

The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches

150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Telephone +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org

Editor-in-Chief

Karin Achtelstetter
ka@lutheranworld.org

English Editor

Pauline Mumia
pmu@lutheranworld.org

German Editor

Dirk-Michael Gröttsch
dmg@lutheranworld.org

Layout

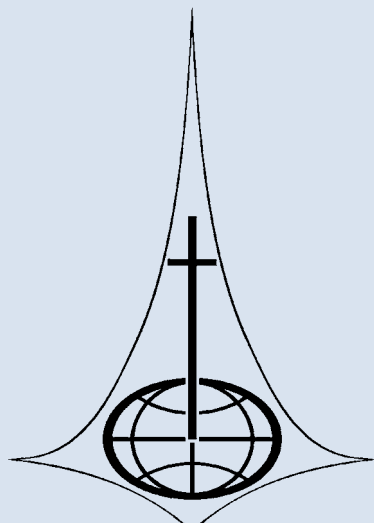
Stéphane Gallay
sga@lutheranworld.org

Circulation/Subscription

Janet Bond-Nash
jbn@lutheranworld.org

The Lutheran World Information (LWI) is the information service of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Unless specifically noted, material presented does not represent positions or opinions of the LWF or of its various units. Where the dateline of an article contains the notation (LWI), the material may be freely reproduced with acknowledgement.



300 Years of Lutheran Ministry in India



From 3 to 9 July 2006, Lutheran churches in India marked the 300th anniversary of the arrival of the first Protestant missionary in the country. Events included a seminar on Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's legacy, an international consultation on Christian mission and the challenges facing the Indian churches, rededication of the church where the German missionary is buried, and an ecumenical thanksgiving service.

(Photo above) The kharagattam dance group leads the festivities.
© F. Imhoff/ELCA

See pages 3–7

Highlights

Tribute to the First Protestant Missionary in India4

Tribute was paid to the legacy of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, the first Protestant missionary to arrive in India in 1706. The challenges facing the Indian Lutheran churches were discussed at a seminar organized during the July tercentenary celebrations held in Chennai, India.

World Church Leaders Appeal for End to Violence in the Middle East.....8

Leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches have issued a joint appeal calling upon Israel and Hizbollah "to end the fighting in Lebanon" and for the United States, European Union, and Arab States "to exercise their influence toward this end."

Methodists' Affirmation of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Agreement a New Ecumenical Landmark 13

The Lutheran World Federation General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, says the formal affirmation of the Joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the World Methodist Council represents a new ecumenical landmark "for which we must thank and praise God together."

FEATURE: Not as Simple as ABC... 15

"Love doesn't protect you from contracting HIV." This simple truth is not easy for many women to accept, says Sonia Covarrubias, a social worker and health educator from Chile.

Contents

Communio

300 Years of Lutheran Ministry in India

- 3 LWF President Hanson and General Secretary Noko Participate
- 4..... LWF President Hanson Says Indian Lutherans Have Much to Teach
- 4 Seminar, International Consultation, Look at Past and Post-Modern Mission Challenges
- 6 Tamil Lutherans Rededicate Tranquebar Mission Church in India

LWF Focus on the Current Middle-East Crisis

- 8 Holy Land Lutheran Bishop Urges Negotiations Around Unsolved Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
- 8 World Church Leaders Appeal for End to Violence in the Middle East
- 9 LWF General Secretary Welcomes UN Resolution, Appeals for Sustainable Middle East Peace
- 10..... Ecumenical Pastoral Delegation Reports on Visit to Lebanon, Israel and Palestine

12..... Salvadoran Lutheran Synod Praised for Prophetic Witness

LWF Secretariat

- 13..... Methodists' Affirmation of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Agreement a New Ecumenical Landmark
- 13..... Delegation of LWF AIDS Coordinators Attends Global AIDS Conference
- 14..... 2007 LWF Council Theme: "Living in Communion in the World Today"

Features & Themes

15..... FEATURE: Not as Simple as ABC ...

News in Brief

- 2..... Tribute to Dutch Cardinal Johannes Willebrands
- 7 János Itzész Appointed Interim Presiding Bishop of Hungarian Church
- 7 New LWF Publication: Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: A Global Challenge to the Church
- 11 LWF Sunday 2006: Reflections on "Living in Communion"

Tribute to Dutch Cardinal Johannes Willebrands

The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, has paid tribute to the great contribution of **Johannes Cardinal Willebrands** to the cause of unity among the churches and with the Jewish people.

Dutch Cardinal Willebrands, emeritus-president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) died on 2 August in the Netherlands, aged 96.

In a letter of condolence to PCPCU President Walter Cardinal Kasper, Noko expressed his appreciation and respect for "the special quality of spiritual warmth and personal commitment to the cause of unity for which Cardinal Willebrands was so well known also in the Lutheran world."

The general secretary particularly noted "the strong mutual confidence" that has been established over the years between the PCPCU, its predecessor bodies, and the LWF. "It is clear that our current ecumenical work stands in



*Johannes Cardinal Willebrands.
© Servizio Fotografico
"L'Osservatore Romano"*

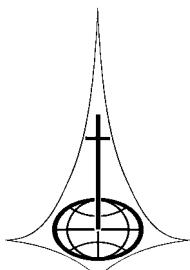
a tradition of more than forty years to which our predecessors have all contributed their parts," he added.

Johannes Willebrands was born on 4 September 1909 in the Netherlands. He was ordained into priesthood in 1934, and named bishop in 1964. He was created a Roman Catholic Cardinal in 1969, the same year he was appointed president of the then Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. He led the secretariat until his retirement in 1989, a year after Pope John Paul II renamed it the PCPCU.

The international bilateral dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics led to the October 1999 landmark signing of

the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by representatives of the LWF and the PCPCU.

Noko expressed his hope and prayer that the memory of Willebrands would serve "as an inspiration for present and future ecumenists and leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ."



300 YEARS OF LUTHERAN MINISTRY IN INDIA

Jubilee Celebrations, 3-9 July 2006 in Chennai and Tranquebar

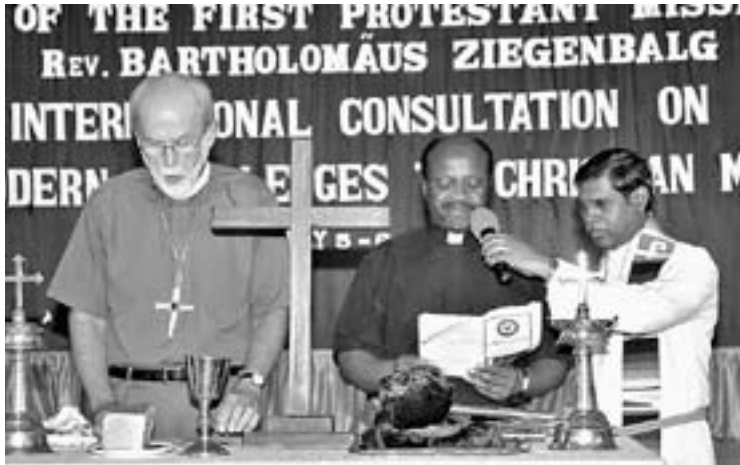
LWF President Hanson and General Secretary Noko Participate

CHENNAI, India/GENEVA, 7 July 2006 (LWI)

– The President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Bishop Mark S. Hanson, and the General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, joined hundreds of delegates attending week-long celebrations in Chennai and Tranquebar, India, to mark the 300th anniversary of the arrival of the first Protestant missionary in the country.

