

**The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches**

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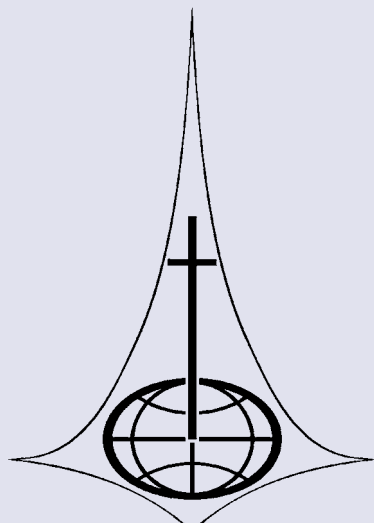
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Tribute to Former LWF Vice-President Prasanna Kumari

A former vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari died on 16 March at the Apollo Hospital in Chennai, India, following a massive cardiac arrest. She was 56 years old.

Kumari, LWF vice-president for the Asia region, 1997–2003, was at the time of her death vice-president of the National Council of Churches in India, and head of the department for women studies at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, India.

Prior to her election as LWF vice-president, Kumari had served on the LWF Council as chairperson of the Program Committee for Theology and Studies, 1990–1997. She was a member of the theology and studies' committee from 1997 until 2000, when she was appointed chairperson of the then newly created LWF Standing Committee for World Service. She served as regional coordinator of the LWF Committee on Women in Church and Society (WICAS), 1984–1989 and was a member of the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, 1986–1992.



*Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari at the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada.
© LWF/D. Zimmermann*

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The Church of Sweden elected Bishop Anders H. Wejryd as Archbishop of Uppsala, 30 March. He effectively becomes the head of the Swedish Lutheran church. Wejryd has been a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council since 2003, and is chairperson of the LWF Project Committee.

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Nicaraguan Flor de Maria Mendoza has worked as a salesperson in a small-scale business in Santa Rosa de Lima, El Salvador, for ten years. She is a migrant worker, who has herself on several occasions been a witness to and victim of open discrimination against migrant populations in El Salvador.

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LWF Internet Forum on Theology in the Church

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) has launched a new Internet-based discussion forum for its "Theology in the Life of the Church" global initiative. Started on 4 April, www.luthersem.edu/lwfdiscuss provides initial papers and a discussion forum, where one can sign up at no cost, read what has been posted or participate in the forthcoming discussions.

The current focus is *Confessing and living out faith in the triune God* in the face of

- death and injustice (track 1)
- multi-faith challenges (track 2)
- charismatic and Pentecostal challenges (track 3)
- moral differences that threaten church unity (track 4).

A basic premise is that theology *can* and *does* make a difference in the life of the church worldwide. Through this forum, DTS aims to bring together theologians from the different parts of the world to share mutually from their diverse backgrounds, contexts and approaches, insights on theological writing that can contribute in significant ways to deepening the self-understanding of the life and practices of churches globally. The Web-based interaction will allow its users to exchange information and ideas, support and mutually challenge one another on the focus subjects.

For further information, please contact: Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, Director, LWF 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 kbl@lutheranworld.org (240 words)

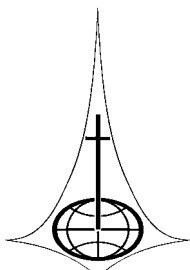
New Christian Council of Norway to Include All Major Churches

Two church groupings in Norway have agreed to form a national body that will include all the major churches in the country. The new body will be formally inaugurated on 1 September 2006. It will include the major Christian denominations—Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic. The impending merger was agreed at separate meetings of the Christian Council of Norway (CCN) and the Norwegian Free Church Council on 30 March.

Established in 1992 as a national council of churches with a broad ecumenical agenda, the CCN groups all major denomi-

nations except the Pentecostal movement. The Council of Free Churches was founded in 1903 as an instrument for the free churches to promote their religious rights in a country where the (Lutheran) Church of Norway was a state church. The willingness of representatives of the Pentecostal movement to work together with the Catholic Church is seen as a key element in the founding of the impending new church body.

The two church groupings that are merging have shared offices at Oslo's Church House since 2000. (186 words)
(*Ecumenical News International*)



Tribute to Former LWF Vice-President Prasanna Kumari

“A Strong Advocate for Equality Among Women and Men”

GENEVA, 16 March 2006 (LWI)

– A former vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari died on 16 March at the Apollo Hospital in Chennai, India, following a massive cardiac arrest. She was 56 years old.

Kumari, LWF vice-president for the Asia region, 1997–2003, was at the time of her death vice-president of the National Council of Churches in India, and head of the department for women studies at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, India.

