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– A Communion of Churches**

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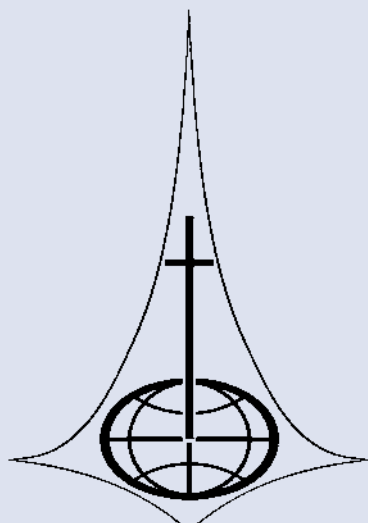
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2008 LWF Themes: Human Rights, Illegitimate Debt and Climate Change



LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko invites churches to enter the year 2008 with the resolve to reclaim promises made nearly six decades ago to respect the fundamental elements of every person's God-given human dignity. In his New Year Message issued in December, Noko cites human rights, illegitimate debt and protecting the earth, as some of the major challenges requiring churches' reflection and action.

(Photo above & p. 7-8) "Children's Rights"—to education, food, play—drawn in 2005 by Vincent Ndayizeye, then a 12-year-old pupil at Axel Aller primary school, Kanembwa refugee camp, a project of the Tanganika Christian Refugee Service in Tanzania's western district of Kibondo. © LWF/DWS Tanzania/V. Ndayizeye

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Radmila and Petar Radonjic, both in their early fifties, run a small farm in Tomina village, northwest Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is seven years since the couple returned to their village after five years of displacement in Banja Luka town, the country's second largest city.

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The memory is still very painful to me, G. Raju recounts in a faltering vice. Yet, there was nothing he could do. The flood waves were six or seven meters high and he could not reach his house and his family.

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Finland: General Synod Welcomes 16-Year-Olds to Vote in Parish Elections

At its November meeting, the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) approved an amendment to its Ecclesiastical Act, giving young people aged 16 and 17 years the right to vote in parish elections. However, the minimum age for eligible candidates remains 18 years, a news release from the ELCF communications center stated.

Proponents of the change argued the right to vote would increase opportunities for young adults to participate in church life and strengthen their commitment. The action of the ELCF's highest decision-making body also provides young people with better chances of being elected to positions of responsibility.

According to the ELCF, young Finns are most active in congregations at the age when they attend confirmation classes—which included 88 percent of all 15-year-olds in 2006. It is hoped that young people with a right to decision-making soon after confirmation would remain more interested and active in their congregations.

Parish elections held every four years decide members of local governing bodies in parishes and parish unions. About 12,000 elected lay persons serve in positions of responsibility in the church's 517 parishes.

The ELCF has over 4.5 million members, including those residing abroad. It joined the LWF in 1947.

(ELCF Communications Center)

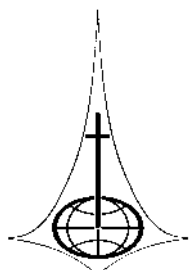
Court Convicts Finnish Pastor Opposed to Conducting Service with Woman Clergy

In a recent case in Hyvinkää, northeast Finland, a court ordered a visiting male pastor representing the Lutheran Evangelical Association in Finland (LEAF) to pay a fine for refusing to conduct a worship service with a parish pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF).

Also indicted was the local chairperson of LEAF, which does not accept the ELCF's women's ministry.

The ELCF Church Council adopted the women's ministry in 1986, and ordained the first women pastors in March 1988. In 1990, the synod agreed that women could be consecrated as bishops. In 2005, the ELCF included 748 female and 1,449 male pastors, with the latter representing 66 percent of all parish pastors. Around 62 percent of all hospital chaplains were women, as were 69.8 percent of family counselors.

(ELCF Communications Center)



Tanzanian Church to Host 2008 LWF Council Meeting

Theme: “Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro—Christian Witness
Amidst the Suffering Creation”

GENEVA, 18 December 2007 (LWI) – “Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro: Christian Witness Amidst the Suffering Creation” is the theme of the 2008 meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council to be hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

The Council meets from 25 June to 1 July 2008 in Arusha, Tanzania, dates agreed by the LWF governing body at its March 2007 meeting in Lund, Sweden. The theme is developed in consultation with the Council host church.

The LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko conveys the Council theme and venue in a December 2007 letter addressed to the member churches, and invites them to concerted action in view of the theme and current global environmental challenges.

“This theme connects well with our concerns related to ecology and global warming, pointing to some stark realities and injustices,” Noko writes. He invites the churches to observe 29 June 2008 as a “Sunday on Climate Change” reflecting and worshipping together as they focus on the theme. “I urge you ... to sensitize the pastors and congregations on the urgent issues related to God’s suffering creation,” he adds.

LWF Work in the Region

Noko notes the meeting in Arusha will offer possibilities to experience some aspects of the life and work of the ELCT congregations in the northeastern dioceses of Meru and Arusha. The Council participants would have the chance to visit some of the LWF Departments for World Service (DWS) and Mission and Development (DMD) projects and programs implemented in collaboration with the ELCT and other member churches in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

The general secretary notes the Arusha location of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) would serve as a reminder “of the ongoing search for justice on the continent and the continuing challenge of impunity.”

In accepting the ELCT invitation to host the Council meeting, “we are deeply aware that this pilgrimage will expose us to and help us to understand the unique challenges faced by the LWF communion and its expressions in the United Republic of Tanzania,” he

writes. Gathering in Arusha would be an opportunity to learn more about the “House of Africa,” Noko says, and points to the “House of Europe” focus at the 2007 Council meeting and LWF 60th anniversary celebrations in Lund, Sweden.

The Council, LWF’s governing body between Assemblies, meets once every 12 to 18 months. It consists of the President, who is elected by the Assembly, the Treasurer, who can be elected from among the membership or from outside, and 48 persons elected by the Assembly.