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, a German Lutheran missionary sent by the Danish king, Frederick IV, to seek converts to Christianity, arrived in India on 9 July 1706 at Tranquebar (known as Tarangambadi in Tamil), which was then a Danish colony on India's eastern coast, 300 kilometers south of Chennai. With fellow missionary Heinrich Plütschau, Ziegenbalg set about translating the Bible, prayers and hymns into Tamil, the local language. Though Plütschau later returned to Germany, Ziegenbalg remained in Tranquebar until his death at the age of 36 in 1719.

Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), described Ziegenbalg as a great figure who had laid the foundations of modern Christian mission in India. A 16-member ELCA delegation is participating in the tercentenary commemorations taking place from 3 to 9 July at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, and in Tranquebar. Five days of seminar and consultation on Ziegenbalg's legacy and the challenges facing the Indian churches will be followed on 8 July by a rededication of the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar, where Ziegenbalg's body is buried. An ecumenical jubilee thanksgiving service will be held on 9 July.



LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson (left) presides at the eucharistic service in Chennai, India, during the tercentenary celebrations. LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, and Rev. Dr Samuel Meshack, principal of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, assist. © Gurukul/UELCI

As well as translating the New Testament into Tamil for the first time, the missionary is credited with bringing the first mechanized printing press into India, and with compiling a Tamil-Latin grammar book that was reprinted in Halle, Germany, where he had studied. He is also known for his pioneering work in herbal medicine.

The inaugural ceremony on 3 July was followed by the handing over of more than 100 rolls of microfilm containing over 20,000 pages of manuscripts and other documents on the life and work of Ziegenbalg by Dr Thomas Müller-Bahlke, director of the Francke Foundation, Halle. The foundation is named after August Hermann Francke under whom Ziegenbalg studied theology.

"This will certainly help better research and encourage more of our students to study the contribution of Ziegenbalg and others," said Rev. Dr Samuel Meshack, principal of Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, which received the microfilm and co-sponsored the celebrations.

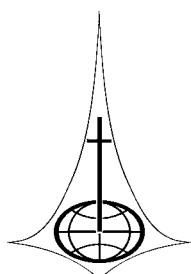
The Lutheran college organized the tercentenary events jointly with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, which brings together 11 Lutheran churches; the National Council of Churches in India, comprising 29 Orthodox and Protestant churches; and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, an LWF member church since 1947.

Over 300 delegates including international guests and local government representatives attended the celebrations.

(Based on articles by the ELCA News Service and Ecumenical News International (ENI))



The rolls of microfilm on Ziegenbalg's life and work are handed over. Right: Consul Mr Erwin Wendland, Management & Cultural Affairs, German consulate in Chennai, India. Left: Rev. Dr Samuel Meshack, principal of the Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute. © Gurukul/UELCI



LWF President Hanson Says Indian Lutherans Have Much to Teach

CHENNAI, India/GENEVA, 13 July 2006 (LWI) – Inaugurating week-long celebrations to mark the tercentenary of Lutheran ministry in India, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, H.E. Thiru Surjit Singh Barnala, said the arrival of the first Protestant missionary no doubt “marked a remarkable change in the lives of the Tamils in that area (and) the beginning of modern education there.” The opening ceremony took place on 3 July at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, India.



Ms Vidhya Rani, secretary Women's Desk, UELCI, presents State of Tamil Nadu Governor, H. E.Thiru Surjit Singh Barnala, with a wall plate gift. Left: Bishop Gideon Devanesan, UELCI president. © M. Lankapalli/UELCI

Bishop Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, were among several guests who brought international greetings to the governor and to the more than 425 registered participants for the 3 to 9 July week that included a seminar and consultation exploring German Lutheran missionary Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's impact on India and Christian mission.

“The eyes of 140 member churches in 78 nations, representing 66 million Lutherans, are now upon this city as the whole Lutheran World Federa-

tion joins you in thanking God for 300 years of Protestant ministry in India,” Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), told the gathering. He praised the Lutheran churches in India for three centuries of coexistence in a society of multiple religions and classes: “You have much to teach us about what it means to be Christians in a pluralistic context. ...We in other parts of the world are looking to you to be our teachers,” he said.

“We are here to accompany you, to walk with you as you struggle not only with being a church of Dalit people but with being a church of Dalit people who continue to seek their full liberation and restoration to their God-given dignity and full humanity,” Hanson continued.

Recalling the contributions of the German missionary, Governor Barnala said it was “fitting to celebrate the arrival of this great missionary” who was committed “to serve the poor people,” and is credited with setting up the first public school for girls in the country in 1710. He noted that Ziegenbalg's Bible translation had laid a foundation for a culture rich in Tamil literature, adding that his translation of Tamil works into German had “built a literary bridge between the two countries.” He had also introduced a Tamil printing press in Tranquebar in 1712.



LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran Paul Martin addresses delegates during the inauguration of the tercentenary celebrations in Chennai, India, on 3 July 2006. © M. Lankapalli/UELCI

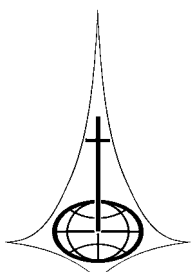
Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, LWF deputy general secretary and former executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, said the Tranquebar Mission was critical for LWF member churches in Asia. “It is responsible for laying the foundation of the creative solutions in freeing the gospel of Christ in very difficult circumstances and pioneering the work for social justice,” he said.

(With reporting from the ELCA News Service, and Ecumenical News International.)

Seminar, International Consultation, Look at Past and Post-Modern Mission Challenges

CHENNAI, India/GENEVA, 18 July 2006 (LWI) –Tribute was paid to the legacy of the first Protestant missionary to arrive in India, in 1706, at a one-day seminar

and a two-day international consultation, organized for 4 July, and 5-6 July respectively, during the recent tercentenary celebrations held in Chennai, India.



