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– A Communion of Churches**

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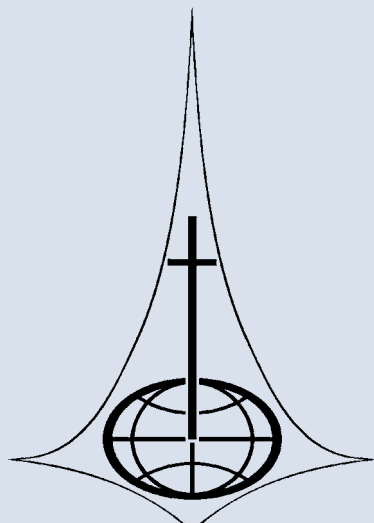
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## LWF New Year Message: Meet One Another as Human Beings



Nine-year old Samira Sumaiya from Bangladesh drew the motif for the 2007 LWF New Year Message. It is titled "Communal Harmony." © LWF/S. Sumaiya

In his New Year Message, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko expresses his hope and prayer that 2007 would be dedicated to working for a peaceful world and better future. In his message addressed to the LWF member churches, National Committees and related and supporting agencies, Noko points out that the path towards peace is a risky one.

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The heart sinks as the brain tries to make sense of the scene presented by the eyes. This is a strange field—bamboo canes and sticks covered with an amalgamation of pieces of plastic sheeting, matting, sacks and cloth. These semi-circular and square mounds, just big enough for a few people to shelter inside, are refuge for thousands of people.

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### Antje Jackelén Is Bishop-Elect of Sweden's Lund Diocese

Rev. **Antje Jackelén** will become the next bishop of the Church of Sweden's Diocese of Lund. She was elected as bishop of Lund in October. The Church of Sweden pastor will assume her new position in April 2007, succeeding retiring Bishop Christina Odenberg, who has led the diocese since 1997.

Jackelén has been an associate professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago since 2001. Ordained in 1980, she was a parish pastor for 16 years in the Stockholm and Lund dioceses. She also served

in Gardstanga and at the Lund Cathedral. She earned degrees from the universities of Tübingen in Germany, and Uppsala and Lund in Sweden.

Jackelén is married to Rev. Heinz Jackelén, and they have two daughters.

The Diocese of Lund has an estimated 1 million members in its 217 parishes. It is one of the 13 dioceses of the 7 million-member Church of Sweden.

*(ELCA News Service)*

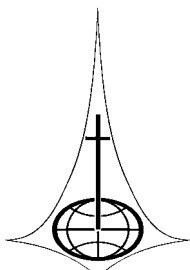
### Italian Lutheran Leader Elected to Protestant Churches' Governing Council

The Dean of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy **Rev. Holger Milkau** is a member of the recently appointed Council of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI). Domenico Maselli, a pastor of the Waldensian Church in Lucca, Tuscany, was elected as FCEI president, during the body's 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly from 1 to 4 November in Rome. The new council that will govern the umbrella body of the Protestant churches in Italy for the next three years also includes two other Waldensian pastors

and Methodist lay members. Outgoing president Gianni Long, who had served six years as the head of the body of Italy's Protestant churches assured the FCEI of his strong commitment, especially in the field of freedom of religion and in strengthening relationships with other Italian Protestant churches.

The Italian Lutheran church has 7,000 members. It joined the LWF in 1949.

*(FCEI News Bulletin – NEV)*



# Beyond Toleration, Toward Deeper Relationships With Muslims

Christian Identity Is Not Set Aside But Deepened Through Dialogue With Muslims

*BREKLUM, Germany/GENEVA, 6 December 2006 (LWI)* – The hope for an engaged dialogue in Christian-Muslim relations beyond mere disinterested toleration was expressed by German Lutheran Bishop Dr Hans Christian Knuth at a theological consultation in Breklum, Germany.

“I do hope that we will be able to give witness to the love of God and the truth of the Christian faith in interfaith contexts and move beyond mere disinterested toleration, towards an engaged dialogue of love and compassion with people of different beliefs,” Knuth, bishop of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Germany, told around 30 participants attending the 1 to 3 December consultation at the Christian-Jensen-Kolleg in Breklum.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) organized the meeting in cooperation with the North Elbian Mission Center (NMZ). Its theme was “Beyond Toleration? Assessing and responding to the new challenges in Christian-Muslim Relations.” The consultation’s purpose was to assess the present situation after some decades of LWF work in the area of Christian-Muslim relations, and to deepen theological responses to the new challenges member churches face in this area.

Participants mostly came from the LWF member churches in European countries that have recently been experiencing increases in the visible presence of Muslims, and tensions related to this. Other countries



*The Rev. Manmasih Ekka, Gossner Theological College, India, in conversation with Prof. Viggo Mortensen, Aarhus University, Denmark. © LWF/K. Bloomquist*

represented included Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania and the United States.

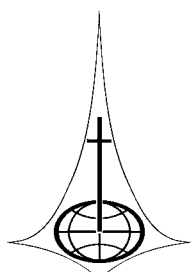
Representatives from the North Elbian church and from other churches in Germany, shared the many ways in which their congregation members have been pursuing Christian-Muslim relations. It became apparent that there are striking differences in how Muslims are integrated into neighboring countries such as Denmark and Sweden.

Prof. Viggo Mortensen, Aarhus University, Denmark, warned that Europe may be on the brink of developing apartheid societies of Christians and Muslims. In contrast, Dr Göran Gunner, representing the Church of Sweden Research Department, pointed to a distinctly Swedish form of Islam that is developing there, with Muslims adapting some rituals to become more “Swedish.”

Asian and African participants pointed to how deeply cultural, global economic and political factors affect Christian-Muslim relations. “In India, both Christianity and Islam are regarded as foreign, and must together face the power of a Hindu majority,” pointed out Rev. Manmasih Ekka, Gossner Theological College. Dr Leonard Mtaita, general secretary of the Christian Council of Tanzania said, “If we do not find ways to live together, we may not live at all.” “We must move beyond tolerance to genuine relationships with Muslims, rooted in accountability and respect,” pleaded Dr Carol Schersten LaHurd, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



*Participants discussing Christian/Muslim relations in their contexts. © LWF/K. Bloomquist*





Christian identity and belief are not set aside but deepened and expanded through dialogue with Muslims. A number of participants remarked that Muslims are much clearer about who they are and what they believe. They also noted that this causes many Christians to probe deeper into the content and meaning of the Christian faith. "In that sense, this is evoking the kind of theological probing that is at the heart of the LWF's "Theology in the Life of the Church" initiative, of which this event was a part," observed Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, DTS director.

