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– A Communion of Churches**

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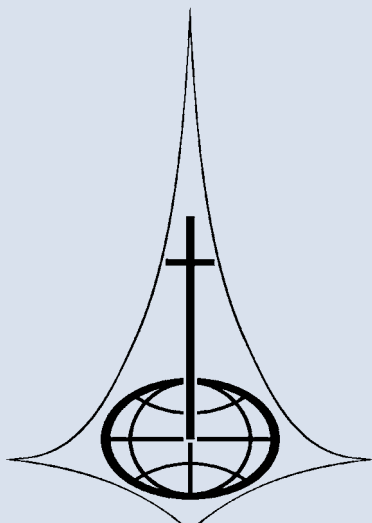
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First Joint Meeting of LWF and WARC Governing Bodies



The Officers of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation holding their meetings in the course of overlapping days, met for the first time in joint session on 18 November 2006 at Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva, Switzerland.

(Photo above) © WARC/J. den Hollander

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Gustav Björkstrand Installed as Bishop of Finland's Porvoo Diocese

Rev. Dr **Gustav Björkstrand** is the new bishop of the Diocese of Porvoo, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). He was installed as head of the ELCF's Swedish-speaking diocese on 3 December.

The diocese's elections for bishop were held on 13 September. Björkstrand succeeds Rev. Dr Erik Vikström, who led the diocese from 1983 until his retirement on 1 December.

In 2005 Björkstrand retired from the position of rector of Åbo Akademi University, Turku, a position he held since 1997. From 1991 to 1997, he was a professor of practical theology at the university, where he also taught church history and religious pedagogics between 1975 and 1983.

Prior to joining Åbo Akademi, he worked as a parish and school pastor, and as rector of the Swedish-speaking Christian Folk High School in Nykarleby. He was ordained as a pastor in 1964, and earned his doctorate in theology in 1976.

From 1983 to 1987, Björkstrand worked as a Minister of Culture and Science, and was a Member of Parliament from 1987



*Bishop Dr Gustav Björkstrand, Diocese of Porvoo, Finland.
© M. Wallendahl*

to 1991. He was a delegate to the ELCF Synod for some 20 years between the 1970s and 1990s.

Björkstrand, 65, is married to Prof. Eila Helander. He has two children and four grandchildren

Established in 1923, Porvoo is the only Swedish-speaking diocese among the ELCF's nine dioceses. It comprises 75 parishes from throughout Finland, including all the Swedish-speaking parishes, bilingual parishes where the majority of the members speak Swedish, and the German parish in Helsinki.

Porvoo is known for the 1992 historic agreement to the Porvoo Common Statement, an agreement between the British and Irish Anglican churches and Baltic and Nordic Lutheran churches, allowing them to recognize each other's ordained ministry including at the episcopal level, and opening up closer church relations and co-operation.

The 4.6 million-member ELCF joined the LWF in 1947. *(ELCF Church Communications Center)*

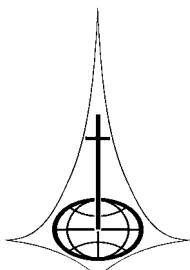
Lutheran World Information Subscription 2007

In 2007, *Lutheran World Information* will continue to provide information about the various activities of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), its member churches and related partners and organizations worldwide. Subscriptions will be automatically renewed unless otherwise indicated, and will be invoiced in the first quarter of 2007.

The subscription rates including mailing remain the same at CHF 75 per year.

As printing and mailing costs are based on the Swiss franc, the equivalent in Euros and US dollars for next year will be EUR 50 or USD 65.

The staff of the LWF Office for Communication Services wish all LWI readers a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.



Two Lutheran Pastors Murdered in El Salvador

LWF General Secretary Noko Calls for Swift and Thorough Investigation

GENEVA, 7 November 2006 (LWI) – The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko has received with deep distress news about the murder of two pastors from the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS), Francisco Carrillo and Jesús de Carrillo.

A statement received from the SLS says Pastor Francisco Carrillo and his wife Jesús were cowardly assassinated on 4 November 2006 by three unknown young perpetrators, as they were leaving the Montes de Pensbert congregation church in the Jayaque municipality, in El Salvador's central department of La Libertad.

"This tragic news serves to impress upon us again the serious and increasing violence afflicting society in El Salvador, and the important work being undertaken by the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod in an often difficult and dangerous context," Noko told the *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The LWF general secretary said he expects the Salvadoran authorities "to conduct a swift and thorough investigation of this crime, and to bring those responsible to justice." It is Noko's prayer that "the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, its pastors and members, will be upheld by the prayers of all their sisters and brothers in Christ around the world, and strengthened for their essential continuing witness for peace and human rights in El Salvador."