An Unparalleled Contribution to Civil Society

In a keynote address to the seminar on the “Contribution of the Tranquebar Mission to Civil Society,” Dr S. P. Thyagarajan, vice-chancellor of the University of Madras in Chennai, praised Ziegenbalg’s “farsightedness” in bringing Indian and European cultures together. He had made an “unparalleled contribution” to strengthening the civil society, he said, and people should consider him as a “role model.”

The former director of the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archeology, Dr Ramachandran Nagaswamy, pointed out efforts by the German missionary to introduce Westerners to the richness of Tamil culture and literature.

Dr Bernard D’Sami of the Roman Catholic Loyola College in Chennai, paid tribute to Ziegenbalg’s devotion “to the pursuit of true wisdom,” and urged Christians to emulate him by making their schools more open to people of all castes and classes.

Dr Daniel Jeyaraj, a theologian and professor of World Christianity, in Newton, Massachusetts, USA, underlined the Tranquebar Mission’s contribution to Indology. “Ziegenbalg wanted to empower people,” and was even prepared in the process to expose the misdeeds of the local rulers at the time, he said.

Post-Modern Challenges to Christian Mission

LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson delivered the inaugural address of the 5-6 July consultation on “Post-Modern Challenges to Christian Mission.” His presentation included a description of “post-modern,” what Lutherans had to offer to Christian mission in the context of Ziegenbalg’s contribution, and the emerging themes for study. “The roots of this church deeply planted 300 years ago continue to bear fruit as Lutherans in India remain steadfastly committed to being engaged in God’s mission for the life of the world. Your absolute resolve that all Dalit people must be granted human rights, dignity, and liberation, is a sign to the whole world that your discipleship is centered in the cross,” Hanson said.



LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson delivers the inaugural address at the international consultation on “Post-Modern Challenges to Christian Mission,” in Chennai, India. © Gurukul/UELCI



In one of five panel discussions during the consultation, Ms Priscilla Singh, LWF Department for Mission and Development secretary for Women in Church and Society, urges greater recognition of the history of women in church affairs. © Gurukul/UELCI

“As people of faith, we cannot be in service without being in pursuit of justice,” he added.

Bishop Dr Margot Kässmann of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, Germany, noted that today, “The church that goes out and meets the people is a relevant church.” She urged Christians to discern the spirit of the times amid a “rapidly secularizing context,” not only in Germany, but also in India and other parts of the world.

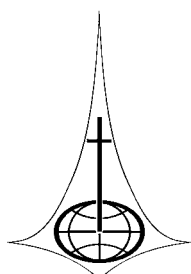
Concerns of Poor Should Become the Churches’ Agenda

In the five panel discussions that followed, the presenters focused on Christians’ ethical responsibility toward the poor and marginalized people; response to the country’s health care needs; and greater recognition of women in church affairs.

Dr William Stanley, director of the Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections in India (IRDWSI), pointed out that the “church has the duty to protect God’s creation,” saying that environmental protection and conservation had to be a serious concern for the church. “The poor, the marginalized and the least powerful are those who suffer most from illness and pollution caused by environmental degradation,” he said. He emphasized Christians’ ethical responsibility to “seek policy changes through advocacy and promote alternatives for sustainable initiatives.”

Ms Priscilla Singh, the secretary for Women in Church and Society in the LWF Department for Mission and Development called for greater recognition of women in church affairs. “History has proved that mission becomes a success only when it starts to include women,” who at times had served without even being acknowledged as missionaries, or when mission had made it a priority to empower them with knowledge and skills. To reiterate her plea, Singh urged the participants to pursue the model set by Ziegenbalg who gave women the opportunity to question and learn from him.

The church has an “impressive record” of developing human power for health care, according to Dr K. M. Shyamprasad, director of the National Lutheran Health and Medical Board in India, but “we have not



responded to the current needs of the health-care sector of the country.” Even though India has the largest number of HIV cases in the world, Shyamprasad said, “the very mention of HIV and AIDS is anathema to the church, which equates it with sexual sin.”

“Will the church dare to break new paths and new inroads to solve (the) issues related to poverty, caste and gender, which perpetuate this disease and many others?” he asked.

In his closing remarks, Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in India asserted that, “The concerns of the poor should become

the agenda of churches not only at the national and international levels, but at the local congregations also. ... We need to revise the theological curriculum to make the pastors and others respond to the new challenges.”

Ziegenbalg died at the age of 36 on 23 February 1719. He is buried at the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar.

The full text of this article is available on the LWF Web site at www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1898.EN.html

(With reporting by Ecumenical News International correspondent Anto Akkara, and the ELCA News Service.)

Tamil Lutherans Rededicate Tranquebar Mission Church in India

TARANGAMBADI, India/GENEVA, 19 July 2006 (LWI) – The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) marked the 300th anniversary of Protestant ministry in India by rededicating the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar (known as Tarangambadi in Tamil), on 8 July. The church was first dedicated by the German missionary, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, in 1718.

The Tranquebar Mission buildings were damaged by the December 2004 tsunami. At the weekend’s events, hosted by the TELC, many of the restored buildings were showcased, including the New Jerusalem Church. The restoration was carried out in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

On 9 July, the last day of the tercentenary celebrations, the TELC formally opened a new education compound, including the Plütschau Primary School. A procession, led by more than 100 schoolchildren made its way through the Tranquebar streets toward the church, where an Ecumenical Jubilee Thanksgiving Service was held.

Christian Witness in a Divided World

Preaching at the service, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson emphasized the united witness of Christians in a divided world. Unity, noted the president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), does not mean sameness but embracing the other not to make them like “us,” as “Ziegenbalg did not come to make Tamil people Germans or Danes.” He came not to teach European customs, but taught Tamil people to take pride in their own ways, he said. Chris-



An official rededication of the New Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar, originally built by Ziegenbalg, took place on 8 July. © F. Imhoff/ELCA

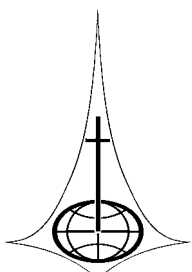
tian ministry continues to worship God and to serve “all suffering humanity,” he affirmed, emphasizing the work of Lutherans for “the full participation of Dalits in India’s society.”

According to TELC Bishop Dr T. Aruldoss, more than 10,000 local Christians drawn from different denominations, attended the concluding celebrations, which had begun on 3 July with an inauguration ceremony at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological and Research Institute in Chennai, India. In addition to more than 200 delegates led by officials of the National Council of Churches in India, which groups 29 Orthodox and Protestant churches, over 100 international delegates joined in the celebrations at Tranquebar.

