

Lutheran World Information

1404

In this issue

LWF Encouraged by Sustained Advocacy to Resolve Financial Situation at Augusta Victoria Hospital..... 3

Hopelessness turns into Joy and Confidence 4

Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion 9

LWF Deeply Concerned about Suspended Activities' Impact on Communities in Myanmar 15



Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity meeting from 12–19 July in Paderborn, Germany. © pdp - Erzbistum Paderborn

Joint Catholic-Lutheran Study Document Recommended to Member Churches

“From Conflict To Communion” Is Being Put into Practice

GENEVA (LWI)— In a joint letter The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) recommends the publication “*From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran—Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*” to their respective member churches.

The study document, which has been prepared by the Lutheran-Catholic Study Commission on Unity, was received and commended for the member churches for study by the LWF Council in June 2013. By definition of the commission, “From Conflict to Communion” is intended to be an accompaniment for

the upcoming Reformation commemoration in 2017 as well as a reflection of 50 years of ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and the LWF.

“*From Conflict to Communion* is the first-ever attempt at an international level jointly to describe the history of the Reformation, to analyze the theological issues at stake, to trace ecumenical developments between our communions and to identify where convergence has been achieved and where differences remain,” the letter to member churches signed by PCPCU president Cardinal



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

Continues on page 3

Contents

Communio

- 1.....Joint Catholic-Lutheran Study Document Recommended to Member Churches
- 3.....[LWF Encouraged by Sustained Advocacy to Resolve Financial Situation at Augusta Victoria Hospital](#)
- 4.....Hopelessness turns into Joy and Confidence
- 5.....[LWF General Secretary Martin Junge Attends Reformation Event in Goslar, Germany](#)
- 6.....German and Tanzanian Member Churches Consulting Together
- 7.....[Implementing Gender Justice Policy in Africa](#)
- 8.....A Call for Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala
- 9.....[Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion](#)
- 10.....Freedom of Religion: Liberated From the “Embrace of Power”
- 12.....[Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement Would Be a Sign of Hope to the World](#)
- 13.....General Secretary Junge: The Cross of Christ Calls for Advocacy
- 14.....[Church Leaders Join in Fast for the Climate](#)

Features & Themes

- 15.....LWF Deeply Concerned about Suspended Activities’ Impact on Communities in Myanmar
- 16.....[Join the LWF on a Unique Visit to Nepal](#)

News in Brief

- 2.....Ecumenical Organizations Discuss Swiss Immigration Vote with Geneva Authorities

Ecumenical Organizations Discuss Swiss Immigration Vote with Geneva Authorities

François Longchamp, president of the state council of Geneva, received heads of three international ecumenical organizations in a meeting on 25 March. With concerns being expressed over the 9 February Swiss referendum that recommended new restrictions on immigration, implications of the referendum were discussed in the meeting.

The three ecumenical organizations are the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the ACT Alliance. All are based in the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva.

Longchamp met with the WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and the ACT Alliance General Secretary John Nduna. He assured the three ecumenical leaders that the Swiss government is addressing the matter seriously.

Longchamp said that it will take time for the referendum to have an impact, and matters related to the cantons of Geneva and Vaud will be given special attention. Longchamp assured them of his support for their organizations, especially in relation to work permits for incoming international staff.

The WCC General Secretary invited Longchamp to the upcoming WCC Central Committee meeting, which will be held from 2

to 9 July in Geneva. “We deeply appreciate the opportunity of meeting with Mr. François Longchamp to discuss the implications of the Swiss referendum,” said Tveit.

“This support from Swiss officials is essential for international ecumenical organizations like the WCC, the LWF and the ACT Alliance to carry out their mission and work effectively while based in Switzerland,” he added.

Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the LWF, said, “We were grateful to be received and listened to and encouraged by our discussions with Mr Longchamp and his awareness about potential implications of the immigration vote for international organizations including ecumenical organizations.”

“The political authorities of Geneva are fully aware of the potential impact of the Swiss vote concerning immigrations on international organizations, and are assuring us that they have these organizations and their interests in mind as they engage in negotiations at a federal level on how to implement the outcome of the referendum,” said Junge.

