of every single human being. Their unique voice should be heard in every community, bringing the people together in peace, justice and understanding. We have a long way to go, but as our sages tell us, "It is not for us to complete the task, but neither may we not begin the work... and the time to start is NOW!" (457 words)

By Paddy Meskin president of the WCRP chapter in South Africa. Meskin is Jewish.

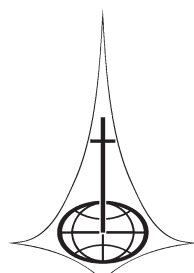
Mauritania's Political, Faith Leaders Stress Need for Religious Tolerance

Speaking serenely but firmly, Sheikh Khalil Ould Cheikhny emphasized: "We need a reformation, not fanaticism, to solve the problems in Africa." The Muslim dignitary was speaking to an audience of 500 people seated inside a large Bedouin tent discussing what inter-faith dialogue entails, together with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, and members of his delegation.

Inside the tent sparsely lit with neon lights, oversized transparent banners revealed the Muslim village community's willingness to be engaged in open discussion. The declaration of the nearly 3,000 inhabitants of Maata Moulana reads "Yes to Inter-Faith Cooperation toward Peace in Africa and in the World." The settlement, a spiritual center which attracts Qur'anic students from the whole of West Africa and many other countries, is located 180 kilometers southeast of the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott.



In Mauritania, an inter-faith dialogue discussion inside a Bedouin tent: Far left, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko; second left, IFAPA coordinator Sheikh Saliou Mbacké. © LWF/ D.-M. Gröttsch



Sheikh Khaithy Ould Moma pointed out, "We wish to cooperate in order to be able to live peacefully in Africa." The differences should not be overemphasized, because Islam does not distinguish itself from Jesus [Christ] and Mary [the mother of Jesus] all that much." As a proof of Islamic tolerance in Mauritania, he referred to the fact that there is a church located right opposite the mosque in Nouakchott, an opinion shared by many of the sheikhs and imams present. In their statements, they all stressed their willingness to be engaged in inter-religious dialogue including a focus on the common origins and values of Islam and Christianity, and the tolerant approach of the Islamic religion in Mauritania.



Hadama Abakar, 26, a teacher at the Qur'anic school in Toumbouyali, where 125 pupils are attending classes. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

Noko pointed out that Africa was going through a severe crisis, and described the common fight against poverty, human rights issues, the role of women in society, the fight against HIV/AIDS, as well as resolving and preventing conflicts as major concerns. He stressed the time had come for religious leaders to seek common solutions to respond to the urgent need for healing on the continent.

The general secretary hopes to see such support at the Second Inter-Faith Action for Peace Summit in Africa to be held in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, near Johannesburg, South Africa April 2005. In Nouakchott, when he met with 80 Muslim dignitaries, government and non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) representatives and journalists, Noko spoke about the need for inter-faith dialogue in Africa. His February 22–26 visit was

subject poverty and other marginalized communities.

Over 99 percent of the 2.8 million people in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania are Muslims, with only a dwindling minority of Christians. Noko described the several decades of close cooperation between the LWF and Mauritanian government as a remarkable testimony that the Abrahamic religions were able to work together in numerous areas in mutual respect of each other, and on the basis of common values.



Activities of the LWF/DWS Mauritania program include human rights and gender issues, targeting mainly poor and vulnerable socio-economic groups. © LWF/ D.-M. Grötzsch

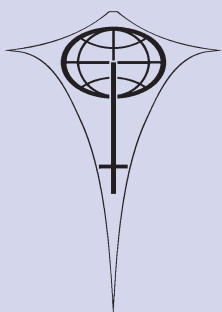
to mark the 30th anniversary of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) presence in the northwestern African country.

The LWF has been active in Mauritania through the DWS program since October 1974, following severe consequences of a prolonged drought that started in the early 1970s. Although the field program initially focused its work on disaster and emergency humanitarian assistance, its scope has since expanded to include the promotion of an integrated community. There are projects that help to mobilize and support local NGOs, increase HIV/AIDS awareness, promote environmental protection, advocacy and human rights related activities, gender issues, as well as support to rural population groups living in

During a meeting with Mauritanian President, Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, the LWF general secretary stressed the need for the kind of tolerance practiced in Mauritania.

(593 words)

By Dirk-Michael Grötzsch, LWI German editor, who was in Nouakchott for the DWS Mauritania 30th anniversary celebrations.



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