Aruldoss said the highlight of the closing ceremony was the dedication of 12 missionaries (to resemble the 12 disciples of Jesus



Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in India, displays a commemorative plate for the July 2006 Tranquebar Tercentenary Celebrations in India. © Gurukul/ELCA



Christ) “to continue the missionary work (Ziegenbalg) started in India 300 years ago.” This is part of the project we have launched to send 300 missionaries to areas where the gospel has not been preached yet,” he said.

Ecumenical Academy Honors Lutheran Contribution

Earlier on July 8, hundreds of local Christians cutting across denominations attended a “missionary revival conference” calling for the number of missionaries to be raised to 3,000 instead of 300.

The Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration in Chennai held a special convocation on July 7 in honor of those who have contributed to the cause for which Ziegenbalg arrived in India. Of 26 honorary doctorates in divinity, three respectively were awarded to LWF President Hanson, LWF General Secretary Noko, and LWF Department



Schoolchildren gather at the formal opening of Plütschau Primary School. © F. Imhoff/ELCA

for Mission and Development Secretary for Women in Church and Society, Ms Priscilla Singh.

(With reporting from Ecumenical News International correspondent Anto Akkara, and the ELCA News Service.)

János Ittzés Appointed Interim Presiding Bishop of Hungarian Church

János Ittzés, bishop of the West District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) has been named interim presiding bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran church. Ittzés, 62, succeeds Bishop Dr Imre Szebik who retired in March 2006. The church’s synod will make a final decision on the position in November this year.



Interim Presiding Bishop János Ittzés. © ELCH/G. Menyész

in Budapest from 1962 to 1967, leading to his ordination in 1970. After serving as a vicar in Koszeg from 1970 until 1971, he was a congregation pastor in Takácsi from 1971 to 1981, and in Koszeg from 1981 to 2000. He has been bishop of the church’s West District since 2000.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, an LWF member since 1947, has some 305,000 members.

Ittzés pursued theological studies at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Academy

New LWF Publication: Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: A Global Challenge to the Church

Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: A Global Challenge to the Church is the title of a new publication of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) aimed at encouraging an open atmosphere for discussion and dialogue about spirits, ancestors and healing within the LWF member churches. Produced by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) through its desk for Church and People of Other Faiths, this resource seeks to address such questions as: Why do increasing numbers of Christians seek support within spiritualistic groups and indigenous religions? What are the implications of this? What pastoral and theological questions does this pose?

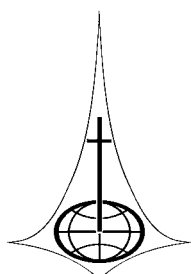


Challenge to the Churches in Europe (LWF Studies 02/2004), and *Ancestors, Spirits and Healing in Africa and Asia* (LWF Studies 01/2005).

A final meeting discussed the results from the seminars, and suggested how these matters might be dealt with in churches. This new 56-page publication was developed through deliberations at a final January 2005 global consultation in Berlin, Germany, where outcomes of the regional meetings and their implications were discussed.

The booklet, edited by Rev. Dr Ingo Wulhorst, DTS study secretary for Church and People of Other Faiths (2001-2006), can be ordered from the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, 150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Tel. +41/22-791 61 11, Fax +41/22-791 66 30, E-mail Liesch@lutheranworld.org. It is free of charge with postage and packaging charged for bulk orders.

To seek some answers to these questions, the LWF/DTS convened four regional seminars between 2004 and 2006 in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, which resulted in three previous books: *Espiritualismo/Espiritismo: Desafios para a Igreja na América Latina* (LWF Studies 01/2004), *Spiritualism: A*



LWF FOCUS ON THE CURRENT MIDDLE-EAST CRISIS

Holy Land Lutheran Bishop Urges Negotiations Around Unsolved Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

JERUSALEM/GENEVA, 28 July 2006 (LWI) – As conflict escalates in Israel, the Gaza strip and Lebanon, Palestinian Lutheran Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan says the only way to end all the military operations in the Holy Land and to stop further loss of human life is “to negotiate around the unsolved and urgent core issue—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

In a pastoral letter dated 24 July, Younan, who is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) noted it was time to move from the logic of war and from self-justifying violence and acts of terror. He also called for world leaders to admit that they had failed to bring a just peace “and humbly change course.”

“Justice will be served and the conflict ended when we achieve a shared Jerusalem, the respect of the rights of the refugees, two states living side by side in peace and security according to international law. Now is the time to serve justice with action, not words or plans or maps,” said Younan, who also is vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for the Asian region.

The ELCJHL bishop joined the call by global religious leaders for an end to the Middle East violence, as Al-Qaeda’s deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Muslims, in a message recorded for television, to attack Israel and its allies over the violence in the Middle East involving a war with the Lebanon-based group Hizbollah.



ELCJHL Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan
© LWF/H. Putsman

Younan urged the parties involved to engage in negotiations to end the violence, arguing that the current hostilities could only achieve more destruction, fear, hatred, anger and further retaliation on every side. “We must reject the idea that we can fight our way to peace and security...we cannot,” he wrote in the pastoral letter titled, “It is time for all to turn away from anger and vengeance and seek justice.”

More than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon and 50 in Israel since fighting erupted on 12 July when Hizbollah fighters abducted two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid into northern Israel and began firing rockets into Israel. Israel’s air strikes have damaged Hizbollah installations but also badly hit

civilian infrastructure in Lebanon.

Younan described the current situation as a moral, spiritual and political crisis of global proportions. “As a Lutheran bishop, my plea is for all Christians to commit themselves to prayer and fasting to seek God’s empowerment in addressing the call to repent and seek justice. This includes urging Christians to go beyond their excellent relief and emergency work to secure the future for a just peace.”

(With reporting from Ecumenical News International)

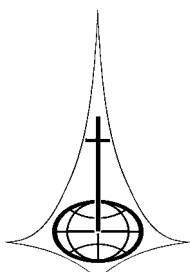
(A statement issued on 18 July by the LWF General Secretary on the conflict in the Middle East is available at: www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1897.EN.html)

World Church Leaders Appeal for End to Violence in the Middle East

GENEVA, 8 August 2006 (LWI) – Leaders of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and World Council of Churches (WCC) have issued a joint appeal calling upon Israel and Hizbollah “to end the fighting in Lebanon” and for the United States, European Union, and Arab States “to exercise their influence toward this end.”

The appeal signed by LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, WARC President Rev. Dr Clifton Kirkpatrick and WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, also states that while the terms for a lasting peace “cannot be reached in a brief time frame ... “a cease-fire is an “imperative first step to end the violence.”

