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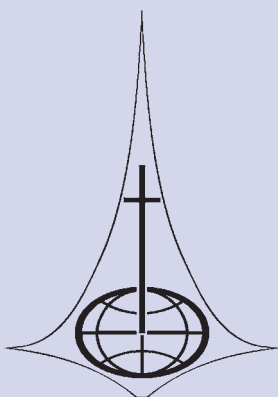
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LWF Eleventh Assembly Speaks to Churches Around the World



Participants registering at the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. © LWF/Erick Coll

Assembly Theme: "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread"

STUTT GART, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – Meeting around the theme, "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," participants in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, turned those words to God and to their fellow Christians, declaring that the prayer also means sharing daily bread with one's neighbor.

About 1,000 people took part in the Assembly, which met from 20 to 27 July in Stuttgart's Liederhalle Convention and Cultural Center. Participants included 360 delegates from the Federation's member churches, invited ecumenical observers, official visitors, interpreters and translators, stewards, members of the LWF staff and co-opted staff, accredited journalists

and volunteers. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg hosted the meeting of the Federation's highest governing body, held normally every six years.

"Hunger is not God's fault; it's our fault," said LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson at the Assembly's opening press conference. The president said, "If people lack what they need for daily life, it is because we have failed to ensure that the good things of God's creation are justly and equitably distributed to all."

Hanson said that the Assembly included people who know what it means

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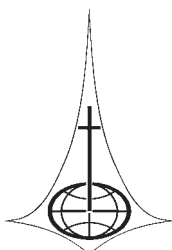
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LWF Eleventh Assembly Speaks to Churches Around the World

Assembly Theme: "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread"

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to not have enough food. "So we are not talking about this subject in the abstract ... but in the context of our lived experiences," he said. Hunger does not refer only to the absence of food, he added. "There are also those who hunger for peace in the midst of warfare," he said. "There are those who hunger for human rights. They are marginalized because of HIV and AIDS, or because they are first-nation people, or because of their gender or generation."

The Assembly Message to LWF member churches said Lutherans are part of a worldwide community with other Christians and with people of other faiths or with no faith. Issues affecting everyone's "daily bread" include concern for the world's food supply, global climate change, the plight of indigenous peoples, and the effects of HIV and AIDS. Lutherans should also welcome into their countries migrants who left their countries for "political, economic or climate reasons," the Message said.

Daily worship, Bible study and meetings in legislative sessions and in smaller "village groups" occupied participants throughout the week-long meeting. It was in those sessions that the themes of the message emerged.

Forgiveness

An emotional highlight of the Assembly came as delegates adopted a statement repenting of Lutheran persecution of Mennonites and Anabaptists during the decades following the Reformation. Because they disagreed with Lutheran reformers, Mennonites were sometimes forced to leave their homelands, imprisoned or even executed with the approval of Lutheran theologians.



Banners with the LWF Assembly theme, "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," fly outside the Liederhalle Culture and Congress Center in Stuttgart, Germany. © LWF/Ratna Leak

Some delegates knelt rather than stood to indicate their approval of the declaration asking forgiveness "from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers" for past wrongdoings and the ways in which Lutherans subsequently forgot or ignored this persecution and have continued to describe Anabaptists in misleading and damaging ways.

A service of healing and repentance followed the action.

Younan Elected LWF President

The Assembly elected Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) as the new LWF president. Younan, 59, succeeds Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who has been LWF president since the organization's last Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, in 2003.

Younan, a former LWF vice president for Asia, is well known in his homeland for being a champion of human rights in the Middle East.

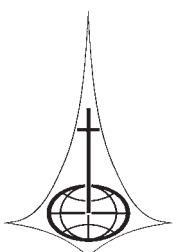
Several ecumenical visitors addressed the Assembly, all praising Lutherans for opportunities to work together and seek greater unity among Christians.

They included Walter Cardinal Kasper, recently retired head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, representing Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch and Archbishop of Constantinople; Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, World Council of Churches general secretary; Rev. Dr Gerald Kieschnick, head of the International Lutheran Council and president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the USA; Rev. Nicta M. Lubaale, general secretary of the Organization of African Instituted Churches; Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, World Communion of Reformed Churches general secretary; Dr Jean-Daniel Plüss, co-chairperson of the Lutheran-Pentecostal Study Group; and Dr John Graz, director, Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists.

At a festive dinner, Assembly participants honored Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, LWF general secretary since 1994. Noko, a native of Zimbabwe, was praised for his ecumenical leadership and his direction of the staff in the LWF's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Assembly adopted several resolutions recommended from discussions in Stuttgart or from pre-assembly meetings held in the LWF's regions. Pre-assembly meetings were also held for women and for youth.

See related stories in LWI 08 and 09.



LWF PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE

10-17 July 2010, Dresden, Germany

**Lutheran Youth Find Unity
in Faith and Action**

Preserve the Faith, Namibian Bishop Urges LWF Pre-Assembly

DRESDEN, Germany/GENEVA, 16 July 2010 (LWI) – They came from 45 different countries, their lives separated by distance, language and culture. But they had common bonds, celebrated daily in a week-long meeting in Germany’s eastern city of Dresden. They were young. They were Christian. And they were Lutherans, preparing for the Eleventh Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Stuttgart, the following week.

The LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC), 10-17 July, was one of the gatherings held so far in several regions before the LWF Assembly. Most were regional gatherings, but special pre-assembly meetings were convened for women and for young people.

While there were varying opinions among PAYC participants, the enthusiasm about having an impact on their churches prevailed.

“It is important that we are from all over the world and learn to accept our differences,” said Rahel Gysel from Chile, anticipating her participation as a young delegate in the 20-27 July event. “We have to respect each other’s differences and not just try to change each other’s opinions but help each other understand why we believe as we do.”

The young people were brought closer together by daily Bible studies, worship services, and times to share what life is like for young people in their home churches.

In long meetings during the week, the young people drafted a message to be presented to the LWF Assembly, stressing their concern for protecting the future by improving what they called the “unsustainability” of current environmental, social and economic systems. The message also declared that “gender justice” was a key issue for youth



PAYC keynote speaker Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, listens to Ms Heidrun Tobler from South Africa during a panel discussion. © LWF/Florian Hübner

and that increased attention should be given to the contributions that young people can make to their churches.

On the LWF Assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” Karen Andrea Ettlin Frey said she hoped the young people could help others “improve the comprehension of what it means to have daily bread.” Frey, a 23-year old physical education teacher from Uruguay, like many of the youth meeting in Dresden looked forward to her role as a steward at the LWF Assembly.

Moving Forward

The forward movement of the youth and their churches was also stressed by the pre-assembly keynote speaker Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia. In the biblical story of Exodus, the “manna” or bread that God gave to the Israelites was “so that they could keep moving on,” said Kameeta, who is LWF vice president for the Africa region. He urged the youth to “preserve the faith, and keep moving on.”

One way that the young people are already “moving on” is their

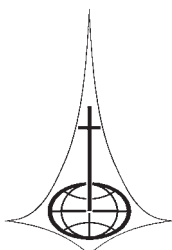
extensive use of the Internet and its “social media” to disseminate their views and form new friendships.

When asked by one of the facilitators, Emily Davila, from the USA, now living in Bonn, Germany, how many participants had accounts on Facebook, more than three-quarters raised their hands. Several are blogging about the pre-assembly meeting (at www.lwfyouth.org) on Facebook and on their personal Web sites.