Dr Risto Jukko, working with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, and based in Paris, France, advocated a plurality in unity approach as the way forward. "The

Triune God means that there must be principles of transparency, companionship, and equality in our relations... The Trinity is the transcendental condition for inter-religious dialogue, permitting us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear or violence," he said.

The consultation's recommendations included a call for the critical review of the Lutheran historical legacy as it relates to Muslims. A number of theological themes for possible exploration with Muslims were identified. Christians were challenged to reciprocate the "open mosque" hospitality practice of Muslims by designating a specific day when Muslims and people of other faiths would intentionally be welcomed to visit "open churches."

## Kazakhstan: We are Only a Few In Kokshetau, But Over 66 Million Worldwide

### LWF General Secretary Noko Visits Lutheran Congregations in Kazakhstan

*KOKSHETAU, Kazakhstan/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI)* – "You are but a small congregation but you have brothers and sisters all around the world." Those were the words of the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, during a visit in mid-September to a small chapel in Kokshetau, some 400 kilometers north of Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

Noko suggested the following reply to those who may ask how many people were members of the Lutheran congregation: "In the congregation we are only a few, but within our Lutheran family we are over 66 million in 78 countries!"

The LWF general secretary was in the region for the Second Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions on 12 and 13 September in Astana. As a follow-up to the congress, he was invited by Bishop Yuri Novgorodov of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan (ELCRK) to visit ELCRK congregations in Astana, Kokshetau, Letovochnoye, and Kamysheinka. Noko was accompanied on his visits by Bishop Novgorodov, Rev. Gennadiy Konin of Almaty, Rev. Hans-Wilhelm Kasch, who is responsible for ecumenical affairs at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg, and Bishop Callon W. Holloway of the Southern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as Dutch journalist Praxedis Bouwman, and Regina Karasch, public relations officer of the LWF German National Committee.

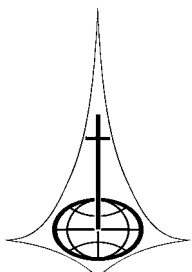
Discussions with ELCRK parishioners revolved largely around finance and education. Noko was, moreover, impressed with the congregations' great diaconal commitment.

The Kokshetau congregation, for example, regularly serves around 25 people in its soup kitchen. The kitchen mostly serves adults who lost their jobs when their farming collectives (*kolkhozy*) were disbanded or due to other regional economic problems, old people whose pensions, equivalent to around EUR 50, do not provide them with enough to survive, and children whose parents who are too poor to provide them with regular hot meals.

Lena, 8, and Masha, 6, are two of those children, both of whom have unemployed parents and younger brothers and sisters. They come to the soup kitchen every day because "it tastes so good and there is nothing at home," the girls said nearly in unison. Meals in the parish soup kitchen are often the only meals available each day. This is true especially in the wintertime, when the temperatures of the steppes fall below minus 40 degrees, short-term employment



Members and lay-workers of the ELCRK-congregation in Kökschetau receive LWF scarves from LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko. © LWF/R. Karasch





ELCRK Bishop Yuri Novgorodov, receives a chalice for Holy Communion from LWF General Secretary Noko. © LWF/R. Karasch

grows even scarcer than usual, and the families begin to use up the last of their scant reserves.

Provost Ewald Krassowski, whose great personal commitment is the driving force behind the diaconal work of the ELCRK, brings along an empty bag whenever he visits parishioners' homes, "so that the people can give me potatoes, vegetables, or whatever they can do without for the soup kitchen!" This collection adds to the equivalent of around EUR 1,000 each year in produce, while the partner church in Mecklenburg provides further financial support. In total, three quarters of the ELCRK budget is financed through support from

Mecklenburg. Representatives from the two churches meet to discuss and set budgetary priorities.

"We have encouraged the pastors to get involved in diaconal work," Rev. Kasch explained. "When the economy broke down in the early 1990s, it was urgent that we find alternatives to the state system." The Kazakh economy has now begun a slow recovery anchored in the ample natural gas and petroleum reserves. People in rural areas have, however, yet to benefit much from this trend, in contrast to Astana, which was made the country's capital in 1997, and which has virtually been one immense construction site ever since.

Education was another focus of discussion in Kazakhstan. Following the great emigration wave of the past 15 years, the ELCRK is now composed of only 46 parishes and parish groups. The number of registered members has stabilized at around 1,060. Around three times as many, however, attend the church's worship services. The church currently has 12 pastors and 44 lay preachers on its roster. Its theology students attend the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) in St. Petersburg, Russia. The church seminary in Astana primarily trains lay preachers and Sunday school teachers.

The ELCRK is an independent regional ELCROS church.

*(This article is based on information provided by Praxedis Bouwman of the Netherlands, and by Regina Karasch, public relations officer of the LWF German National Committee.)*

## Kazakhstan: A New Building for the Lutheran Church in Astana

### President Nazarbayev Confirms Replacement for Church Building

ASTANA, Kazakhstan/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has confirmed the construction of a new church building and parish house for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan (ELCRK).

The president expressed his approval of the plan in his discussion with the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, and ELCRK Bishop Yuri Novgorodov at the Second Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

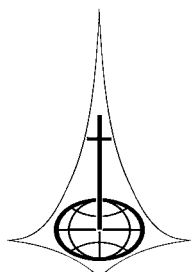
During a recording for television, Nazarbayev expressed his understanding for the concerns of the congregation and his support for this endeavor. He said that the new buildings would be constructed before the ones currently in use are demolished as a part of the comprehensive project of urban redevelopment in Astana.

Throughout the process of expanding and transforming Astana into the Kazakh national capital, beginning in



An interpreter assists in the discussions between the LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (left) and the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. © Government of Kazakhstan

1997, there have been repeated controversies between the municipal authorities and the ELCRK on the pres-



ervation of the complex that includes parish facilities and the bishop's office. The authorities had decided to tear down the city's old buildings to make way for the construction of new, modern replacements.