The Carrillos were serving the Pan de Vida and the Montes de Pensbert congregations in Jayaque. The SLS statement says they were tireless defenders of human rights. Among other responsibilities, Rev. Francisco Carrillo was president of the Green Cross (La Cruz Verde) in Jayaque, which includes medical charities and organizations providing health care to the local people. The couple is survived by two adult children.

In a joint letter of condolence to the SLS Bishop, Dr Medardo E. Gómez Soto, the LWF Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Rev. Martin Junge, and Dr Guillermo Kerber, the World Council of Churches (WCC) program executive for Latin America and the Caribbean



Salvadoran Lutheran Synod pastors Francisco Carrillo (left) and his wife Jesús Calzada de Carrillo (right) were assassinated by three unknown young perpetrators in El Salvador's central department of La Libertad. © SLS

in the international affairs team say, "We are aware of the fact that these cruel events unfortunately have become a daily experience in the Salvadoran society, making human life increasingly precarious and the population more vulnerable to becoming victims of such violence."

As ecumenical organizations that are closely linked to the SLS, "we wish to raise our voices in condemnation of these and all the killings that are extinguishing the precious gift of life for men, women, youth and children in El Salvador," Junge and Kerber write.

Both regional desk officers express confidence that the "Salvadoran Lutheran church will persevere in its witness for reconciliation and peace and will not let itself be confounded or dragged down by the spiral of violence that threatens to involve an ever-increasing section of the society. Instead, the church will continue raising its voice with prophetic clarity, announcing with words and deeds the good news of Christ, who came to bring life in abundance."

The 12,000-member SLS joined the LWF in 1986. It is a WCC associate member church.

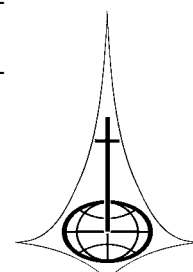
LWF President Hanson Pays Tribute to Hungarian Lutherans

First Official Visit as LWF President to Member Churches in Europe

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA, 8 November 2006 (LWI) - In his first official visit to a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church in Europe as LWF President, Bishop Mark S. Hanson paid tribute to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) for its significant contributions to the

Federation. He particularly mentioned the church's hosting of the LWF Seventh Assembly in Budapest in 1984.

During his visit to Hungary (26–29 October) and Romania (29 October–2 November) Hanson met with church and government leaders. His wife, Ione, accompanied him.





LWF President and ELCA Presiding Bishop, Mark S. Hanson prays after placing a lit candle at the "House of Terror," memorial site in Budapest, Hungary. During the Communist rule, people were questioned and tortured at the site, which today serves as a museum and informal memorial. © ELCA/J. Brooks

Speaking to the leadership and pastors of the ELCH on 26 October, Hanson said that the Seventh Assembly was "a very significant" one in the life of the Federation, as it declared that the LWF member churches understood themselves to be in "pulpit and altar fellowship" with each other. Also, the Assembly, as a matter of confessional integrity, suspended membership in the LWF of two churches of Southern Africa whose lives had been organized around a principle of "whites only" thus upholding South Africa's apartheid policy at the time. The gathering also lifted the roles of women and youth in all aspects of the LWF's life and work.

"We want to continue to work for the full inclusion of women and youth in the LWF," said Hanson, who was elected LWF president at the 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. He is presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Tribute to Bishop Lajos Ordass

Hanson emphasized the need for the ELCH members to know that they belong to a global Lutheran organization. He paid tribute to the former LWF vice-president and head of the ELCH, Bishop Lajos Ordass (1901–1978), widely respected in the Hungarian Lutheran church as he led the church through a difficult period in the country's history between 1945 and 1958.

Throughout its history the Hungarian church has been deeply affected by the prevailing political situations. Losses in membership occurred following World War I and during the Communist occupation that followed World War II through 1989, when the Cold War ended, said ELCH Presiding Bishop Janos Ittzes.

Lutheranism in Hungary dates back to the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century. "Today there are about 300,000 Lutherans in 300 congregations in Hungary, Ittzes noted.

The Hansons also visited the ELCH's facilities for people living with physical and mental disabilities and for people in nursing care. The church's diaconal work currently includes some 30 separate institutions in the country, serving people of all ages living with disabilities, young mothers and their children, older people in need of assisted-living or nursing home care, and feeding programs for the homeless. Plans are underway for a Lutheran hospital specializing in rehabilitation services.

LWF's Challenges

In a meeting with the ELCH staff, Hanson spoke of the four challenges facing the LWF and its member churches today: reaching out to people of other faiths and determining how it will interact with Jews and Muslims especially; confronting HIV and AIDS; understanding the Word of God and the authority of Scripture; and meeting its financial needs to remain a viable and interdependent organization.

