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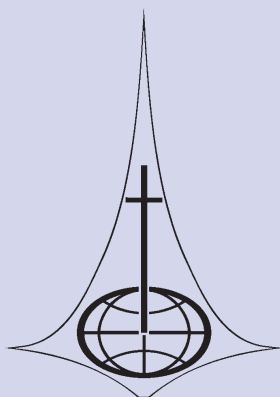
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FEATURE: Small Church Loans Boost Farming, Build Interfaith Harmony in Indonesia



A Muslim farmer in Pardamean village North Sumatra, gives a bunch of tomatoes to Indonesian Lutheran pastor Rev. Libarson Sigiro (right). © LWF/Anto Akkara

Religious Leaders' Voice Urged in the Call for Bread, Freedom and Social Justice

PARDAMEAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Farmer Jaya Hotman Turnip used to struggle every year when the rains came.

“I was always short of funds and could never cultivate our entire ancestral land,” Turnip said recently at his maize farm at Pardamean, a remote village in the North Sumatra province of Indonesia.

“But since the credit union was formed here, our lives have become very comfortable,” said Turnip, standing next to his brothers and farm assistants drying maize in an open area next to his house.

After the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) launched a credit union at the village in 2008, Turnip took out a loan of Indonesian Rupiah -IDR 5 million (at the time, USD 550).

“With that money, I was able to cultivate the entire 15 hectare for the first time. I could also buy fertilizers without going to money lenders,” Turnip explained.

His story was one of many micro-credit successes that came to light as Christians and Muslims from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, the United States and the Netherlands met at Medan, Indonesia, 12-17 March to develop common strategies on how society can work for the common good.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation jointly organized with the LWF National Committee in Indonesia and the Muhammadiyah University of

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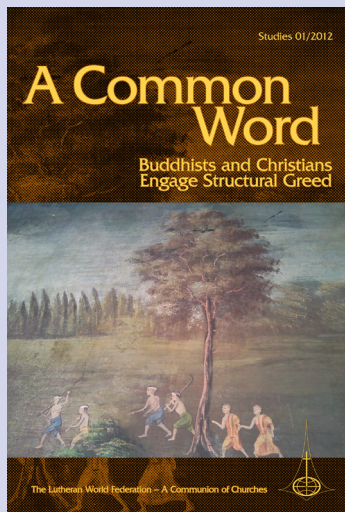
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Publication Explores How Faith Challenges Structural Greed

The global financial crisis that started in 2008 has left large numbers of people around the world distraught, devastated and robbed of their human dignity. *A Common Word: Buddhists and Christians Engage Structural Greed* is the title of a new LWF publication, in which Buddhist and Christian leaders and scholars explore structural greed as a spiritual and moral crisis.

Produced in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) "Studies" series (01/2012) by the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DPTW), it contains papers presented by scholars from Buddhist and Christian traditions at a consultation jointly organ-



ized by the LWF and the World Council of Churches in 2010 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The authors propose concrete ways in which people of faith can together engage in contemporary social challenges. The publication is not meant to be an academic exercise rather it seeks to encourage readers to engage across religious communities on economic issues that affect society.

A Common Word is edited by Rev. Dr Martin L. Sinaga, and published by Lutheran University Press. To order copies please write to Iris.Benesch@lutheranworld.org

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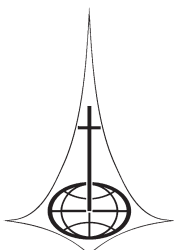
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FOCUS ON INTERFAITH CONSULTATION ON STRUCTURAL GREED

12-17 March in Medan, Indonesia

FEATURE: Small Church Loans Boost Farming, Build Interfaith Harmony in Indonesia

Continued from p. 1

Yogyakarta focused on the topic “Toward a Democratic Polity and the Common Good.”

In a statement issued at the gathering, which included visits to local micro-credit projects, the 40 participants urged faith communities to inspire hope and work for a better, more prosperous and just society. Religions should monitor governments and corporations to see that they are democratic and just, they stated.

Participants urged faith groups to provide direct assistance and empowerment to marginalized people and communities through services such as credit unions, micro-financing, Islamic community banking, training and healthcare.

Careful at First

At Marihat Baru village, *Warsito, a landless laborer, explained how these services helped him forge a new life with his wife Suwarni and two children when they migrated to the farming area of Pardamean, 120 kilometers from Medan, in 2004.

“I used to borrow money from money lenders at high interest to cultivate land on lease here,” said the 32-year old Muslim as he sat inside the home of a Christian neighbor.

After joining the GKPS credit union, which then had four dozen Christian members, Warsito took out a loan of IDR 3 million (USD 330) and expanded his farming business by taking more land on lease.

“With the profit from successive years, I have bought a hectare of land and built [my] house,” Warsito said.

Suwarni recalled that the Muslim family was “very careful” when they

first came to the Christian area, and had only minimum interaction with the Christians.

“But after we joined the credit union, the relationship has become very friendly. We now feel like one family,” said Suwarni.

Her parents, Sutrisno and Waginem, have also moved to the village

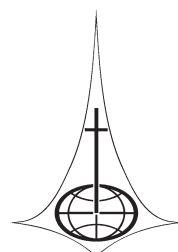
from their home at Pematang, which is 60 kilometers away.