On the LWF youth Web site, Jared Magero from Kenya, another steward at the Assembly, quickly posted a response to a presentation by Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, director of the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, gently suggesting a stronger emphasis on *sola scriptura* (by “scripture alone”), a key theme of the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

Unity of the Lutheran Communion

During some of the sessions, the young people expressed varying views on the issue of homosexuality, a controversial topic in many churches.



One participant said that some of the discussion was “heated,” but the disagreements did not fracture the unity of the pre-assembly meeting. “The issue of homosexuality shouldn’t break our beautiful communion of Lutheran churches,” said Rev. Miika Ahola, a youth delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

On their message to the Assembly tackling such thorny social issues as ecology and an end to injustice based

on gender, participants also expressed concern for the spiritual life of young people and their churches. Dénes Horvath-Hegyí from Hungary said “we didn’t treat spirituality very much, maybe because it is something that already works for us.”

Horvath-Hegyí, 25, also a steward at the assembly, said “while I will not have a voice at the Assembly, I have a voice here at the pre-assembly, and I can influence the message.” He said he hoped the youth message

would deal with how youth can be integrated into church decision-making.

That was also a concern for Ma-henge Omega from Tanzania. The 28-year old teacher slated as a delegate at the Assembly, said “youth have ideas that can make changes; and they can work with older people for those changes.” The direct involvement of the youth with their churches “will make them better Christians in the future,” she added.

LWF Pre-Assembly Seeks Greater Role for Young People in Churches

Young people preparing to participate as delegates and stewards at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart called upon the LWF to take steps to alleviate the suffering caused by environmental abuse and climate change, seek an end to gender-based injustice, and enhance the role of young people in Lutheran churches around the world.

“Youth very often represent the most important potential for change in society,” said a message issued at the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC) in Dresden, Germany. “It is young people who are generally the first ones to challenge injustice and oppression, and to envisage a different future,” the message continued.

About 100 young adults met for a week preceding the LWF Assembly

and drafted the message after long discussions. Some of the youth, delegates to the Assembly, will present the message and defend it in Assembly debate in Stuttgart.

While affirming the LWF communion as a powerful tool for advocating globally, they asked that the LWF hold “an experimental, virtual meeting of executives during the next four years in order to explore the feasibility” of using such meetings, which also contribute to “saving economical and environmental resources.”

The young adults also want the LWF Assembly to adopt a public statement “addressing greed” and issues related to security for the world’s food supply and climate change. The message further asked that the LWF consider disconnecting itself

from banks known to have policies considered unjust.

In seeking “gender justice,” the message said the young Lutherans “believe that cultures and practices within both society and the church that diminish the God-given dignity of women must be transformed.” Systems that prevent women from receiving an education, withhold sex education information from women, and keep women from fully participating in decision-making in church and society should be changed, the message stated.

Asking for more involvement of young people in LWF activities, the message said the LWF should consider regional youth conferences, as a way of providing forums for strengthening the involvement of youth in the churches.

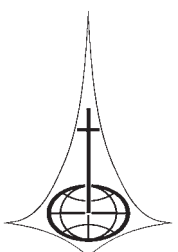
“We do not wish to be mere numbers in a quota but to be valuable and valued contributors to the life and work of this church family,” they noted, referring to the designated 20 percent youth participation in all LWF events.

The young adults challenged churches to provide their “designated representatives with the information and perspectives necessary to enable them to truly represent their churches in LWF contexts, and afford them the opportunity to provide feedback to the church governance, structures and congregations.”



Daily worship services bring young people closer together at the PAYC. A participant at a eucharistic service makes the sign of the cross as a symbol of peace. © LWF/Angelious Michael

The full text of the PAYC message is available at: www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Youth_Pre-Assembly_Message.pdf



LWF ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY 20-27 July 2010, Stuttgart, Germany

Hunger Is Not God's Fault, It's Our Fault

Eleventh Assembly Focuses on Alleviating Hunger in all Forms

STUTTGART, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – “Hunger is not God’s fault; it’s our fault,” said The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Mark S. Hanson at the 19 July opening press conference of the Federation’s Eleventh Assembly. Introducing the Assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” the president said if people lacked what they needed for daily life, it was because of human beings’ failure to ensure just and equitable distribution of the good things of God’s creation to all.

In Nicaragua the theme of hunger is fundamental, said Bishop Dr Vic-



LWF Vice President Bishop Dr Victoria Cortéz Rodríguez responds to a question at the opening press conference. © LWF/Erick Coll

toría Cortez Rodríguez, of The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope. “We have people in our country who live each day and go to bed hungry.” Reinforcing the theme introduced by the LWF president, Bishop Cortez Rodríguez said that “poverty did not come from God ... God created enough for everyone.” The people of God are responsible for caring for each other and for treating



LWF Office for Communication Services staff listen to the remarks of panelists at the Assembly opening press conference. © LWF/Erick Coll

every person with dignity “because every person was created by God.”

“Like Daylight and Dark”

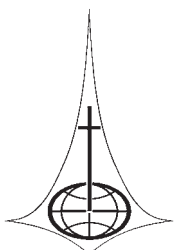
Over the past 58 years the LWF has changed in ways that cannot be measured, said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko. In 1952 the Second LWF Assembly was held in Hanover, Germany. Contrasting that

Assembly with the current one, he said, “There was hardly a Roman Catholic at that Assembly; nobody represented the Reformed churches and there were no Mennonites.” He also noted that at the last Assembly held in Germany, women had virtually no voice, indigenous people “were not part of the imagination of our people at that time” and Africans came not as voting members but only as official visitors. Noko further pointed out how the character and ecumenical nature of the LWF had changed over the past decades, noting in particular the inclusion of Reformed Churches in the federation’s membership. The difference between the LWF of 1952 and the LWF of 2010 is “like daylight and dark,” the general secretary said. “The meeting here is a landmark in many ways.”

The issue of same-sex partnerships was unlikely to be a major point of discussion at the Stuttgart Assembly. The general secretary said that as a result of a decision of the 2007 LWF Council meeting in Lund, Sweden, member churches were discussing issues relating to marriage, family and sexuality. “What might appear to be tension between some churches is simply the expression of diverse views on these issues.”

The general secretary said that the LWF has given itself ample time—from 2007 to 2012—to converse and reflect on these matters. He promised that his report would update the Assembly on progress.

See the Assembly Web site for more information and resources including the theme video for downloading and other video reflections; news stories, features, photos and blog feeds; the handbook, Assembly Updates and Study Materials: www.lwf-assembly.org



No Fleeing to “Private Enclaves,” Says LWF President

Hanson Preaches at Assembly Opening Worship Service

STUTT GART, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)

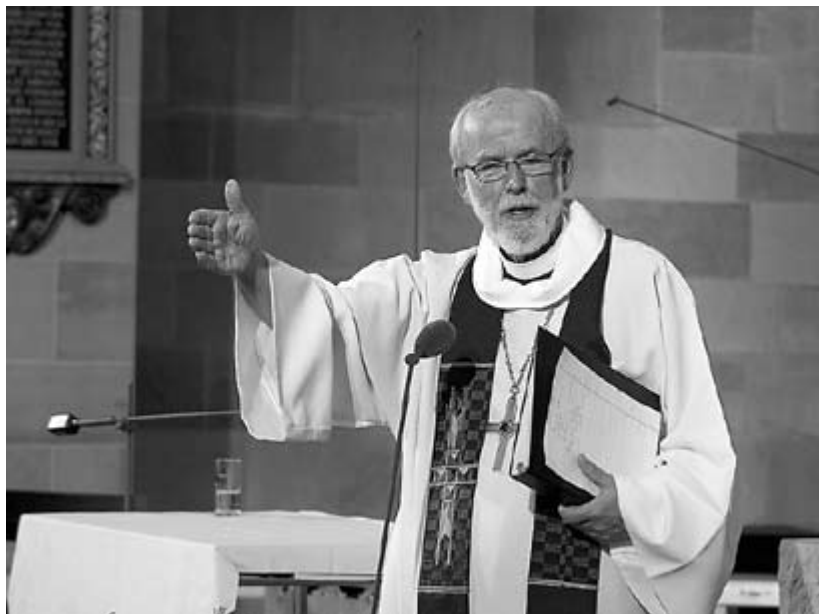
– Christians should not flee from the world into “private enclaves” seeking the “security of familiarity,” said The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, as the LWF began its Eleventh Assembly in the German city of Stuttgart on 20 July.