The Lutheran church is one of the few historical buildings still present in Astana. It belongs to the ELCRK congregation, which was the first in the entire Soviet Union to be registered following the years of Stalinist oppression. It thus does not only carry



Pastor Natalia Boldt receives an LWF scarf from Dr Noko during the Sunday service in the church of Astana. © LWF/R. Karasch

great historical and emotional significance for the congregation, but for the ELCRK as a whole. "For many parishioners, especially older ones, the church is a place of healing after a long period of oppression," as Bishop Novgorodov explained. The congregation had to wait until the Eastern Bloc collapsed to be able to renovate the church buildings properly, with great financial support from the LWF and German partner churches in Mecklenburg and Westphalia.

It was however noted that a new highway now in planning should not pass so close to the church that the road construction and later vibrations from traffic could damage the building. Bishop Novgorodov stressed that "church services and parish work would be impossible under such conditions. We are not, however, seeking financial compensation, but rather equivalent buildings that can be provided to the congregation before the old ones are torn down."

And just such a pragmatic solution is now in the works. In his discussions with the Kazakh president, the LWF general secretary described the congregation's difficult situation, and alluded to the president's words at the congress when he stated that all religions needed to be provided with the opportunity to conduct their services and congregational work with impediment. Nazarbayev promised to pass on the general secretary's letter to the mayor of Astana and to ask him to report on the issue.

The ELCRK bishop said that, while this was not in fact the solution that especially the older parishioners had wished for, it was certainly the best solution that could be reached. He expressed his appreciation for the support from the global Lutheran family. At the worship service to bid farewell to the LWF delegation in Astana, Novgorodov said that being a Lutheran is "like having an e-mail address. When you have one, people can reach you everywhere in the world, no matter where you are! And we can reach our Lutheran brothers and sisters everywhere as well. We have now seen the faces of our brothers and sisters: faces from Switzerland, Zimbabwe, and the Netherlands, from the United States and Germany." He added that they would not forget the visitors, just as the visitors would not forget them.

*(Contributed by Regina Karasch, public relations officer of the LWF German National Committee.)*

## Deepening Partnerships, Seeking New Ways of Cooperation

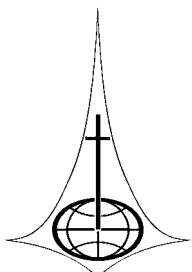
### Regional Conference of LWF Member Churches in Russia and Baltic States in Vilnius

VILNIUS, Lithuania/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is an important instrument for building communion, and finding common answers to the challenges confronting the churches. This conclusion was drawn by participants in the regional conference of the LWF member churches in the Baltic States and Russia, held from 25 to 28 September in Lithuania's capital, Vilnius.

Sub-regional meetings were necessary for building mutual understanding and trust, the 30 conference participants stated. They represented Lutheran churches in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States, and churches and their related organizations and agencies from Germany, Finland, Sweden and the USA.

According to Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), the main concern of the conference was "to deepen our partnership and seek new ways of cooperation." In respect to the DMD-published LWF document on mission titled, "Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – A Contribution of the LWF to the Understanding and Practice of Mission,"





Nordstokke said the central challenge, as stated in the publication, was how to discern today's changing understanding of mission in church and society and to formulate a theological understanding of mission. The DMD director said the goal was still to strengthen the church's understanding of itself as a missional church and to deepen its gospel practice of mission.

Ways and means of being in mission were discussed in plenary. The special role of the LWF was highlighted and its supportive function at the different levels of mission theology, including sharing the experiences from other regions. It was noted that the LWF was an instrument of coordination to put churches into contact and communication with each other and to encourage mutual responsibility and commitment. It was thus the responsibility of churches to accompany one another and enable experiences in partnership, participants said.

Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, LWF/DMD area secretary for Europe stressed that evangelization was directed more inwards, to the building up of churches. "Our church members are being attracted into secularism. We need inward assurance and strengthening of the faith in order to be able to walk our path as Christians in today's world," she said. Mission was about transforming the whole person through God's spirit. In order to accompany one another and encourage spiritual growth, church practice required appropriate methods, which was a challenge to practical theology and training, she noted.

The conference also focused on the question, "What holds us together as a Lutheran communion?" based on a presentation by Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, director of the LWF Department for Theology and Studies. The subsequent discussion took up the question of the Lutheran understanding of ecumenical fellowship. "Being Lutheran means being ecumenical," Bloomquist underlined.

The third area of discussion around "human sexuality," in particular the practice of individual member



Around 30 participants attended the LWF regional conference for churches in the Baltic States and Russia. © LWF

churches regarding the blessing of same-sex couples, clearly indicated the need to continue the discussion.

Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania reported on the progress of the eight-person LWF Task Force on Family Marriage and Sexuality, which was set up in 2004 with the aim to provide helpful background material and support for discussion on this issue within LWF member churches and in the Lutheran communion. Sabutis, himself a member of the working group, reported that the LWF Council would receive the report of the task force in March 2007 in Lund, Sweden.

Several participants at the Vilnius conference expressed the expectation that the LWF would continue to engage in the necessary biblical, theological, historical and ethical reflection on this topic. A task of the LWF task force is also to take up questions about whether, and if so, how the life realities and principles impairing church unity can be handled with differing hermeneutical approaches to scripture and different ethical attitudes.

*(This story is based on a report by Marina Chudenko, ELCROS press officer.)*

## Russian Church Defines Its Position

### Synod of Lutheran Church in European Russia Meets in Moscow

MOSCOW, Russia/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI)

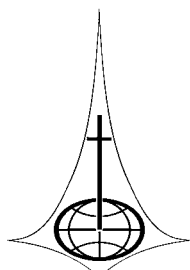
– The 13<sup>th</sup> Synod of the (ELCER) has rejected a proposal for blessing same-sex couples. According to a report by the ELCER church office in Moscow, Russia, the synod members adopted a resolution to this effect after a "lively discussion." They also approved a statement by ELCER Bishop Siegfried Springer 'on same-sex relationships and so-called marriages.' Diakonia was the theme of the 5 to 7 November synod meeting in Moscow's Puschkino suburb.