“I feel very happy and comfortable here living among Christian families. It is the credit union that has brought us together,” noted Sutrisno, who has bought two hectares of land in the village. Half of the dozen Muslim families now living in the area are



Nurdui Purba, a farmer in Pardamean village shows coffee beans from his farm.

© LWF/Anto Akkara



members of the GKPS-run credit union, he said.

Rev. Liharson Sigi, director of the Credit Union Modifikasi (CUM) of the GKPS that is named "Talenta" (Talent), said that the Lutheran church has 110 village chapters with over 7,000 members in the region.

More than four dozen Muslims are members in the CUM units. There is also an exclusive Roman Catholic chapter at Sipolin, under the GKPS. "Since the CUM was launched in 2007, our credit union has been growing steadily. Our aim is to have one chapter in every pastorate," he added.

Handsome Dividends

CUM officials said that while two percent interest is charged on outstanding amounts every month, half of this is returned to the members at the end of each year. Profits from each CUM chapter are used to support funerals, weddings and medical emergencies of the members, and to organize training programs.

Rev. Syahrudin Sinaga, director of the CUM regional office at Simalungun, explained that the expansion of the credit union does not require any financial commitment from the church. "The congregation members contribute to the initial capital and they get handsome dividends for it." The groups, he added, have also created a "new social bond" in the farming community.



Rev. Syahrudin Sinaga (second from left), director of the CUM regional office at Simalungun and his colleagues.
© LWF/Anto Akkara

"Our credit union chapter has 63 families. Earlier there was not much unity among us. But now we are like a family. We discuss concerns of each other at the monthly credit union meetings," explained Nurdul Purba, a GKPS member of the CUM chapter at Marihat Baru village.

"Though there is competition (in farming) among us, our families are living peacefully with greater mutual sharing," said Purba, who has switched to coffee cultivation after obtaining a loan from the credit union.

Counseling Services

The CUM Simalungun office also offers counseling and prayer sessions for credit union members. "During the

counseling of couples we have been able to restore peace in the families along with financial stability," noted counselor Cahaya Munthe.

This approach has significantly eased the pastors' workload. "In areas where there is a credit union, there are far fewer family problems and disputes," said Rev. Jankris Harinato Sinaga, a GKPS pastor in Raya town, where CUM coordinates 43 units with over 2,600 members.

"Being members in the credit union, they are also very cooperative and regularly attend church services," he added.

*[*In some cases, first names have been used upon request.]*

LWF Christian-Muslim Consultation Outlines Strategies for Democratic Economic Structures

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) continued a series of interfaith consultations on structural greed, this time with a goal to defining common strategies by Christians and Muslims in ensuring equitable and just sharing of economic resources.

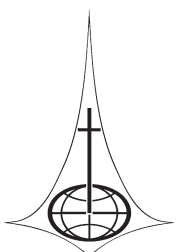
More than 40 delegates including scholars, community leaders, justice activists and economists from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, the Netherlands and the United States,

attended the 12-17 March conference in Medan, under the theme, "Toward a Democratic Polity and the Common Good."

"Let faith bear fruit through democracy," said Bishop Langsung Maruli Sitorus, chairperson of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia, as he opened the meeting jointly hosted by the 12 Lutheran churches in the country and the Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. He noted

that the "aim of faiths (religions) is not merely to promote harmony in society. We have to convert tolerance into love for others and translate it into the good of the society."

The consultation organized by the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) underscored the contention that true democracy recognizes the need for just economic structures, which both Muslim and Christian teaching embraces.



“Christians and Muslims need to identify the ways in which, based on their respective traditions, certain structures can be developed so that wealth can be shared among all,” a DTPW paper for the event stated.

Sarwo Edi, chief of the Muhammadiyah Council of Medan, noted that interfaith dialogue should benefit local people. “We hope this conference will be fruitful in finding new ways to help the communities,” he said.

Rev. Dr Martin Sinaga, LWF study secretary for Theology and the Church, explained the consultation was part of LWF’s efforts “to have socially engaged interfaith dialogue to deepen and reclaim democracy for the common good.”

He added: “The pro-democracy movement in the Arab world is heartening. The fact that people are supporting democracy shows that they want changes for the good of the society.” With this goal in mind, the conference is scrutinizing the grass root-level experiences of democracy and preparing the way for a “just society that enables the people to share common wealth.”

Common Good

Delivering the keynote address, Prof. Katimin of the Institute of Islamic Studies at Medan, called for religions’ engagement in society for the common good of all people.

“The challenge before us is to apply democracy to deal with people’s problems,” said Rahmawati Husein, assistant professor of government studies at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. “Religions have to develop an action plan within the democratic structures for the good of the society,” added Husein, former vice president of the university women’s youth wing.

Speakers also urged faith communities to learn from people’s movements such as the ‘Arab Spring’ in North Africa and the Middle East, seeking political changes; and the Narmada Bachao Andolan movement in India fighting against the construction of dams across the Narmada River, the subcontinent’s fifth largest river. Similarly, it was pointed out that during the Christian-Muslim clashes in Indonesia in 1997-1998, women from both communities joined hands to provide relief and shelter to affected people, ignoring taunts from religious leaders.