Prior to her election as LWF vice-president, Kumari had served on the LWF Council as chairperson of the Program Committee for Theology and Studies, 1990–1997. She was a member of the theology and studies’ committee from 1997 until 2000, when she was appointed chairperson of the then newly created LWF Standing Committee for World Service. She served as regional coordinator of the LWF Committee on Women in Church and Society (WICAS), 1984–1989 and was a member of the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue, 1986–1992.

Kumari was a co-editor of *From Federation to Communion – The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, published in 1997, to mark the 50th anniversary of the LWF. In her capacity as the Asian region vice-president, Kumari was among the LWF representatives who signed the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany.

In his tribute to Kumari’s tremendous contribution to the life of the church globally and nationally, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, said in a statement today, she will be remembered “in the Lutheran communion as a strong advocate for equality among women and men.” In a statement issued on 16 March, he recalled her fearless struggle for justice, her compassion toward the poor and vulnerable, and her devotion to helping women find their equal place in church and society.



Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari at the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada. © LWF/D. Zimmermann

The general secretary cited Kumari’s conviction that “working for and with the poor” was one of the effective ways to witness for Christ in India. This was evident through her active participation in several projects aimed at assisting women living in slum areas to claim their rights to livelihood and progress.

The former LWF vice-president served as executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) for two three-year terms since 1992, and as the organization’s women’s secretary, 1982–1992. Among other responsibilities in the region, she was chairperson of the Advisory Committee for Theological Education in Asia (ACTEAS).

Kumari had taught New Testament and Women’s Studies at the Gurukul theological college since 1985. She received a bachelor of theology degree from the Hindustan Bible Institute and College, in Chennai, India, and a bachelor of divinity and master of theology from the United Theological College in Bangalore. She held a doctor of divinity from the Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration in Chennai.

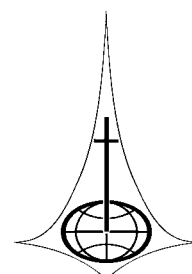
Posthumous Doctorate

At the time of her death, Kumari was a Ph.D. student at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), Illinois, USA, scheduled to graduate in May 2006. The LSTC conferred on her a posthumous doctorate in systematic theology based on her dissertation, *Dalit Women’s Experiences: A Theological Imperative for Constructing Indian Feminist Theology*.

The Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari is survived by her husband, Rev. Dr Samuel Meshack, dean at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, their two daughters and one grandchild.

(578 words)

*Her funeral was on 22 March in Chennai.



Anders Wejryd Elected Archbishop of Uppsala

LWF General Secretary Congratulates Newly Appointed Leader of Swedish Lutheran Church

UPPSALA, Sweden/GENEVA, 1 April 2006 (LWI) – The Church of Sweden elected Bishop Anders H. Wejryd as Archbishop of Uppsala, 30 March. He effectively becomes the head of the Swedish Lutheran church.

Wejryd has been a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council since 2003, and is chairperson of the LWF Project Committee.

Born in 1948, Wejryd, currently bishop of the Diocese of Växjö in the south, was the first head of the Swedish Lutheran church to be appointed by the church itself. Prior to the change of relations between the church and state in 2000, all bishops were appointed by the government. As the 69th Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, he will be succeeding incumbent Archbishop K. G. Hammar, who has led the church since 1997.

Wejryd received 176 out of a possible 320 votes against 127 for Bishop Ragnar Persenius in the final and determinative round of elections, the Church of Sweden said. The new archbishop will be installed on 2 September 2006 at the Cathedral of Uppsala.

Congratulating Wejryd, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said the election was significant not only for the Swedish church, the largest LWF member church [with nearly 7 million members], but also ecumenically.

In the new archbishop-elect, said Noko in a statement issued 31 March, the Church of Sweden would have a person who “will bring to his ministry deep knowledge of peoples’ concerns and difficulties. Out of deep commitment to service based on faith in Christ, he will seek to address these concerns in our globalized and rapidly changing world.”

The general secretary cited Wejryd’s ecumenical experience, and contribution to the LWF especially as a Council member and chairperson of the LWF Project Committee, both of which focus on a broad range of activities in which the Lutheran churches worldwide co-



Newly appointed Uppsala Archbishop Anders H. Wejryd. © Jim Elfström/Ikon

operate. Through this committee, noted Noko, “he has challenged us to see our calling as a communion of churches: to be a tool for building just, inclusive, participatory and self-sustaining communities, bringing positive change to people’s lives in many parts of the world.”

Noko also paid tribute to the contribution of Archbishop Hammar, who he said had led the Church of Sweden through a significant phase of change, particularly to its current autonomous structure. As chairperson of the LWF Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, 1997–2003, Hammar contributed “very substantially to the ecumenical work and profile of the Federation,” the general secretary said.