11th Assembly

The general secretary’s letter also informs the churches about the second meeting of the 11th Assembly Planning Committee (APC) to be held 28–30 January 2008 in Stuttgart, Germany. The APC will, in addition to its deliberations, have orientation to the conference center facilities, and to opportunities for worship and interaction with the Assembly host church—the Evangelical Church in Württemberg. The APC comprises 14 persons drawn from the LWF member churches worldwide, and is chaired by Ms Angelene Swart, president of the Moravian Church in South Africa.

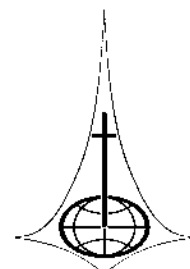
The Assembly is the LWF’s highest governing body meeting every six years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada hosted the July 2003 Tenth Assembly, held in Winnipeg, Canada. The 11th Assembly will be held 20–27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.

Executive Committee

The general secretary’s letter highlights the LWF Executive Committee meeting 30 November–2 December near Geneva, during which the Strategic Plan implementation was discussed among other issues. Members of the committee also provided information regarding the life of the churches in the regions, while paying particular attention to efforts for reconciliation in internal church conflicts, he notes.

Noko invites the LWF churches to join in the 18–25 January 2008 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, also marking the 100th anniversary of the ecumenical week of prayer.

More LWI News at
www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html



LWF Urges Youth to Join Centennial Prayer Events for Christian Unity

Young People’s Vision, Courage Are Crucial for Ecumenism

GENEVA, 18 December 2007 (LWI) – Ahead of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity centennial in 2008, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has called on young adults in its member churches and various networks to join Christian youth in praying for “the much-needed Christian unity in every global region.”



Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke, LWF/DMD director, stressed youth vision and courage.
© LWF/H. Putsman

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and its 100th anniversary will be marked from 18 to 25 January 2008 under the theme “Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17).”

“Young people took a leading role when the ecumenical movement started over 100 years ago. For today’s ecumenism—which, according to many has come to a standstill—the vision and courage of young people is of utmost importance,” said Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke,

director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), where the LWF Youth desk is located.

Nordstokke stressed the LWF’s ecumenical contribution: “It is widely accepted within the Lutheran communion that being Lutheran implies being ecumenical. It should therefore be natural for Lutheran youth to join with other Christians in praying for unity.”

The LWF/DMD Youth desk is among 12 Christian youth organizations and units of international church bodies that have signed a joint statement calling on young Christians to “take action and make our voices heard for Christian unity” during the week.

LWF Youth secretary Rev. Roger Schmidt said young adults’ impetus toward Christian unity was crucial. “The ecumenical movement needs a strong push from young people. Although the week of prayer has been observed since 1908, Christian unity remains an ever-burning issue,” he said.

Schmidt noted “young people identify more easily with diversity in their respective contexts, and have a strong sense of the critical role of Christian unity. They are enthusiastic to actively play their part in realizing this global, ecumenical goal,” he added.

The World Council of Churches and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity coordinate the week of prayer, observed ecumenically through joint prayer, worship and other activities to express the need for greater visible unity among the churches.

More information at <http://lwfyouth.org/issues/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/>

FEATURE: Affirming Indigenous People as Equal Partners

LWF Regional Consultation Debates Contextual Issues for Ministry in Asia

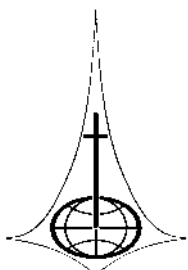
SABAH, Malaysia/GENEVA, 20 December 2007 (LWI) – “Coming from the Munda indigenous people and a theologian, I have always been concerned about issues on indigenous people. This is the first consultation in the Asian region, which really met some of my expectations—carefully chosen and meaningful themes, and dynamic participation—although some people could not articulate their issues due to language limitations [...],” remarked Ms Elina Horo, a representative of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India,



Indian theologian Elina Horo
© LWF/S. Lim

following her participation in a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regional consultation on indigenous people’s rights.

The 6 to 8 November consultation on “Indigenous People’s Rights: Diversity Within Communion” was held in Kundasang, Sabah, Malaysia, hosted by the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia. It was organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) Asia desk in consultation with the Office for International Affairs and Human Rights (OIAHR), and the Lutheran Council in Asia – LUCAS.



The over 40 participants included representatives of indigenous people's groups and LWF member churches in Asia, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand, from the Mekong Mission Forum and LWF staff.

The consultation was a follow-up to commitments of the July 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly, urging member churches to recognize and support the basic human rights of indigenous people according to international laws and standards. The Assembly also asked the churches to "acknowledge and seek the presence of indigenous people within our churches, and take steps to challenge paternalistic patterns and affirm indigenous people as equal partners."



Worship during the LWF consultation. Far right, Rev. Jensey Mojuin, a participant from the LCMS. © LWF/S. Lim

Responsibility

The LWF consultation provided sessions for experience exchange and sharing of common concerns among the participants, especially those representing indigenous communities. Through presentations and discussions especially on the keynote address, "Gospel and Indigenous Culture and Spirituality in the Asian Context," participants affirmed the churches' responsibility in protecting and nurturing indigenous people's culture and in identifying their specific needs as equal members and partners within the Lutheran communion.

"I had this wonderful feeling of healing, and my Christian faith has been deepened. The sessions reminded me that there are not many writings on the rights of indigenous people in my church," said Rev. Jensey Mojuin, Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). The LCMS pastor said the LWF gathering had encouraged him "to develop specific documents for the people and community in my church, so that they could understand and open their eyes to speak freely and no longer be silenced by prohibitions."

Other aspects featured in the consultation included: land rights



Rev. Martin Lalthangliana, Myanmar. © LWF/S. Lim



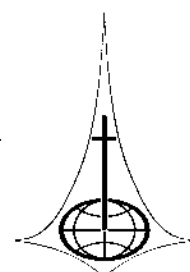
From left: Rev. Harlen Simangunsong, executive secretary of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia, and LWF/DMD Asia secretary, Rev. Dr. Ginda Harahap. © LWF/S. Lim

and the fundamental survival of indigenous people and their cultures; networking among indigenous people in the Asian region; mapping indigenous constituency in the Asian Lutheran churches; and whether the gospel is relevant to indigenous contexts today.