Delegates heard about the positive impact of a basic income grant project in an impoverished community in Namibia, and about micro-credit schemes in Indonesia. A booklet will be published from the consultation outlining how Christians and Muslims can help structure economic governance for the sake of all citizens.



Rev Nelson Siregar, head of the diakonia department of the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) in Indonesia, addresses delegates at the LWF conference. © LWF/Anto Akkara

Best Grassroots Practices Presented at LWF Interfaith Conference

Grass root level banking systems for the poor have been hailed as examples of the kind of economic democracy promoted by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to counter greed and exploitation.

Speakers at the conference endorsed the popular credit union system in Indonesia as a model of economic democracy that helps empower the poor against market forces.

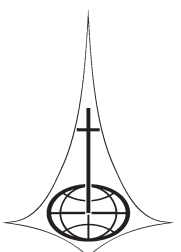
“Credit unions are not about money alone. Besides arranging loans

for the people, they have overriding influence on the life of the people,” Rev. Nelson Siregar, head of the diakonia department of the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), told the interfaith conference.

Credit unions have become an integral part of the life of the agrarian villages of India and of the urban poor in Indonesia, Siregar said. “Credit unions have brought economic freedom to thousands of families.”

Apart from providing loans to ordinary people who are considered untrustworthy by banks, Siregar noted that credit unions have prompted “massive social changes,” permitting members to shape their economic activities and destinies.

“This is not only an alternative banking system, but a clear example of democracy at the grass roots level. It has been a powerful tool for social liberation. Even bed-ridden HIV and AIDS sufferers are now conduct-



ing their own businesses with the support of credit unions,” said the HKBP leader.

Indonesia’s largest Lutheran church with 4.1 million members, the HKBP has 600 credit union branches with over 20,000 members.

Benefits for the Poor

Rahmawati Husein, assistant professor of government studies at the Muhammadiyah University maintained that micro-credit benefits women. “While banks deny loans to the poor for lack of security, it’s still worse for women. Women need a husband’s signatures to avail themselves of loans,” said Husein.

“But in the credit unions, the women stand on their feet. There are no external factors or superiors to dictate orders, and the members take the decisions,” she remarked.

Adi Setia, assistant professor at the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, described micro-credit as a powerful weapon for social change and economic uplifting in situations of extreme poverty. It “is a movement against the capitalist banking system,” he emphasized.

Rev. Claudia Haarmann of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia told the conference how the Basic Income Grant



Rahmawati Husein, assistant professor of government studies at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, speaks at the Christian-Muslim interfaith conference. © LWF/Anto Akkara

(BIG) poverty reduction campaign is playing a similar role in the mineral rich Southern African nation where unemployment rate is estimated at 50 percent. The ELCRN has taken a leading role in the initiative that is supported by a coalition of civil society organizations.

Under a two-year BIG pilot project started in 2008, Namibian dollars 100 (USD 10) was paid out monthly per head to residents of Otjivero to encourage small scale enterprises in this settlement community marked by poverty, some 100 kilometers from the capital Windhoek.

Haarmann summarized the project’s success: “As a result of steady support, malnutrition has declined from 42 percent to 10 percent. School attendance has improved and children are going to school with cleaner and better uniforms.”

She noted however, “Right now this is a voluntary program led by the church and social action groups. The state has a duty to assure that the people have the means for a decent living.”

“It is not enough that the government collects royalties for oil and mining on behalf of the people. It has to make concrete plans to ensure that the royalties are transferred to the people. This is also necessary for a true democracy,” Haarmann urged.

(LWI correspondent Anto Akkara wrote the stories in this section.)

The full text of the statement from the LWF interfaith consultation is at :

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Christian%E2%80%93Muslim-Statement-on-Economic-Democracy.pdf

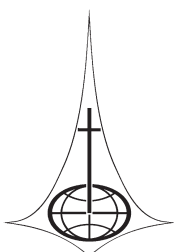
Read more about the interfaith dialogue at

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/dtpwmedan2012

5 April 2012



Rev. Claudia Haarmann, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia and BIG coordinator. © LWF/Anto Akkara



Global Lutheran Bodies to Explore Common Commemorations of Reformation Anniversary

Communiqué from ILC-LWF Meeting Affirms Value of Global Conversations

GENEVA (LWI) – Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) highlighted in their meeting this year the need to continue conversations about common commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

In a communiqué following their annual meeting, 27-29 March in Geneva, the ILC and LWF stated they had discussed a number of positive developments that had taken place among their member churches since they last met in 2008. In view of the Reformation anniversary, they expressed the hope to work together through seminars, educational events and publications, and agreed to update each other on their continuing plans.

The meeting hosted by the LWF, was co-chaired by General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Interim ILC Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Ralph Mayan.

Mennonite Action

Mayan reported that the ILC will consider at its September 2012 Conference, the LWF Council invitation to join in the “Mennonite Action” of repentance and reconciliation, which Lutherans and Mennonites endorsed at the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. Junge pointed out that the action had proved to be a profoundly moving experience, which “resulted in unexpected fruits including a new trilateral dialogue on Baptism involving the LWF, Roman Catholics and Mennonites.”