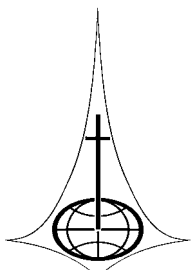
The Hansons were shown the original handwritten Last Will and Testament of Luther, a document written in the 1540s. It was presented as a gift to the Hungarian Lutheran church in the 19th century and has remained in the church's possession since.

Preaching in a Lutheran congregation in Pilis near Budapest on 29 October, the LWF president pointed out that freedom was a gift from God given through Jesus Christ, and that Christians cannot achieve freedom on their own. His sermon focused on St Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Referring to Martin Luther's writing in "The Freedom of a Christian," Hanson noted that Luther said that in Christ, Christians are free and servants at the same time, and that "we are free to serve our neighbor."



LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, views the original copy of Luther's Last Will and Testament during the visit to Hungary. With Hanson are, from left, Ione Hanson, Hungarian Bishop János Ittzés, and Dr Péter Szentpétery, Lutheran Theological University, Budapest. © ELCA/J. Brooks



He compared the text to the lives of most Hungarians under Communist rule. “You in Hungary know the way of the cross. You kept the gospel alive during years of repression,” he said.

Hanson pointed out that the LWF’s mission in the world was similar—“free in Christ for the sake of the neighbor.” He cited such examples as providing medical care to Palestinians through the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, and working for

a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; working for human rights where there are repressive governments; and working with people of other faiths to end hunger in the world.

“We will stand with those who mourn, those who are meek and those who yearn for justice. This is the promise of the gospel. This is the heart of the Reformation,” the LWF president concluded.

(ELCA News Service)

Equal Treatment of Churches a Focus of LWF President’s Meeting with Hungarian State Official

Call for Government Support to Lutheran Church Social Ministries

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA, 8 November 2006 (LWI) – Cooperation between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) and the national government was a theme of a series of meetings involving local church leaders and Bishop Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), in the Hungarian capital, Budapest.

Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, visited Hungary from 26 to 29 October. His wife Ione accompanied him.

During discussions with Katalin Szili, president of the National Assembly (Parliament) of Hungary, the LWF president and the ELCH representatives focussed on a variety of church and state issues such as funding, cooperation, equal treatment of churches and the current political situation.

Noting that the ELCH had made a significant commitment to social service through its diaconal program, Hanson told Szili that he was “always concerned” that small Lutheran churches were recognized for their contributions in their home countries. “My hope is that they (ELCH social ministries) are supported by the government and are not overlooked,” he said.

Szili pointed out that the ELCH’s contributions to education, charity and social work were “very important,” adding that the government and the church must work more closely together. She also proposed that regular discussions between the church and government be “institutionalized.” The church, she said, “should witness to the values of human life.”



LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson presents a gift to Katalin Szili, president of the Hungarian parliament. © ELCA/J. Brooks

The ELCH Presiding Bishop János Ittzés noted that churches in Hungary should be treated equally by the government, adding that they have had their difficulties because of past aggression under the former Communist regime.

“We can create a framework under which we can do further work, and I fully agree with equal treatment of churches,” Hanson told the president of the Hungarian parliament. “Transparency and accountability: we ask that of ourselves, and we expect that from governments.”

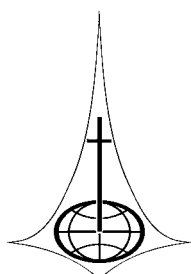
The ELCH has 305,000 members in a country of approximately 10 million people. It joined the LWF in 1947. *(ELCA News Service)*

Lutheran Leader’s Meeting with Romanian Pastors Focuses on Relations with Non-LWF Churches

Hanson Stresses ‘Standing with the Poor and Work for Justice’

BRASOV, Romania/GENEVA, 8 November 2006 (LWI) – On the last section of his pastoral visit to Europe, 26 October–2 November, Bishop Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

visited Sibiu/Hermannstadt, the headquarters of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, and met with the leaders and pastors of the two LWF member churches in Romania.



During a meeting with local pastors from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), shared his views about the Lutheran church, LWF and the ELCA.

The pastors' questions to the LWF president focused on relationships with Lutherans, who were not in the LWF, issues related to human sexuality, and how other Christians and politicians viewed the LWF.

Hanson's response included explanation about the LWF task force on marriage, family and sexuality, which is studying how the various member churches are addressing these issues. He

spoke also of the ELCA's regular meetings with the non-



The historic "Black Church" in Brasov, Transylvania, a congregation of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania. © ELCA/J. Brooks

LWF member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS); the ongoing ecumenical dialogues involving the LWF and other churches including the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Orthodox Church; and his engagement with top government officials in the countries he visits as LWF president.