The full text of the joint appeal follows:



A joint appeal by the leaders of the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

A Call to End the Violence

8 August 2006

As followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and as leaders of the World Council of Churches and the worldwide fellowships of Lutheran and Reformed churches, we are shocked by the relentless violence, death, and devastation occurring in Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. We mourn the loss of life. We abhor the untold human costs of this conflict, especially its impact on innocent people. We deplore the destruction of infrastructure and property. In the face of tragedy of such magnitude, we affirm that God calls us to do justice, reconcile with our enemies, and live together in peace.

We call upon Israel and Hizbollah to end the fighting in Lebanon, and we call upon the United States, the European Union, and the Arab States to exercise their influence toward this end.

We call upon the Israeli government, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas to end the conflict in Gaza.

The number of Lebanese deaths approaches 1,000, one-third of them reportedly children under 12, and the number of Israeli deaths moves toward 100. Whatever the reality of the alleged provocations by both sides of the conflict, this spiral of violence serves no end but the devastation of Lebanon and the inflicting of wounds of terror in Israel. Neither the terror of Katyusha rockets nor the destruction of Lebanese homes, schools, and villages can contribute to a lasting peace in the region. Such acts will lead to even deeper hatred between the parties than that which has fueled the current violence.

The Israelis have declared that they will continue military operations in Lebanon until there is a "peacekeeping force" on the ground. Hizbollah, in return, declares that they will not stop fighting until all Israeli military presence has left Lebanon. It is time for this intransigence by both parties to end. Israel must withdraw speedily from all the Lebanese territory, and Hizbollah, at the same time, must cease its actions against the Israeli people.

Close to 175 Palestinians, many of them civilians, have been killed since Israel began military operations in the Gaza Strip. The devastation of the infrastructure of Gaza brings added hardship to people who already have nothing. The people of Israel know the terror of random rockets launched day and night.

While it is true that terms for a lasting peace cannot be reached in a brief time frame, the world cannot wait for signs of "a new Middle East" to stop the killing. It is time for the leaders of the nations, working through the United Nations, to bring to bear the full force of their influence. A cease-fire is an imperative first step to end the violence. As people of faith, we implore all parties, in God's name, to agree to this, lest violence spread further through a region already stained with the blood of innocents.

When a cease-fire is achieved, we call the leaders of nations and other parties to begin the work for a compassionate order that will lead to a lasting peace. Our organizations and our churches are eager to share in that endeavor. The task is great and the way is hard, for fear must be overcome with faith, hate with trust, enmity with reconciliation, and injustice with justice. But it is a task worthy of our efforts and it is the way that leads to life.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Clifton Kirkpatrick
President
World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Bishop Mark S. Hanson
President
The Lutheran World Federation

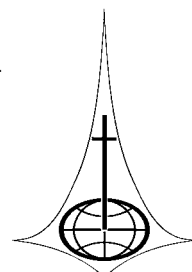
LWF General Secretary Welcomes UN Resolution, Appeals for Sustainable Middle East Peace

GENEVA, 15 August 2006 (LWI) – The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, welcomes the UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to the armed hostilities in Lebanon and northern Israel, and appeals to the international community to establish a true basis for sustainable peace in the whole Middle East region.

In a statement issued following the unanimous passage on August 11 of the UN Security Council Resolu-

tion 1701, Noko said sustainable peace in the Middle East must include the establishment of a just basis for coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Noko described as a welcome development the resolution's explicit call for the immediate cessation of both the Hizbollah attacks and Israeli offensive military operations and the agreement to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in parallel with the deployment of Lebanese forces



and an enhanced UN peacekeeping presence. Vitally important, Noko added, is the establishment of full and effective humanitarian access to all affected areas in southern Lebanon in order to secure the essential needs of those still living in those areas.

Pointing out the destruction of livelihoods, and the experience of loss, pain and anger that have occurred, Noko urged the international community to “hold out the prospect of more than the mere absence

of conflict.” He stressed the need to deal with the “fundamental grievances and injustices that have for so many years provided such a fertile ground for hatred and violence in the region and the wider world.”

It is Noko’s prayer that the sanctity of human life and human dignity recognized by Christianity, Islam and Judaism alike, would provide a basis for progress toward justice and peace in the Holy Land.

The full text of the statement follows:

Statement by Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation

Geneva, 15 August 2006

I welcome the unanimous passage by the UN Security Council of a resolution to bring to an end the armed hostilities in Lebanon and northern Israel, which have caused so much suffering and destruction over the last month. It is, at the same time, a tragedy that it took so long to achieve this result. The loss of life and destruction of livelihoods that occurred in the meantime cannot be undone by means of this overdue resolution. Nor can this resolution undo the profound harm done to the cause of peace and justice in the Middle East, or restore trust in the goodwill and integrity of the international community in the minds of the many victims of the violence.

Nevertheless, the explicit call contained in the Security Council resolution for the immediate cessation of both the Hizbollah attacks and Israeli offensive military operations is a welcome development, as is the agreement to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in parallel with the deployment of Lebanese forces and an enhanced UN peacekeeping presence. It is vitally important that full and effective humanitarian access to all affected areas in southern Lebanon should now be established, in order to secure the essential needs of those still living in those areas. It must also provide a basis for the swift restoration of Lebanon’s civilian infrastructure, deliberately targeted in the recent fighting.

Beyond this resolution, the international community must finally grapple with the need to establish a true basis for a sustainable peace in the whole region. It must hold

out the prospect of more than the mere absence of conflict, and deal with the fundamental grievances and injustices that have for so many years provided such a fertile ground for hatred and violence in the region and the wider world. It must in particular include the establishment of a just basis for coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis, without which no sustainable peace can be envisaged.

Sadly, every bomb dropped and rocket fired in this latest conflict has sown new seeds of hatred, making peace in the Middle East an even more difficult challenge than before. Regardless of gross statistics, the experience of loss, pain and anger is similar for each victim of the violence, whether Israeli or Arab, and every such experience must harden the heart. But despite the obvious difficulties, diplomacy and dialogue remain the only possible means for progress towards peace. Violence and revenge has only ever succeeded in making a peaceful future for all the people of the region recede further into the future.

Now more than ever, the international community must invest in hope, rather than in weapons for the conflicting forces. All people of goodwill must offer their support to those who continue to work for justice and to struggle for mutual understanding across the lines of division. These voices of reason are a precious treasure of humanity, and the best hope for peace in the Middle East.

Let wisdom and conscience prevail. Let sanctity of human life and human dignity, recognized by Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike, provide a basis for progress towards justice and peace in the Holy Land.

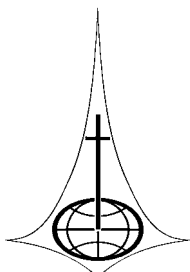
Ecumenical Pastoral Delegation Reports on Visit to Lebanon, Israel and Palestine

GENEVA, 17 August 2006 (LWI) – Peace in the Middle East will not be achieved until the core issue of the conflict in the region, namely the coexistence of Palestine and Israel is addressed, said the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, when he joined leaders of the Ecumenical Center-based church organizations in welcoming an ecumenical pastoral delegation returning from Beirut, Jerusalem and Ramallah.