The ELCER said it was not reacting to a problem existing in its own congregations. The church, it noted, had

wanted to "take a position within the global Lutheran family." The criteria for admission to the Lord's Supper had also been raised in the discussion on this resolution.

In working groups, delegates discussed a number of topics including mission, children's and youth work, marriage and family, and women's ministry. There was intensive debate on the issue of women's ordination, the report stated.

The synod agreed to improve the ELCER's organizational structure with an aim to achieving greater stability. In this respect, the synod members voted for a new version of the legal statute of the church and for



the establishment of a church council (Konsistorium) as a governing body besides the synod presidium and bishop's chancery. The future church council will consist of the bishop, his deputy, the director of the bishop's chancery, the synod president and his deputy, as well as two elected representatives of the superintendents' conference.

The church's current diaconal activities are to be integrated into a central structure in the future. Establishing a church social service agency like the

Diakonisches Werk was a long-term goal, delegates noted. They emphasized the need for the ELCER to face up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century missionary challenges. The conference of superintendents was asked to draw up ideas for sustainable activities.

The ELCER is an independent regional church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and other States (ELCROS). It encompasses 170 congregations and congregational groups structured in 12 districts (Propsteien). Springer has been the church's bishop since 1992.

## A Unique Reformation Day for Tamil Nadu's First Lutheran Women Pastors

### Result of a Strategic, Long Discussion Process

*TIRUCHIRAPALLI, Tamil Nadu, India/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI)* – "Reformation Day, 31 October 2006 became a remarkable and unique day in the 300-year history of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC) in south India," remarked Rev. Suseela Gnanabai, one of the first women to be ordained as pastors in the church.

The ordination of Gnanabai, five other women and one man as pastors on 31 October at the Tiruchirapalli Holy Trinity Church in Tamil Nadu was historic, as this was the first time the Indian church had ordained women as pastors. Many of them have undergone theological education over a period of nearly three decades.

Some of the recently ordained female pastors were among a group of theologically trained women who were commissioned as candidates for pastoral work by TELC Bishop Dr T. Aruldoss in July 2002. He confirmed at the time that "these women will be ordained as full fledged pastors after a short period."

Rev. Jeevayothi Martin, the first woman in the Tamil Nadu Lutheran church to study theology had been waiting for the affirmation of her call to the ministry for 28 years. She said she hopes "to be a role model for the upcoming women pastors through my ministry and life. I wish to become God's tool to transform and develop the church in all respects. My future plan is to encourage girls to enter into the ministry so that the devotion, sincerity, honesty and hard work of women could be used for the glory of God."

Also ordained was Rev. Dora Thilagavathai, currently working as a hospital chaplain. She said she now feels "strengthened to counsel the patients with whom she shares God's love and care every day." Rev. Valarmathi, who has since become a pastor in one of TELC's congregations, expressed her personal vision to "plant new churches in the villages, proclaim the gospel in a multi-religious context, and encourage more women to pursue theological training."

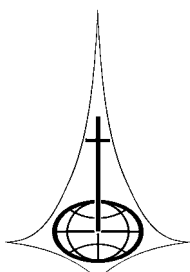
Rev. Adlin Reginabai, currently teaching at the Tamil Nadu theological seminary, said she hoped, among other things, to work with community members



*Bishop Aruldoss (second from right), his wife (far right), and Rev. Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan, director of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society in Lower Saxony, and the newly ordained TELC pastors. © TELC*

to struggle for justice for all people, and to encourage support for women's participation in all areas of church life. Rev. Cornelia Gunaseeli, general secretary of the TELC women's fellowship remarked: "In some families, parents used to be disappointed if they do not have male children to send to pastoral ministry. Now the parents can send their girl-children to the pastoral ministry." She particularly thanked the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for its encouragement and support toward the issue of women's ordination through the desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS).

"This was neither an easy nor a quick decision. It is the result of a strategic and long process of discussion and awareness raising in the church," noted Ms Priscilla Singh, secretary for WICAS in the LWF Department for Mission and Development. In the nineties, the LWF supported the Tamil Nadu Lutheran church in organizing meetings and seminars at which theologically trained women, pastors, lay leaders decision makers and educators could openly debate the issue of women's ordination, she explained. The outcome was a general agreement that women should be ordained, but the motion was defeated in one of the church's governing body meetings.





Singh paid tribute to Bishop Aruldoss for his concerted effort and resolve to see women's ordination become a reality for the Tamil Nadu church.

The LWF Deputy General Secretary Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, said "the ordination was 'justice at last' done to the women, who have been the backbone of the church and its faith for 300 long years." Martin is an ordained

pastor of the TELC, and former executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India.

Founded in 1706 by German missionaries Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, the TELC became independent in 1919. The 120,000 member-church joined the LWF in 1947. The Tamil Nadu church celebrated its tercentenary in July this year.

## LWF Treasurer Stoll Thanks Churches for Support to Endowment Fund

First Goal of CHF 10 Million Attained

GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – The Treasurer of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Mr Peter Stoll has thanked the LWF member churches for their support toward the LWF Foundation—Endowment Fund, which reached its first goal of CHF 10 million in October 2006.

"We are grateful and proud that the Endowment Fund reached its first capital target of CHF 10 million (USD 8.2 million) in October 2006. The Fund now makes a notable contribution to financing the essential core functions of the LWF communion," Stoll said in an interview with the *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The LWF treasurer stressed the need to build up the Fund's assets and



Mr Peter Stoll, LWF Treasurer  
© LWF/H. Putsman

expressed confidence in the "help and support of the member churches to reach our next target."

He noted that in the short-term, "the LWF we will have to get used to the idea that the financial contributions of member churches which have paid more than their fair share will not longer be so high." He said the next realistic target is to double the CHF 10 million by the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

The LWF Foundation-Endowment Fund was established in 1999 to supplement financial support for the work of LWF. The fund's long-term goal is CHF 50 million.

## Swedish Lutheran and Mission Covenant Churches Sign Ecumenical Agreement

"Aim to Be Open for a Common Worship"

UPPSALA, Sweden/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – The majority (Lutheran) Church of Sweden and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden have signed an ecumenical agreement recognizing "each other as apostolic churches, participating in the Church of Christ ... holding the same confession of the apostolic faith" and "the same understanding of the sacraments," the Church of Sweden said in a statement.