LWF’s 60th Anniversary

Noko said he looked forward to cooperating with the new archbishop as the LWF prepares for its 60th anniversary celebrations to be held in March 2007 in the Swedish city of Lund, where the Federation was founded in 1947.

Wejryd was ordained as a pastor for the Diocese of Västerås in 1972, and consecrated Bishop of Växjö in 1995. Between 1987 and 1995, he was director of the Diaconal Institute of Ersta in Stockholm. He has been moderator of the national organization for psychotherapy and pastoral counseling (St Lukas) and head of the Swedish Church Press.

He has also chaired the Church of Sweden Aid Council and is currently a member of the Executive Board for International Mission and Diaconia in the Church of Sweden, and chairperson of the Church of Sweden Committee on Ecumenical Issues.

Archbishop-elect Anders H. Wejryd is married to Kajsa Wejryd, a school inspector, and they have three grown-up children.

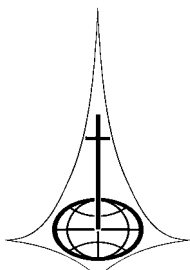
(579 words)

Swedish Lutheran Church Official Sees Hope for Restored Relations with Russian Orthodox

Multilateral Partnership Continues Under Regional Church Council

UPPSALA, Sweden/GENEVA, 12 April 2006 (LWI) – A Church of Sweden official from the northern diocese of Luleå sees hope for the resumption of bilateral

relations between the Swedish Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches. The relations were suspended after an October 2005 vote by the Swedish church’s



General Synod to introduce a special service of blessing for civil partnerships.

“We regret that the Russian Orthodox Church has come to this decision. They take a ‘time-out’ in our bilateral co-operation,” Ms Inger Aasa-Marklund, the Luleå diocese international and ecumenical officer said of the decision by the Russian church. “We hope it will be possible to resume it [the co-operation] in the future,” she added in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

Announcing the bilateral relations’ suspension in a statement issued by its Holy Synod in December 2005, the Russian Orthodox Church said the Swedish church had not only failed to “oppose the so-called same-sex marriages, but also issued a decree to establish an official blessing rite for those same marriages.”

The decision by the Swedish church implies that a couple in a formally recognized partnership, including a same-sex civil partnership, is entitled to an official blessing of the relationship in a Church of Sweden parish.

The ten-year co-operation involving the Lutheran Diocese of Luleå and Orthodox Diocese of Murmansk-Montjegersk included activities such as joint conferences on Sunday-school work, issues on environmental protection, health camps and regular visits by church delegations.

Cancelled Events

Because of the suspended bilateral relations, some events planned for 2006 have been cancelled. They include two health camps for Russian children in northern Sweden, and the Diocese of Luleå’s 19–24 April journey to Murmansk to share in the Russian Easter Sunday celebration on 23 April.

Aasa-Marklund expressed appreciation that contact between both churches is continuing under the Council of Christian Churches in the Barents Region, an over ten-year multilateral partnership comprising Lutheran and Orthodox dioceses in Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden. The issue of sus-

pending relations was discussed early this year in the context of the council’s ordinary meetings.



Dr Göran Möller, secretary for theology, Church of Sweden. © Jim Eluström/Ikon

Proposed Liturgical Order

Meanwhile on 13 March, the Church of Sweden Central Board sent the proposed liturgical order for the optional act of blessing for legally recognized partnerships to its 13 dioceses. Church of Sweden Secretary for Theology, Dr Göran Möller, who was involved in preparing the proposed liturgical order, said the criticism raised by the Russian Orthodox Church [and separately by the (Anglican) Church of England in January 2006] had been taken seriously by

the Church of Sweden, but not to the extent of discontinuing the drafting procedure of the new order. A churchwide decision on the proposal is expected later this year.

Option Existed in Pastoral Context

Möller explained that the Swedish church’s general synod decision was not about introducing a same-sex marriage act, but rather about an optional act of blessing for couples whose partnerships were registered by a civil authority. The issue of cohabitation, he told *LWI*, had been on the agenda of the church’s governing bodies over recent years, with theological discussions on the subject throughout the country at diocesan and parish levels.

“This option has existed in the Church of Sweden since 1995, although in the more private context of pastoral counseling,” Möller told *LWI*. But what would be new, he explained, would be the more explicit recognition of an act of the church in a public service.

Around 77 percent of Sweden’s 9 million people belong to the Church of Sweden. With nearly 7 million members, it is the largest member church of the Lutheran World Federation.

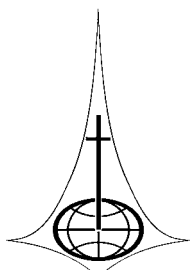
(618 words)

(Reported by Luleå-based journalist, Håkan Sjunnesson.)