As long as this issue is not addressed, more bridges will be destroyed, Noko said at a 16 August press

conference in Geneva, during which the delegation reported on its visit. “Any bomb that falls in any part of the Middle East is the seeding of hatred and putting up of walls of enemy images,” he remarked.

Three members of an ecumenical delegation entrusted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) jointly with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the LWF and World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) traveled to the Middle East, 10-15 August, to express solidarity with the people there following the recent



armed hostilities in Lebanon and northern Israel. They met with representatives of churches, Muslim and Jewish leaders, civil society and government officials.

At the press conference, the delegation members—CEC President Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tours, France, Mgr Bernard Aubertin, and WCC program executive on racism, Ms Marilia Alves-Schüller—said they had returned with the task of transmitting the hopes and expectations of churches in Lebanon, Palestine and Israel to the international ecumenical family.

De Clermont said one question that “was heard over and over again by the delegation” in relation to Israel’s attacks on Lebanon was “Why such awful destruction?” The group emphasized that the representatives of the different Lebanese communities with whom they had met “had all agreed that the answer to that question is that the destruction was both deliberate and planned.”



At the 16 August press conference, from left: General Secretaries of the Ecumenical Center-based church organizations, Ven. Colin Williams, CEC; Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (LWF); Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC; and delegation members, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tours, France, Mgr Bernard-Nicolas Aubertin; CEC President Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont; and WCC program executive on racism, Ms Marilia Alves-Schüller. © WCC/P. Williams

Multi-Confessional Society

The delegation members affirmed the concern of representatives of Lebanese communities about the overriding value of the multi-cultural and multi-confes-

sional nature of their society. For the community leaders, this represents a guarantee for peace. They noted that Lebanese “of all religious faiths—Christians and Muslims, both Sunni and Shi’ia—had remained firmly united despite the enormously divisive pressures of the war.”

The WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia said the ecumenical delegation’s visit was a sign of the WCC’s intention to broaden its coordination of ecumenical response to the Middle East crisis. He noted that the situation in the region was changing, and “a new political, economic and moral landscape requires new elements to be brought into the equation for a just peace in the Middle East.”

Over 50 Years of LWF Presence

The delegation members spoke of the strong interreligious engagement of Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. The LWF general secretary stressed the urgent need to strengthen such commitment and “to support Younan, his colleagues and counterparts in other religious traditions whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim” in their work within the ecumenical Middle East Council of Churches and the newly established council for religious leaders in the Holy Land.

Noko noted that the LWF has been serving the needs of Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem and the West Bank for more than 50 years. As a major Christian presence on the Mount of Olives, the LWF Department for World Service Jerusalem (DWS) program provides essential health care, vocational training, scholarships and support for the blind. It promotes justice, peace and reconciliation while engaging and serving the diverse and divided communities of the region. It also operates the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem, which responds to critical emergency situations that result from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The AVH provides quality health services to refugees and others who cannot receive such services elsewhere.

LWF Sunday 2006: Reflections on “Living in Communion”

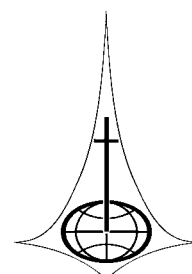
The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, during this year’s traditional LWF Sunday celebrations, invites the Lutheran communion to reflect on the theme “Living in Communion” and to focus on the federation’s 60th anniversary.

In the annual LWF leaflet, prepared for use by congregations and other groups during worship services on or around Reformation Sunday, Noko invites readers to contemplate what it means to be a communion of churches. “By grace, God calls us into the communion of divine life,” he writes. “This implies that we take courageous strides toward building and sustaining relationships among the members in the communion and throughout the world.

There are no longer member churches on the one hand and the LWF on the other,” he adds.

The LWF Council adopted the concept of an “LWF Sunday” or a “Lutheran Communion Sunday” in 1995. The LWF Department for Mission and Development provided material for this year’s publication. The four-page leaflet is free of charge and available in English, French, German and Spanish. A PDF version can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/Essentials/LWF-Sunday.html

Printed copies can be ordered from the LWF Office for Communication Services, 150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Tel. +41/22-791 61 11, Fax +41/22-791 66 30, E-mail jbn@lutheranworld.org



Salvadoran Lutheran Synod Praised for Prophetic Witness

LWF Congratulates Bishop Medardo Gómez on 20th Anniversary of Episcopal Ministry

GENEVA, 8 August 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has paid tribute to the contribution of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS) and its leader Bishop Medardo E. Gómez, to outstanding prophetic witness and commitment in El Salvador, especially in the face of persecution and violence.

In a letter to Gómez on the occasion of his 20th anniversary as bishop, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko recalls the difficult and complex situation of “a harsh war and a voracious spiral of violence,” when the former took over responsibility as the first SLS bishop in 1986.

In the letter dated 4 August, Noko said Gómez and the church “embodied a ministry through which the whole people could see the signs of God’s faithfulness” to creation. “In the midst of hatred, the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod under your guidance offered signals of love and solidarity; in the midst of despair, it proclaimed hope. And where violence was unfolding, you sought peace,” he wrote.



Since the early 1980s, ordination of women has been a common SLS practice. Rev. Guadalupe Cortez (left) and Rev. Concepción Marina Ángel. © R. Menjivar/SLS Communication Unit

SLS Work Had a Significant Impact on Thousands of People

The general secretary noted that the work of the SLS has had a significant impact on thousands of people, eliciting respect and admiration for the church’s ministry not only in El Salvador but globally. “Your witness and commitment,” Noko said, “honors and commits the whole communion of Lutheran churches in the world.”

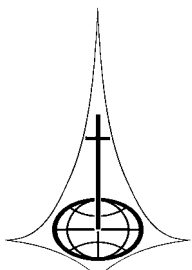


Lutherans take part in a procession marking the 20th anniversary of episcopal ministry of SLS Bishop Medardo Gómez. From left: Rev. Eliseo Rodríguez, SLS creation and disaster-preparedness program, Rev. Luzaoir Lenz, a Brazilian missionary serving in the SLS, and Bishop Gómez. © VELKD/OKR Dr. Christoph Jahnel

During the 1980-1992 civil war in the Central American country, the SLS played an outstanding role advocating for justice and assisting the internally displaced and poor population. But it paid a high price for this work and its clear prophetic denunciation of injustice and oppression: one of its pastors was murdered. The episcopal offices suffered a bombing attack, and many workers in the church, including Gómez, received numerous death threats, with some going into hiding or fleeing the country. In April 1983, Gómez was captured and detained in a clandestine jail and later turned over to a local police force. An international protest campaign eventually led to his release.