Contextualizing the Gospel Message

Horo, who belongs to a central Indian indigenous group that has been fighting for its social, economic, cultural and political rights over the forests it depends on, however noted that some pertinent contextual issues had not been addressed adequately. "What seems to be missing in all of it was the understanding of the gospel and Christian faith in relation to the context and reality that the indigenous people are facing. Without that perspective, some participants may misunderstand and objectively interpret their issues [in the same way] like main stream society and governments do," she noted.

"I believe and hope that the result of this consultation would benefit the indigenous people in Asia and around the world so that they can defend their faith and their own rights, and enhance their knowledge and upgrade their edu-



cation,” added Rev. Martin Lalthangliana, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar.

A final statement from the consultation includes recommendations to the LWF and its member churches, to Lutheran theological seminaries and other institutions, highlighting major aspects for the

realization of the 2003 Assembly commitments on indigenous people.

In September 2006, LWF/OIAHR organized an international consultation under the theme “An Indigenous Communion,” also responding to the Assembly commitments.

LWF Executive Committee Action on Church Conflict Issue

Emphasis on ‘Growing Sense of Communion’

GENEVA, 20 December 2007 (LWI) – At its recent meeting, the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) stated its concern about interference of a Finnish mission organization in the LWF member church in Zambia.

In a statement adopted at its 30 November to 1 December meeting at Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva, the Executive Committee said it “shares the concerns” raised by the LWF Vice President for the African region Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta that members of the Lutheran Evangelical Association in Finland (LEAF) were intervening “in a church-divisive manner” in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia (ELCZ).

Kameeta is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia.

The ELCZ has over 5,600 members, and joined the LWF in 2002. It is led by assistant senior pastor, Rev. Rabson Mwanza.

The LWF governing body said its action “is taken in the spirit of the growing sense of communion within the member churches at the Lutheran World Federation who understand ourselves to be members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ.”

LEAF is one of the recognized mission organizations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, an LWF member church since 1947. On its Web site, LEAF states it does both domestic and overseas missionary work, with the aim to propagate the gospel of Christ, and to circulate literature that conforms to the Bible, and to the Lutheran confession. It was founded in 1873.

The LWF Executive Committee normally meets twice a year. It comprises the LWF President – Bishop Mark S. Hanson (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), the Treasurer, Vice Presidents and chairpersons of the Program Committees.

Regional Baden and Württemberg Protestant Synods Approve Church-State Agreement

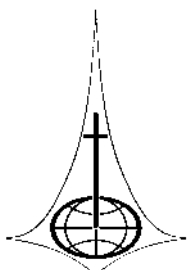
At their first joint meeting in late October, the synods of the Evangelical Church in Baden and Evangelical Church in Württemberg gave their approval for an agreement between the churches and the German state of Baden-Württemberg. The agreement will regulate the relationship between the two Protestant churches and Baden-Württemberg. The document was officially signed on 17 October by the Baden-Württemberg premier Günther H. Oettinger and the Württemberg and Baden bishops, Frank O. July and Ulrich Fischer respectively.

At the 25 October joint meeting, Premier Oettinger referred to the agreement approval by the two Protestant synods as a special moment for Christians and the entire state of Baden-Württemberg. He said they now had a just and competent basis for future relations between the churches and state, adding he was proud that Baden-Württemberg was a state with a strong Christian tradition.

Württemberg Bishop July characterized as “truly historic” the first joint meeting between the two synods, which marked the agreement’s approval. Baden Bishop Fischer lauded the agreement as a “wonderful” document, even taking its esthetic qualities into account.

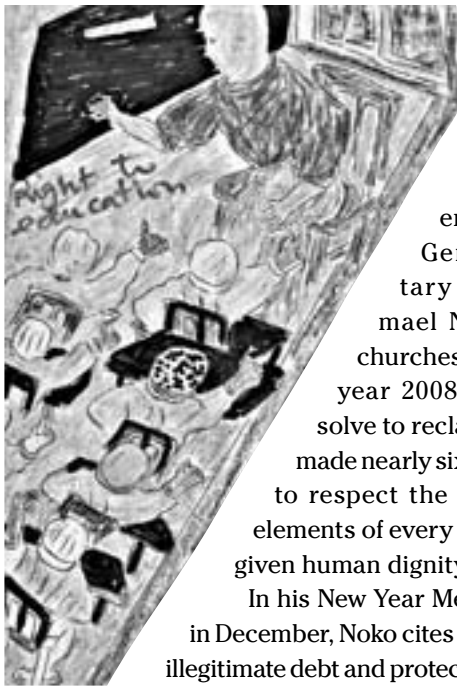
The Baden church has had an agreement with the state since 1932, which will be replaced by the new one. The Württemberg church, by contrast, is the last German regional church apart from Hamburg and Berlin to sign such an agreement. The Evangelical Church in Württemberg, a member of the Lutheran World Federation since 1947, has approximately 2.3 million members, while the Baden church has 1.3 million.

The agreement determines, among other things, the amount that the state would pay the churches as compensation for property loss during the Reformation and secularization of 1803. It also regulates religious education in public schools, which the churches provide for the state, and the payment involved. Observance of Sundays and holidays as days of rest are also to be respected in general, while the theology departments of the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen would continue providing training for religion teachers and pastors, and receive adequate equipment. The agreement, furthermore, provides guidelines on diaconal services, cemeteries, and pastoral care for prisoners.