“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” was the theme of the Assembly, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Germany.

Delivering his sermon at the Assembly opening eucharistic service in Stuttgart’s Stiftskirche, Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said that Jesus called followers into “one community.”

An estimated 1,000 people attended the Assembly which concluded on 27 July. The participants included 360 delegates from the LWF’s 138 churches with full membership and observers from two associate members in 79 countries around the world.

Others included representatives of LWF recognized congregations and council and national committees, ecumenical guests, interpreters



Outgoing LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson preaches at the Assembly’s opening eucharistic worship service in Stuttgart’s Stiftskirche. © LWF/Erick Coll

and translators, co-opted and LWF staff, stewards, volunteers, accredited media and visitors.

In his address, the LWF president said that among the followers of Jesus “there would be no private dining, no separating and sending to satisfy one’s own hunger, no fearful fleeing [of] one another that haunts so much of our lives today.”

Exclusion

As the disciples of Jesus gather today, said Hanson, no one should be “excluded on account of ritual impurity, gender, social class, HIV and AIDS, poverty or wealth, language or race.”

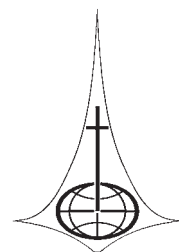
Citing a story in the biblical book of Ruth, where Naomi advises her daughters-in-law to “turn back” from accompanying her and return to the security of their homeland, the LWF president indicated that the command to “go back” to places of comfort should not be the message of the church today.

When crowds around Jesus got large, Hanson said, the disciples wanted to send them away, back to their homes, so that they could find food for themselves. Instead, the large crowd became a place where Jesus and the disciples provided food, bringing people into a fellowship gathered around Jesus and the meal—eventually the sacrament of Holy Communion—that he would provide.

Jesus was saying, Hanson emphasized, “Do not retreat to separated



Assembly participants gather 20 July in Stuttgart’s Stiftskirche for the opening worship. © LWF/Erick Coll



places that are impoverished by your fears, your resentments, your preoccupation with what you do not have, and your lack of faith in what God promises.”

The center of the LWF Assembly, the president concluded, was “Jesus Christ through Word and bread and wine bringing us into communion, into the life of one body.”

The full text of Bishop Hanson’s sermon is available on the Assembly Web site at: www.lwf-assembly.org

German Finance Minister: Prosperous Nations Need to Recognize When Enough is Enough

“There is a ‘too little,’ but there is also a ‘too much,’” the German Minister for Finance Dr Wolfgang Schäuble said after the opening worship service of the LWF Eleventh Assembly on 20 July.

In an address strongly supporting the Assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” Schäuble said that the economic system of wealthy countries is faulty on two counts—“it deprives too many people of their basic needs [and] it also fosters an attitude of unlimited and unrestrained desire, which continues in the face of wealth and abundance.”

Western countries do well when they focus on abolishing hunger worldwide, the minister said, but they should equally commit themselves to limiting their economic growth. “We should be able to accept that falling behind emerging nations like China or India or Brazil in our growth rate does not mean we are failing. It means that we already have achieved substantial wealth for large parts of the population.”

In the richer parts of the world it is common practice to suggest that we need an unlimited amount of things, Schäuble said. Asking God for “daily bread” reminds us that we do not need a lot at all; we are asking God to give us what we really need. “This contrasts with our own excessive demands to fulfill every possible wish we might have.” Many Western countries have reached a wealth “saturation” point. “In this situation, our needs lie elsewhere,” he said.

A Technology-Driven Life

Schäuble pointed out that asking God for daily bread was important in a world where advanced technologies

could tempt Christians to forget that they depend on God for all they have. The minister said that in a technology-driven life human beings can persuade themselves that they are entirely in control of their lives and of the world.

While technology can improve and even transform the lives of many people, “there are limits to what we can achieve, and it is important for us to be reminded of those limits.” He said that while he was not discouraging further advances in science and technology, the fundamental truth contained in the words, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” served as a reminder that human beings cannot do everything they think they can, and therefore are asking God for a gift.

An active member of a Protestant church, Schäuble said it was clear, and also very important, that faith

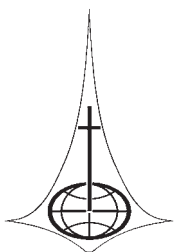
and politics “are not and could never be entirely different things.”

He said that Christian belief in God can never be detached from respect and love for fellow human beings. “The commandments to love God and to love one’s neighbor are directly related: one cannot obey one without obeying the other.” In the modern era this belief has led to the rise of human rights, he noted.

He said that democracies have much to gain from the contributions of people who are motivated by the love of God. “It is one of the major challenges facing modern, democratic countries that the insights faith produces and the energies it sets free in believers are brought to bear on the political process of decision-making.”



Addressing the congregation after the Assembly’s opening worship service, German Minister for Finance Dr Wolfgang Schäuble says that the economic system of wealthy countries “deprives too many people of their basic needs...” © LWF/Erick Coll



A World in “Pain” but Lutherans Gather in “Confident Hope”

LWF President Calls Churches’ Attention to Celebrating Their Common Heritage

STUTTGART, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutherans gathered in Stuttgart, Germany, for their international assembly at a time when “the world is in pain,” said LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, when he presented his 21 July address, to the once-every-six years gathering, held in this southern city of Germany.

theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

On the theme of the meeting, Hanson said that although many in the world lack their daily bread, “we gather for this assembly in confident hope, for God has neither abandoned God’s people nor forsaken God’s creation.”

commitment to encourage member churches to support the ordination of women. Yet we have much work to do in holding one another accountable for that commitment.”

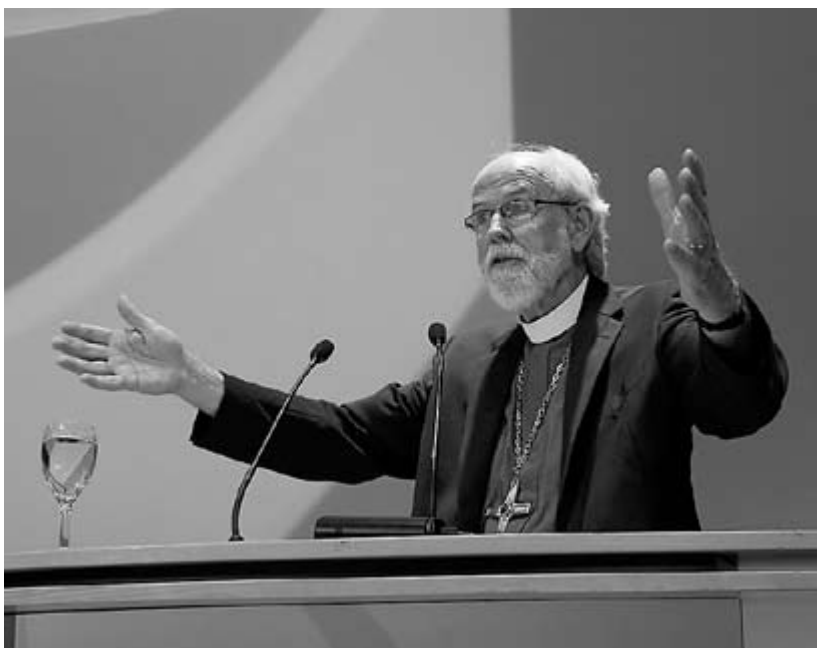
The second issue was “decision-making,” and Hanson said there would be a “healthy tension” among some LWF member churches because of the way decisions made in one church impact churches in other parts of the world.

