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– A Communion of Churches**

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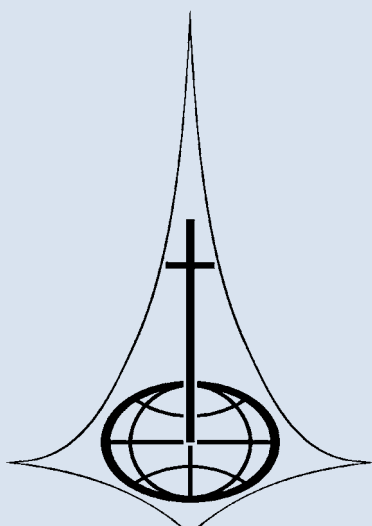
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I Have Learnt About My Human Rights



Chhing Kim owns the only fishpond in Yaing Piss in Cambodia's Oral district. The community members chose the mother of two to manage this demonstration pond, by which other villagers learn how to breed fish for food and profit. This project is among several others supported by the LWF Department for World Service program in Cambodia, with the aim to empower especially the poor and vulnerable people to manage their own development processes. © LWF/Linda Macqueen

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Germany: Munich Churches to Host 2nd Ecumenical Kirchentag in 2010

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and (Roman Catholic) Archdiocese of Munich and Freising will co-host the Second German Ecumenical "Kirchentag" (church convention) from 12 to 16 May 2010 in Munich, Germany. More than 100,000 people are expected to attend the ecumenical gathering of Christian lay organizations in Germany, of which the central theme will be the role of Christians in society. The German Protestant Kirchentag and the Central Committee of German Catholics are jointly organizing the event.

Presenting their joint official invitation to the event on 10 March in Munich, Bavarian Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich and Cardinal Friedrich Wetter of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising, cautioned against linking the Ecumenical Kirchentag with unrealistic expectations in view of a shared Eucharist. The

stage reached by the theological conversations between Protestants and Roman Catholics was not sufficiently advanced to fulfill such an expectation "in any realistic way," Friedrich noted. He said disagreement over joint eucharistic celebrations around the time of the first Ecumenical Kirchentag had not helped ecumenism. Over 200,000 people attended the first such gathering from 28 May to 1 June 2003 in Berlin, Germany.

Cardinal Wetter noted, "A gathering of this kind will hardly be able to contribute to solving such questions." He recommended a contribution of the common Christian values to the public debate.

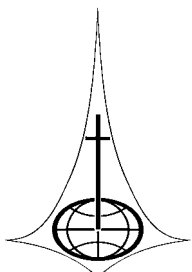
Organizers of the ecumenical event note that other Christian churches are invited to participate. Conversations with other religions would be welcome.

Membership Decline Slowing in German Regional Church

There is a continuing decline in the number of people leaving the regional Evangelical Church in Württemberg, Germany. The church's provisional statistics indicate that the 9,700 people who submitted their membership resignation from the church in 2005 represent the lowest figure recorded since 1988. In 2004, some 11,500 people left, while in 2003 there were 14,100 recorded departures.

In 2004, the church had 2,335,722 members compared with the 2,346,879 recorded for 2003.

The number of new members, excluding baptisms, increased from 2,641 in 2004 to more than 2,900 in 2005. The number of baptisms in 2005, especially in view of the ongoing general decline in the birth rate, was 21,300 compared with 22,061 in 2004.



LWF LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE IN SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

Church Urged to Define Points of Reference and Road Ahead

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica/GENEVA, 28 April 2006 (LWI) – Over 50 representatives of Lutheran churches tackled questions of viability (*viabilidad*) and sustainability (*sustentabilidad*) to start off the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Conferencia de Liderazgo—COL) in San José, Costa Rica, 25-28 April.

“In light of global challenges, the Church is called upon to define the road ahead and to establish points of reference in no uncertain terms not only for itself and its members, but for the society as a whole.” The Rev. Dr Gottfried Brakemeier, former LWF president, challenged conference participants with these words in his address on the “Viability of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).” Brakemeier’s critical questions, read by the IECLB General Secretary, Rev. Nestor Friedrich, touched on the variety of issues facing the IECLB today: statistical realities, questions of identity, conflicting ecclesiologies, and the challenge of mission.



Bishop Medardo E. Gómez, leader of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, addresses the COL meeting participants. © LWF/Youth Leadership Training

Friedrich urged the church representatives not to restrict the concept of “sustainability” to fundraising strategies alone, but instead to strive to integrate their efforts into a concept of social development, paying equal heed to Christian witness, service, fellowship, liturgy and economic issues.