Ms Inger Aasa-Marklund, Church of Sweden. © Haakan Sjunnesson

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www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html



New Dynamics of Church Reform Debate in Central Germany

Central German Church Federation Aims at Merger in 2009

EISENACH/MAGDEBURG, Germany/GENEVA, 13 April 2006 (LWI) – It came as a surprise: a few weeks after the constitutional commission of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Central Germany (EKM-Föderation Evangelischer Kirchen in Mitteldeutschland) started its work in January this year, the joint church board of the Evangelical Church of the Province of Saxony and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thuringia already announced its proposed plan mid-February. From 2009 onward the two sections of the church will merge—with one bishop and one head office for the nearly 1 million Protestant Christians across Sonneberg (Thuringia) and Salzwedel (Church of the Province of Saxony).

This has brought new dynamics to the discussion about the future of EKM, which was established in mid-2004. It is now a question of giving concrete shape to what the two neighboring churches in the last few years have called the most important issue in their joint existence: to work more efficiently as a result of simplified structures and better services, and avoid work duplication at intermediate and higher levels, in order to serve their congregations more effectively.

Demographic Changes

One of the consequences of the impending merger would be the reconsideration of church borders inherited from the 19th century—which determine that parts of the Church of the Province of Saxony belong today to the Free State of Thuringia including its regional capital, Erfurt. But, above all, the churches involved want to deal with the issue of declining financial resources in view of a decreasing membership. This trend is not only a church problem but also an expression of continuing demographic changes resulting from people leaving the area and a low birth rate, which have led to declining income from church taxes. “As the church in Thuringia, we now have to face up to this issue if we want to continue to be able to act, rather than being overtaken by events,” stressed Eisenach Bishop Christoph Kähler, vice-chairperson of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thuringia.

The first steps have already been taken. The church headquarters, governing boards and synods are working together through a common administration and as joint bodies, but in different locations. The brass bands and women’s work have been merged. The most recent outcome of the process was the “Center for Church Music” which was opened in March in Erfurt.

But there is more at stake in the intended unification. The current discussion about the future bishop’s seat also relates to the perception of the two big Protestant churches in their traditional federal regions of Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, both considered to be “core regions of the Reformation.”

At the 30 March–1 April EKM synod in Halle, Germany, it was decided that preparations be made in the coming months to clarify the location of the federation’s head office. A feasibility study will consider not only Erfurt and Halle as possible headquarters for the combined administration, but also Eisenach and Magdeburg. There is also the possibility to maintain the church headquarters in two cities.

The Saxony and Thuringia synods will take a final decision on the future headquarters and on the merger in November 2006. However, the decision on the unification may have to be postponed to 2007, as was emphasized by the vice-president and legal officer at the EKM headquarters, Dr Hans-Peter Hübner. The federation specifies March 2007 as the time it would decide on the future management, administrative and financial structure of its church districts.

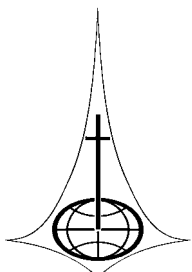
Critical Stage

In his current report on the situation, Kähler, who is also acting EKM board chairperson, spoke of a “critical stage” in the federation. Alongside the successful union of specific areas of work, the remaining decisions about future direction had caused the initial enthusiasm to give way to greater sobriety and some disappointment. The open question about the headquarters’ location, anticipated financial measures and the quest for a uniform structure at the intermediate level were causing considerable uncertainty among church employees. The speed of the process also raises concern, for example about the loss of regional church identity.

Nevertheless, decisions about the federation’s future, which Kähler described as “arduous paths,” could not be postponed, because the staff needed to know about their prospects soon.

The federation and merger now taking more concrete shape, are the first union of two German regional churches of about the same size in three decades. Their different backgrounds within the EKD will continue unchanged—Thuringia as historically Lutheran and the Church of the Province of Saxony as a united church. (779 words)

(Contribution from LWI correspondent Thomas Bickelhaupt, Weimar, Germany)



Christianity's Future Can Only Be Ecumenical, Says Head of LWF Assembly Host Church

Württemberg Bishop July Invites LWF 11th Assembly to a Festival of Faith in 2010

GENEVA, 13 April 2006 (LWI) – The head of the host church for the 11th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2010 anticipates a major outcome of the LWF event in Stuttgart, Germany, to be emphasis on the ecumenical nature of Christianity in the future.

“We want Stuttgart to constitute a semicolon for our common ecumenical future in the world,” said Bishop Frank Otfried July, Evangelical Church in Württemberg, during his first official visit to the LWF Geneva Secretariat on 7 April.