"To be religious leaders in a free society we must work with political leaders for the common good, but we must challenge leaders when we believe they are in error," Hanson stressed. He told the pastors that a key commitment of the LWF was to "stand together with the poor and work for justice."

The LWF president also preached during a Reformation Day service at the historic

"Black Church" in Brasov, a congregation of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, so named because a fire in the city about 300 years ago left the exterior stone structure darkened. The church building, one of the largest in Europe, took about 100 years to build and was completed in the 13th century—predating the 16th century Reformation.

Bishop Dr Christoph Klein, leader of the 14,460-member Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania is LWF vice president for Central Eastern Europe. Bishop Dezső Zoltán Adorjáni heads the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania with a membership of 32,500. Both churches joined the LWF in 1964.

Since his 2003 election as LWF president, Hanson has paid pastoral visits to the LWF member churches in Latin America (September 2004), Africa (February 2005) and Asia (July 2006).

(ELCA News Service)



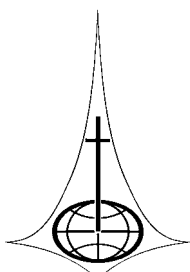
Bishop Dr Christoph Klein (left), head of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, presents Bishop Mark S. Hanson a book during the LWF president's visit to the church's headquarters in Sibiu/Hermannstadt. At right is Lone Hanson. © ELCA/J. Brooks

LWF Latin America Churches Welcome Norway's Debt Cancellation

Church President Rojas Urges Further Debt Studies

GENEVA, 10 November 2006 (LWI) – The 14 Latin American member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have welcomed the unilateral and unconditional decision of the Norwegian government to cancel some Euro 63 million (USD 81 million) of the illegitimate foreign debt of five developing countries.

In a letter to Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, the moderator of the region's Lutheran church leadership body, COL, Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas wrote that this "brave and totally unprecedented step" places the Norwegian government within "the vanguard of the topic of debt."



It is of particular importance that the Norwegian government explicitly mentions its “co-responsibility” as the “creditor country for the credit granted in what it defines as a failed development policy that lacked an appropriate evaluation of needs as well as an appropriate risk analysis,” said Rojas in her letter presented on 10 November to Ambassador Wegger Chr. Strømme, Norway’s Permanent representative to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Switzerland. Rev. Federico H. Schäfer, president of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (IERP) of Argentina, presented the COL moderator’s letter at the LWF Secretariat in Geneva.

Rojas, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH), added that the cancellation being made without linking it to Norway’s development aid funds came in positive contrast to other developments. In other cases, “supposed debt relief has gravely distorted the amounts actually granted to the poorer countries for their development.” She said that the Latin American LWF member churches now hoped that the Norwegian government would continue to pursue debt studies and audits within the UN structures, the World Bank and other international institutions.

Unfair Negotiations

According to the IERP president Schäfer, the Norwegian government’s decision is a positive step that supports the understanding that a large amount of foreign debt is negotiated unfairly and under questionable circumstances. This debt cancellation could be used as a kind of model for other governments to follow. Schäfer also supported the development of universally recognized international laws with acknowledged and enforceable minimum standards for fair trade, pointing out that injustices such as illegitimate foreign debt cannot be brought before a court until there are globally recognized rules to follow.

Ambassador Strømme stressed that the Norwegian government places great importance in receiving responses such as those given by the Latin American LWF member churches. He promised that the points made in the letter would be taken into account in the government’s further deliberations on the question of international debt. He continued that the future was a common concern and that everyone would have to “work together, even if you live close to the South Pole and we live close to the North Pole.”

According to the LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, the Latin American churches’ letter represents a

response of the whole federation. Noko, furthermore, asked Norway to take the lead in the establishment of an international tribunal dedicated to auditing debt. He said that Norway had shown that it was willing to listen to the voiceless, and that the LWF supported the establishment of an international court. The general secretary called upon other ecumenical organizations to join in the process.

Norwegian Campaign

Following years of pressure by churches, non-governmental organizations, and social movements, the Norwegian government decided in early October to cancel the debt owed by Egypt, Ecuador, Jamaica, Peru, and Sierra Leone. This debt originated from the Norwegian Ship Export Campaign. In an attempt to lead the Norwegian shipyard industry out of a severe crisis, the Norwegian government provided 21 countries with credit to purchase ships and shipping equipment between 1976 and 1980. The government did not however, consider whether the ships delivered made developmental and economic sense for the developing countries in question.

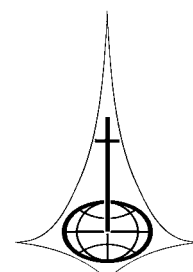
A statement of the Norwegian government states that it “is now generally agreed that the Ship Export Campaign was a development policy failure.” As a creditor, “Norway shares part of the responsibility for the resulting debts. By canceling these claims, Norway takes” up its responsibility in allowing these countries not to service the remainder of this debt.