“Sustainability can be attained through planning, a task that is not always simple. And planning is of vital importance to our thoughts concerning the development of our churches and congregations,” Friedrich added.

The LWF’s Latin America and Caribbean region stretches from Mexico in the north to Chile and Argentina in the south, comprising 16 member churches—14 in Latin America and two in the Caribbean—and nine LWF recognized congregations throughout the region. Some 835,500 Lutherans belong to LWF member churches and recognized congregations in the region.

These churches are rooted in a vast variety of backgrounds. While some were the result of immigration from mainly European countries in the eighteenth century, others were started by missionaries from the United States and Europe, with still others emerging locally.



Rev. Gloria Rojas (center), president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile moderates a plenary session during the Latin American Church Leadership Conference (COL). Left is Rev. Melvin Jiménez, president of the Lutheran Costarican Church; and right, Rev. Martin Junge, LWF/DMD Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean region.

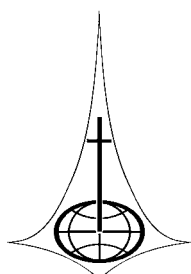
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Lutheran Churches Are Present in Critical Segments of Society

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica/GENEVA, 16 May 2006 (LWI) – Argentine pastor Lisandro Orlov, the Latin American regional coordinator of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) HIV/AIDS campaign, says Lutheran churches

in the region “have been successful in maintaining a presence in the critical segments of society.”

Presenting his report to participants in the LWF Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Con-



ferencia de Liderazgo—COL), in San José, Costa Rica, Orlov pointed out that the churches had “succeeded in saying something new, something different—to be a church that takes on responsibility for the people, one which does not just talk about HIV, but which lives with those affected in community and solidarity.”

The report by Orlov, of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU), was one of four such presentations to the COL about the region’s program activities.

The Rev. Ángel Furlan, coordinator of the Latin American LWF member churches’ advocacy program

on the illegitimacy of Latin American and Caribbean foreign debt, emphasized the particular accomplishment of the region’s churches having become involved with the topic. Furlan, IELU president, 1996–2004, added that the connection between foreign debt and the imposition of free trade agreements had now developed into a main focus of discussion.

As pointed out by Rev. Melvin Jiménez, coordinator of the regional diakonia (church social service) network, “diakonia is an important and integral component of church life.” Latin America enjoys a wealth of diaconal experience, he continued, but “we are often not aware of the quality and diversity of this service.” He added that it was now the time to systemize the theological foundation and methodology of the diaconal service provided by churches over the years.

Brazilian pastor Heitor Meurer, president of the Lutheran communications network in Latin America, *Luteranos Unidos en Comunicación* (LUC), expressed the need for increased support for the region’s Lutheran churches in their proclamation of the gospel. Meurer, of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), said it was additionally important to establish and provide opportunities for education and information exchange, and to give fresh impetus for better communications.



The coordinator of the LWF HIV/AIDS campaign, Rev. Lisandro Orlov, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina, preaches at the opening service.
© LWF/Youth Leadership Training

Churches’ Sustainability and Viability Is a Major Concern for Latin America

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica/GENEVA, 16 May 2006 (LWI) – The four-day Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Latin American Church Leadership Conference in San José, concluded with a decision to establish a working group to focus on the issue of sustainability and viability for the region’s churches.

The working group, which includes Rev. Adita Torres, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru (ILEP); Rev. Paulo Butzke, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB); and Rev. Ilo Utech, Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE), has been asked to initiate and implement a three-year sustainability program within the communion of Lutheran churches in Latin America. A plan of action will be presented to the region’s church leadership by July 2006.

Another group led by the Continental Director of Women’s Ministries and Gender Justice Desk of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), Rev. Judith Van Osdol (sent by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to work in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church [IELU] in Argentina), will focus on a working document presented to the COL meeting,

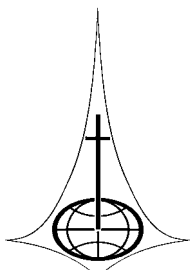
“Ministry and Leadership from a Gender Perspective: The Search for a Common Path.” One of the working group’s tasks is to provide further recommendations for a broad, intensive dialogue on the subject of women and gender questions, based on the document, and on a subsequent dialogue that will include the region’s churches.

Emphasis on Communications

The COL participants also emphasized the important role of communications in church life. Current priorities include introducing a Web site for the region, and providing technical and strategic assistance for churches to improve their communications and advocacy profiles.

The conference deliberated further on the next meeting of the LWF Council in Lund, Sweden, in March 2007. This included questions on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement.