According to the statement, the churches "aim to be open for a common worship at the local level and to work towards joint responsibility in the society and in the world." They celebrated the agreement's signing at a service in the Uppsala Cathedral on 2 December.

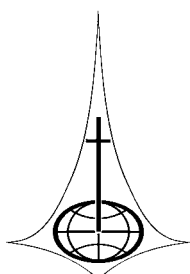
The Mission Covenant Church, the country's second largest denomination, is a Reformed free church founded in 1878 that places emphasis on the Word of God, baptism and communion based on biblical teaching. A state church until 2000, the Church of Sweden is the largest church, comprising around 80 percent of the country's 9 million people.

The statement said that the two churches recognize each other's ordained deacons, priests and pastors and welcome these to serve, by invitation and in accordance with their own regulations, without having to undergo re-ordination.

"They offer, subject to local decisions, each other the use of church buildings and chapels for weddings, funerals and other services and confirm their wish to contribute to a growth in communion between other partner churches both in and outside Sweden," the statement said.

The next step in cooperation between the two denominations, which are in altar and pulpit fellowship, will be at the local level where parishes and congregations are being encouraged to enter into talks on ways of promoting the agreement. In some local situations the two churches already share common services, church buildings and ministries.

(*Ecumenical News International*)



## Forum for Interfaith Dialogue Created in Iceland

Discussions on Issues of Common Interest

REYKJAVÍK, Iceland/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – Thirteen religious organizations including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland (ELCI) have founded an interfaith forum in Iceland.

According to a statement from the ELCI, the Forum for Interfaith Dialogue was established on 24 November by representatives of Christian churches, Muslims, Buddhists, the Bahá'í and Ásatruar. Its objective is to promote dialogue between religious organizations and life-stance (based on human values) organizations.

Initiated by the ELCI, the forum is open to all religious organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs. It will work to promote tolerance and respect between persons belonging to different religions and also protect religious freedom and other human rights, the statement said.

The spirit of cooperation is further explained in a policy statement by the Forum: "Such a goal will not be reached through simply agreeing with whatever



Karl Sigurbjornsson, bishop of Iceland, was the first to sign the policy statement of the Interfaith Forum. © A. S. Danielsson

is said or letting anything and everything pass by without comment or criticism, but rather by being prepared to listen to the views of others and put oneself in their shoes, respecting the right of independent individuals and religious organizations to self-determination."

The Forum provides leaders and representatives of its member organizations the opportunity to learn about one another, and, among other things, facilitate discussion on issues of common interest such as access to religious services in the public sphere and how to address potential problems such as persecution, civil disturbance, and national disasters.

The Forum has the capacity to promote increased tolerance and respect among the general population by advocating for professional education on religions, emphasizing the social value of faith, correcting obvious misinterpretations, and working against prejudice and negative discrimination.

(ELCI)



Salmann Tamimi, chairperson of the Muslim association in Iceland. © A. S. Danielsson

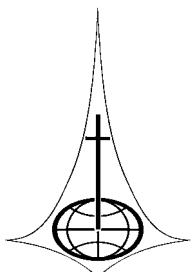
## Church of Sweden Bishops Publish Episcopal Letter about Funerals

Archbishop Wejryd Hopes Letter Will Provoke Discussion

UPPSALA, Sweden/GENEVA, 21 December 2006 (LWI) – Funerals are a major focus of the latest episcopal letter from the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden to all its parishes. The letter by the church's 14 bishops is titled, "The Funeral – A Letter from the Bishops of the Church of Sweden, 2006."

The letter aimed at contributing to the overall thinking about funerals contains a strategy for meeting mourners—one of the most important encounters between the church and its members.

"It is a tremendous responsibility to be in charge of the shaping of so many people's farewell departure from life," Swedish Archbishop Anders Wejryd writes in introductory remarks to the letter. "The Church of Sweden would like life and the departure from life to be carried and interpreted in [light] of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (...) It is my hope that this letter will provoke many conversations throughout the entire Church of Sweden for the purpose of letting activities connected with death build more obvious bridges



between the individual and the community, between time and eternity, between earth and heaven.”

The most numerous and most important encounters between the Swedish Lutheran church and its members take place in connection with major events in life, such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Eight out of ten funerals take place in church.

During their work on issues connected with funerals for a couple of years, the Swedish bishops involved parish representatives, including hospital chaplaincies, dioceses, directors of cemeteries, the Association of Crematoria, funeral directors, trade unions and the Christian Council of Sweden.

The letter focuses on the funeral service, proposing that the details of a good service should be worked out jointly between the clergy and the mourners according

to tradition and with openness to personal aspects. The social memorial immediately after the funeral including the meal and conversations is also considered as an important part of the arrangements. Among other issues, the bishops’ letter lays special emphasis on children; environmental aspects; and funerals for those who are not members of the Church of Sweden.

The episcopal letter will be sent to the over 2,220 parishes of the church, the diocesan offices, participants in the process of developing the letter, and to formally registered funeral directors.

An estimated 80 percent of Swedes belong to the nearly 7 million-member Church of Sweden. It is the largest member church of the Lutheran World Federation, which it joined in 1947.

*(Based on a Church of Sweden press release.)*

## North Elbian Synod Decides for New Bishop’s Office

### Common Responsibility for the Future

*RENSBURG, Germany/GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI)* – A bishop will soon preside over the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). The NELC synod took this decision at their meeting in Rendsburg, Germany on 23 September. Bishops will, however, also preside over the churches’ Northern and Southern Dioceses, which are also to be established, following restructuring, in the near future. The three bishops will share their responsibilities.

The present church chairperson and bishop of the Diocese of Schleswig, Dr Hans Christian Knuth, described this decision as a well-balanced compromise. He said that this expressed an awareness of the fact that all those involved carry a common responsibility for the future viability of the church structures. Knuth added that adopting a model that is carried by a majority would be of benefit to all.