The Württemberg church considers it important also to have strong delegations of guests from other churches attending the assembly, July told Lutheran World Information (LWI) in an interview.

Emphasizing his church's ecumenical and missionary commitment, he said it hoped to open the doors wide and invite many people representing different nationalities, backgrounds and religious convictions to Stuttgart in order to celebrate a festival of faith. He said it was important that reconciled diversity is made visible, and that a new door could be opened in the ecumenical history of the LWF.

July has been bishop of the Württemberg church since July 2005. With 2.35 million members, it is the third-largest LWF member church in Germany, and was a founding member church of the Federation in 1947.

“We want our hospitality in Stuttgart to underline that we still have an ecumenical vision and that, as a regional church, we want to make our contribution to promoting this vision,” he said.

The German bishop said he hoped the assembly would be an opportunity for the host church to see again “that we are a part of a worldwide communion endeavoring to witness to the gospel in this world, and find answers to social questions on the basis of the Lutheran confession.” In hosting the LWF event, the church also wanted to demonstrate the active engagement of German churches in issues concerning churches worldwide, he said, adding that this could strengthen the churches in Germany as well.

Local Preparations

In discussions with LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and other LWF staff persons, July said

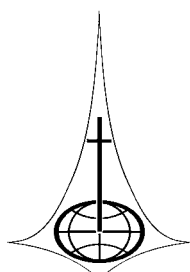


Delegation from the Evangelical Church in Württemberg, Germany, during the 7 April visit to the Ecumenical Center, Geneva, Switzerland (left to right): LWF Treasurer, Mr Peter Stoll, former WCC President, retired Bishop Eberhardt Renz, Bishop Otfried July, Oberkirchenrat Heiner Küenzlen, Kirchenrat Martin Penzoldt, Rev. Georg Eberhard and media spokesperson, Mr Klaus Rieth. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch

his church had already appointed a working group for the assembly's local preparations. “We have had a lot of experience with big events in Stuttgart,” he said, referring to the 28th German Protestant Kirchentag (convention) held in Stuttgart in 1999. The organization of the LWF assembly is included in the church's mid-term financial plan, he noted.

Concerning entry visas for some of the assembly participants, July emphasized that contact had already been established with the respective German authorities. “We shall naturally take advantage of the good political links we have to make it clear to the federal government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal President that we want to be hosts to an international assembly, and that hospitality essentially includes opening doors to the invited guests.” Although it would not be possible yet to anticipate the international political situation in 2010, “as far as we are concerned, we shall do everything possible to ensure that there are no problems in this area [visa issuance],” he said.

The Württemberg church bishop also met with representatives of the Ecumenical Center-based Conference of European Churches (CEC), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and World Council of Churches (WCC). In the coming months, he plans to meet with Walter Cardinal Kasper, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. (585 words)



Indian Theologian Martin to Take Up Position of LWF Deputy General Secretary

Responsibility for LWF Office for Planning

GENEVA, 1 April 2006 (LWI) – Effective early June 2006, Indian theologian and communicator, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin will assume the position of Deputy General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF Executive Committee appointed Martin at its 9–11 March meeting in Geneva.

Martin, 47, is currently executive secretary of the Chennai-based United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI). He has been a member of the LWF Council since 2003, serving as vice-chairperson of the Program Committee for Communication Services.

As deputy to the LWF general secretary, Martin will assume responsibility also for the LWF Office for Planning, and for LWF

Council meetings. Other key functions will include coordination of all LWF program planning. His appointment is for an initial period of four years.

He will be taking over tasks currently carried out by incumbent LWF Deputy General Secretary, Ms Karin Achtelstetter, designated by the LWF Council to this position since January 2005. Her term runs concurrently with her responsibilities as director of the LWF Office for Communication Services.

For financial reasons, the LWF Office for Planning has been vacant after the January 2003 departure of Ms Agneta Ucko from Sweden, who had served as deputy general secretary since April 1996. The Rev. Sven Oppeggaard, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, was interim deputy general secretary in 2004.

As UELCI chief executive officer since 2002, Martin is responsible for overall coordination, priority setting and strategic planning management for various development-related activities of the eleven-member Lutheran church body representing over 3 million Christians. A Dalit [“untouchables” in India’s caste



Newly appointed LWF Deputy General Secretary, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin from India. © LWF/D. Zimmermann

system] himself, Martin has been a strong advocate for the Dalit people’s liberation through a national process involving the churches, Dalit communities, governments and civil society movements.