Also discussed were the efforts the IECLB has undertaken to resolve the issue of rebaptism in a



process of dialogue with the IECLB's charismatic movement. (see LWI No. 08/2005 page 4)

The COL also recommended the introduction of a "Diakonia Day" among the region's churches in order to honor the particular importance of diaconal service in church life, and to provide a platform for the systematic review of relevant diaconal experience. In 2007, the Latin American LWF churches' annual publication series will be dedicated to diakonia, thus bringing diaconal thought and practice closer to a broader public.

The next COL meeting will be held in Chile, 16–20 April 2007. This year's conference was the first to meet under the newly established COL. Previous meetings of the region's Lutheran church leadership convened under the Conference of Bishops and Presidents (COP).



The COL meeting participants included the Latin American region members of the three-year LWF Youth Leadership Training in Communication program, seen here discussing one of their projects during the group's training workshop. © LWF/Youth Leadership Training

Further information and documents on the San José conference can be found in Spanish and Portuguese at: confencialiderazgo2006.blogspot.com

FEATURE: Sport Opens Young People's Hearts

The Church's Mission Has to Be Experienced in Daily Life

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica/GENEVA, 23 May 2006 (LWI) – A key that opens the hearts of young people, is how the Lutheran Costa Rican Church—Iglesia Luterana Costarricense (ILCO) perceives its "Football for Life" program targeting children and adolescents from less privileged families.

The program's coordinator, Mr Roy Arias Cruz, says he sees football as an essential tool in attracting young people's attention. It serves as an important forum for discussion about drug consumption, its prevention, as well as violence, among the many other issues encountered in society by youth. Through sports, he adds, they "can be given hope that a different world is possible."



Mr Roy Arias Cruz. © LWF/Youth Leadership Training

More than 50 collaborators, including young people's parents and friends in the community, volunteer for "Football for Life," which has become an independent ILCO-coordinated non-governmental organization, also supported by German Protestant churches' aid agency, "Bread for the World."

ILCO clearly affirms its support in saying that carrying out mission through sports is fully in agreement with the understanding of mission by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The church has been an LWF member since 2002.

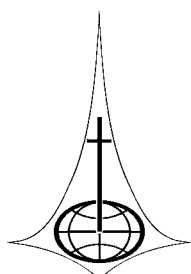
During the 25–28 April LWF-facilitated Latin American Church Leadership Conference in San José, Costa Rica, representatives of the region's churches and invited guests, visited three ILCO projects. Among them was the Alajuelita community, a poor neighborhood of some 15,000 people, where the "Football for Life" program is being developed.

The Alajuelita Lutheran congregation also runs a daycare program for the children of working mothers as well as courses on English, music, and computer applications. The congregation additionally seeks employment opportunities for Nicaraguan migrants.

Assistance to Migrants

Another ILCO outreach area is the community of La Carpio, in the district of Uruca, where there is evidence of xenophobia. La Carpio, home to poor Costa Ricans, currently also houses a large number of undocumented Nicaraguan migrants. Here, the church offers training for women in dressmaking, and helps migrants to obtain legal status.

The Quitirrisi reserve, another ILCO working area, is a one-hour drive from the capital, San José, and home to the Huetar indigenous community. This



community has been hard hit by the exodus of young people to the city in search of better educational and employment opportunities, which poses the risk that they lose touch with their indigenous roots.

Consequently, and in cooperation with its association for women, ILCO has begun the difficult task of recovering indigenous communities' educational and cultural roots, beginning with basic characteristics such as food, dress, language and natural medicine, according to reports from Evelyn Heck from Argentina, and Rodrigue Covarrubias from Chile, who participated in the LWF Church Leadership Conference.

The President of ILCO, Rev. Melvin Jiménez, emphasizes the integral nature of the church's mission, "It must be a ministry of Word, sacrament and service" that is experienced in people's daily lives.

Presenting the LWF Mission Document, "Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment," to the Church Leadership Conference, Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development emphasized mission as a task of the Church, which must include proclamation of the gospel, serving the needy and protecting the most vulnerable in society.

French Lutheran Leader Anticipates Greater Visibility After Regional Union with Reformed Church

Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine Inaugurated

STRASBOURG, France/GENEVA, 19 May 2006 (LWI)

– The recent merger of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Alsace and Lorraine, France "will allow a stronger and more solid witness [of the church] in a world where religious identities have a tendency to lose their effectiveness. It will be one voice and one visible presence," said Rev. Dr Jean-François Collange, president of the Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine (ECAAL) in France.

action and to strengthen the bonds between the two Protestant churches in Alsace and Lorraine." The churches can decide to delegate some or all of their individual areas of competence to the union.