Church in the Philippines, the LWF and ILC representatives agreed to send a joint letter to the church, encouraging continued dialogue toward reconciliation.

They acknowledged the value of the global conversations between both bodies, and underlined the need to encourage member churches to seek opportunities for interaction at the local and regional levels.

Also discussed were a number of theological topics including the different expressions of faithfulness to Scriptures, the meaning of “confessional Lutherans,” human sexuality, ministry and biblical hermeneutics.

Wittenberg, Germany, was suggested as a possible venue for the next meeting, scheduled for November 2013.

The ILC and LWF meetings are held under the auspices of a 2005 “Memorandum of Understanding,” which agreed to regular gatherings to increase mutual understanding between the two Lutheran world bodies and their member churches.

The ILC was established in 1958 as an association of confessional Lutheran church bodies that support one another and study theological issues together. Founded in 1947, the LWF currently has 145 member churches. Some of the LWF member churches also have membership in the ILC.

The full text of the ILC-LWF communiqué is available on the LWF web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/LWF-ILC_Communique_201203-EN.pdf

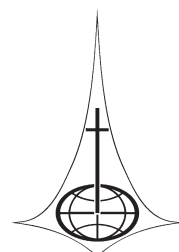
4 April 2012



ILC Interim Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Ralph Mayan (fourth from left) and LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge (fifth from left) and other representatives from both organizations during the meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. © LWF/M. Haas

“Both the ILC and the LWF thanked one another and affirmed the positive spirit of the meeting in which frank and candid conversation could be shared about mutual concerns, while building upon a common Lutheran heritage in Christ’s Church,” the communiqué stated.

Discussion also focused on a number of local situations where tensions have occurred, particularly in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and the United States, with the meeting encouraging “ongoing communication in all these situations.” With respect to the Lutheran



LWF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
 23-26 April in Florianopolis, Brazil

Lutheran Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean Form Women and Gender Justice Network

A Tool to Support Gender Policy in the LWF

FLORIANOPOLIS, Brazil/GENEVA (LWI) – Women theologians and leaders from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have formed a network with a goal to promote women leadership with gen-

der justice in all spheres of church work. Society (WICAS) desk focusing on the COL's theme, "Rereading Our Common and Unique Lutheran Identity in LAC."

The vision to build up such a network was initiated in 1993 in Chile when women pastors and theologians

and in the different church ministries. When the first women joined seminaries, they started a new chapter in the churches' history. Over the years, they gained experience and were ordained.

"Today, this network represents the achievements of many women. This date is important for the women in Latin America and [the] Caribbean because it affirms the way they will work in the Lutheran communion. We don't want to compete with men, but we want to have the same opportunities. We want to help build a united, creative, lively and joyful church," added Rojas.

"Today, we affirm that we are motivated to continue serving in the church. This empowers us, enables us and gives us more strength to continue with the mission of God. Such initiatives reinforce discussions on the role of women in the church and society," said Helen Rios Carrillo, a member of the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope, who is a young leader in the WICAS regional coordinators' network.



LWF Vice-President for the Latin American and Caribbean region Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas blesses participants at the founding of the Women and Gender Justice network. © IECLB/Tobias Mathies

The 25 women representing churches in 10 countries said the LAC "Women and Gender Justice" network would, among other priorities, enhance inclusive, sustainable and hospitable communities within the church and in the local settings in which the Lutheran churches are carrying out their work.

The women met in the context of the LWF Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Conferencia de Liderazgo-COL), taking place 23-26 April in the southern Brazilian city of Florianopolis, hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

The network's inauguration on 22 April was a result of a process led by the LWF Women in Church and

shared experiences and read the Bible from women's perspectives, recalled Rev. Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas, LWF Vice-President for the LAC region and the first female president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH).

"I remember many years ago when I began studying theology, the difficulties were too big. The bridges were built by women to overcome cultural challenges that do not promote access to education and work," said Rojas, who was ordained in 1985 and led the IELCH from 2000 to 2011.

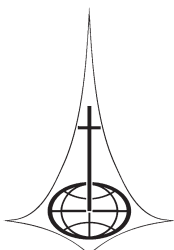
Struggle for More Space

The participants in the women's meeting noted that for more than 40 years, women had struggled to gain more space in decision-making positions

Theological Education, Ordination

The participants noted that one of the inspiring examples was that all the 16 LWF member churches in the LAC region ordain women. An initial mapping exercise demonstrated that there is an increased number of women pursuing theological studies.

"This reality can be seen with joy because women are developing theological reflections that lead and coordinate important ministries, but on the other side it is an issue to be reflected critically as it shows a tendency of feminization in theological studies and churches. Empowering women to share their visions and to develop their



active role as leaders in the church, exercising their ecclesial citizenship is a central task for WICAS programmatic work,” said Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, LWF WICAS secretary.

“The agenda of women’s empowerment and gender justice is a concern for the leadership conference space in LAC. It’s an ecclesiological concern, a church issue and not a women’s issue only,” emphasized Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, the region’s area secretary at the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), which organizes the church leadership conferences.

Neuenfeldt praised the LAC churches for their committed support toward the WICAS initiatives. “I have no doubt that the regional ‘Women and Gender Justice’ network will



A presentation by youth at the LWF regional church leadership gathering. © IECLB/Tobias Mathies

serve as a tool to support the process of gender policy in the LWF,” she added.