Destructive for Millions

In Rojas’ letter, she mentioned that “according to the Conference of Bishops and Presidents of the LWF Member churches in Latin America,” foreign debt is



The IERP President, Rev. Federico H. Schäfer (second from the left), presents Norwegian Ambassador Wegger Chr. Strømme (right) the letter from the moderator of the Latin American Lutheran church leadership body, during the meeting coordinated by the LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (second from the right) in Geneva. At far left is Rev. Juan Abelardo Schwindt, IERP general secretary. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch



“destructive to the lives of millions of human beings and to societies and entire communities.” She added that the countries of the South were generally forced to service debt that never provided their people with any particular benefit or any form of overall economic development. “In many cases, in Latin America as well as in other parts of the world, the debt is linked to dictatorial processes and state terrorism responsible for crimes against humanity,” Rojas continued.

Reflecting on the reasoning behind the Norwegian decision, the Chilean church president remarked that while the term “illegitimate” was not expressly used to refer to this debt, the creditor did in fact admit responsibility for a failed loan project. In her letter, she wrote that this was a “very important step that will allow us to advance toward an open acceptance of the concept of ‘illegitimate debt.’”. She continued that this “category must encompass the debts acquired by dictators, those acquired for unsuccessful or fraudulent projects,” and those, whose “use has been tainted with corruption by the officials of one or both hemispheres.”

Advocacy Program

The LWF’s Latin American member churches have been conducting an advocacy program since 2004 to focus on the illegitimacy of the region’s foreign debt. The program supported by the LWF Department for Mission and Devel-

opment and coordinated locally, aims to raise awareness about illegitimate foreign debt at various church levels in countries of both the North and South.

The July 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, stated in its “Public Statement on Illegitimate Debt” that, far from seeing an improvement in the situation, “the debt burden has increased and is today a major barrier against eradication of poverty and fulfillment of basic human rights for all.” It continued that the international financial institutions “and the dominant nations in the world have to accept their responsibility for the bad policies, decisions and practices, which led to the current debt crisis.” The statement concluded that “there is an urgent need to develop mechanisms at an international level in order to find ways” to introduce justice-oriented debt management.

The full text of the letter written by Rev D. Gloria Rojas can be accessed as a pdf file on the LWF Web site:

Spanish: www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Letter_Gloria_Rojas-11-2006-ES.pdf

English: www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Letter_Gloria_Rojas-11-2006-EN.pdf

Click here for a Compilation of Resolutions and Statements adopted by the LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada: www.lwf-assembly.org/PDFs/LWF_Assembly_Resolutions-EN.pdf

Related LWI news at: www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1829.EN.html

Church of Norway Synod Supports Proposal to End State-Church System

2013 Seen as Earliest Date to Effect Any Changes

OYER, Norway/GENEVA, 29 November 2006 (LWI) – The general synod of the (Lutheran) Church of Norway has supported the proposal of a government-appointed commission to abolish Norway’s current state-church system.

A majority of 63 out of the 85 delegates attending the 13–19 November synod meeting in Oyer, Hamar diocese, voted that the church should no longer be referred to as a state church in the country’s constitution, the *Church of Norway Information Service* reported. Rather, the church should be founded on a separate act of parliament, and the general synod should undertake all church authority, currently vested in the King of Norway and government. Nineteen synod delegates voted to retain the present system.

The general synod largely consists of the Church of Norway’s 11 bishops and 11 diocesan councils. It is among 2,000–3,000 church and public bodies, institutions, organizations and parties that will have had the chance to state their view on the state-church system to the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs by the end of the year.

On 31 January this year, the government-appointed commission delivered its report, in which it recommended

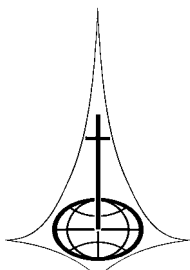
abolishing the current relation between the Church of Norway and the state. A government report to the Stortinget (Parliament) is expected in late 2008. As major changes will require a revision of the country’s constitution, 2013 is seen as the earliest date for possible changes.

“The synod’s decision is historic,” said Jens Petter Johnsen, director of the church’s national council. “What matters is the relation between church and people, not between church and state. We will do our utmost to strengthen the service of the church in and with our people,” he noted.

The state-church system was established in Denmark-Norway in 1537 during the Lutheran reformation. The Church of Norway has 3.9 million members, representing around 85 percent of the Norwegian population. It joined the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1947.

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway with nearly 22,000 members, held LWF associate membership since 1997, and changed to full membership in 2005.