Prior to joining the UELCI as its chief executive officer, Martin had served as communications’ secretary for the National Council of Churches in India for five years. He first joined the UELCI in 1984 as coordinator of its campus ministry until 1986. He also served as editor of the UELCI’s *Indian Lutheran* news and information journal, 1984-1998. From 1988 until 1992, he held the position of project officer and emergency secretary, responsible for the

implementation of the organization’s diaconal activities. He has authored and co-edited several publications and papers on the churches’ perspectives on pertinent issues such as water, the Dalit liberation, and communication and power.

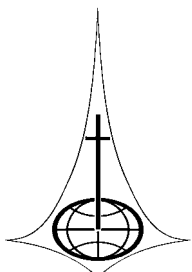
Martin is currently a Ph.D. studies’ research scholar in history and archeology with the Acharya Nagarjuna University in Andhra Pradesh, India. He pursued his undergraduate studies locally, receiving a bachelor of divinity from the United Theological College, Serampore University, Bangalore, in 1985, and a bachelor of arts from St Joseph’s College of Arts and Science, Bangalore University, Bangalore, in 1980. In 1987, he graduated with a diploma in Christian communication from Trinity and All Saints College, University of Leeds, United Kingdom. He earned a master’s degree in theology from the Chennai-based Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in 1999.

The Rev. Chandran Paul Martin and his wife, Mercy Martin, have two children. (521 words)

LWF Asia Regional Office Relocates to Singapore

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Regional Office for Asia (ROAS) has relocated from Thailand to Singapore. Effective 1 March 2006, ROAS is situated at the headquarters of the Lutheran Church in Singapore. Ms Sally Lim Kee, regional coordinator since the office was established nearly six years ago, continues in her current position. The role of

ROAS is to coordinate and facilitate the regional activities and events of the 47 LWF member churches in the region. Among other tasks, the regional coordinator maintains close cooperation and information sharing among the member churches and ecumenical organizations through the bi-monthly *Asia Lutheran News (ALN)*. (107 words)



Eberhard Hitzler to Head LWF Department for World Service

Church Development Work Experience in Germany and Africa

GENEVA, 13 April 2006 (LWI) – Oberkirchenrat Eberhard Jakob Hitzler from Germany will assume the position of director of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) in July 2006. Hitzler, 53, was appointed by the LWF Executive Committee at its March meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. His initial term is four years.

He will succeed Mr Robert Granke who joined the relief development organization, Canadian Lutheran World Relief in March 2006.

Since 2000, Hitzler has been head of the department for development policy at the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) headquarters in Hanover, and head of the organization's Africa department since 2003. He was executive secretary of EKD's church development services, 1998 to 2000.

Hitzler pursued theological and mission studies at the Mission Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria in Neuendettelsau, Germany, 1972 to 1978. From 1976 until 1977, he studied African theology, religion and Islam in East Africa among other subjects, at the Makumira Theological College, Usa River, in Tanzania. From 1978 until 1980, he was a vicar in the Nuernberg-Worzeldorf parish. He was



Oberkirchenrat Eberhard Hitzler will head the LWF Department for World Service. © Rainer Lang

ordained as a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria in May 1981, and served as a pastor of St Anna Parish, Augsburg, 1980 to 1983.

He served as a missionary to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) Arusha diocese, 1984 to 1991. Alongside pastoral responsibility for 15 ELCT congregations, he was coordinator of several community-based development projects, and assisted in developing the diocese's HIV/AIDS work. From 1991 until 1998, he worked with the Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development (EZE) in Bonn,

Germany, as head of the policy and communications' department.

Hitzler and his wife, Monika Hobelsberger-Hitzler, have two children.

As the LWF's internationally recognized humanitarian and development agency, DWS works with marginalized and disadvantaged communities in areas of greatest vulnerability and endemic need. It cooperates within global networks that include ecumenical, governmental and non-governmental partners. In 2004, DWS spent a total of USD 87 million in its 24 programs in 37 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin and Central America. (360 words)

Hans-Jörg Voigt Elected SELK Bishop

Delegates to the electoral synod of Germany's Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) appointed **Rev. Hans-Jörg Voigt** as the new bishop of the 37,000-member confessional Lutheran church. During the second round of voting, 11 February, Voigt received 42 votes against 40 cast for Rev. Hinrich Müller (Cottbus, Germany). The term of office is 12 years. He will be installed on 24 June in Hanover, Germany, succeeding incumbent SELK Bishop Dr Diethardt Roth, who will be retiring.

After his studies and practical training, Voigt, 43, worked as a trainee pastor in the Greifswald district (Germany), the same region where he was installed as a pastor in 1993. From 2000 until 2003, he was church superintendent in the Berlin-Brandenburg district before taking up responsibility for the training of assistant pastors at SELK's theological seminary.