LWF Churches Urged to Act on Human Rights, Illegitimate Debt and Climate Change in 2008

New Year Message from General Secretary Noko



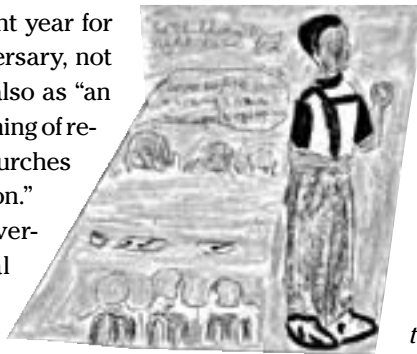
GENEVA, 22 December 2007 (LWI)

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko invites churches to enter the year 2008 with the resolve to reclaim promises made nearly six decades ago to respect the fundamental elements of every person's God-given human dignity.

In his New Year Message issued in December, Noko cites human rights, illegitimate debt and protecting the earth, as some of the major challenges requiring churches' reflection and action.

He underscores 2007 as a significant year for the LWF as it celebrated its 60th anniversary, not as a celebration for its own sake, but also as "an occasion for the renewal and strengthening of relationships within the communion of churches and with our partners in Christ's mission."

As next year marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Let this not be an empty celebration,"



Noko stresses. The Universal Declaration has served as an inspiration and call to action worldwide, "but too little has been achieved in fulfilling the promises it contains," he notes. The LWF general secretary challenges the churches to see the coming year as one in which "we as churches reclaim the promises made in 1948, insist on accountability to them, and work for their universal practical implementation."

Noko highlights illegitimate debt as an obstacle not only to the enjoyment of human rights but also "to the reception of the liberating Good News of Christ in those communities who still groan under its crushing weight."

The general secretary argues the jubilee in which debts are forgiven and captives set free, "is too long overdue for these victims of economic injustice." He urges churches, instead of striving for an exceptional jubilee, to seek new ways of ensuring that "economic relations between states are informed by ethical principles, and no longer result in debt bondage for generations of poor people."

Noko reminds the LWF to respond as a communion to the challenge of climate change, pointing out 2008

will be a critical period in shaping the international framework for achieving the requisite emission reduction targets in order to avoid catastrophic impacts. "We must promote new ways of relating to and living within creation that better reflect in practice our theological understandings of *communio*," he adds.

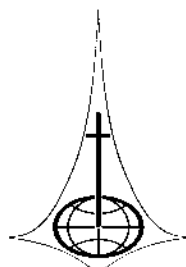
The full text of the general secretary's New Year Message follows:

2008 New Year Message from the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation

In the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, I greet all members of the LWF communion throughout the world. As we enter into a new year with the good news of Christ's birth still ringing in our ears and in our hearts, we renew our commitment to following Christ in his mission in the world, to being the church for others, and participating with Christ in God's Kingdom. In 2008, as in all years, we are challenged to reflect on how to be Christ's church in the world's contexts, and to act in response to the many challenges facing God's people on earth.

In 2007 we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the LWF. It was not a celebration for its own sake, but a celebration of what God has done through LWF's work over these 60 years, perfecting our imperfect efforts in God's name. It was also an occasion for the

renewal and strengthening of relationships within the communion of churches and with our partners in Christ's mission. The year 2008 will mark another 60th anniversary—the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which the international community promised to respect the fundamental elements of the human dignity that God has given to each of us. Let this not be an empty celebration either. The Universal Declaration has served as an inspiration and a call to action to all peoples around the world. But in truth, too



little has been achieved in fulfilling the promises it contains. Let 2008 be a year in which we as churches reclaim the promises made in 1948, insist on accountability to them, and work for their universal practical implementation.

The continuing burden of illegitimate debt is an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights and to the reception of the liberating Good News of Christ in those communities who still groan under its crushing weight. The jubilee, in which debts are forgiven and the captives set free, is too long overdue for these victims of economic injustice. Instead of an exceptional jubilee, let us strive this year for new ways of ensuring that economic relations between states are informed by ethical principles, and no longer result in debt bondage for generations of poor people.

The fundamental ethical challenge of our age is to protect the planet—to be good stewards of creation—and to respond as a communion to the challenge of climate change. The year 2008 will be a critical period in shaping the international framework for achieving the emission reduction targets that will be required to avoid catastrophic environmental, developmental and humanitarian impacts. We as churches must play our role in witnessing to the damage inflicted on God's creation, to the suffering of the voiceless vic-

tims—human and non-human—of our profligacy. We must encourage the political will to change the unsustainable patterns of the past. And we must promote new ways of relating to and living within creation that better reflect in practice our theological understandings of *communio*.



We are a communion of churches in Christ's body. We believe that when any part of the body suffers, all suffer. And we are a communion of churches for others—for those who suffer and are oppressed—regardless of their belief. To paraphrase Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we will not let our Christianity be a mere metaphysical abstraction to be spoken of only at the edges of life. We will stand,

as the church must stand, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of our global village. May God strengthen us for this task, and to continue to follow Christ in 2008.

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
December 2007

Schuegraf Is New VELKD Secretary for Ecumenical Questions

Rev. Dr Oliver Schuegraf, 38, has been named *Oberkirchenrat* by the leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) in Hanover, Germany. The pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria will be responsible for fundamental ecumenical questions for the church body, from the beginning of 2008. He will succeed Rev. Dr Christoph Jahnel, who has since returned to the Bavarian church.



Rev. Dr Oliver Schuegraf
© VELKD

Schuegraf studied Protestant theology in Erlangen and Bonn, Germany, with a year abroad at the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem. He completed his doctorate at the Augustana Seminary in Neuendettelsau near Nuremberg, Germany.

His dissertation focused on the ecclesiology of documents pertaining to bilateral consensus. Professionally, he has served as the chaplain of Coventry University, England, and as coordinator of the Community of the Cross of Nails at the International Center for Reconciliation of Coventry Cathedral. He has been a pastor in Feuchtwangen, Germany since February 2006.

VELKD includes eight Lutheran churches in Bavaria, Brunswick, Hanover, Mecklenburg, North Elbia, Saxony, Schaumburg-Lippe and Thuringia, representing nearly 9.8 million Lutherans. It is headed by presiding Bishop

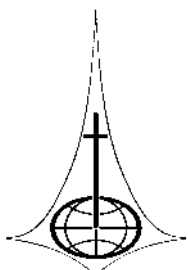
Dr Johannes Friedrich from Bavaria.