In an interview appearing in the ECAAL and ERAL biweekly magazine *Le Messager* (No. 19), Collange said that one of the union's advantages is that it allows for the two churches to be seen as a single Protestant church, thus improving its visibility. "The union will also make our services more dynamic," he continued.

In the same interview, the president of ERAL, Rev. Dr Jean-Paul Humbert, added that "from now on, our own identity will reflect the other's as well. We are now Lutheran-Reformed Protestants, which does not exclude common opinions at the core of this great family." He continued that "within schools, for teachers and school administrators, and in connection with representatives of other religions, it is better to be a single Protestant church."



French church leaders, during the service celebrating the UEPAL founding at St Thomas Church in Strasbourg, France: (left to right) Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the French Protestant Federation; ERAL President, Rev. Dr Jean-Paul Humbert; and ECAAL President, Rev. Dr Jean-François Collange. © Albert Huber

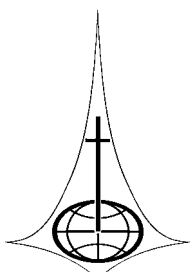
The founding of the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine (UEPAL), resulting from the merger of the ECAAL and the Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine (ERAL), was celebrated in a worship service at the St Thomas Church in Strasbourg, France, on 7 May.

A government decree on 18 April 2006 formally instituted the UEPAL. According to the decree, the Union is "given the responsibility to conduct common

tion of their activities since October 1969. Following considerable consultation with the individual parishes, the governing assemblies of the two churches approved the union in November 2004. The new organization provides an official framework for this cooperation, allowing for decisions to be made by a majority of its members, and no longer by a majority within the individual churches, as had been the case in the previous system of cooperation. This signifies

Long History of Cooperation

The ECAAL and ERAL have been cooperating with each other for a number of years with the leadership in both churches working together to coordinate a large por-



considerable progress toward the two churches' vision of an ever more effective witness.

Both churches have a combined membership of some 300,000 people, or around 10 percent of the population, a much higher figure than in the rest of France (less than 2 percent). Four fifths of the total regional membership belong to the ECAAL while roughly one fifth are members of the ERAL. Some 300 pastors are active in both churches combined.

The ECAAL and ERAL will continue to exist within their own structures, and remain members of their respective alliances and federations at the international level.

The first General Assembly of the union is scheduled for 24 June 2006, during which a president will be elected for a three-year term.

The 210,000-member ECAAL joined the LWF in 1947.

Developing Lay Leadership Is Crucial, Says Canada's Second Lutheran Woman Bishop

Elaine Sauer Elected Bishop of Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod

WINNIPEG, Canada/GENEVA, 18 May 2006 (LWI) – Canada's second Lutheran woman bishop, Rev. Elaine Sauer, says the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) needs to continue to develop its lay leadership and strengthen its evangelism work.

"We need a strong program of evangelism where the baptized are encouraged to go and tell the story of God working in their lives and invite the unchurched and marginalized to come to the table with us, to know that they belong here in the kingdom with us," said Sauer during the run-up to the election for Bishop of the Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario (MNO) Synod on 28 April.

She addressed her speech outlining her vision for the church to the delegates of the 2006 MNO Synod Convention in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Sauer, 51, currently works in the ELCIC National Office as Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Relations.

The bishop-elect emphasized the need to "intentionally develop leadership of the laity," and to seek out leaders to serve in vocations that would help build up the church. With her election as bishop, Sauer returns to the MNO synod office where she worked as Campus Chaplain and Youth Ministry Facilitator



Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Bishop-Elect, Elaine Sauer. © ELCIC

from 1998 to 2003, prior to joining the ELCIC head office.

Drawing upon her own personal experience and the impact of the ELCIC on her during her youth, her acceptance speech included a vision for a church where "an environment of openness is fostered so that our young people can see that the church is relevant in their lives." Ordained in 1998, Sauer is the second woman to be elected bishop in the ELCIC. In July 2002, Rev. Cindy Halmarson became

the first female bishop in the church after she was elected bishop of the Saskatchewan Synod.

Sauer will be installed on 15 September for an initial term of four years. She will succeed Bishop Richard M. Smith who will be retiring after 12 years of service.

Bishop-elect Elaine Sauer and her husband, Rev. Rick Sauer have three children and one grandchild.