Voigt and his wife have four children. (142 words)

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria Is New DWS Program Coordinator

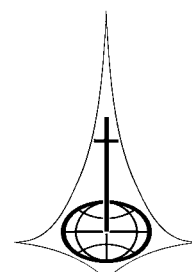
Effective 1 April 2006, **Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria** is the new program coordinator in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS). Until his March 2006 appointment by the LWF Executive Committee, De Faria, 43, had served as the department's program officer for sustainable development and the environment since September 2003.

His current appointment is for an initial period of four years. He succeeds Mr John Damerell who was in this position from 2000 until the end of 2005.

De Faria studied commerce and business administration, and pursued post-graduate studies in church social work at the Lutheran biblical and diaconal college in São Leopoldo. He worked with the development office of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, and later joined the LWF/DWS program in El Salvador as the country representative.

De Faria is married, and has two daughters.

(152 words)



LWF's PARTICIPATION IN 68TH UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Guatemala's Indigenous Group Presents 'Shadow Report' to UN Committee

GENEVA, 27 March 2006 (LWI) – Guatemalan anthropologist, Irma Alicia Velásquez, is an expert on issues concerning discrimination against indigenous people, especially women, in her country. With support from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Velásquez, herself a member of an indigenous community, participated in the 68th session of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 20 February-10 March 2006 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Guatemala was one of the 16 States parties that submitted to this year's CERD meeting comprehensive reports on legal, judicial, administrative and other steps taken in fulfillment of obligations to combat racial discrimination. It is among the 128 countries that have ratified the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Velásquez describes the opportunity to present to the Committee a 'shadow report' on discrimination against indigenous people in Guatemala as historic. "Discrimination against people based on ethnic descent is prevalent in the economic, political environment and in structural settings, and the government has responsibility to effect change," she says.

Together with colleagues, Mr Carlos Tamup and Mr Benito Morales, she is grateful for the LWF's support for Guatemalan indigenous people's participation in this year's CERD's session. Despite some doubts about the grassroots' effectiveness of the UN system, she experienced how openly the Committee receives concerns



During the first year, DWS Guatemala provides agricultural training to local community members, which results in a good harvest. The people also receive advice on improved nutrition using food grown on their pieces of land. © LWF/DWS Central America/L. Maza

from individuals or groups claiming to be victims of a violation of obligations under the Convention. Equally important for her, were the Committee's critical questions to the state delegation concerning the issues raised by the civil society representatives.

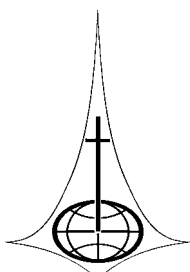
It was the first time that the LWF, through its Office for International Affairs and Human Rights (OIAHR), was facilitating the direct participation of non-governmental organization (NGO) delegates in the UN treaty body system. This system comprises committees of independent experts, which periodically review the situation in countries that have ratified international human rights treaties. The committees rely heavily on civil society input as an alternative source of information about compliance with treaty obligations. The state reports rarely reveal the full picture, and even such a self-critical report as that presented by the Government of Guatemala may conceal some important concerns.

Increasing Human Rights' Violations

The Guatemalan NGO delegation to CERD comprised individuals from partner organizations of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) office in Central America, covering Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The LWF/DWS Central American office points out that increasing human



The four NGO delegates from Guatemala standing outside the UN Geneva offices: (left to right) Mr Benito Morales, Ms Irma Alicia Velásquez, Mr Ruben Ortiz and Mr Carlos Tamup. © LWF/G.Dyrhagen



rights' violations in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are reflected in raids on civil society organizations, abuse by the police, labor rights' violations and legislated discrimination based on ethnic identity.

DWS Central America accompanies the region's peoples in their struggle to achieve reconciliation, justice and the consolidation of democracy through a holistic approach that includes support toward the most socially excluded groups. In preparation for this year's CERD review, the LWF office in Guatemala organized a consultation focusing on racial discrimination, and assisted in drafting the shadow report presented to the CERD before it considered the state report.

OIAHR, which sees its role as facilitator of participation by LWF member churches and field programs in the UN treaty bodies, expressed appreciation for the professionalism of the Guatemalan delegates,

for whom this was the first interaction with the UN system. "Without the important input from the NGO delegates, the Committee would not have had the same critical view of the discriminatory practices against indigenous people in Guatemala," said Ms Gitte Dyrhagen from the LWF human rights office.

CERD's periodic review of actions by States parties has had positive results including among others, amendments to national constitutions to include provisions prohibiting racial discrimination, and the creation of new agencies to deal with problems of racial discrimination and to promote the rights of indigenous groups. (639 words)

The LWF summary report on the CERD review of Guatemala is available at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIAHR/OIAHR-Treaty_Body_Sessions.html

NGO Representatives Urge Salvadoran Government to Guarantee Equal Rights for All

GENEVA, 27 March 2006 (LWI) – Nicaraguan Flor de Maria Mendoza has worked as a salesperson in a small-scale business in Santa Rosa de Lima, El Salvador, for ten years. She is a migrant worker, who has herself on several occasions been a witness to and victim of open discrimination against migrant populations in El Salvador.