(Church of Norway Information Service and Oivind Ostang)



LWF Welcomes Resettlement Option for Bhutanese Refugees

“Resettlement Does Not Extinguish Refugees’ Right to Return Home”

GENEVA, 16 November 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has welcomed recent indications by several countries of openness to receiving Bhutanese refugees for resettlement, but pointed out that resettlement does not exclude repatriation to Bhutan.

“The LWF would ... like to underline that acceptance of third country resettlement does not extinguish the refugees’ right to return to the homes in Bhutan from which they were obliged to flee,” LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said in a statement issued on 16 November.

The LWF Department for World Service (DWS) program in Nepal has been supporting over 100,000 refugees from Bhutan in refugee camps in eastern Nepal for more than 15 years. In accordance with the refugees’ expressed wishes, the LWF has consistently pushed for their repatriation to Bhutan. The Government of Bhutan, however, has so far failed to accept any of the refugees back.

In his statement, Noko reiterated that Bhutan “has a moral and legal responsibility to repatriate the

refugees” in conditions of safety and dignity, and to restore the properties they were forced to abandon.

The United States of America and a number of other countries have recently confirmed that they are willing to accept significant numbers of the Bhutanese refugees for resettlement. Noko expressed his gratitude to these countries and the LWF’s satisfaction that “after so many years of living in limbo without any durable solution on offer,” the refugees will finally have the opportunity of considering an option for their future. He also stated the LWF’s expectation “that no political or practical obstacle will be placed in the way of the refugees’ consideration of third country resettlement as a viable option.”

The LWF/DWS work in Nepal focuses on the empowerment of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the country, including humanitarian support and advocacy for the rights of the Bhutanese refugees living in the camps.

Please find the full text of the LWF statement on the Web site: www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1954.EN.html

First Joint Meeting of LWF and WARC Governing Bodies

Future of Ecumenical Assemblies Is of Crucial Importance for Conciliar Ecumenism in the 21st century

CHAVANNES-DE-BOGIS, Switzerland, 20 November 2006 (LWI) – The Officers of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), holding their meetings in the course of overlapping days, met for the first time in joint session on Saturday, 18 November 2006.

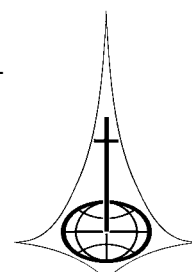
Discussions during the meeting at Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva, focused on the present status of Lutheran-Reformed relations around the world, on various areas of shared challenges and cooperation, and on the new Joint Consultative Commission between the Christian world communions (CWCs) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). The agenda also included the issue of future ecumenical assemblies, and the possible coordination of meetings of the WCC and CWCs’ governing bodies.

The joint meeting was co-chaired by the presidents of the two communions, Rev. Dr Clifton Kirkpatrick, (Presbyterian Church, [USA]), and Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The WARC Officers, including some members of the WARC Executive Committee,

held their regular meeting at the John Knox International Reformed Center, Geneva, from 13 to 18 November. The 13-member LWF Executive Committee met from 18 to 20 November at Chavannes-de-Bogis.

Regarding future global assemblies, the LWF and WARC governing bodies agreed that the future of ecumenical assemblies is a matter of crucial importance for conciliar ecumenism in the 21st century. They agreed that there is an urgent need for a new type of assemblies, in which the broad, multilateral nature of the ecumenical movement is expressed more substantially. They said there is a need for such assemblies to be a place “where representatives of churches, CWCs and church agencies for mission and development can process a commonly developed agenda, and where CWCs that have no relationship with the WCC at present might also be represented.”

The LWF and WARC representatives strongly recommended that the first such new type of ecumenical assembly be considered to take place in 2013. They also urged the WCC to prepare for a decision in principle on this matter at the next meeting of its Central Committee in 2008, and asked that their two general



secretaries discuss the issue as soon as convenient with the WCC general secretary.

Both governing bodies considered that after 2010, “the LWF and WARC would no longer hold global assemblies of their own, given a satisfactory development in this area.”

Commenting on the meeting’s outcome, LWF President Hanson said, “We give thanks to God for this significant conversation, as together with WARC, we have strengthened our relationship with one another within the context of our shared commitment to ecumenism and to working for justice, peace and reconciliation.”

WARC President Kirkpatrick said, “We celebrate the growing unity we find among Reformed and Lutheran Christians and leave this historic meeting with great hope that our organizations will be able to strengthen one another and the church ecumenical to bring justice to a our world today.”

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko described the meeting as “a concrete translation of our mutual commitment to the search for visible unity. This meeting will give energy to our constituencies.”