New Zealand's Lutheran Church Has New President, Robert Erickson

Rev. Robert Erickson is the new president of the Lutheran Church of New Zealand (LCNZ). The LCNZ is a district of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), an associate member church of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). LCA president Rev. Michael P. Semmler installed Erickson into his new position in late October. Erickson, 55, succeeds Rev. Steen Olsen.

Before taking up the leadership position at LCNZ, Erickson, originally from the United States of America, had served as a pastor in California. When he joined the LCA, he served in parishes in the Brisbane area. The LCA has 75,000 members, and joined the LWF in 1994. The LCNZ has 976 members.

(*The Lutheran – Australia*)



ELCA Synod Bishop, Other Faith Leaders Urge Reauthorization of AIDS Plan

The **Rev. Richard H. Graham**, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Metropolitan Washington, DC Synod, joined with other faith leaders and government officials on Capitol Hill on 13 December in advocating for robust funding and improved policies in the reauthorization of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

PEPFAR is due to expire in 2008 and discussions are under way regarding its reauthorization.

"Twenty-five years into the world's most devastating health pandemic we must ask ourselves, what does the ministry of reconciliation mean to our communities throughout the world that have been devastated by HIV and AIDS?" said Graham.

"What does it mean to the millions of people throughout the world infected and affected by this disease who are longing for the advent of comprehensive prevention, treatment and care? What does it mean to those who are still discriminated against and stigmatized because of AIDS?" he asked.

As it considers the PEPFAR reauthorization, religious leaders urge Congress to support the funding of USD 50 billion over the next five years, with at least 10 percent dedicated to addressing the needs of orphans and vulnerable children through integrated community programs. They also call for increased flexibility for implementation of comprehensive prevention, treatment and care programs that empower local communities; and more funding to train and help sustain the number of health care workers and volunteers while strengthening the infrastructure of health systems.

The ELCA is currently developing an HIV and AIDS strategy requested by its 2007 Churchwide Assembly, for presentation at the 2009 Assembly. It is among member churches of the Lutheran World Federation that have been responding to HIV and AIDS actively through advocacy and prevention education, treatment and care for affected children and families, among other initiatives.

(ELCA News Service)

Major Changes Foreseen for Danish Lutheran Church

Following the November 2007 elections in Denmark, the center-right coalition government put forward proposals to limit the tenure of bishops and to replace the state's direct grant to pastors' salaries with a block grant to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD).

"The biggest change in nearly 100 years," according to church historian Kurt E. Larsen, referring to the reform in the 1920s which democratized bishops' appointment by enfranchising all church council members. Bishop Steen Skovsgaard of Lolland-Falster said he feared the proposal would turn pastors into politicians.

A majority of bishops have previously supported a 10 to 12-year tenure for a bishop, as opposed to the present system where tenure is relinquished upon retirement. The argument is that a limited office term concentrates focus better in a job where leadership is required not only in church matters but also increasingly toward other religions, the press and toward pervading Danish indifference to the church.

The bishops are also concerned about proposals to cut the number of pastorates and to move pastors around to where the need is greatest. According to a government report, the Aalborg diocese has 33 pastors too many. "This is armchair politics at its worst," says the affected bishop, Soeren Lodberg Hvas. "In many areas the pastor and church council are the only resource people left!"

The bishop of Viborg, Karsten Nissen agrees, "We are under considerable pressure, so I move pastorates around internally in the bishopric to meet local needs."

The ELCD is the Danish national Church, with the parliament—*Folketinget*—as its legislative authority. It is divided into 12 dioceses, each headed by a bishop, and has 103 deaneries served by around 2,000 pastors. The 4.5 million-member church joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1947.

(Church News from Denmark)

Danish Christians and Muslims Establish Joint Working Forum

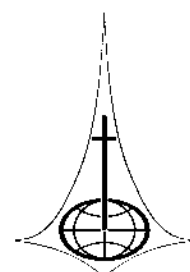
Leaders of Denmark's Christian and Muslim communities have set up a formal joint forum to work toward better understanding between both religions. During a recent conference at the Imam Ali Islamic Center in Copenhagen, 40 religious leaders discussed how to improve their relations, including how to remove fear and prejudice. They also heard of Norway's experience, where such a forum has existed for a number of years.

The chairperson of the Danish Islamic Council, Jihad Al Farra, welcomed the new forum, and the presence of

both Sunni and Shia Muslims at the conference. "Dialogue has always led to better understanding, and as Denmark increasingly becomes a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, misunderstandings arise but can be easily corrected through a dialogue forum," he said. Denmark must lead from the front and ensure that there is no conflict between living here and being Muslim," he added.

Muslims comprise less than two percent of Denmark's 5.5 million people.

(Church News from Denmark)



FEATURE: No Place Like Home

A Balancing Act – LWF 15 Years in the Balkans

SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina/GENEVA, 20 December 2007 (LWI) - Radmila and Petar Radonjic, both in their early fifties, run a small farm in Tomina village, northwest Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is seven years since the couple returned to their village after five years of displacement in Banja Luka town, the country's second largest city. Their situation was similar to that of other Bosnians in the early 1990s—looted houses and stables, destroyed livestock, joblessness as industries shut down, failed infrastructure, and probably worst of all, fear of reprisals from former neighbors belonging to a different ethnic group.

“Living as displaced persons in Banja Luka, we always knew that we wanted to go back home—we didn't want to consider any other option!” remarks Radmila.

“There was not a day that I did not express my desire to return,” Petar recalls.

Income Generation Project

Through its large-scale agricultural income generation project, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) program in the Balkans region helped the family rebuild their



Radmila and Petar Radonjic in front of their new stable.
© LWF/DWS Balkans/S. Hadzic

needs. “Gradually I recognized the power and beauty of agriculture and I found myself planting vegetables even in flower pots all over my house,” she recalls.