Mendoza has contributed to promoting equal recognition of migrant workers' rights in El Salvador and has joined like-minded individuals and organizations speaking out for other marginalized groups including indigenous people. In this process she has collaborated with the Central America regional office of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) that began in mid 2004 to mobilize local support to present the issue at the international level.

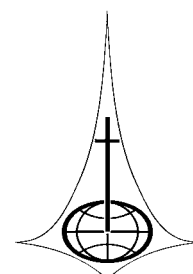
LWF/DWS El Salvador assisted the civil society representatives in drafting a comprehensive 'shadow report' on racial discrimination in the country, which Mendoza and two other non-governmental organization (NGO) delegates presented to the 68th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 20 February–10 March 2006 in Geneva.

Presenting the shadow report to CERD on behalf of ten civil society organizations, the three-person delegation emphasized that the Government of El Salvador was ignoring the marginalization of indigenous people and migrant population. Mendoza said she was happy to speak before the Committee and explain to the UN the problems that communities like hers face. But more than that, she hoped the Salvadoran government, which had presented to the CERD its official report on the human rights situation in El Salva-



This photo was taken during a Maya ceremony in El Salvador. Tata (priest) Gustavo blesses the letter identifying their representative on the delegation that would present the shadow report to the CERD in Geneva. © LWF/DWS Central America/N. Badilla

dor, could openly acknowledge that indigenous people and migrant communities in the country faced open discrimination. She wants concrete steps to guarantee equal rights for migrant workers and overall protection of their human rights in the country.



The LWF-supported NGO delegates were the only civil society representatives addressing the Committee on El Salvador's human rights' situation. "Without their input, the quality of the Committee's recommendations could have been a lot less substantial," commented Ms Gitte Dyrhagen of the LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights (OIAHR), which aims to involve the LWF member churches, field programs and their partners more directly in the UN treaty body processes. The Committee posed some critical questions to the state delegation, including several concerns that were raised in the shadow report.

Celia Medrano, working with DWS El Salvador, described the opportunity to exchange civil society views with the Committee as an effective tool to address



*Ms Celia Medrano, LWF/DWS office in El Salvador.
© LWF/DWS El Salvador*

national problems through the UN system. She emphasized the importance of speaking out on behalf of many voices, which would otherwise not be heard. (454 words)

The LWF summary report on the CERD review of El Salvador is available at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIAHR/OIAHR-Treaty_Bodies.html

***This article is part of the ongoing LWI Features on Healing focusing on the LWF Tenth Assembly theme, "For the Healing of the World." The series highlights the relevance of the Assembly theme in the different contexts of the worldwide Lutheran communion by presenting projects and activities aimed at promoting reconciliation and healing. This theme continues to be an important aspect of LWF's work even after the 21-31 July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.**

Theologian Sørensen Heads Danish Church Council on International Relations

Theologian, Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen is the new general secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD) Council on International Relations.

Sørensen has been in his new position since 1 April 2006. He succeeds Ms Kirsten Auken, who had been acting general secretary since the death of Rev. Ane Hjerrild in July 2005. Hjerrild had served as the council's general secretary since 1990.

Born in 1964, Sørensen has been assistant professor at the Center for Multireligious Studies, University of Aarhus, Denmark since 2005. He is chairperson of the Council of Areopagos, a Scandinavian and Asian-based foundation supporting theological studies and interreligious dialogue.

Sørensen holds a doctorate in missiology and ecumenical studies from the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. He earned his bachelor and master



*Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, new general secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark Council on International Relations.
© Christian Pedersen, ELCD Council on International Relations.*

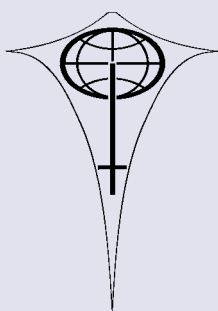
of theology degrees from the University of Aarhus, Denmark.

He worked at the Danish Missionary Society (now Danmission), 1994 to 1999, with responsibility for the organization's work in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Since 2002, he has held various positions at the University of Aarhus multireligious studies' center, including research assistant, development officer and part-time lecturer.

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen and his wife, Ann Elisabeth Skov Sørensen, have three children.

The ELCD Council on International Relations is responsible for the relations of the Danish Lutheran church with other Christian churches and organizations at national and international level.

(232 words)



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