The NELC bishop will be elected for a period of ten years, and will be responsible for the spiritual leadership and supervision at the NELC. He or she will represent North Elbia in church matters, and before the state governments of Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg. The other bishops will provide spiritual leadership within their dioceses and will represent

the NELC in church matters and public life within their regions, in coordination with the church bishop. They will continue to hold rights and responsibilities such as ordination and visitation. The current bishops’ collegium will give way to a bishops’ council to be led by the NELC bishop. The council will be active in deciding on and coordinating the tasks of the church.

The NELC bishop’s office will be located in Kiel, as it is attached to the seat of the North Elbian church office and the church leadership. The NELC bishop will, however, hold his or her sermons in Lübeck, thus increasing the importance of that city within the church.

The NELC is currently divided into three dioceses, Hamburg, Holstein-Lübeck, and Schleswig, each led by a bishop. Currently, Maria Jepsen is bishop of Hamburg, Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter bishop of Holstein-Lübeck, and Bishop Knuth bishop of Schleswig. They make up the NELC bishops’ collegium.

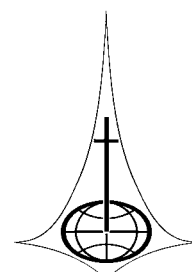
The members of the synod also decided to commence upon a process of spiritual renewal. The church leadership was assigned the task of presenting a plan for the process at the upcoming synod in February 2007.

## Australian Lutherans Fail to Reach Majority Vote for Women’s Ordination

At its 2006 Regular Convention, the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) failed to reach the required majority vote for women’s ordination. The 26–29 September LCA General Pastors’ Conference and the General Synod, meeting 30 September to 5 October in Toowoomba, Queensland, did not get the two-thirds majority required to adopt the vote.

This was the second time in six years that the LCA governing body has rejected the proposal for women’s ordination.

The LCA has studied the issue of women’s ordination since the 1990s. The 75,000-member church has been an associate member church of the LWF since 1994.





## New Rules for Foreign Preachers in Denmark?

With a draft bill, Denmark's Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs wants to tighten up the demands for giving residence permits to foreign preachers in religious congregations, *Church News from Denmark*, reports.

Denmark currently has 675 foreign preachers affiliated either to Christian congregations, to the Muslim communities as imams or as missionaries to the Mormon church. There are also a few foreign priests and nuns related to the Roman Catholic Church, according to *Church News from Denmark*, the information service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD).

According to the bill, a condition for obtaining a residence permit would include that the foreigner has familiarized himself/herself with Danish language and respects human rights, especially freedom of religion and faith, and the right to change religion.

An expert in religion and law, Lisbet Christoffersen told the Danish newspaper, the *Christian Daily* that "it is a fundamental part of religious freedom that a congregation is allowed to call

its own preachers. A law demanding a Danish language test is, therefore, a move against full religious freedom because then you can only call persons who pass the test."

Over 80 percent of Denmark's population of 5 million people belong to the ELCD. The leader of the Churches' Integration Service, Hans Henrik Lund, said to *The Christian Daily* that this proposal will be reintroduced.

The Minister of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs, Rikke Hvilshøj, was reported saying that "when we give residence permits we would like to make sure that foreigners—not least those who come here as preachers in order to influence and move other people—know something about Danish society and the Danish language." As examples she mentioned the democratic principles, individual freedom and integrity, equality between men and women, practical knowledge on the education of children, and the parental responsibility for children. It is not demanded that preachers speak fluent Danish.

(*Church News from Denmark*)

## Two Lutheran Churches in Norway Move Closer to Unity

The (Lutheran) Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway negotiated an agreement of full recognition and cooperation to come into force once approved by the synods of the two denominations.

According to the *Church of Norway Information Service*, the agreement called "One Faith—Together as Lutheran Churches in Norway," states that the two denominations fully recognize each other, including their ordained ministries. The churches will remain separate, though with a common doctrinal basis. The *Church of Norway Information Service* announced the agreement late October. The Evangelical Lutheran Free



Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit (left), general secretary of Church of Norway's Council for Ecumenical and International Relations, and Helge Utaker, representing the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Norway. © Church of Norway

Church in Norway was founded in 1877 by priests and lay people who left the majority (Lutheran) Church of Norway over disagreement about the country's state-church system.

The two churches have cooperated for many years in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) National Committee in Norway. The Church of Norway, which includes 85 per cent of the country's 4.6 million people, joined the LWF in 1947. The 22,000-member Free church joined the LWF as an associate member church in 1997, changing to full membership in 2005.

(*Church of Norway Information Service & Ecumenical News International*)

## Rev. Dr Miloš Klátik New Lutheran Bishop in Slovak Republic

Rev. Dr Miloš Klátik, 43, is the new general bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic (ECAC-SR). He was installed as general bishop in his own congregation in Bratislava-Petržalka on October 28. Klátik succeeded Dr Július Filo as general bishop, who received his farewell at a celebration the previous evening in the auditorium of the University of Bratislava's Faculty of Protestant Theology. Filo was vice president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for its Central and Eastern European region from 1997 to 2003, but was no longer eligible to run for the post after his second term in office.

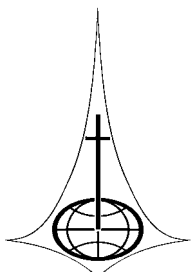


ECAC-SR General Bishop Dr Miloš Klátik © ECAC-SR

Klátik studied theology in Bratislava, in the German cities of Erlangen, Berlin, Tübingen, and Heidelberg, and in Birmingham and London, England. He worked as a vicar (intern pastor) in the congregations in Ružomberok and Petržalka, where he focused strongly on parish growth and organized a new church center. Klátik received his doctorate in systematic theology for his dissertation on the priesthood of all believers. He now teaches systematic theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Bratislava.

Miloš Klátik is married with four children.

The ECAC-SR has some 373,000 members and has been a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) since 1947.



## LWF Welcomes Special Session of Human Rights Council on Situation in Darfur

### Deep Concern on Slow Implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement

GENEVA, 13 December 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the calling of the Special Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the Human Rights Situation in Darfur, particularly saluting the “broad cross-regional support the calling of this Special Session has received.” This was stated in a written declaration of the LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights, submitted on Wednesday, 13 December to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The session convened in Geneva from 12 to 13 December. The statement expressed the LWF’s approval for this support. The support “demonstrates the mounting international concern for the tragic and deteriorating situation in Darfur.”