The third issue cited by the LWF president was “sustainability,” that is, furthering trust in and support for the Lutheran communion as developed in the LWF.

Lutheran Identity

In his report, touching on his seven years as the organization’s president, Hanson reiterated the identity of Lutheran churches as:

- “Evangelical,” stressing the good news that Jesus Christ frees people from bondage to sin.
- “Sacramental,” focusing on the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.
- “Contextual,” adapting their mission and service to specific social situations.
- “Communal,” living in communion with one another and with concern for the entire human community.
- “Diaconal,” giving service to others in God’s name,
- “Ecumenical,” seeking unity among the world’s Christians.



Presenting his address to the Assembly, Bishop Mark S. Hanson identifies leadership, decision-making and sustainability as issues for LWF attention. © LWF/Erick Coll

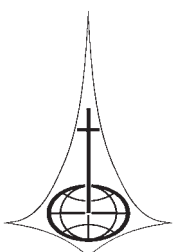
“Wars rage, the creation groans under the weight of our consumption, refugees wander in search of shelter, illness and death come to those who lack access to clean water and health care,” said Hanson, who is also Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

“You bring to this assembly the cries of the people in your communities,” the LWF president said to the delegates and hundreds of other participants attending the meeting hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg under the

Lutherans from around the world are creating a “communion” of churches, he said, where Lutheran churches working together celebrate their common heritage, but do not become “preoccupied with our own identity and survival.” Rather, the LWF president said, “I believe our self-understanding is for the sake of being turned outward toward the world God so loves.”

The LWF president said he saw three issues that the LWF should address.

One was “leadership.” Hanson said, “We have made progress in our



Ecumenical Dialogue Will End Only When All Churches Share Eucharist Together

The Lutheran commitment to ecumenism will not end until we can share the Eucharist with other churches, LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson said at a press conference after his official address to the Eleventh Assembly. He outlined progress made in ecumenical relations, but said that “we must continue the dialogue about theological issues that still prevent us from communing together.”

The LWF president had been asked if he could envisage a day when a Roman Catholic and Lutheran married couple could commune together with the blessing of both churches. It is the lay people of the churches who are driving and sustaining these conversations, he responded, acknowledging the “grassroots ecumenism” that is alive among lay people. While leaders wrestle with difficult theological issues, “lay people of different churches

pray together, study together and work together to build just societies. If Roman Catholics and Lutherans [for example] can feed the hungry together, wouldn’t it be good if they could be fed at the Lord’s Table together?”

Hanson acknowledged that he was unlikely to see all Christian churches communing together in his lifetime, but “if I can contribute to that vision being realized I’ll be very grateful.”

Unity Within Lutheran Churches

Hanson spoke of his desire to see full unity between churches extending also to unity within Lutheran churches. He expressed concern about emerging conversations in some Lutheran churches about what it means to be truly Lutheran. “I

sense that there is a growing desire on the part of some to look at our rich, shared confessions not as a reason for conversation about how we can live in that confessional tradition, but rather as a way of determining who is truly Lutheran and who is not. That would be an unfortunate breakdown.” A better response would be to invite people who share the Lutheran confessions to “explore how they speak to us rather than use them to divide us,” said the president.

Engaging in respectful conversation about the issues that foster unity rather than division was also the way to approach the subject of human sexuality, according to Hanson. With respect to this particular issue, a helpful starting point was to identify what people have in common—“we are all sexual beings.” Starting from common ground makes it easier to engage in conversations about points of diversion. Hanson noted that member churches will be engaged in discussions about marriage, family and sexuality until 2012.

“Some churches discuss these issues in relation to creation, others from the starting point of the doctrine of the two kingdoms and others approach them from the biblical context,” he said. “Rather than starting from a position of judgment and assuming that some churches are following Scripture and others are not,” it would be more helpful to first examine how our own tradition, context and understanding of Scripture have framed our views on this subject,” he added.



Following his presentation, Hanson answers journalists’ questions at a 21 July press conference moderated by LWF Office for Communications Services director, Rev. Karin Achtelstetter. © LWF/Erick Coll

General Secretary Noko Relates “Daily Bread” to Caring for the World

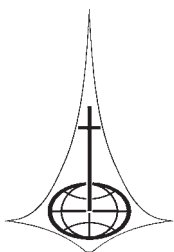
A changing world, a more inclusive communion of Lutheran churches, closer ecumenical relations and the challenge of serving others are some of the issues the LWF will address in the years ahead, said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko in

his report to the Eleventh Assembly, 21 July.

Referring to the Assembly theme, Noko said “daily bread” had strong “spiritual significance.” It was in the act of breaking bread that the risen Lord Jesus was revealed to the travelers on

the road to Emmaus, he said. “And it is in fellowship and care for one another that we recognize the face of God.”

Noting that the last Assembly in Germany was in 1952, Noko said it was “an act of spiritual courage” for Lutherans to meet in Hanover during



the post-World War II era and at the onset of the Cold War. “The world has changed since 1952. Developments such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the liberation of [South Africa’s] Nelson Mandela released forces that have reshaped our global village,” he said. “The forces of globalization both connected and disconnected people,” he added. “The gap between those who do not have enough to eat and those who have far more than they need has grown tremendously,” and in Europe “the situation of minority peoples and communities has become an increasingly heated political issue.”

The general secretary said that the equitable participation in God’s mission is “the hallmark of an inclusive communion.” He thus urged member churches to take appropriate steps toward the ordination of women and, where this was not the case, to put in place “practices of equality.” Sometimes decisions receive strong support at assemblies, Noko said, but “do not enjoy much subsequent follow-up by the churches.”

Evangelical Reformation

Noko noted that 2017 will be the 500th anniversary of the Evangelical Reformation. “It is my hope that we might find an appropriate way to mark this anniversary,” he said, expressing hope that the celebration would ac-



In his report to the Assembly on 21 July, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko highlights issues the Federation will need to address in coming years. © LWF/Erick Coll

knowledge the achievements made in overcoming condemnations of the past, making visible the unity of the church and seeking to discover, “the message of the Evangelical Reformation for the whole of the church today.”

He reported to the Assembly that a number of commemorative activities had underscored the “wide ecumenical significance” of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) in 1999, which he described as “a powerful sign of the value of the LWF as an instrument for ecumenical progress.” In Augsburg on 31 October 2009 Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodists celebrated the 10th an-

niversary of the signing of the Declaration, and in Wittenberg the planting of commemorative trees marked the event. Noko said that the dialogue relating to the JDDJ was continuing.