“I thank God for this meeting which was a particularly significant event in the life of the church. I am happy that both Lutheran and Reformed representatives expressed a commitment to our common witness and action for justice and peace as it is lived out daily in many regions of the world. I hope and pray our meeting today inspires an even greater commitment to work together for life in fullness for all,” noted WARC General Secretary, Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi.

Please find the full text of the communiqué from the meeting between the WARC Officers and the LWF Executive Committee on the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Luth-Ref_Communique-18_Nov_2006.pdf

Church of Sweden Staff Aasa-Marklund Killed in Car Crash

Ms Inger Aasa-Marklund, the International Secretary for the Church of Sweden Diocese of Luleå, was killed in a car accident on 24 November in the vicinity of Cairo, during a visit to partner churches in Egypt. Her daughter Sara also died in the accident.

Her husband, Rev. Richard Marklund, and a close friend of the family, Bishop Thomas of the Diocese of El Quossia in Southern Egypt, also travelling in the same car escaped with injuries.

“It is a terrible thing that has happened, and it is with great distress that we have received this news. I have



*Ms Inger Aasa-Marklund, Church of Sweden
© Church of Sweden*

lost a good friend and member of staff. Richard and other members of the family are in my thoughts and prayers all the time,” said the Bishop of Luleå, Hans Stiglund in a statement.

Aasa-Marklund was born in 1960 and her daughter Sara in 1998. Besides her position in the Diocese of Luleå, she was also a member of the Central and Executive Committees of the Geneva-based World

Council of Churches.

(Based on a Church of Sweden press release.)

New Publication on Latin American Lutheran Churches’ Response to HIV and AIDS

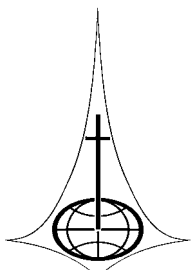
The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America have published a book comprising a variety of documents and texts from among its constituency dealing with the challenge of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It is titled *Para que puedan vivir – la comunión Luterana escucha y responde en el VIH y SIDA* (That You May Live – The Lutheran Communion Listens and Responds in Times of HIV and AIDS). Its four chapters—1. Documents from Ecumenical Organizations and Churches; 2. Biblical and Theological Foundation; 3. Education and Prevention; and 4. Accompaniment, Pastoral Action, Liturgy and Meditation, present the current reflection and practices of the churches in the region with regard to HIV and AIDS. As



expressed in the book’s foreword, the churches hope through this publication “to consolidate joint learning processes, reaffirm fundamental convictions and open spaces to creatively continue building and developing the witness of the churches in today’s world.”

Para que puedan vivir vivir – la comunión Luterana escucha y responde en el VIH y SIDA is the second book in the series named after Rev. Humberto Ramos Salazar, president of the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church who died in a car accident in October 2004.

Copies can be ordered from the higher institute of theological studies (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, at rectorado@isedet.edu.ar



FEATURE: Set Free

ELCA Candidate for Ordination Lives with Faith and HIV

CHICAGO, United States of America/GENEVA, 18 December 2006 (LWI) – Preparing for ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is filled with uncertainties—about seminary classes, God’s direction, church structures, congregational acceptance and more. A 40-something, African American, single mother of three can anticipate even more uncertainties in a 4.85 million-member church that is about 97 percent white.

Adrena Ingram faces those uncertainties and others related to her being tested HIV-positive. Yet, she matches those uncertainties with an overwhelming faith in Jesus Christ, who healed a “bent over” woman with whom she relates.

“A lot of people in my community were dying from the virus and ... I was nervous about it, but I went ahead and I got tested,” Ingram said. “When I received my diagnosis, I was devastated. ... I felt like damaged goods.

“Because I saw so many people in my community getting sick and wasting away, I believed that would happen to me also. I was depressed, and it was only because of my children that I made an appointment at a clinic—[outside] my neighborhood, of course—and began to get treated. My doctor also recommended that I see a therapist for my depression,” she said in a recent interview with the *ELCA News Service*.

When Ingram heard about the church down the block, she put her youngest son in its summer program so she could “be miserable during the day without him watching me in that condition.” At the end of the summer program at Transfiguration Lutheran Church, South Bronx, New York, parents were asked to enroll their children in the after-school program, seek baptism for their children or become a member of the congregation. “I signed up to have my son baptized and forgot about it,” Ingram said.

Invitation to Sunday School

A few days later, Rev. Heidi B. Neumark and intern pastor Andrea L. Walker were standing at Ingram’s door. “That completely blew my mind,” Ingram said. “I just remember that the pastor took time out of her day to visit me.”

Ingram talked with them about all that she was going through. “I didn’t think that God loved me, because I had been away from God for so long,” she said. The women invited her to bring her son to Sunday school.

“I was afraid of going to church, because I feared being judged by God. I feared being looked at by others and being judged by them also.” But she took her son to Sunday school and started attending church.