The election of a synod bishop occurs at every second Synod Convention. This year, all five ELCIC synods will hold their biennial conventions and elections for the position of bishop. Bishops can be reelected. Led by National Bishop Raymond L. Schultz, the ELCIC has some 182,000 members. The Canadian church joined the LWF in 1986. (ELCIC News)

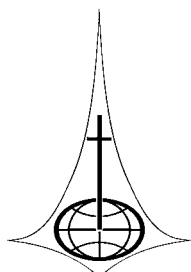
United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India Elects New Head

Rev. Dr A. G. Augustine Jeyakumar is the new executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI). He was elected at the 17 March meeting of the UELCI Executive Committee. He assumed office in the middle of May, succeeding Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, who will take up the position of Deputy General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in early June.

A member of the Arcot Lutheran Church, Jeyakumar has served the Chennai-based UELCI in different capacities for more than three decades. Until his recent election, he has been executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in

India since 2003 and director of the UELCI Division for Social Action. The UELCI unites eleven Lutheran churches with a combined membership of almost 2 million Christians.

The UELCI Executive Committee also elected Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam as Executive Secretary of the LWF National Committee in India, a position he has previously held. A leading figure in the Indian Lutheran and global ecumenical scene, Rajaratnam has served the UELCI for more than four decades. From 1975 until 1979, he was Secretary for Asia in the then LWF Department of Church Cooperation. He was a member of the LWF Executive Committee from 1985 until 1990.



LWF Calls for Commitment to Justice and Democracy in Nepal

Increased Support for LWF Work Is Critical

GENEVA, 27 April 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes recent efforts to restore a democratic system in Nepal, and urges parties to that country’s internal conflict to demonstrate a commitment to justice and democracy by respecting the human rights of all people.



Freed Kamaiya women pay a local vegetable vendor. © LWF/DWS Nepal

In a statement issued on 26 April, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said he hoped that agreements in dealing with the current political crisis would “address the underlying grievances, which predispose Nepalese society to instability.”

Nearly three weeks of pro-democracy street protests in Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu, forced King Gyanendra to restore the country’s parliament, sched-

uled to reconvene on 28 April. The king assumed absolute power in February 2005, citing government failure in controlling the Maoists whose decade-old insurgency has resulted in the deaths of thousands. The group has declared a three-month cease-fire.

In his statement, Noko indicated that hope for sustainable peace and human development in Nepal could only be created through genuine and committed attention to the underlying injustices that have fed the internal conflict and political crisis in the country.

He also urged the partners of the LWF’s work in the country to increase their essential support “at this critical historical moment for the people of Nepal.”

In Nepal, the LWF works with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups through its Department for World Service (DWS) program. In the country since 1984, DWS Nepal primarily focuses on people who are subjected to severe discrimination, especially the Dalits (untouchables), freed *Kamaiyas* (former bonded laborers), the Bhutanese refugee community, and women in general. The Geneva-based LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights has helped lead international advocacy on the issue of caste-based discrimination in Nepal and on the Bhutanese refugee question in particular.

Further information about the LWF/DWS program in Nepal is available at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Nepal.html

Water: The Challenge of the 21st Century

LWF Discusses “Stirring the Waters” in Phnom Penh

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia/GENEVA, 26 May 2006 (LWI) – The participants of Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regional conference on water declared water to be “the challenge of the 21st century.”

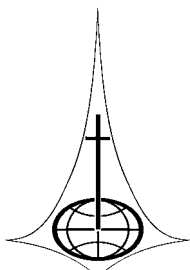
Representatives of both the LWF member churches and the Department for World Service (DWS) country programs in the Asia-Pacific region took part in the “Stirring the Waters” Asia Regional Consultation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 17 to 22 April 2006. The conference participants called on the LWF member churches to prioritize water issues, and to work toward protecting the quality of water, while raising awareness for water management and global warming.

In their closing statement, the participants emphasized the need for people to recognize water as God’s precious gift, and to increase reverence for water. They



Participants sing during the closing service, which integrated rich symbolism on the theme of water. © LWF/D.- M. Gröttsch

regarded attempts at resolving water concerns as a contribution toward reducing conflict around the world.



The LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) Desk for Women in Church in Society (WICAS) organized the regional consultation which was the third follow-up program to build on the LWF Tenth Assembly's stated commitment toward developing an Action Plan on Water. Following the July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, regional meetings on the subject of water were held in Europe (September 2004) and Africa (April 2005).

The LWF Action Plan on Water was launched to mobilize resources and to highlight how essential water is to human life and for all of creation, as well as to delve into questions concerning the just and affordable distribution and privatization of water.

The participants of the Phnom Penh meeting committed themselves to addressing "the issues of water" in their respective countries and organizations, and to forming "regional electronic groups for information exchange and lobbying." They furthermore resolved to join the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) and, within its framework, to create a database and to facilitate common interfaith action.