Continuing the ecumenical theme, Noko predicted that the action anticipated at the Assembly would redefine Lutheran relations with Mennonites. “Our Lutheran confessions have [had] some very harsh things to say [about Mennonites],” he said, noting that even Martin Luther used theological arguments to support persecution of members of the Anabaptist tradition.

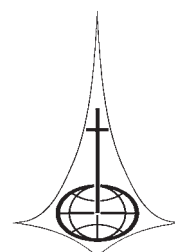
Interfaith diapraxis—cooperation across religious borders—has been a special focus of the life of the LWF since the 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. Noko highlighted the work taking place in Mauritania, Cambodia and in other places, where people of other faiths are working for and with the LWF in the pursuit of a shared humanitarian objective. “Diapraxis provides a platform from which people of all faiths can jointly address many common concerns and in the process build deeper and stronger relationships.”

Dialogue

The LWF is also promoting dialogue on issues relating to marriage, family and sexuality, Noko said, noting that



Rev. Daniel Kabamba Mukala Wa Kasonku, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (ELCC), and Ms. Marie Nkulu Nsenga, also of the ELCC, were among the more than 300 delegates and hundreds of other participants to the Assembly. © LWF/Erick Coll



the Council had approved discussion guidelines for member churches.

“From the reports received so far, it was clear that the member churches were at various stages of reflection and action, and that dif-

ferent positions were emerging on these issues,” he said. Some churches have proceeded with policies that endorse same-sex unions or allow gay or lesbian clergy, but other Lutheran churches oppose such actions. Noko

said that the general consensus in pre-Assembly meetings was that these issues not be dealt with by the Assembly but that the process is allowed to continue until 2012, as originally recommended by the Task Force.

Good Stewardship Demands Secretariat Changes: LWF Treasurer

There has been a positive development in the LWF membership fees, the organization’s Treasurer Mr Peter Stoll said in his report to the Eleventh Assembly on 21 July. Since the 2003 Assembly, fees have increased from USD 2.6 million to USD 3.2 million in 2009.

said Stoll. All departments faced financial deficits, he said, urging efforts to achieve balanced budgets. The treasurer asked the Assembly to consider decentralizing the headquarters in order to “create more synergy with the resources of the member churches and regions,” and

Stoll reported that the annual budget of the LWF secretariat was approximately USD 100 million excluding budgets of the Department for World Service associate programs. “This money has been entrusted to us for the healing of the world,” he said. “We must be good stewards.”

“Today we are witnessing the accelerating pace of globalization,” said Stoll. “We are confronted with increasingly new challenges for our churches. We have to do our work under rapidly changing, if not deteriorating, financial conditions.” Because of this, the LWF and its member churches need to concentrate on “being a communion, holding onto our mission and vision [and] being willing and flexible enough to adapt to the conditions and contexts existing in our world today.”



LWF Treasurer Peter Stoll [left] responds to questions from journalists at a 22 July Assembly press conference. Moderating the session is Mr Dirk-Michael Grötzsch [right], communication director for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg (Germany) and part of the Assembly communication team. © LWF/Erick Coll

Nevertheless, there are still churches “in the North as well as in the South” that do not pay their membership fees, said Stoll. Although the LWF’s financial situation was stable, efforts must be increased in order to secure its future in the longer term. Funds in the Endowment Fund, established in 1999 with a long-term target of CHF 50 million, amounted to almost CHF 12 million at the end of 2009. The next goal is to reach CHF 20 million by 2017.

restructuring the seven LWF regions and all the departments of the LWF secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, where the organization has been located since its founding in 1947.

Stoll stressed that the changes should not be driven by financial reasons alone. Restructuring must be linked to a clear, strategic reflection on the LWF’s tasks in the world as well as the resources available.

For example, he noted that the Eleventh Assembly cost around USD 2.3 million and suggested that future assemblies might be coordinated with other ecumenical organizations, not only for financial reasons but also to further inter-church cooperation.

LWF Investment Policies

The LWF has investments of approximately USD 65 million, all of which are managed according to ethical principles approved by the Council, Stoll told the Assembly. “God creates and sustains all that is, and calls us to seek justice, peace, dignity and sustainable communities for all.”

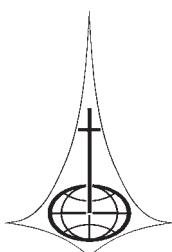
He said the way the LWF invests its resources and holds companies accountable for their practices should reflect its faith convictions. By investing ethically, the Federation was being a responsible steward “of what God has created and entrusted to us.”

The full texts of the President’s Address and Reports of the General Secretary and Treasurer are available on the Assembly website at:

www.lwf-assembly.org

Synergy

The time had come to financially restructure the LWF headquarters,



Archbishop of Canterbury: Prayer for Daily Bread Is a Petition also for “Tomorrow’s Bread”

The petition “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” is not only asking God to provide today’s bread but also tomorrow’s bread, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams said in his keynote address to the LWF Eleventh Assembly, 22 July. “The need, the hunger, we must learn to express is a need not simply for sustenance but for God’s future. What we need is the new creation, the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Exploring this theme of “tomorrow’s bread” further, the head of the Anglican Communion said that “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” is “a prayer that inevitably looks beyond the present moment and the settling of immediate needs ... It is as if in order to live in peace and hope today, we have to ask for that foretaste or ‘advance payment’ of God’s future.” He said that every petition in the Lord’s Prayer is implicitly a prayer for the coming of the Spirit, “and this one is no exception.”

The Anglican archbishop said that praying for the Spirit “is indeed praying for the grace to receive our humanity from God at each other’s hands in the reality of communion,” noting that this often involves struggle, “since we cannot remain



The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams addresses the Assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” in his 22 July keynote address to the LWF gathering. © LWF/Erick Coll

content with our images of each other. Becoming bread for each other means breaking the stony idols of ourselves and of the other.”

Recognizing Human Dignity

He told the Assembly that people recognized human dignity in one another by sharing the truth of what humanity is in the eyes of God. “We feed each other by honoring the truth of the divine image in each other,” he said.

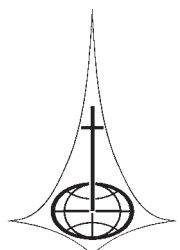
Thus “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” is a petition for all humanity, Williams said. The prayer “both challenges the arrogance of those who think they are not in need and establishes that the needy are fully possessed of a treasure that needs to be uncovered and released.” The prayer, he said, kept Christians awake to what they owed to the neighbor as a gift; “their humanity depends on ours, as ours does on theirs.” It is irrational to pray for daily bread while at the same time seeking to hold on to it at the expense of others in one way or another, he said.

In the fourth petition “we are praying for grace to receive our own humanity as a gift as well as asking for openness and gratefulness to whosoever and whatever awakens us to our dignity.” He explained that while human dignity was primarily given during creation, it was “always in need of being called into active life through relationships, by the gift of others.”

Williams said that the petition “becomes a prayer that asks God to sustain in us the sense of our humanity in its fullness and its richness; to give us those relations with other human beings that will keep us human, aware of our mortality and our need, yet confident that we are loved.”



Accredited media photograph the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams while he delivers his keynote address. © LWF/Erick Coll



Honesty

He described daily bread as the bread of truth, which was also the bread of honesty about those asking for it. So when we pray for our daily bread, “we pray also for awareness of our failure, and—hard as this always is—for the grace to hear the truth about it from one another, and also from the wider world.”

He said that God also acts to nourish our humanity by the challenges, questions and rebukes that the rest of the human race puts to the church.