The statement expressed the concern of the LWF and its partners on “the slow implementation” of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), “the inadequate efforts to broaden its support base,” and “the failure to secure new parties to the Agreement.” It added that the “implementation of the DPA must be seen as an essential basis for improving the humanitarian and human rights situation on the ground. A much greater commitment to consultation and inclusiveness will be required in order to achieve improved support and implementation.”

It was also emphasized that the “international community must make stronger efforts to bring together the non-signatories and assist them to find a unified position.” For the process to be effective, however, “the outstanding issues of compensation, disarmament and political representation” would have to be addressed.

The LWF, furthermore, supported “the urgent dispatch of an impartial, independent, professional and expert human rights mission to Darfur to assess the human rights situation.” This was in fact “mandated by other recent Special Sessions of the Council.” The mission was to report back to the Human Rights Council without delay.

The statement also welcomed the cooperation between the government of Sudan and the UN Special Rap-

porteur on the situation of human rights in Sudan. The LWF called upon the government of Sudan “to intensify its cooperation with the Special Rapporteur and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.”

All of the parties, including non-signatories and signatories to the DPA, were required to recommit themselves to the N’Djamena ceasefire. As it was phrased in the statement, insecurity is the critical issue affecting the lives of the Darfurian people, “and without the curtailment of violence, displaced people will not return to their homes.” It was in fact the government of Sudan that had “the responsibility to protect all the people of Sudan and ensure their safety.”

The LWF criticized the government of Sudan for “failing to provide humanitarian agencies with the support it has agreed upon,” and for “failing to provide access to the areas where people are in need.” The statement emphasized the importance that “all humanitarian agencies have access to those people who are in need,” and that “humanitarian organizations should be enabled and assisted to have free access and freedom of movement.”

The LWF called upon on the government of Sudan “to respect the Memorandum of Understanding it signed with the UN where these principles were laid down and agreed upon.” The LWF is, moreover, “deeply concerned by reports of obstruction and harassment of humanitarian workers and agencies, preventing them from providing relief and humanitarian assistance and operating effectively in Darfur.”

*The written statement submitted by the LWF can be downloaded as a PDF version on the LWF Web site at: [www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/LWF\\_Darfur\\_statement-12-2006.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF_Darfur_statement-12-2006.pdf)*

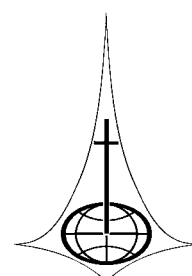
*The LWF’s oral statement is also available as a PDF version at: [www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/LWF\\_Darfur\\_oral\\_statement-12-2006.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF_Darfur_oral_statement-12-2006.pdf)*

## LWF New Year Message: Overcome Pretense and Meet One Another as Human Beings

### “We Depend on God’s Grace,” Noko Reminds Christians

GENEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI) – In his New Year Message, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko expresses his hope and prayer that 2007 would be dedicated to working for a peaceful world and better future.

In his message addressed to the LWF member churches, National Committees and related and supporting agencies, Noko points out that the path towards peace is a risky one. He underscores the need to overcome pretense and seek to find one another as human beings and as equals “within and beyond our usual comfort zones.”



The LWF general secretary notes that while the different religious communities have different religious symbols with respect to New Year celebrations, they are all centered around a strong human desire to renew positive forces in creation and in strengthening the bonds of human relationships.

Referring to the individual and collective new-year resolutions that many people make about working for a better future, Noko reminds Christians, that “we cannot manage on our own such new year resolutions

## **New Year Message from the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation**

To:  
LWF Member Churches  
LWF National Committees  
Related and supporting agencies

That the global village in which we live is multi-religious may be self-evident for many people today. However, what might not be so obvious in some parts of the world is the fact that most of the religions that constitute our dynamic contexts observe different calendars with regard to the beginning of a New Year. However, what is important is not when the new year actually begins but rather that the different religious communities represented in the diversity of our global context commemorate the new year. Careful studies of the rituals associated with each of these religious communities demonstrate that New Year celebrations are centered around a strong human desire to renew positive forces in creation and in strengthening the bonds of human relationships. Gifts and messages of goodwill are usually exchanged toward this purpose. Many people either individually or collectively, make personal resolutions about working for a better future. While some of these well-intended goals are achieved, others are not.

As Christians, we make such commitments fully conscious of the fact that we cannot manage on our own such new year resolutions because of human sin, which has alienated us from the very source of our

because of human sin, which has alienated us from the very source of our being—God and consequently from one another.”

He urges Christians not to lose sight of the fact that they depend entirely on God’s grace, which is a gift for all people. “Being a good, transformed human being is a fundamental requirement to being a good religious person,” Noko adds.

*The full text of the New Year Message from the LWF General Secretary follows:*

being—God and consequently from one another. We therefore depend entirely on God’s grace, manifest in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This divine grace is a gift not only for Christians but also for all people (John 3:16). When we “slip on the banana peels” of our resolutions, we should never lose sight of the transformative power of God’s grace, making us better human beings. Being a good, transformed human being is a fundamental requirement to being a good religious person.

As we all know, the path towards peace is a risky one. It requires that we overcome pretense; meet one another first and foremost as human beings and as equals; and find one another within and beyond our usual comfort zones. It is therefore my sincere hope and prayer that the year 2007 will be an occasion and moment for all of us to work for a peaceful world and better future.



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

Geneva, 22 December 2006

## **ELCA Council Urges Synods to Join in LWF’s 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) called on the church’s 65 synods, 10,549 congregations and 4.85 million members to support the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and join in preparations to celebrate the LWF’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in March 2007.

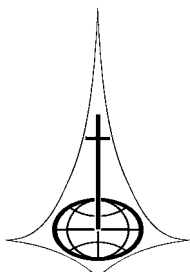
The Church Council is the ELCA’s board of directors and serves as the legislative authority of the church between churchwide assemblies. The council met Nov. 11–13.

The Council adopted a resolution “that the synods and congregations of this church commit to hold the Lutheran World Federation in prayer.” The resolution encouraged

ELCA synods and congregations to use resources—prayers, litanies, devotional readings and stories—that will be available to mark the anniversary and LWF Sunday, usually the first Sunday of each October, “to become better informed and also to understand more deeply the relationship of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the global Lutheran family.”