To implement the LWF’s decision to have gender justice as a cross-cutting priority, WICAS has been

Lutheran Leaders Urged to Promote Interactive Communication

Brazilian theologian Rev. Dr Nestor Friedrich called upon Lutheran leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean to promote the use of interactive communication in order to encourage congregations’ active involvement in addressing justice issues and in promoting inclusion in society.

Speaking at the LWF COL meeting, Friedrich, president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), also called for greater youth participation in church life.

In his opening address on the conference theme, “Re-reading Our Common and Unique Lutheran History in Latin America and the Caribbean,” the IECLB leader emphasized that the youth are a vital part of the Christian community. This community, he said, should “help youth in building identities grounded in values and practices that make sense for life.”

The church, said Friedrich, should be a place where youth can find comfort in times of despair, fear and doubt. “From this foundation, it will

be possible to build communication among and between the churches in order to affirm our communion and identity as active and young churches,” he told delegates at the 23-27 April conference in the southern city of Florianópolis.

Ministry of Service

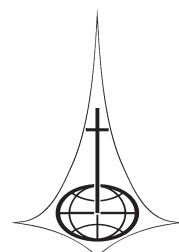
Rev. Dr Valerio Schaper, who teaches at the IECLB Lutheran School of Theology, said the mission of the church was rooted in its ability to be polyphonic and to embrace diversity. His presentation focused on the topic, “In the Shadow of the Cross—Under the Sign of the Resurrection: Lutheranism in Latin America between the Transition and Consolidation of Democracies.”

He said for the church to insist on the cross as a symbol of the church is to center its ministry of service on offering light and resurrection. “Christ’s ministry guides towards life, which moves to embrace the different, but it is only under the shadow of the cross that it is possible to understand and live the message of resurrection,” he explained.

During discussions on Shaper’s presentation, Rev. Angela Trejo of the Mexican Lutheran Church



Rev. Dr Nestor Friedrich, IECLB president, during the opening service of the LWF COL meeting. © IECLB/Tobias Mathies



(ILM) commented that concern for life and human rights have been crucial throughout the history of Lutheran churches.

“Martin Luther focused on the social role of the church because he affirmed that we are a part of a society and the church cannot be confined within its own walls. When we, as churches, focus on the challenges that the society sets before us, we must address topics like respect, tolerance and openness to listen to other voices,” Trejo said.

Structural Issues

Speaking on “Elements for a Biblical Hermeneutics in Dialogue with Our Lutheran Identity,” Rev. Dr Mercedes Garcia Bachmann, who teaches at

the ecumenical theological institute ISEDET, said the Bible is a resource to affirm the Lutheran identity using various hermeneutical approaches.

“The Bible evokes a number of topics and ways which we need to deepen. The Bible should not be unified into a single theology because, considering obedience as part of our faith, there is a source to recover the meaning of being faithful through the lenses of love and justice,” said Bachmann, a pastor of Argentina’s United Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In response, Bishop Siegfried Sander of the Lutheran Church in Chile (ILCH) said that liberating elements gained from study of the Bible invite Lutherans to address structural issues in church and society.

Regional Lutheran Leaders Pledge Sustainable Life for All

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean affirmed that their continuing commitment to environmental justice is integral to the Lutheran identity.

At the conclusion of the regional Church Leadership Conference (COL), they pledged to work ecumenically and with civil society.

“Together with our sisters and brothers living in vulnerable conditions and suffering the effects of climate change, we propose alternatives to advocate and support models that build sustainable life for everyone,” they said in a final message.

Affirming the participation of all church members in the leadership of the church, they highlighted the “long journey and ministry of women in the region” and embraced the task of working for the inclusion of young people in decision making.

The COL leaders committed to stimulating the education of future leaders through opportunities for learning exchanges with a mind to strengthening the Lutheran identity.

They urged church members to join in the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, exhorting them to “walk as pilgrims,” seeking justice and

strengthening the ties of the global communion.

COL moderator, Bishop Eduardo Martinez of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia, which will host the LWF Council meeting in June, said focus on environmental justice was crucial as current development models that sacrifice life and profit the few dramatically affect the region.

On inclusiveness and participation, Martinez emphasized that the involvement of women and youth in decision making at COL is deeply tied to their engagement in the local churches, where there is recognition

“We are invited to use the Bible from a different perspective in order to promote communities open to change and inclusiveness. Society expects that churches promote relationships that empower individuals,” the ILCH leader added.

LWF secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti urged the regional leaders attending the conference to continue to probe the different aspects of Lutheran identity. She underlined today’s changing contexts and the call for the Church to be inclusive.

Rev. Wilma Rommel, United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Argentina), leads COL participants in exploring different aspects of Lutheran identity.

about their contribution and the different gifts that they bring in the body of Christ.

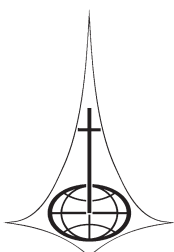
(IECLB communications officer Tobias Mathies wrote the stories in this section.)