“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” is thus a prayer for the fullness of the church to be made manifest in a pattern of recognizing individual need and the neighbor’s, the archbishop

said, “and to turn with confidence to each other so that the need may be met.”

The prayer is, simply, “for Christ to be our food and sustenance, so that all self-sufficient pride, all individual anxiety and defensiveness, all greedy effort to live at the expense of the neighbor are overcome.”

Lament about Injustice in Africa

“The widespread injustice in [my country] Cameroon and in all of Africa is a scandal,” lamented Assembly delegate Ms Jeanette Ada. She was responding to the keynote address of the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams.

Ada called on churches to rethink their diaconal ministries and missionary mandates in order to work against the unjust distribution of resources and negative cultures that humiliate people.

She especially denounced human trafficking, which affects women and children in particular. For example,

in the north of Cameroon, at the age of 12, young girls are forced to get married in order to bring together two families. In some cases even unborn children are promised in marriage. Furthermore, children are subjected to large-scale trafficking and forced labor. They are stripped of their dignity and are humiliated.

Lost Dignity

Like Williams, Ada said she understands that the term “bread” in “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” refers not only

to food. Rather, she sees “bread” as representing all needs that are not satisfied. In this sense this would include the lost dignity of sold children as “bread.”

Referring to the rich resources in Cameroon and in Africa as a whole, Ada lamented that so many people suffer from hunger and thirst. She said one of the reasons for this was that governors only wanted to make themselves rich. Because of the unjust distribution of resources, many people are suffering. She called for diligent stewardship of Cameroon’s resources, while pointing out that the political will was still missing.

The questions that concern the people of God should not be left to the politicians. “Rather, the churches should be aware of their responsibilities,” said Ada. In Africa, a continent especially vulnerable to and affected by climate change, and where deserts are growing, “we Christians must work together in order to make use of the earth again,” she said. The communion of churches must not remain silent while large tracts of land are in the hands of companies or enterprises. Considering that Africa is so rich in resources, “it is a scandal to see so many people suffering from hunger,” lamented Ada.



Assembly delegate Ms. Jeannette Ada from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon offers a perspective from the global South in her response to Archbishop Williams’ keynote address... © LWF/Erick Coll

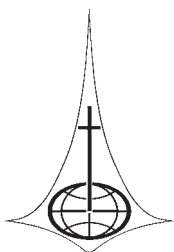
Spiritual Gifts Include Food from the Land, Says Sámi Delegate

The prayer for daily bread is perhaps an invitation to be spiritual “in a way that embraces our connectedness to creation,” Ms Inga Marie Nordstrand, a Sámi delegate representing the Church of Norway, told the Assembly. Perhaps it is an invitation to “humbly receive and

affirm daily bread as a merciful gift to be shared.”

Responding to the keynote address by the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams Nordstrand described the impact of climate change on the livelihoods of indigenous people in Alaska, northern

Canada, Greenland, Siberia and northern Scandinavia, where communities have traditionally depended on fishing, hunting, gathering and reindeer-herding for their “daily bread.” It is well known, Nordstrand said, that the sea-ice hunting culture of the Inuit is under threat. But cli-



mate change is badly affecting the livelihoods of other communities too. Fish are relocating, weather patterns are becoming much less predictable, the spring migration of the reindeer is affected, and there have been “explosive” caterpillar attacks.

Connectedness

Nordstrand told the Assembly that in one Alaskan community, in response to the impact of climate change and on the advice of their elders, young people were learning to develop a spiritual relationship with the land. Now they are “greeting the land as they go out harvesting, and affirming the gifts of food from the land as fundamentally spiritual gifts.”

She concluded that daily bread was “not only a commodity” but also “a spiritual gift, a sacrament of the



... while Ms Inga Marie Nordstrand, a Sámi delegate from the Church of Norway, responds from an indigenous perspective. © LWF/Erick Coll

earth that affirms our fundamental connectedness with all created life, a gift of God’s mercy that connects us with the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life.”

The full text of the Assembly keynote address and the responses are available on the LWF Assembly Web site www.lwf-assembly.org.

Bread Combines Religious and Cultural Elements

In Latin America, bread is a liberation element that relieves both the physical hunger caused by starvation due to unfair distribution of food and the psychological hunger caused by discrimination and oppression, said Rev. Cibele Kuss, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

Sharing her impressions on the Assembly theme, Kuss said bread reveals a strong impression of equality, and symbolizes the strength to overcome hunger. She said she sees the sharing of bread as having a mystic influence as it combines the religious

and cultural experience. “One tends to learn and know more about the ‘other’—one’s neighbor who also is created in the image of God,” according to the IECLB pastor.

Kuss urged the church to be vocal against over-consumption. “Unless the church raises its political voice and participates in advocacy, it cannot address the acute problem of hunger in the midst of waste. It must be the central ethical passion of the church to take the side of the poor and the needy that deserve a humane life,” she stressed.

A Challenge to Act with Conscience

“The rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer” is a common phenomenon in Asian countries, remarked Bishop Dr Philip Lok of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS).

Reflecting on the meaning of “give us” instead of “give me” in the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, the LCMS bishop underlined that the prayer was a calling to “share our resources

with the underprivileged and the ostracized and also reminds us to be interdependent of each other.”

He pointed out that the inequitable distribution of resources reminded him of his context whereby the Orang Asli [literally: “indigenous people”] are deprived of their daily living. “Food security is a basic right for all and as a church we are challenged to act with the conscience of sharing God’s providence,” he added.

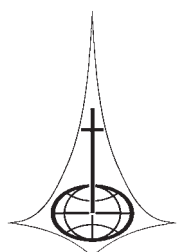
The Face of Global Poverty Is Varied

The face of poverty experienced in different parts of the world is varied, said Bishop Michael Pryse of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) Eastern Synod, speaking about the implications of the LWF Eleventh Assembly theme.

If the poverty experienced by the global South is of physical hunger, then the poverty experienced by the global North is the inability to fully appreciate the goodness of God’s gift, he remarked. “We are spiritually impoverished. We waste and squander the things that we are expected to

share. We need to realize what is important and of value in life,” he said.

For Pryse, the voices of those not having enough must be brought into greater prominence. He emphasized the need to learn to be more self-critical of the economic system that perpetuates the cycles of poverty. “Though not enough is done to alleviate poverty, there is now a greater understanding in the general public in North America to be more generous in sharing—sharing not as charity but as a necessity,” he concluded.



Call to Action on Climate Change and Food Security

Addressing climate change is a *kairos* moment in the life of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), calling for immediate action because “God’s world is suffering,” Prof. Dr Barbara Rossing, a delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, told the Assembly. “God is calling us to hope and have life in the midst of this urgent issue.”

The call to action, from Rossing and from many other delegates at the LWF’s Eleventh Assembly, came during a public hearing session on climate change and food security on 23 July. A common theme throughout the presentations and testimonies focused on the need for urgent action and for this to be done in unity among LWF members.

“We will all be helped if we can see this as a communion issue,” said Rossing, who spoke of the need for visible action during the Assembly in the form of a motion that would impress upon member churches the urgency of climate change and “step up the focus.”

suffering, food insecurity, disparity, division, poverty and violence.

Global Warming

“Global warming is proceeding as predicted,” said Dr Stefan Rahmstorf, climatologist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, who connected via web conference and shared stark statistics on the rapid pace of climate change.

“The first six months this year have been the hottest first half of a year ever recorded,” he said. “And the last 18 months have been the hottest 18 months.”