His installation on 6 August 1986 as the first SLS bishop symbolized his commitment to the victims of El Salvador’s civil war. He was installed at an improvised outdoor cathedral at the *Fe Y Esperanza* (Faith and Hope) refugee camp in Nejapa, north of the city, instead of the San Salvador church where he had served as a pastor for 13 years.

Today, the SLS’ holistic ministry—proclamation and service—includes, among others, a strong public profile advocating for social justice. Its work is organized through some 200 so-called “Communities of Faith and Life,” which are connected to 68 congregations, served by 17 pastors, 19 deacons and 11 evangelists. The 12,000-member Salvadoran Lutheran Synod joined the LWF in 1986.



Methodists' Affirmation of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Agreement a New Ecumenical Landmark

LWF General Secretary Noko Anticipates Broader Forms of Cooperation

SEOUL, South Korea/GENEVA, 27 July 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, says the formal affirmation of the Joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) by the World Methodist Council (WMC) represents a new ecumenical landmark “for which we must thank and praise God together.”



Representatives of the WMC, the LWF and Vatican at the July 2006 signing of the “Official Common Affirmation” of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Seoul, South Korea. © World Methodist Council/Dr G. Freeman

of the agreements reached. There are deep realities in the churches and the world that must be dealt with in concrete ways, he said, adding, “we must [now] grow together in the mystery of our union through God’s justifying grace, for the renewal of our churches and for the healing of humanity.”

The “Official Common Affirmation” signed by the three partners in Seoul af-

Addressing the 19th World Methodist Conference in

Seoul, South Korea, on the occasion of the affirmation on 23 July, Noko said he hoped the Methodists’ endorsement of the JDDJ would be an encouragement for new and broader forms of ecumenical cooperation among the respective communions. The 20-24 July conference met under the theme “God in Christ Reconciling.”

Representatives of the LWF and Roman Catholic Church signed the JDDJ on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. With the signing, the two Christian communions declared that mutual condemnations at the time of the 16th century Protestant Reformation do not apply to their current teaching.

The Methodists are the first Christian world communion besides the original signing partners, to formally affirm in a substantial theological statement, the agreements in basic truths of justification as expressed in the JDDJ. A WMC statement on the JDDJ explains how Methodist teaching relates to the doctrine of justification at a fundamental level.

Noko noted there had been some criticism of the JDDJ for not sufficiently drawing the consequences

of the WMC and its member churches’ agreement to the JDDJ. It also states the LWF and Roman Catholic Church’s joint acceptance of the Methodist statement. In the document, the three parties commit themselves “to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching,” and to the pursuit of full communion and common witness to the world.

The signatories to the “Official Common Affirmation” included the WMC Chairperson, His Eminence Sunday Mbang and WMC General Secretary, Rev. George Freeman; LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, Rev. Sven Oppegaard; Walter Cardinal Kasper, president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Archbishop emeritus Cardinal Soo-Hwan Kim.

The full text of the Methodist Statement on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is available on the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OEA/Methodist-Statement-2006-EN.pdf

Delegation of LWF AIDS Coordinators Attends Global AIDS Conference

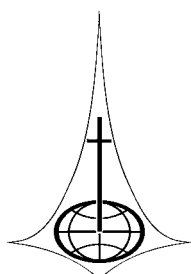
“Getting Churches and Their Leaders on Board”

GENEVA, 9 August 2006 (LWI) – Ms Mercy Chandral Devadhas is a counselor at an outpatient AIDS clinic of the Chennai-based United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. A regular working day for the 38 year-old registered nurse includes carrying out blood tests, administering treatment for HIV symptomatic diseases, and counseling individuals living with HIV.

Devadhas is a member of a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation of AIDS coordinators from

the LWF member churches and field programs of the Department for World Service participating in the 16th International AIDS Conference (IAC), 13-18 August 2006 in Toronto, Canada. “Time to Deliver” is the theme of the conference to be attended by some 20,000 participants including policymakers, researchers, health-care providers, activists and people living with HIV.

“The conference is an important forum for our coordinators to hear and see how others, including people



living with HIV, are dealing with this issue,” Dr Sheila Shyamprasad, the LWF consultant for HIV and AIDS in the LWF Department for Mission and Development said on the eve of the conference. She is leading the team of 21 AIDS coordinators to the IAC, which will also be attended by other representatives from the LWF member churches.

From 10 to 12 August, over 500 faith-based participants will hear and discuss central challenges to their response to HIV and AIDS at ecumenical and interfaith pre-conferences under the theme “Faith in Action: Keeping the Promise.” The LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, and Ugandan Anglican Canon Gideon Byamugisha, co-



Ms Mercy Chandral Devadhas
© LWF/H. Putsman

founder of the African Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV or AIDS (ANERELA+) will address the gathering. An LWF-led workshop titled, “Getting Churches and Their Leaders on Board,” will focus on the global strategies and processes that contribute to the successful transformation of churches and their leaders from “silence” to “courage and action.” The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), the Geneva-based network mobilizing AIDS and trade justice advocacy, is co-organizing the pre-conferences.

Shyamprasad pointed out that while churches and their related organizations have made an enormous contribution to AIDS work “they don’t always realize it, and many even feel that they do not measure up to expectations.” She said she hoped this conference would help Devadhas and others realize the churches’ significant role in the fight against AIDS through the innumerable networks of co-workers and volunteers actively involved in nearly all aspects of HIV and AIDS work, especially care for people living with HIV and orphans.

But she also expects the forum to be an eye-opener to the enormous challenges that still remain, and mentioned fighting AIDS-related stigmatization as a concern for the churches.



Ms Joni Ricks, a member of the ELCA delegation to the 16th IAC, participates in the AIDS Treatment March during the conference.
© M. Engle/EAA

More articles on the 16th IAC will follow in the next LWI Issue.

2007 LWF Council Theme: “Living in Communion in the World Today”

Preparations for LWF 60th Anniversary Events Proceeding Well

GENEVA, 1 September 2006 (LWI) - “Living in Communion in the World Today” is the theme of the 2007 meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council to be hosted by the Church of Sweden in Lund. The meeting scheduled from 20 to 27 March 2007 will include celebrations marking the LWF’s 60th anniversary.

The Council meeting theme is traditionally determined upon suggestion of the host church. The last meeting was held under the theme “The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation,” and hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, from 31 August to 6 September 2005.

In a letter to all the LWF member churches, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko confirms the Council meeting theme, and reports that preparations for the upcoming meeting and anniversary events are proceeding well.