The LWF member churches were called upon to educate their congregations on water issues in sermons and seminars, placing particular emphasis on gender issues, and mobilizing women's groups to work on related matters. The participants called for the development of basic educational materials, poems, and motivational slogans.

They concluded that water "is the cradle and source of life, well of health, and God's gift for all living beings." Whether in overabundance or scarcity, "the waters of life require human responsibility." There is therefore a need for "advocacy and action, by placing water issues on the churches' agenda, supporting



Following the celebration of Holy Communion at the conference closing worship, the participants were invited to drink water mixed with fruit juice, symbolizing the "bitter and the sweet taste" of what they had heard and shared during the meeting in Phnom Penh. © LWF/D.- M. Grötzsch

community-based initiatives, addressing trade and privatization concerns," as well as the advocacy of sufficient support and funding for water projects, all founded on the basis of fundamental convictions.

The participants, moreover, called upon the LWF member churches to speak out against the over-consumption of water. They encouraged the churches to work together with governmental and non-governmental organizations in campaigns against water pollution, water abuse, and illegal logging.

The full text of the closing statement of the Phnom Penh meeting can be found as a pdf document at: www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Cambodia_Water-2006.pdf

Further information on the "Stirring the Waters" Asian regional meeting in Phnom Penh from 17 to 22 April 2006 can be accessed at: stirringthewaters.blogspot.com.

German Protestant Kirchentag Has New General Secretary

Dr Ellen Ueberschär will be the new general secretary of the German Protestant Kirchentag (church convention) in Fulda, Germany, effective 1 July 2006. The Kirchentag's board appointed the 38-year-old theologian in late March. She will succeed Superintendent Friederike von Kirchbach, who has been general secretary since 2000.

Ueberschär is currently director of studies in theology, ethics and law at the Evangelical Academy of Loccum in Germany. She studied theology in Berlin and Heidelberg

from 1988 until 1995, and was a research assistant specialising in theology at the University of Marburg. She was awarded the Philipps Prize for her dissertation at the University of Marburg in 2002. Her practical church training included work on contemporary history and politics at the Protestant Academy in Berlin. She has been a member of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

The 31st German Protestant Kirchentag will take place from 6 to 10 June 2007, in Cologne, Germany.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Calls Church to Action for Darfur, Sudan

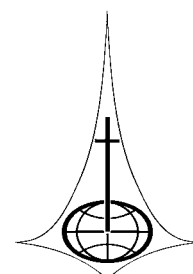
The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has called on the church to learn about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, western Sudan and, most of all, pray for the people there.

In a message to the ELCA on 19 May, Hanson, who is also president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), noted there was "cautious, hopeful news" about the Darfur region with the May 2006 signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement. His

message included an appeal to the United States' Congress to approve more than USD 400 million for humanitarian and peacekeeping aid to Sudan in the current fiscal year.

Hanson noted that the ELCA, LWF and the Geneva-based Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and other relief agencies were providing needed supplies in Sudan.

The text of Bishop Hanson's statement, including links to resources, is at www.elca.org/bishop/m_darfur.html



FEATURE: I Have Learnt About My Human Rights

LWF/DWS Cambodia Empowers Communities in Self-Sustainable Development

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia/GENEVA, 22 May 2006

(LWI) – The first thing you notice about Chea Phan is the right sleeve of his shirt hanging empty at his side. His arm was severed just below the shoulder during the civil war. His wife’s disability is not so obvious. She walks with a minor limp. It is not until Saw Pheap points downward to the parched earth that you notice the plastic mould where her left foot used to be.

Phan and Pheap live in Kauk, a dry, dusty village of about 270 people in poverty-stricken Oral District in the Province of Kampong Speu, Cambodia. The couple and their eight children sleep in a very small bare hut, propped up by one-meter-long stilts of roughly hewn timber. The family cooks and eats outside, around a big cooking pot hanging over an open fire. Kauk is only 98 kilometers from Cambodia’s bustling capital, Phnom Penh. But it could be a world away. They have no such luxuries as furniture or electricity, not even a regular, reliable water supply. Villagers struggle to produce enough food for their families, especially now that the drought is in its third year. For Phan and Pheap it is an endless fight, working long hours in stifling heat, and fetching water from the village well for their vegetable crops.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) country program in Cambodia has identified their household as one of Kauk’s 18 poorest. In accordance with its guidelines to assist the poorest and most vulnerable villagers, the program’s community empowerment facilitators have taught Phan and Pheap improved farming techniques. The couple now produces enough food for the family, and earns income by selling vegetables at local markets. They also keep and breed chickens and fish. Under its Food for Work incentive scheme, the LWF provided the family with three kilograms of rice when Phan dug the family pond with his remaining arm.