“In the last century, there have been 28 mega droughts [in Northern Kenya], four of them in just the last decade,” said Rev. John Halkano Halahke, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. These conditions have led to significant losses of livestock and, as a result, “many environmental livelihood consequences as people are just surviving to live.”

The lack of resources in the region has led to violence and even

in order to restock livestock lost to drought.

Amid the devastating consequences of climate change and food security, several delegates spoke of finding hope through the response of member churches.

Responding Locally

Ms Eszter Kalit, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, told of how congregations within the church are working together, within their local communities and through the LWF, to provide opportunity for a new future for those affected by climate change.

Following major flooding in the region, an effect of climate change, the region has experienced widespread unemployment. “Work and school is something people can only start after they have had something to eat,” said Kalit, speaking about the catalyst for a project involving the building of an oven and founding of a bakery.

In return, the result of the actions has been twofold, she said. “Food is produced, and a safe and legal livelihood is produced.”

“We have learned that much is possible,” said Michael Windfuhr, human rights director for the German Protestant agency Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) and co-moderator of the hearing, in summarizing the public hearing. While the effects and impacts of climate change are increasingly dangerous, Windfuhr noted there was a feeling among participants that the LWF must be involved in “encouraging communities and helping them become active,” so as to understand their critical role. It is important to act in solidarity, he said.

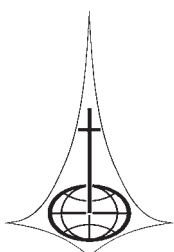
“The nature of God is challenging us, demanding us, and now it is our task to listen and ask what is our responsibility as individuals, as member churches and as a global organization as the LWF,” added Windfuhr.



Mr Michael Windfuhr, at right, head of the Human Rights Unit of Bread for the World, listens as Ms Sindisiwe Ndelu, a delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, moderates the public hearing on “Daily Bread, Climate Change and Food Security.” © LWF/Erick Coll

Delegates heard stories from different parts of the world on the impact of climate change on the environment and how this leads to human

death. “One hundred people have lost their lives as a result of fighting for resources,” said Halahke, noting that some have resorted to raiding



Churches Urged to Intensify Efforts in Global Response to HIV and AIDS

“Injustice, poverty, gender violence, stigma and discrimination continue the suffering and vulnerability of the poor and powerless, especially girls, youth and women,” said Rev. Dr Veikko Munyika, coordinator of the LWF HIV and AIDS desk. Even as the global response to AIDS is beginning to “bear some fruit,” daily bread is out of reach for many, he told delegates at the Eleventh Assembly during a public hearing on this topic, 24 July.

Munyika called for more focused action by LWF member churches, and shared startling statistics about the continued rise of HIV and AIDS. For every person beginning to receive life-saving treatments, there are five new HIV infections, he said. “Our churches have some beautiful programs but it seems we need to do more, especially in the area of prevention.”

Munyika called on member churches to join in intensifying efforts toward AIDS awareness and advocacy. “We call on you, brothers and sisters, especially church leaders, to join us in intensifying efforts.”

“Keep the Promise”

Members of the Betseranai Choir of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe used their voices to bring messages about HIV and AIDS to the Assembly. In the song “Stop AIDS, Keep the Promise,” composed by director Paul Maphosa, the choir highlighted the promises community and church leaders have made to fight AIDS, asking them to “keep the promise.” The song laments that people are still suffering and asks when deliverance from this deadly affliction would come.

The 20-voice choir is composed of persons living with HIV. They sing about the problems and challenges of living with the illness, and remind church and community groups, the government of Zimbabwe, the media, employers and employees to honor their declarations of commitment to work toward the prevention of HIV and AIDS.



Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe Betseranai Choir perform during an Assembly public hearing on HIV and AIDS. The 20-voice choir—12 women and eight men—is composed of persons living with HIV who use their musical gifts to raise awareness and advocate for people living with HIV. © LWF/J. Latva-Hakuni

“We are here to give a face to the HIV infection,” said one member of the choir. “Through our music, the choir wants to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS. In rural areas the sickness leads to injustice, poverty, stigmatization and gender-based violence. Women and girls are especially affected.”

An HIV-Free Generation

Speaking on behalf of the many millions of people affected by HIV and AIDS, several individuals—many of whom are HIV-positive—shared their personal stories with the Assembly. They told of signs of hope and demonstrated that while being HIV-positive, they were alive, productive and should be allowed to enjoy human rights like everyone else.

Sukhulile Mhere said his greatest wish was “to see the creation of an HIV-free generation.” He shared with the Assembly how he and his wife were living with HIV.

Diagnosed when he was single and in his early 30s, Mhere was told by many, including his own parents, that he should never consider marriage as “he was about to die.” Through counseling he came

to understand that he had a right to love and to be loved and “even have a family.”

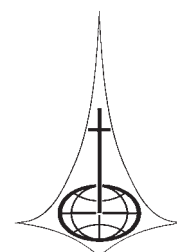
“I met and fell in love with someone who [is] also HIV-positive,” said Mhere, now 40. His wife recently gave birth to “bubbling baby girl,” he boasted.

Mhere and his wife have to wait for their daughter to turn nine months before she can have HIV testing, but in the meantime, the experience of having a child has shown him “that being HIV-positive is not the end but only the beginning.”

Love and Affection

When Joseph Anthony Samy from India was diagnosed with HIV in 1990 there was little awareness about AIDS, let alone counseling services, available for him or his family. “Many people, including doctors, advised my wife to leave me and get a separation.”

Twenty years later, Samy and his wife remain committed to their marriage and have two grown children. He lends his time to assisting with counseling people about HIV risks and helping those who have tested positive with employment, reunite-



ing broken families and admitting orphaned children in homes where they receive care.

Samy called on delegates to avoid stigmatizing and discriminating

against HIV-positive people. "Show your love and affection," he urged. "If possible, give care and support to them in all ways and kindly see the Christ in them as well."



Mr Sikbulile Mhere of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia speaks of his wish to see an "HIV-free generation" during the public hearing on HIV and AIDS. © LWF/J. Latwa-Hakuni

Manfred Weber, who lives near Ulm, Germany, said he discovered he was infected when donating blood in 1989. Married and with three children, the 60 year-old said he initially kept it secret, even from his own family, but he now lives openly with the illness and is committed to obtaining better care for people who are HIV positive. "At that time I lost a lot but I also gained a lot." In 2011 he hopes to organize a "positive pilgrimage" with other persons affected.

Rosemarie Rincon from Colombia criticized the "macho" society in her country. "I was infected in my own home," she said. That was 12 years ago and after that she lost her husband and two children. Now, in her own words, she is experiencing "a new spring time." She is able "to live anew with God, reconciliation and forgiveness." She has a daughter aged 18 months and a husband. Each day, she accepts the challenge of living with the illness. At the same time, she is taking further training in psychology in order to be able to accompany sick persons. "HIV and AIDS are not synonymous with death," she emphasized.

Lutherans Ponder Illegitimate Foreign Debt as a Justice Issue

Some financial institutions consider only profits instead of also taking people's needs into account, "which causes many people to be deprived of their daily bread," Bishop Ángel F. Furlan of Argentina's United Evangelical Lutheran Church told delegates at the Eleventh Assembly. Debt plays a fundamental part in excluding people from food, education and health services in countries where accumulated debt has become an overwhelming burden, he said.