She did not encounter any of the reactions that she had anticipated. No one looked at her “funny” or “moved over in the pew,” she said. Everyone hugged her, and she heard that “Jesus loved me.”



Adrena Ingram in a group discussion of the ecumenical pre-conference prior to the August 2006 AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada. © EAA/ M. Engle

Ingram heard a story from Luke (13:11–13) about Jesus healing a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years “That was a story about me,” she said.

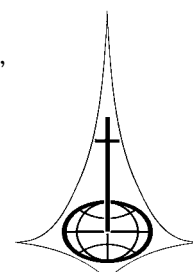
Neumark invited Ingram to read Bible lessons in church and to teach Sunday school. Whenever Ingram said she couldn’t do something, Neumark convinced her she could. “Just as Jesus told that woman who was bent over, ‘You are set free from your ailment,’ he said that to me. I was set free from my ailment, and it wasn’t the physical ailment that had me bent over, but the emotional ailment, the spiritual ailment,” she said.

Becoming an Ordained Minister

One day Neumark asked her to think about going to seminary. “I said, ‘Well, I don’t know.’ She said, ‘Yes, you can do that,’” Ingram said.

Ingram applied to become a candidate for ordained ministry through the ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod. Her entrance interview with the candidacy committee included a review of her psychological evaluation. It ended abruptly with a question: “What if we sent you to seminary and you developed AIDS dementia?”

“I was kind of shocked when I heard those words,” Ingram said. She didn’t have a response other than “Thank you for your time.”



Ingram applied again the following year, and when the same question came up, she responded: "What if you got hit by a bus when you left the building?"

Ingram entered the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia as part of the ELCA's Theological Education for Emerging Ministries program, an alternative path to ordination that does not require a master of divinity degree. But during her second year in the program, she decided to earn the master's degree. "I felt that I needed everything the seminary had to offer, in order to deal with the stigma that is attached to my age, my gender, my culture and my illness. The stigma that I sometimes deal with goes much deeper than just the illness," she said.

Ingram completed a year of internship with St John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Melrose Park, Pennsylvania. This December she is due to complete her academics and seek a call from a congregation in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Standing Up Publicly

In August, Ingram attended the 16th International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, and its interreligious pre-conferences, where Mark S. Hanson, ELCA presiding bishop and president of the Lutheran World Federation, urged religious leaders to confront the

AIDS stigma and discrimination by taking HIV tests and publicly disclosing the results.

"As a religious leader stepping forward to put a face to HIV, I am aware of some of the risks in doing so. But there is a larger risk here," Ingram said. "It is the risk that people take every day in having unprotected sex. It's the risk of someone feeling the stigma ... the discrimination of [having] HIV or AIDS," she said.

People living with HIV and AIDS should be able to find "sanctuary, a shelter from the storms of life" at church, she said. "People will not go and get tested, if they feel that they are going to be rejected."

"We can do something about minimizing the spread of [HIV]. We can erase the stigma and discrimination. We can love one another, and ... be the community that we are called to be—the body of Christ."

"I hope to be a bridge between the community [of people living with HIV and AIDS] and the church," Ingram said.

Edited from the original feature by Frank Imhoff, associate director for the ELCA News Service.

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

Namibia's "Poverty Ambassador" Kameeta Praises Churches' Work

Namibian Lutheran **Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta** says he hopes his recent appointment, as one of the country's ambassadors for the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) would strengthen "the efforts of the churches in the region and within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to address poverty-related issues."

Kameeta is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) and LWF vice president for the Africa region.

In the context of the 17 October commemoration of the United Nations' "World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty," the Namibia Non-Governmental Organization Forum appointed Kameeta and Ms Veronica de Klerk, executive director of the Women's Action for Development (WAD), as GCAP ambassadors. They will lead the national anti-poverty campaign.

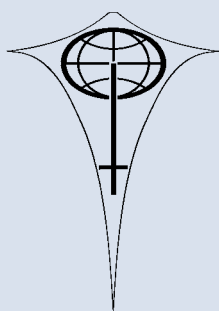


Church leaders from the major denominations in Namibia attended a CCN special prayer meeting to mark the "World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty." © CCN

Speaking to *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* about his anticipated role in the fight against poverty, Kameeta said the "appointment was a great surprise for me ... and an honor for the Lutheran church in Namibia." He described it as "an acknowledgment of the work we have been doing in Namibia and in the region."

The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), to which the ELCRN belongs, commemorated the day with special prayers for victims of poverty, and renewed its call on the government to alleviate mass poverty in the country.

The 2005 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program indicated that 34.9 percent of Namibia's population of 2 million people live on one US dollar per day, and 55.8 percent live on two US dollars.



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