The LWF/DWS program also takes care of children. In all villages of the Oral District project area, under-five-year-olds receive supplementary food, and children of the poorest families



The Kauk Village Development Committee chairperson, Mr Heng Hon (second from right), with Chea Phan, his wife Saw Pheap and their eight children. The family, identified by DWS Cambodia as one of the poorest in the village, is receiving targeted assistance from the LWF program. © LWF/Linda Macqueen

receive scholarships to attend primary school. Three of the couple’s children benefit from scholarships.

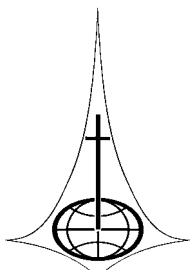
Phan proudly describes what a difference the LWF/DWS program has made to his family: “Before, I didn’t have any tools but now I have a hoe and a watering can. I can also borrow money from the village bank to buy seed for more food.” As the only person in the village who can read and write, Phan administers the village’s nutrition program. “I have learnt a lot from the LWF,” he says. “I have learnt about my human rights, and I now know about sanitation and hygiene. My children are learning to read and write. Their life will be a lot better than mine.”

Over 25 Years of Service

The LWF’s involvement in Cambodia began in 1979, as part of an effort by a consortium of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to respond to the devastation caused by the Khmer Rouge regime. From 1975 until 1979, under Pol Pot’s leadership, the Khmer Rouge killed from 1.5 to 2.3 million people out of a population of some 8 million. The regime targeted Buddhist monks, Western-educated people, and others who appeared to be “intellectuals,” for example, people who wore glasses, or who spoke foreign languages, “non-laborers” identified by



Built with LWF assistance, this well generates up to 4,300 liters per hour. The Suoy people fear the “eco-tourism” project could exhaust the underground water in the future. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch



their soft hands, people with disabilities, or people from ethnic minorities, such as Laotians and Vietnamese.

During the 1980s, the international isolation imposed on Cambodia by Western countries left it with only a few NGOs contributing to the country's massive essential reconstruction and rehabilitation. The LWF was among them.

In May 1998, the LWF/DWS country program placed Kauk, with all other villages in the commune of Sangkei Satop in the Oral District project area, under its Integrated Rural Development Through Empowerment Project (IRDEP). Through holistic and sustainable development, and by using a rights-based approach, the project facilitates the empowerment of communities, and especially of poor and vulnerable people, so that they can take over their own development processes, and advocate for their rights. The community members identify their needs such as collective organization, establishment of infrastructure, agricultural development, and HIV and AIDS education, among others.

A Deep Well—A Glimmer of Hope

Ven Samy, 37, is physically weaker than most of the men in her community, but she possesses another kind of power. When asked to identify who their leader was, about 15 villagers pointed to Samy. They had good reason. She works hard organizing women's meetings, three days a week, in each of the five villages in her district. She conducts a human rights advocacy program, organizes the local community banking system and trains women in dress-making—all with the assistance of the LWF Cambodia program.

Samy belongs to the Suoy ethnic minority group in the village of Kaor Dauntey in the commune of Sangkei Satop. Her simple hut has a wooden floor. Its roof and walls are made of entwined palm fronds. With fellow villagers, she suffers from the effects of the three-year drought, which is exacerbated by illegal logging, slash-and-burn farming, and the widespread harvesting of forest trees for charcoal production.

She struggles to educate her people about their human rights and how to live a life of dignity. This earns her respect and close relationships with the women's groups in the community, but not with the political leaders. "We are now becoming more aware of our rights as humans, unlike before," Samy says. "However, the authorities are not happy about this. They fear that if we are empowered we will fight against them."

Due to the scarce water supply it is becoming harder for the Suoy people to access clean water for domestic use, and to grow rice and vegetables. But there is a glim-

mer of hope. With assistance from the LWF/DWS program, the construction of a deep well in January 2001 has given 25 families in the village of Kaor Dauntey a regular and safe source of clean water. The well, equipped with a hand-pump, generates 4,300 liters per hour. Women, men and children now gather around the well with cans and plastic buckets to fetch water. Their families pay a small amount to the community for well maintenance.

But the community fears that the underground water will be exhausted in future if the golf courses, being developed by two foreign-owned companies, become operational. The construction of golf courses and hotels near the village, in the guise of eco-tourism is ongoing. "We know that these companies will be using much more water than we do," the villagers lament. "Our deep wells might dry up."