Furlan, who was among presenters during the 24 July public hearing on illegitimate debt, reported that over the years developing countries had accumulated debt to international creditors, often in times of dictatorships or when financial organizations considered only profits. For over three decades this external debt servicing had forced millions of

people into poverty by reducing their access to food and opportunity.

For example, "when we ask for our daily bread in Latin America," there is always an element of external debt, said Rev Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile. Hunger, social justice and lack of opportunity are all related to debt, which affects young and old, women and men, and every level of society.

Shared Responsibility

An example of illegitimate debt was provided by Bishop Sumoward Harris of the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) and Ms Margareta Grape, Church of Sweden.

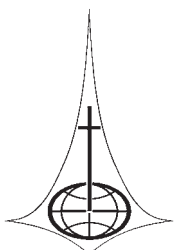
Liberia has accumulated a USD 4.6 billion debt under dictatorships since 1846, said LCL Bishop Sumoward Harris. "How can such a poor

country possibly pay for this when the people have so little money, and many have no food, no education?"

Up until 1980 the Liberian government had bought warships worth USD 6.4 million from Sweden, plus USD 1.8 million in interest, creating a great burden of ongoing debt for Liberia. In 2008 the churches from the two countries demanded that the Swedish government accept shared responsibility, declare the Liberian debt to be illegitimate, and cancel the debt.

This initiative was partly successful. The Swedish government cancelled the debt but it did not accept shared responsibility. Instead the amount of the debt cancellation was subtracted from Sweden's development aid budget.

Ms Cristina Mora of the Lutheran Costa Rican Church and Ms Tuula Siljanen, Evangelical Lutheran



Church of Finland, explained how churches in their respective countries documented the advancing of credit that was connected with corruption. Using so-called “export credit,” the Finnish government enabled the sale of machines to Costa Rican hospitals, but only if they were purchased from a particular Finnish company. Furthermore, the machines’ operation was complicated and they could not be used by the Costa Rican hospitals.

The churches supported changing the understanding of debt from a very narrow legal interpretation to a more comprehensive, moral and ethical one, explained Siljanen. In this process the churches are demanding more transparency from government and in the practices of business enterprises.



Panel participants discussing the problem of illegitimate debt during the Assembly public hearing on this subject. © LWF/J. Latva-Hakuni

A New Financial Architecture

Mr Peter Prove, executive director of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance called on Lutherans to provide an *in communio* response to debt relief and responsible lending.

The church has a long experience with diakonia to alleviate poverty and now also must move toward “prophetic diakonia,” said Jürgen Kaiser of Erlassjahr (a coalition of 700 churches and non-governmental organizations working on illegitimate debt) in Germany. “We need to look for a new financial architecture”—one that includes taking care of people and safeguarding creation. Ethically speaking, debts should be paid, but fraud and extortion need not be a part of debt.

“Trillions of accumulated debts have become an overwhelming bur-

den for many countries, including northern countries,” said Kaiser. “Institutions don’t want to discuss loans to dictatorships; or those transformed into public debt, usury or corruption; or power inequities when debts are renegotiated.” They do not want to talk about rapacious lending practices or second-hand debt packaging.

These debts have left too many people behind, and the image of God in so many has been injured. “We in the church *must* talk about these things. [...] We must be actors, not spectators,” added Kaiser.

Ethical Issue

Rev. Atle Sommerfeld of Norwegian Church Aid said, “We need to say that this is a simple ethical issue. If the person taking the loan is a crook, a dictator, and you have a vested interest in selling to them, you are responsible.

[...] We must have the courage to say that, even though, technically, it can be quite complicated.”

In a recorded message, Bishop Karl Sigurbjörnsson of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland said, “When works and achievements, profit and productivity are put first, the Lutheran doctrine of grace becomes very important. ‘Forgive us our debts.’ We are all indebted to one another. This is the context of community.”

The issue of illegitimate debt has been pursued actively for three decades through the LWF Illegitimate Debt Program. It has resulted in a publication *Not Just Numbers: Examining the Legitimacy of Foreign Debts: LWF Documentation 53* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2008).

You can follow the three public hearings on the Assembly Web site:

www.lwf-assembly.org

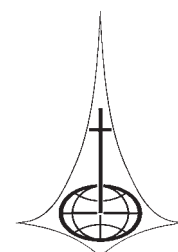
Five Churches in Asia Join LWF

Five new churches, all of them in Asia, have joined The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF Council approved their admission at its meeting 18-19 July.

Three of the new churches are from Myanmar: the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, founded in 1995 with 1,620 members; the Myanmar Lutheran Church, founded in 1998, with 2,150 members; and The Mara Evangelical Church, founded in 1984, with 21,573 members.

Also joining the LWF membership were the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in India, founded in 2007, with 15,400 members; and the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nepal, established in 1943, with 676 members.

The five new churches bring the number of LWF member churches to 145 in 79 countries. LWF member churches now have a combined membership of 70.1 million (70,094,735).



FEATURE: Lutheran Service Agencies Create a Kaleidoscope of Color

Churches Illustrate Their Work at Stuttgart Assembly

STUTTGART, Germany/GENEVA, 2 August 2010 (LWI) – During its Eleventh Assembly, the Lutheran communion transformed the elegant simplicity of the great Beethoven foyer in the Liederhalle Convention and Cultural Center in Stuttgart, Germany, into images and objects of interest that reflect the diversity of Lutheran diakonia.

Every display the visitor's gaze might happen upon told a story of overcoming adversity or of hope, love and life. Stands with a variety of items from Latin America, Asia, and Africa were presented by women inspired by the churches in their countries to produce crafts and food, which they proudly offered to delegates and others present.

At the Tanzanian display was clothing reflecting the satisfaction and hope of women who, with the income earned from their sales, can put a varied diet on their families' tables or can supplement their own resources to pay for their children's education.

Practical Diakonia

At the Central American exhibit, the churches from the region developed the Assembly theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread" in a variety of ways. Their stand displayed bread, candy, coffee, a beautiful hammock and publications illustrated with local symbols and photographs.

"You will be able to see that our work of pastoral care, evangelism, teaching and preaching is accompa-



Celebrating daily bread is the theme of a mural by German artist Anne Stickel in the Brot für die Welt exhibit at the Assembly. Stickel lives and works in Costa Rica promoting artistic expression as a representative of the German Church Development Service (EED). © LWF/L. Ramirez

nied by service to the community and development initiatives, for we are very vulnerable peoples with many social problems. When we proclaim that God loves people, we have to do it in practical ways. Diakonia is one such way," said Bishop Medardo E. Gómez of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church.

Alongside the national exhibits, aid agencies and organizations gave information on society, the environment and their financial stewardship.

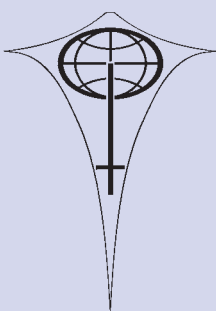
Rural Ecosystems

A large display showing tropical rural ecosystems demonstrated the viability of 13 projects dealing with natural disasters and aimed at restoring land productivity and ensuring

soil conservation. Seven interactive displays gave statistics illustrating the effects of climate change.

In the middle of the exhibition area was a large canvas, blank as the Assembly began and on which Latin American artists painted a work conceived by the public, that is, visitors who paint or were interested in reflecting on the Assembly theme or suggesting a subject. The final product was donated to a Stuttgart school.

This exhibition was a genuine result of the global LWF communion. It symbolized the great diversity of accents to be heard and also the variety of Christian work all over the world, which takes visible form in products, services, cultures and a great variety of activities.



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