Thanks to regular advice from the LWF agronomists, many families like the Radonjics now sell their produce to the local supermarkets or at the open market. “Yes, we can live from what we sell at the market,” confirms Petar.



Against all odds, the Radonjics proudly show their greenhouse.
© LWF/DWS Balkans/L. Dzaferovic

lives by donating three greenhouses and a truck to transport farm produce to the market place and to private food industries.

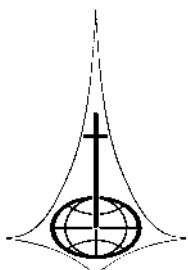
“I did not know a thing about agriculture,” admits Radmila, who like her husband, worked at a local textile company before the war broke out in 1992. Upon return, they produced only enough to cover their own

Electricity

Today, the couple lives in a warm, well-lit house, hardly comparable to the living conditions two-and-a-half years ago. “It was real isolation, not being able to watch news and learn what was going on around us. On long summer days we could not store food for long because the refrigerator was not functioning, even worse, were the long cold winter nights when we had to go to sleep early in order to economize candles,” quips Radmila.

Restoring electricity in Tomina village was one of the many infrastructural rehabilitation projects implemented through the DWS Balkans integrated returnee program in partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

Radmila is enthusiastic about increasing her vegetable production, as is Petar about expanding the family's livestock, in order to provide for their children studying in Banja Luka. “There is a future for all people in our beloved Bosnia” irrespective of ethnic origin, the couple argues, citing peace, health



and equal rights for all as basic ingredients for co-existence. “We are all human beings, other differences do not count,” she asserts.

Fehima and Idriz Selimovic

Fehima and Idriz Selimovic, a Bosnian Muslim couple in their early thirties never lost hope despite the uncertainty they encountered. They fled their homes in Konjevic Polje, Bratunac and the Srebrenica region with their parents and hundreds of thousands of other civilians during the first military attacks on Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Their first child was born in 1994 at the height of the Bosnian war. In Srebrenica, the town that suffered a large-scale military attack leading to deaths of thousands and a mass flight of the local population, the family had taken refuge in

quickly. The extra milk they got from a donated cow provided some income. Today, the couple owns four cows and two heifers.

Fehima and Idriz also spoke about relations with their Serb neighbors. “There is no collective responsibility for what happened in the war. I cannot blame all Serbs for setting my house on fire. It was an individual and I do not know who it was,” adds Idriz.

Long-Term Intervention

Over the past 15 years, the LWF/DWS Balkans program has assisted over 20,000 families such as the Radonjics and Selimovics to return to their original homes in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. Recognizing that a reconstructed house does not guarantee survival, the LWF has provided further assistance in the form of agricultural income generation, rehabilitation of community infrastructure, capacity building, social development, and peace and reconciliation initiatives.

But the major challenge is reintegration within communities where the four-year long war drew significant division lines between the main ethnic groups—Bosnians, Serbs and Croats. The LWF incorporates an inclusive approach, ensuring the rights holders [community members] and the DWS national office staff comprise the different ethnic groups. In partnerships with donor agencies such as SIDA, FinnChurchAid, Church of Sweden, Germany’s Church Development Service (EED), the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches’ aid agency HEKS, and members of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International—the global

alliance of churches and their agencies responding to emergencies—the LWF regional program



The Selimovics’s eldest family member (right) and her daughter-in-law outside their recently reconstructed house. © LWF/DWS Balkans/L. Dzaferovic

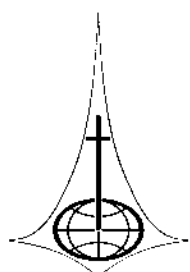
an abandoned house in Potocari village. The couple, their baby son and Idriz’s parents fled again, this time to Gradačac, a small town in the northeast, a region that did not experience a major military confrontation.

“During those difficult times of deprivation, we never lost hope that we would go back home. The birth of our daughter and son was not an additional burden but an encouragement to go on with our lives and struggle for a new start.”

Indeed the “new start” came when the family returned to Konjevic Polje in 1999. That there was no longer a house nor stables or livestock—just plain land—did not discourage them. A former neighbor accommodated them until 2003 when they heard about the LWF/DWS Balkans reconstruction project for returnees. The LWF assistance made it possible for the Selimovic family to move into their new house relatively



“Living from your own work” has been the motto of the LWF/DWS agricultural projects in the Balkans. An LWF-donated tractor outside a greenhouse. © LWF/DWS Balkans/F. Marjanovic



emphasizes local capacity building in order to minimize the rights holders' dependency on international assistance. Three agricultural projects in Bosnia and Kosovo are in the process of evolving into autonomous local non-governmental organizations.

Overall the LWF/DWS Balkans program plans to phase out its direct engagement in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as capacity developed over the years gradually allows transition from the international community management to local leadership. More



*DWS Balkans operations manager
Leila Dzaferovic © Private*

attention will be directed toward Kosovo, where there is still great need for international assistance.

Indeed, the LWF has made a significant contribution to one of the most challenging tasks in southeast Europe—reconstruction and reconciliation.

More about LWF/DWS work in the Balkans at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Balkans.html

(By Leila Dzaferovic, regional operations manager, LWF/DWS Balkans.)

FEATURE: Joy of Living Returns After Tsunami Disaster

LWF/DWS India Program Pays Off

THIRUMULLAIVASAL, Tamil Nadu, India/ GENEVA, 21 December 2007 (LWI) – The memory is still very painful to me, G. Raju recounts in a faltering vice. Yet, there was nothing he could do. The flood waves were six or seven meters high and he could not reach his house and his family. He still vividly remembers the horrible scenes of devastation the tsunami left in its wake three years ago as it swept through his coastal village in southern India.

On the morning of 26 December 2004, the now 45-year-old fisherman was sitting in a teashop in Thirumullaivasal in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. When he saw the gigantic waves suddenly crashing in, he managed to quickly flee to safety. What was particularly uncanny was that the tidal wave had raised the level of rivers and backwaters by several meters, so that the flood engulfed the village from the inland side. While he was desperately helping others



*The Raju family members show their new house in Thirumullaivasal, Tamil Nadu, India.
© LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

to reach safety, he was unable to reach his home to rescue his family.