Mr David H. Mueller, the LWF/DWS representative in Cambodia, points out that the "eco-tourism" project has also claimed the Suoy people's sacred hot springs, and disallows access to other natural resources the community has customarily relied on, especially in the most meager season for food and income. In solidarity with the LWF and other NGOs, Samy and her people have signed petitions to demand a halt to the project. They continue to advocate for their communal land rights.

Further information about LWF/DWS work in Cambodia at www.lutheran-world.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Cambodia.html

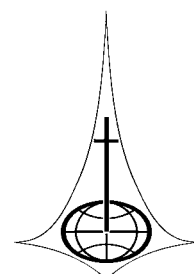
***This article is part of the ongoing LWI Features on Healing focusing on the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly theme, "For the Healing of the World."**



Kaor Dauntey community leader, Ven Samy. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch



Participants of the LWF Asian region Youth Leadership Training in Communication program during their April 2006 workshop in Phnom Penh. The LWF Office for Communication Services (OCS) and Department for Mission and Development jointly coordinate the program. Left to right, front row seated, Ms Linda Macqueen (group's mentor, Australia); Ms Mahanandia Manisha (India); and Mr Dirk-Michael Grötzsch (LWF/OCS); back row, Mr Jusatit Duane (Australia) and Mr Gerald Salda (The Philippines). © LWF/Youth Leadership Training



LWF World Service Cambodia Program Receives National Award

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) country program in Cambodia has received a national medal recognizing its work in disaster preparedness and management.

The Government of Cambodia awarded the LWF/DWS program the National Reconstruction Medal, and a certificate signed by Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen, on 5 May 2006. The award acknowledges the good partnership between the LWF program and the Cambodian National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), which includes organization of some 200 village disaster-preparedness committees, and funding for over 200 disaster mitigation projects.



The deep well, built with support from the LWF/DWS Cambodia program, provides Kauk community members with clean water for domestic use. © LWF/Linda Macqueen

The state medal is the second official recognition of LWF/DWS Cambodia this year. In April, the Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS) gave the program the highest ranking among six programs supported by the Australian Agency for International Development. "Of the six projects evaluated, the LWF project had the highest overall aggregate 'ranking' and was the only project to get a best practice rating of 5," ALWS Executive Secretary, Mr Peter Schirmer, said. The LWF/DWS program, in Cambodia since 1979, works in relatively remote rural areas and in under-served parts of the country. The program currently employs 300 staff members.

Lutheran Leader Says Controversial Law Hurt India's Minorities

The head of the Chennai-based United Evangelical Lutheran Church of India (UELCI) was among church leaders who welcomed the recent defeat in regional elections of India's ruling party, which had backed an anti-conversion law seen as harmful to Christians. "We are proud of the people for exercising their democratic rights responsibly," outgoing UELCI Executive Secretary, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin said after the May 2006 defeat of the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) at elections in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

He noted that most Christians and other minorities in the state voted against the ruling party for its failure on several counts including the controversial anti-conversion bill "that

hurt the minorities badly." The party and its allies won only 69 of the 234 seats in the legislature, while the opposition alliance of Democratic Progressive Alliance that supported the Christians during their protests against the anti-conversion bill garnered 163 seats, representing a two-thirds majority. Ignoring protests by Christians, Muslims, civil rights groups and opposition parties, the ruling AIADMK had in 2002 passed the controversial bill to ban conversions by "fraud, force or inducement" without debate in the state assembly.

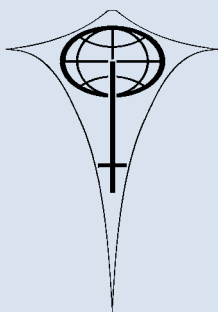
Christians account for just over 6 percent of Tamil Nadu's 62 million people. Muslims make up 8 percent.

(Ecumenical News International)

More People Joined Austrian Church in 2005

The number of people joining the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria grew by 14 percent in 2005, considerably more than in 2004, according to an April 2006 analysis. The number of those leaving the church declined by 4 percent. Baptisms increased by 6 percent and marriages by 3.69 percent, in the same year. Confirmation of young people rose by 3.64 percent as well, indicating relatively stable membership overall. As of 31 December 2005, the church had 324,296 members compared with 325,429 in 2004, a decline of 0.35 percent.

Bishop Herwig Sturm attributes these results to the church's three-year-long reorganization, currently in its second phase. He notes that the church is an "inviting church," beyond the boundaries of its own membership. He says it is important to strengthen ties with congregational members and "openly turn to people outside of the congregation." The issue of spirituality has been a previous highlight, and the current emphasis on a "child-friendly church" enables local congregations to experience "encouragement and strength," firsthand.



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