The full text of the final message from the LAC church leadership conference is available in Spanish at: www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Mensaje-de-la-Conferencia-de-Liderazgo-2012.pdf

11 May 2012



Rev. Wilma Rommel, United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Argentina), leads COL participants in exploring different aspects of Lutheran identity. © IECLB/Tobias Mathies



Norwegian Church to Support Constitutional Proposal to Change Relations with State Structures

Structures Have Implications for Identity, Says LWF General Secretary Junge

OSLO, Norway/GENEVA (LWI) – The process has started in Norway to end a 500-year state-church tradition of the King/Government appointing bishops. A constitutional change in May 2012 will shift the responsibility for the appointment of bishops of Church of Norway from the state to the church.

Addressing the Church of Norway General Synod, Junge said that while the “redefinition of the relationship between the Church of and the State of Norway” was a very significant change with structural implications, it “entails also a revision of the coordinates within which the church locates itself.” These changes,

sions have resulted in several reforms, including a 2008 Parliament (Storting) agreement to institute procedures that would lead to loosening the ties between church and state. Under the new proposal the church would appoint the bishops. However they will still be regarded as civil servants.



Left to right: Church of Norway Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Oslo Diocese Bishop Ole Christian M. Kvarme. © Church of Norway

At its 12-17 April meeting, the 116-member Church of Norway General Synod comprising bishops, pastors and lay church members adopted the new order for appointing bishops. This decision is seen as the beginning of the loosening of historical ties between institutions of state and the majority Lutheran church, which date back to the 16th century.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, who was visiting LWF member churches in Norway and Denmark during discussions on traditional church-state ties, said structural changes have important implications for the overall identity of each church and its relation to other churches, including within the Lutheran communion.

he noted, “raise important questions about the inherited and the intended identity of this church.”

Junge emphasized LWF’s role in accompanying churches in processes of significant change. The LWF has arrived at a point today, where it has realized that there “is no longer a church so old, so strong, so well endowed that it can’t still be at the receiver’s end; and that there is no church so new, so vulnerable and in such scarcity of resources that it can’t be still at the giver’s end. This is the core of what it means to be in communion with each other,” the general secretary told the synod.

In Norway, Lutheran bishops have been appointed by the king. Over the past two decades, discus-

Danish Lutheran Church

In Denmark where Junge met with the Minister for Church Affairs Manu Sareen, the state official said there was complete openness from the ministry regarding the structures that should govern the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in the future. The government, he added, would receive in an open manner proposals from a committee that will be appointed to study the future governance of the Danish Lutheran church.

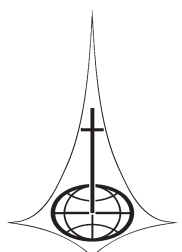
The Danish constitution defines the Lutheran church as “a church of the people” which is supported and governed by state law. However, this law has never been defined despite attempts by several ministers of church affairs.

At a 16 April conference called by Minister Sareen, church and state representatives discussed the division of power between state and church. Participants agreed the new governance structure should be within the framework of the Danish constitution, but not a separation between church and state.

The Danish and Norwegian churches are founding members of the LWF, representing nearly 4.5 million and 3.8 million members respectively.

(With contribution from Church of Norway Information)

27 April 2012



Lutheran-Orthodox Commission Explores Understanding of Ministry/Priesthood

Archbishop Gregorios Underlines Long-Standing Theological Conversations

LONDON, United Kingdom/GENEVA (LWI) – A preparatory meeting for the 16th session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission identified areas of agreement and a considerable number of open questions and differences between the two traditions on their understanding of ministry/priesthood in the Church.

Meeting in London 5-10 May, representatives from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate began a new phase in the commission’s work by exploring the topic “The Understanding of Ministry/Priesthood in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the early Church,” which had been agreed at their 2011 meeting.

Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain offered a warm welcome to the participants in London, bestowing upon them the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

In his address the archbishop noted that the dialogue between the two traditions dated back to the theological conversations between the Lutheran theologians of Tübingen

and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the 16th century.

Archbishop Gregorios emphasized that the dialogue between Lutherans and Orthodox is the oldest discourse between Protestant churches and the Orthodox and expressed his wishes for its continuation.

The next preparatory meeting, 24-29 May 2013, will examine Lutheran understanding of ministry/priesthood during the period of the Reformation and apostolic succession, and ordination from a historical, patristic and canonical point of view. The event will be hosted by the LWF.

4 June 2012



Preparatory Meeting for the 16th Session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission. London, Great Britain 5-10 May 2012. © The Ecumenical Patriarchate

LWF Symposium Explores Trust in the Workplace

“Trust” was the focus of the second in a series of theological seminars on work and faith organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on 3 May at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva.

Speakers at the seminar, sponsored by the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) discussed theological and secular perspectives on trust in the workplace including in

the medical field and in politics. Presenters also offer sociological and ethical insights, as well the implications of new media.

“Trust is a vital component of human relationships which tends to be taken for granted until it is lost,” said Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, DTPW Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice, coordinating the workshop.

“Trusting in God should influence our desire for building communities of trust,” he noted.

In May 2011, the LWF organized the first theological seminar on the notions of work from a faith perspective, focusing on the dignity of work, to mark International Labor Day. The proceedings resulted in the LWF Documentation 56 titled *Dignity of Work – Theological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* with a parallel German edition.