The council also urged ELCA members “to support the work of the LWF with gifts and special offerings for the LWF Endowment Fund” so that the LWF will continue to be “strong and vital” for the next 60 years.

*(ELCA News Service)*





## FEATURE: "I Don't Know Why We Were Attacked"

### Displaced Civilians Seek Protection in a South Darfur Camp

*OTASH CAMP, South Darfur, Sudan/GE-NEVA, 22 December 2006 (LWI)* – The heart sinks as the brain tries to make sense of the scene presented by the eyes. This is a strange field—bamboo canes and sticks covered with an amalgamation of pieces of plastic sheeting, matting, sacks and cloth. These semi-circular and square mounds, just big enough for a few people to shelter inside, are refuge for thousands of people.

Over the past two months, more than 10,000 people have arrived in Otash camp, fleeing attacks on their homes in the Tulus and Buram localities in Sudan's South Darfur province.

"At 6 o'clock on the morning of [30 August], 100 uniformed, armed men, riding camels and horses and some driving cars with big guns in the back, attacked our village," says Sherif\*, recounting a sequence of events that is all too familiar in the Darfur conflict.

"The attackers stole all the assets in our houses," he continues. "And if they found any man, they would shoot him directly," adds his cousin, Adam\*.

For three days, there was a sustained attack on the villages of El Amoud el Akhdar, Buram. All 49 villages were burnt, 47 people were killed, including 15 children, and nearly 2,000 people were injured in the attacks.

"We have lost many of our relatives, particularly our elders and children, and we don't know what has happened to them," explains Sherif. Four hundred people are missing.

Those who were able to flee took their sheep, cows and donkeys with them, but they were attacked again on the way to safety and lost everything. "Even our clothes and shoes were taken," says Sherif. "We arrived in Otash camp carrying nothing in our hands."

#### Urgent Humanitarian Needs

The existing services in the camp cannot support such a large influx of people. There is a desperate need for humanitarian assistance.

Hundreds of recent arrivals spent several days under the shelter of large baobab trees before they were able to rustle together enough materials to make the tiny shelters now covering the dusty landscape. Some of the people who arrived last month have now received more robust shelters, but they are not adequate.



*Young children at El Neem camp build castles in the sand at a community center run by Sudanaid, a partner of ACT/Caritas. © C. Brudenell ACT/Caritas*

There are no latrines for the new arrivals, people are sick with diarrhea and malaria, and children's noses run more constantly than the water sources, which run dry by 7 p.m. Basic household items such as cooking pots and soap are also in short supply.

Agencies are now looking into the humanitarian needs and the anticipated response. The global alliance of churches and their related agencies, Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and Caritas Internationalis (CI) are working together in a joint response to the Darfur crisis. ACT-Caritas and its local partner, Sudanaid, which runs a primary school in the camp, have taken part in a joint assessment. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a founding member of ACT International.

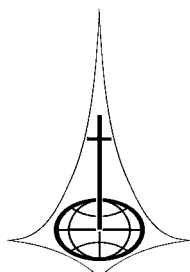
#### Civilian Protection

Humanitarian aid is not the only thing the people in Otash need. "We want to feel safe," states Sherif. "We decided to come to Otash camp because we are looking for protection."

Otash is situated a few kilometers from the town of Nyala, where there are police, military and African Union (AU) forces, but this is not complete protection.

"If women go outside the camp to get firewood, they can face trouble," says Sherif, "but it is better here than in the villages."

"What is the role of the role of the African Union? Is it here to protect or just to watch?" asks Sherif. "If I am not fully protected by the Government of Sudan, then the AU should take up this responsibility of protection."



Everyone is worried that the people who attack women outside the camp will dare to enter the camp and attack them. There is no physical barrier around the camp. In addition, the men who attacked their homes are still armed.

ordinary civilians, who continue to be the biggest victims of the conflict.

"I don't know why we were attacked. We are normal citizens who have been living in our villages for years," says Sherif.



Children washing clothes at an ACT/Caritas hand pump.  
© C. Brudenell ACT/Caritas

\*Individuals' names have been changed to protect their safety and security.

*By Charlotte Brudenell, a field communicator for ACT-Caritas.*

*On 13 December the LWF submitted to the Fourth Special Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council a written statement on the human rights Situation in Darfur. In the statement, the LWF particularly welcomed the "broad cross-regional support" the calling of the special session had received, and expressed concern about "the slow implementation" of the Darfur Peace Agreement. The statement can be accessed on the LWF Web site at [www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/LWF\\_Darfur\\_statement-12-2006.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF_Darfur_statement-12-2006.pdf)*

According to media reports, Sudan has announced that it will launch a plan to begin disarming the pro-government militias within two months, as part of a new national commission to supervise the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, which is headed by the Sudanese president. But it is not clear how the authorities plan to disarm the militias.

Many believe that in contrast to its name, the peace agreement has, in fact, led to escalation in fighting recently and a renewed spate of attacks on

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

## South African Lutheran Pastor Kistner Dies

South African Lutheran pastor **Wolfram Kistner**, died on 4 December aged 83. Kistner was well known for his role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

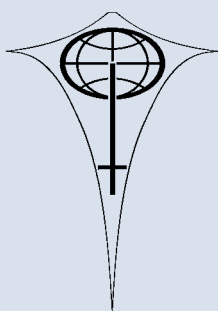
Born as the son of a German missionary in Hermannsburg, in what is now the South African province of KwaZulu Natal, Kistner studied history at the University of Pretoria and in the Netherlands. After receiving his doctorate, he studied theology in Germany.

Ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1952, Kistner served churches in South Africa and Germany, and directed the Hermannsburg mission school. Subsequently, he worked as a lecturer at the theological seminary of the then University

of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. He joined the South African Council of Churches in 1976 as director of the Division of Justice and Reconciliation.

He remained in that post until his retirement in 1988, when he joined in the establishment of the Ecumenical Advice Bureau, which became an important resource in intensifying the struggle against apartheid.

In April this year, Kistner was awarded one of South Africa's highest awards, the presidential Order of the Baobab in Silver, in recognition of his "contribution to the fight for justice, equality and democracy in South Africa."



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