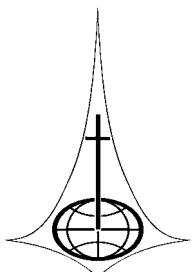
In February 2006, the LWF Executive Committee, via mail vote, decided to combine the next Council meeting with the anniversary commemorations in Lund,

Sweden, where the federation was founded in 1947. The events will include a church leadership consultation bringing together women and youth leaders, as well as all LWF member church leaders.

The 49-member Council governs the LWF between Assemblies, normally held every six years. The current Council was elected at the July 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. Its members include the LWF President, the Treasurer, and 48 lay and ordained persons drawn from the member churches. Up to 30 advisers also serve on the Council’s Program and Standing Committees.

“The Lutheran Church in the World Today” was the theme of the First Assembly of the LWF, held from 30 June to 6 July 1947 in Lund, and hosted by the Church of Sweden. With nearly 7 million members, the Church of Sweden is the largest LWF member church.

The LWF currently has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, representing 66.2 million Christians.



FEATURE: Not as Simple as ABC ...

16th International AIDS Conference: Ecumenical Session Focuses on HIV Impact on Women

TORONTO, Canada/GENEVA, 15 August 2006 (LWI) – “Love doesn’t protect you from contracting HIV.” This simple truth is not easy for many women to accept, says Sonia Covarrubias, a social worker and health educator from Chile.

Covarrubias, a member of a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation attending the 16th International AIDS Conference, 13-18 August in Toronto, Canada, made these remarks at a session focused on concerns about the impact of HIV and AIDS on women, during a pre-conference event for faith-based organizations in the city.

An estimated 76 percent of new HIV infections are among young women, with some activists calling it the “feminization of HIV,” participants heard during the session.

HIV Prevention for Women

Participants in the session were told that moralistic interpretations and theological differences often hindered the advancement and development of HIV prevention strategies for women.

The most widely known approach is the ABC strategy (Abstinence, Being faithful, and Condom use). But according to Becky Johnson of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), the Geneva-based coalition of faith-based groups advocating for increased access to effective prevention and treatment for HIV and AIDS, “ABC is not a holistic approach.”

Many speakers during the session on special efforts needed to prevent HIV infections among women spoke on condition of anonymity, perhaps signaling a feeling of vulnerability when addressing issues of sexual behavior.

One young woman said the ABC approach to prevention emphasized the responsibility of the individual and let pharmaceutical companies off the hook. “It makes it



Faith-based delegates during the IAC march in Nathan Philips Square, Toronto, Canada. © M. Engle/EAA

look as if universal access (to prevention measures) is not decisive. It’s just personal responsibility that matters.” She added that “women in certain circumstances just don’t have the choice to practice ABC.”

Participants unanimously condemned fear tactics used in the past as prevention strategies. “The clergy in Namibia, for example, tried to scare people from having sex when the AIDS pandemic began,” one of the speakers recalled. “But using fear as prevention of HIV does damage to the children and teenagers who are being scared and it increases stigma,” it was noted.

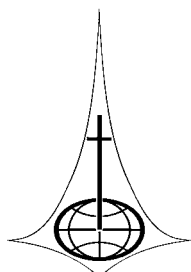
Churches were criticized for fearing to openly promote the “C” in ABC—condom use. “ABC is a black and white approach in a gray world,” one woman said. “We have to go beyond ABC.”

Poverty and Domestic Violence

The problem of HIV infection among women lies not only in sexual relationships and the right to protection. It is also closely connected with the social, political and economic circumstances in which women live.



Members of HIV and AIDS groups in Lalitpur district, Nepal, share their experiences. © LWF/DWS Nepal



Patricia Achieng Sawo from Kenya, the East African coordinator of the African Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV or AIDS (ANARELA+), said, "We have had 25 years of HIV and AIDS but 2,000 years of poverty and violence!"

ANARELA+ promotes "SAVE"—Safer practices, Availability of medication and nutrition, Voluntary counseling and testing, and Empowerment—as an alternative approach to ABC.

Noting the discrepancy between knowing about HIV prevention methods and making an actual change in behavior, a speaker who has worked with HIV and AIDS prevention for many years stressed that women who live in dire poverty did not have the choice to practice ABC or any other prevention strategy. "Without prospects for the future, people just live for the moment. It's that hopelessness that adds to the spread of HIV. Why be careful when there's no hope for me anyway?" she asked.

Pastor James M. Matarazzo, Jr, from the Interfaith Consulting Group, LLC, in Boston, USA, links HIV and domestic violence against women, which is often neglected when talking about prevention strategies. "Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person." He explained, "This includes any behavior that intimidates, manipulates, humiliates, isolates, frightens, coerces, blames or hurts someone."

Matarazzo cited a study based on 50 surveys from around the world, which showed that one out of three women had been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. At the intersection between domestic violence and HIV prevention strategies, he pointed out, "Violence and fear of violence make it difficult for women to negotiate safer sex including condom use. Fear of violence prevents women from accessing information about HIV, being tested, disclosing their status, seeking treatment, care and support." Improving the social situation of women, he said, was an indispensable part of HIV prevention work.

Churches' Role

Many participants expressed regret that clergy and church members did not know what to do in response to the spread of HIV, and called on churches to include more women from the grassroots level in the development of their HIV and AIDS strategies and messages.

"We in the faith-based agencies and organizations only put into practice what comes from the churches. We don't write the messages ourselves. Women, especially the young ones, should get more involved from the beginning," one participant commented.

Discussion pointed to the need for education and information campaigns about HIV and AIDS that target men as well as women. Drawing on her experience with "Popular Education for Health" (Educación Popular en Salud), a health training organization founded in 1982 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, Covarrubias said, "In everything we do against HIV, we have to consider gender inequality. If men are not included, it won't work."

Covarrubias believes the church must "provide clear and accurate information about HIV and promote strategies to empower communities and women." She recognizes this as a long-term endeavor, and encourages the church to "be open to meet with the community and develop programs together." After all, "The role of the church is to place itself on the side of the marginalized in order to overcome social injustice," she adds.

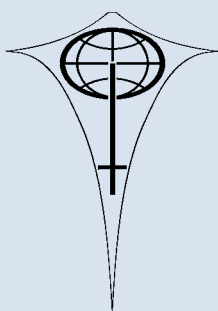
Reported by LWI correspondent Julia Heyde, member of an EAA-coordinated Ecumenical Media Team that provided news and daily feature articles from the 2006 International AIDS Conference.

More information is available at: www.e-alliance.ch/iac_2006.jsp

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



A Burundian refugee drum troupe delivers message about HIV and AIDS. © LWF/DWS Tanzania/J. Stephens



Published and distributed by:
The Lutheran World Federation
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel. +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org