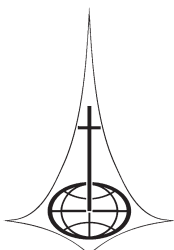
It is hoped that the results of this year’s symposium on trust will be published in an LWF series.



(Left to right) Symposium organizer Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata listens as ILO representative Anna Biondi responds to a presentation by Rev. Rudolf Renfer, former LWF Human Resources director. © LWF/M. Haas

Read more about the “Trust” workshop at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/symposium-trust-safe-places.html



1,000 Refugees Trek Daily into LWF-Managed Camp in Mauritania

Enormous Pressure on Already Stretched Resources

MBERE, Mauritania/GENEVA (LWI) – It looks like any other school yard, any other school day. But it is actually the first day of school in Camp Mbere, a refugee camp 60 kilometers from the Malian border with Mauritania. Suddenly a camera attracts attention and hundreds of children set off, screaming and laughing.

The northwest African region of the Sahel is on the brink of famine. Governments there, including the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, have declared a state of emergency and called for international assistance. At the same time, thousands of refugees cross the borders of Mali fleeing the clashes in the north between Tuareg rebels and armed forces.

At Mbere, in southeastern Mauritania, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) provides a safe haven for those fleeing into the country every day.

“I am so grateful to all our staff working at the front line. It’s a high level of sacrifice on their part,” says Kasongo Mutshaila, LWF representative in Mauritania, as he makes his way through the groups of children in the camp.

Through its Department for World Service (DWS) program in the country, the LWF manages Mbere camp on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



LWF representative in Mauritania Kasongo Mutshaila visits schoolchildren at the Mbere refugee camp in southeastern Mauritania. Children make up more than half of the camp’s population. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund

Mutshaila says this is a risky environment considering the terrorist attacks in the region but staff is very dedicated to their work. “The passion and commitment I can see here [are] stunning,” he says.

A Safe Haven in Need of Support

The fighting in Mali has left more than 60,000 people internally displaced, and a similar number have

fled to Mauritania and neighboring countries.

Camp Mbere, spread out over a surface area of some 570 km² receives an average of 1,000 refugees per day, some days even more. According to the LWF representative, in mid-April the camp population was over 55,000, of which more than half were children.

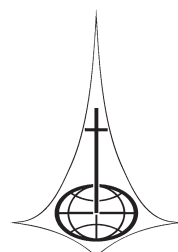
To Mutshaila, the numbers are about needs. The everyday rising influx of fleeing people means a constant gap between resources and needs. And, he says, the needs are extremely urgent and vast.

The camp population comprises 11,382 families, with each unit allocated a parcel of 50 m², putting enormous pressure on already stretched resources, Mutshaila comments. Health and sanitation, water and food, shelter—all are absolute necessities and at the same time all rely on assets. Assets that simply are not there.

But to Mutshaila, the solution is obvious. “We have to downsize the camp,” he says. “We are already projecting a population of 80,000 refugees and dividing the camp in



In mid-April 2012, the LWF-managed camp was receiving an average of 1,000 new arrivals daily and hosting more than 55,000 refugees. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund



two gives us the huge [advantage] of easier logistics, less risk of spreading infections and a safer environment.”

He has taken up the matter with the head of UNHCR but says that the Mauritanian government might be reluctant at first considering insecurity and the fight against terrorism.

Experienced Aid Worker

As head of camp management, LWF Mauritania coordinates activities with all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on site, analyzes the needs and resources, provides the refugees with information and puts up tents according to all applicable standards.

“Yes, it’s a huge responsibility we have,” Mutshaila says smiling. “Besides all the physical practicalities, we also need to make the mental situation bearable for the refugees. We need to start giving them psychosocial support to make the day somewhat normal in this abnormal situation.”

The 52-year-old knows what he is talking about. He has been an aid worker for almost 24 years, caring for

refugees from Darfur and Rwanda in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad in camps five times the size of Mbere.

Deepening Food Crisis Takes Its Toll

But the fighting in Mali is not the only issue of attention. The UN World Food Program says early warning about a foreseen famine in Sahel was not followed by early response. It is not famine yet, but only rapid action would prevent further deterioration of the food security situation and avoid a full-scale crisis.

As the only partner of the global network of churches ACT Alliance in Mauritania, the LWF is assisting the drought-affected population in the country and neighboring Senegal, where one of the local actors is the Lutheran Church of Senegal, an LWF member church, says Mutshaila.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), cereal production in the Sahel region in 2011 was on average 25 percent lower than in 2010, but as much as 50 per-

cent lower in Mauritania and Chad. A combination of several factors has contributed to the crisis, including drought; high grain prices; a shortage of fodder for livestock; a reduction in remittances from migrant workers in several countries; environmental degradation; displacement; and worsening chronic poverty.

FAO estimates some 15 million people are at risk because of food insecurity in the region, including some 700,000 in Mauritania, 3 million in Mali and 850,000 in Senegal.

The need for sustainable, structural solutions to food insecurity has helped shape the LWF/ACT response to crises in previous years and will continue to do so as this new humanitarian episode unfolds, notes Mutshaila.