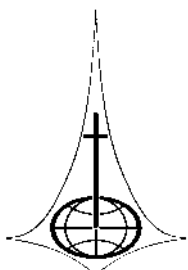
Shortly thereafter, he learned that his two daughters had managed to escape. But his wife and elderly father were not as fortunate. They were in the house and did not see the floodwaters coming. G. Raju lost his wife and his father, and their tiny house was totally destroyed.

For five months after the flood, G. Raju and his daughters continued to live in what was left of their house. A temporary shelter was only made available later on. Even the boat he used for backwater fishing was destroyed.

Now, three years after the disaster, which in India alone cost 16,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands



The building bricks are made locally. A Dalit man in front of a pile of baked bricks, ready for use. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch



of people homeless, G. Raju's situation has changed considerably for the better. A smile creeps onto his face as he takes Jiva by the hand, to whom he has been married for one year, and offers a tour of his new home.



Jiva prepares a meal at the outdoor cooking place of the new family house.
© LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

New Home, New-Found Happiness

Yes, he is happy again, G. Raju said as he put his arms around his eight-year old daughter Mageswari and her ten-year old sister Rajeswari. The memory is still painful, but he has found new happiness. He has a new wife and a new house. He could never have afforded such a beautiful, solid house before, he added.

His house is part of a new residential area which comprises 350 individual homes and shared facilities which the Lutheran World Service India (LWSI), a country program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS), with support from the worldwide network of churches and partner organizations such as Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, built on the outskirts of Thirumullaivasal.

Something remarkable has come about with this project, reports Debesh Bhuyan, LWSI tsunami projects' coordinator since November 2006. Despite strong opposition at the outset, the families of ocean and inland fishermen and Dalits—formerly know as “untouchables”—as well as members of other scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, now live side-by-side. According to the 37-year old coordinator, LWSI placed great importance on avoiding any kind of discrimination, including the project's spatial design.

Property Rights

In addition to this project, which, in compliance with the Indian government directives, had to be built several hundred meters from the coastline, LWSI has also built 180 new houses within the village. This was a response to a needs' plan drawn up by the Indian government, whose go-ahead was required before any new houses could be built. New houses could only be built for families who already had property rights.

The land rights' criteria was a particularly great challenge for LWSI, especially with regard to the Dalits and other scheduled tribes, who, because of their low status in the Indian caste system, had no land rights to assert. The LWSI housing project nonetheless succeeded in procuring houses for these groups and, consequently, land rights as well.

880 Sturdy Houses

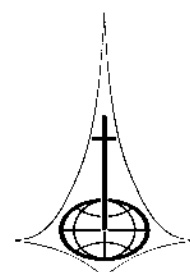
The architecture of the 880 houses built in 13 villages in the state of Tamil Nadu by the LWSI in collaboration with ACT is based on a core design provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) together with the regional government of Tamil Nadu. All houses are sturdily built with locally produced bricks.



The LWSI-constructed houses offer better protection against cyclones, earthquakes and floods.
© LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

However, to ensure greater stability and better protection against cyclones, earthquakes and floods, the LWSI revised the architectural design. Hence, all houses were equipped with reinforced concrete floors and columns, and a sturdy outdoors stairway leads to a roof terrace.

Each house cost around USD 5,000, but the cost in three years has skyrocketed. Many regional





From left: LWSI tsunami projects' coordinator Debesh Bhuyan and the projects' technician Rampada Bhoumik, on the terrace of one of the new houses in Thirumullaivasal. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

suppliers have attempted to take advantage of the sudden increased demand. The price of cement and steel doubled in a very short time. Even after paying such exorbitant prices, the building materials were sometimes never delivered. The total cost of the LWSI tsunami project in Tamil Nadu as of December 2004 was USD 5.8 million.

A crucial component of LWSI strategy is the intensive involvement of all homeowners in the building process. Residents have taken full possession of their new houses even though they are located several hundred meters from the ocean and, hence, quite far from the original center of life. Fences and walls have sprung up around their houses and residents have installed storage sheds and outdoor cooking facilities, and begun growing fruits and vegetables for their daily needs in small gardens set up with LWSI assistance.

Surviving on Less Income

Suddenly, G. Raju remembered he had a family to take care of and it was time to go fishing. He and several other families share a fiberglass boat that together with motor, nets and equipment had been made available by a French relief organization. The 32,000 rupees (around USD

815) compensation he received from the Indian government for the loss of his boat and house only covered part of the cost. Every afternoon he goes with his boat to rivers and backwaters and returns home the following morning with his catch. Despite long hours spent on his boat, he can scarcely survive on what he brings in. The tsunami changed the ecological balance of the ocean and rivers. There are now fewer and different fish compared to before the flood.

Yet, while many of his neighbors complain, G. Raju is not losing hope. He is confident his current daily earnings of 100–200 rupees (around USD 2.5–5) will soon improve and he will find alternative ways of increasing his household income.

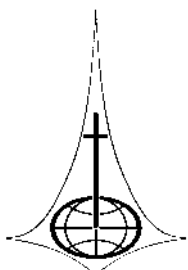
Disaster Control and Advocacy

In addition to building houses and new infrastructure, efforts focus on community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP), advocacy and the launching of income-generating projects, says Rina Chunder, head of information and documentation at LWSI. All village communities in which LWSI tsunami projects are implemented have received CBDP training. People will thus have the necessary knowledge for responding to emergency situations and dealing with injured persons, and know that hospitalization is necessary in cases of serious illnesses and injuries.

Since all activities are implemented through the respective local organizations and bodies, collaboration between local communities and the *panchyats* or village councils has been strengthened, leading to more stable village structures and a greater degree of co-determination. The program fosters an organic increase in autonomy, which, according to Chunder, implies building from within. The program seeks to assist and encourage people, rather than to look after them or cater to them.



LWSI head of information and documentation, Ms Rina Chunder (left) greets a Dalit village elder in Valliammai Nagar. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch



Autonomous Local Organization in 2009

In 2009, after more than 30 years as an LWF/DWS country program, LWSI will become an autonomous local organization, and be categorized as an LWF associate program.

The LWF/DWS India program was started in 1974 in response to refugee needs after the Bangladesh war of independence. Within this program LWSI is implementing disaster response and integrated development projects in several states.

To learn more about the LWSI, go to the LWF web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-India.html

To support LWF's work, please see the LWF online donation tool at: <http://donations.lutheranworld.org>

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



A woman waters vegetables in her small garden at Reddiyarpettai, Tamil Nadu. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

Württemberg Church Establishes Day to Commemorate Kristallnacht

At its autumn meeting in late October, the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg decided by a vast majority to establish 9 November as a day of commemoration and repentance.

Church congregations will be encouraged to commemorate the 1938 events of Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass") and, if possible, in an ecumenical manner and in cooperation with their local municipalities. Materials for the commemoration have already been provided by the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK). Winfried Dalferth, a member of the Württemberg synod, explained that they had not sought to create a new holiday but instead a day of commemoration as a bulwark against forgetting

the historical events. The synod called for a day of repentance and atonement in addition to forward-looking and sustainable Christian-Jewish relations.

The first commemoration day in 2008 will mark the 70th anniversary of this event and is certain to be observed by all. There are also plans to work toward adopting the commemoration day by the entire ACK and other member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

In the night of 9-10 November 1938, synagogues were set on fire and the windows of Jewish shops were shattered throughout Germany. Tens of thousands of Jews, men and women, were arrested, taken to concentration camps, and murdered.

Christine Jahn Named New VELKD Worship Secretary

Rev. Christine Jahn, 47, is the new secretary for worship and liturgy at the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD). The VELKD leadership named the pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria to succeed Oberkirchenrat Hans Krech, who retired at the end of October 2007.

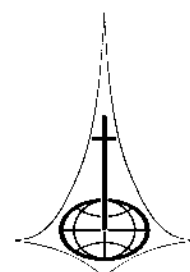
She attended Munich's University of Music and Performing Arts, and studied Protestant theology.



*Rev. Christine Jahn
© VELKD*

From 1995 to 1997, she served as theological secretary for worship and church music, and was theological secretary for pastors in the Bavarian church personnel office from 1998 to 2000.

Jahn has been serving as pastor in Murnau (Munich church district) since 2000. She joined the Bavarian church synod in 2002, and has been a member of the VELKD liturgy committee.



Latin American Lutheran and Presbyterian-Reformed Churches Joint Publication on Neo-Liberal Globalization

The Latin American member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL) have jointly published a book on neo-liberal globalization titled, *Life in All Fullness* (cf. John 10:10).

Most of the publication's articles had appeared in two separate volumes in Spanish by the two confessional organizations in 2004 and 2006. *Life in All Fullness* editor, Rev. Dr René Krüger writes in the book's introduction that soon after the Spanish editions, the idea arose "of publishing a version in English, which would contribute to the dialogue with our sisters and brothers in churches and ecumenical institutions of the Northern Hemisphere." Krüger is a former rector of ISEDET, an ecumenical theological institute in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Prof. Germán Zijlstra, AIPRAL general secretary, explains the publication is founded "in faith, in reflection, in commitment, and in the engagement of our small Reformed-Presbyterian and Lutheran churches within the context of the serious situations faced in Latin America and the Caribbean."

Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas, moderator of the LWF Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Conferencia de Liderazgo – COL) places this publication within the context of the continual reflection of Christians in the



form of dialectic between proclamation and judgment. Christians seek the basis for their faith and hope "in the context of the ever-deepening chasm between rich and poor that has stubbornly taken hold in the Latin American context."

The publication's topics include Voices of the Churches (statements); Reflections; Testimonies and Contributions for Community Discussion; and Liturgical Materials.

Rev. Martin Junge, area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at the LWF Department for Mission and Development, says the publication is an important sign of

ecumenical cooperation "both with regard to cooperation between AIPRAL and the LWF Latin American member churches, and the goal to maintain ecumenical dialogue on neo-liberal globalization."

Junge points out "the diversity of the articles in the book, the variety of voices that come to the fore, as well as the attempt to communicate this in the English language" show that this is in fact a genuine opening for dialogue. "Subsequent to past communication difficulties concerning the understanding of a globalization driven by the spirit of neo-liberalism, this is hopefully a real contribution toward maintaining a dialogue."

Further information on the publication can be requested by e-mail from the ISEDET ecumenical theological institute: (renekruger@isedet.edu.ar).

Mareile Grzanna, VELKD's New Theology Secretary

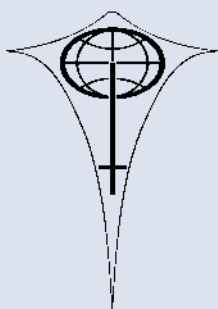
Rev. Dr Mareile Grzanna, 42, from Hanover, Germany has been appointed the new secretary for fundamental theological questions at the church office of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD). Effective 1 February 2008, she will succeed *Oberkirchenrat* Prof. Klaus Grünwaldt, who becomes superintendent of the Alfeld church district near Hildesheim, Germany.



Rev. Dr Mareile Grzanna
© VELKD

Grzanna, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, studied Protestant theology in Marburg and Göttingen in Germany, and in

Lausanne and Bern in Switzerland. She served as a pastor in Cuxhaven, Germany from 1998 to 2002. Since 2002, she has been a pastor of the St Johannis Church in Hanover. In 2007, Grzanna received her doctorate in systematic theology, titled, "Menschwerdung – Die Anthropologie Emanuel Hirschs als Theorie ethisch-religiöser Bildung von individueller Subjektivität in der Moderne" ["Incarnation – Emanuel Hirsch's Anthropology as a Theory of the Ethical-Religious Development of Individual Subjectivity in the Modern Era"].



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