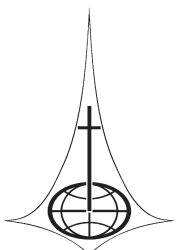
The goal is not only to deliver immediate food aid, but also to help people hit by the crisis provide for themselves in the long-term, he affirms.

(Written for LWI by Thomas Ekelund in Mbere, Mauritania)

20 April 2012



Fatimetou Wolet Mobamed prepares a meal in her family's tent at Mbere camp. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund



Living With Next to Nothing in Senegal's Drought-Hit Region

LWF and Local Church Assist Families

FATICK, Senegal/GENEVA (LWI) – Residents of Fangad village in southwestern Senegal have been living off the beautiful but austere land for generations, always knowing it to be the safest of employers. But things are changing in the Fatick region.

The sparse rainfalls last year meant there was no harvest, no food and no income. Families are struggling to feed themselves.

“It is as if you would go to the bank and find that someone had taken your salary and all your savings. We are left with absolutely nothing. It is a catastrophe,” says Mohomo, who works for the Lutheran Church of Senegal (ELS), a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church that is assisting community members in the midst of the devastating situation.

Fatick, home to 613,000 people, is part of the Sahel region threatened by drought and desertification. The vast majority of the people here earn their living as pastoralists and from fishing.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) describes the situation as a new food and nutrition crisis that is affecting millions of people across northwest Africa.

Due to a combination of drought, high grain prices, decrease in remittances, environmental degradation and displacement of populations coupled with chronic poverty and vulnerability, more than 16 million people currently are facing food insecurity and over 1 million children under the age of five are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. In Senegal, 850,000 people are affected in a population of more than 12 million.

No Water for Pastoralists

In Fangad, the people live off nature. Work is all about harvesting from the land and what the animals can produce. Rice, groundnuts, millet and maize are grown for domestic use



Left without any rain last year, inhabitants of Fangad village in Senegal's southwestern region of Fatick, are on the brink of famine. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund



ELS employee Jean Sarr keeps a steady hand on a grinding mill that has not been used for months this year. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund

and to be sold at the market. Herds of goats and cows as well as poultry and pigs are raised to feed families and for income.

When the rains come, the land yields enough for everyone and there is still some to sell on the market.

In a normal year, rainfall measures about 700-900 millimetres, but last year there was less than half of that. Figures from the World Food

Program indicate a deficit of more than 30 percent in cereal production this year. In Fangad that means empty food shelves.

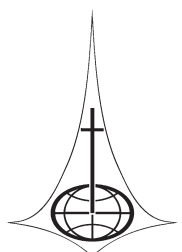
Diomaye Farr, whose great-grandfather founded the village, says he is afraid that all the young people in the village will leave. “Now it is all dry, the little water we can get is too salty and we have nothing to harvest,” he adds.

“Men and women have to walk a long way to try and get a job and an income in Mbour city. We have almost nothing,” he laments.

Diago Farr, 60, says his life is hard. He lives with his five children, a grandchild and a daughter-in-law. Two years ago he had no worries. He lived a perfect life, he recalls. Today he has nothing. While he returns to his plot of land every day, the soil remains dry and yields nothing. “We need help now,” Diago says. “The situation is getting out of hand very quickly.”

Local Government without Resources

Ibrahim, who works at the local government office and is one of two staff members in the Fatick region delegated to take care of all public business, says he feels dejected.





Latsle walked 30 km to the market in Fatick to buy some groundnuts at twice the regular cost, as food prices have increased because of the drought. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund

“There is absolutely nothing,” he says.

“We have too much work, too few staff and very little money.” Ibrahim says there is not much he can do to help, other than give some food for the day but he knows it does not go very far.

Ibrahim can only confirm what those in Fangad say. “People have nothing due to the drought. Women and men leave their homes to look for work in the city. And that is dangerous business, especially for the women,” he maintains. Too many women end up in sex work, he adds.

Easing the Burden

Global church partners are acting to ease the drought’s impact on families in the Fatick region under an appeal

for Mauritania and Senegal through the global emergency network ACT Alliance, of which the LWF is a founding member.

Rev. Pierre Thiam, coordinator of community work for ELS, says there is much to do. “We can provide money, food and accompany the villagers to the market to assist them with transportation.”

But the Lutheran church leader agrees that these are only stop-gap measures. The next step is to help people cope with recurrent droughts on their own.

The ELS drought relief intervention will assist 10,131 people in Senegal. The church will provide USD 40 in cash transfers to each of the 1,447 households for at least

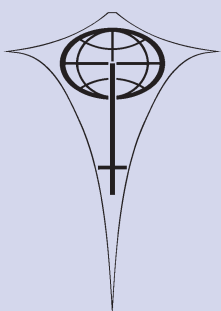
three months and train 40 women in the preparation of enriched food to be distributed to 1,013 people.

Households will receive eight tons of enriched food every month, or almost eight kilograms per person, per month. Farmers in 260 households will get agricultural tools, seeds and animal fodder. The church-led project includes training of 25 community members in cultivating drought resistant crops.

(Written for LWI by Thomas Ekelund in Fatick, Senegal)

Read more about the LWF’s response to the food security crisis in the Sahel region: www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/sahel-crisis

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