The Lutheran World Federation

– A Communion of Churches
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2,
Switzerland

Telephone +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org

Head of Communications

Heidi P. Martinussen
hpm@lutheranworld.org

Layout

Stéphane Gallay
sga@lutheranworld.org

Circulation/subscription

Colette Muanda
cmu@lutheranworld.org

Lutheran World Information (LWI)

is the information service
of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Unless specifically noted, material presented does not represent positions or opinions of the LWF or of its various units.

Where the dateline of an article contains the notation (LWI), the material may be freely reproduced with acknowledgment.

Continued from p. 1

Kurt Koch and LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge reads.

Use on Regional and Local Levels

Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, the LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical relations, encouraged member churches to discuss the document on regional and local levels. “Even though ecumenical dialogues have been considered as important part of the mission of the churches and the reports of these dialogues have been often received with great expectations, the actual reception process of the documents has been left for lesser attention,” Dr Hintikka said.

She added that, while the document might seem directed towards a theologically trained audience of theologians, parts such as the “five ecumenical im-

peratives” at the end of the document could be used by a wider audience”.

Hintikka referred to several examples in North and Latin America or in Europe where the Lutherans and Catholics together have already translated the document and initiated discussions on it within their local communities or study commissions.

Live and Witness Together

“We hope to encourage the Catholic and Lutheran communities to come together and study this document. We hope that through the joint study they will be able to deepen their relationship and strengthen their joint witness,” Dr Hintikka said.

She underlines that that whenever the document is being studied, it should be done together with Catholics and Lutherans: “One option is to enter into joint storytelling on the history of Lutherans and Catholics in their

respective local contexts. Have we been able to live and witness together? Which are the issues that have prevented us to do this? How has the one in majority position been able to hear the one living in a minority situation and vice versa? Is there something we can learn from our joint history? And finally: how can we continue together so that the celebration and communication of the gospel of Christ would become a powerful part of our joint witness to the world?” Says Hintikka and concludes that this is how the document can serve as a means of healing of memories and encouragement for joint witness in local Catholic and Lutheran communities.

We would like to hear how you have received “From Conflict to Communion” in your church. Please send feedback to Anne Burghardt, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations:
Anne.Burghardt@lutheranworld.org

LWF Encouraged by Sustained Advocacy to Resolve Financial Situation at Augusta Victoria Hospital

JERUSALEM/GENEVA – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is grateful to its member churches and related agencies for their sustained lobbying and advocacy in addressing the financial crisis at the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH). Since February such action has resulted in financial support that has enabled the LWF-run hospital to continue providing critical health services in East Jerusalem.

“Our churches have been actively engaging their governments to secure the delayed payments due to the AVH from the Palestinian Authority (PA). Various actions have been carried out to address the situation and there are many signs and signals that these efforts have been successful. Things are going in the right direction,” says Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, director of the LWF Department for World Service.



Hitzler adds that “Although the situation is not yet fully resolved, we are confident because the results are encouraging, and we are able to pro-

vide critical medical services in East Jerusalem. We are grateful to the various governments for their sustained support.”

The AVH financial situation originated in delayed payments of receivables of EUR 18 million by the end of January 2014. This amount represents non-payment of fees for patients referred to the hospital by the PA throughout 2013.

Ongoing advocacy with the European Union and the United States governments, as well as lobby work with the PA and various European governments, has so far secured substantial funds to bridge the liquidity gap and maintain the key services provided by the LWF-run hospital.

Located on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, the AVH serves thousands of patients annually. It provides specialized medical services that are not available elsewhere or readily accessible to Palestinians, including facilities for dialysis, cancer, surgical operations, special clinics and laboratories and medical equipment.

The hospital has an in-patient capacity for 118 beds and 20 out-patient beds, and employs 337 personnel. In 2013, it received the prestigious Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation for its health care quality, patient care and organizational management.

AVH's goals and objectives extend beyond health service provision. Situated in an area of constant political turmoil, the East Jerusalem hospital builds many of its program and work philosophies on practical approaches to assert human rights, justice and peace.

See also our 5 February 2014 press release: www.lutheranworld.org/news/critical-financial-situation-augusta-victoria-hospital-east-jerusalem

Hopelessness turns into Joy and Confidence

Thoughts at Easter by Rev. Rebecca Ruggaber

On Easter Sunday Christians all over the world remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his death on the Cross. John 20:11-18 draws us into the events on Easter morning as experienced by Mary Magdalene. Hearing the gospel story, we are reminded that Jesus Christ overcame suffering and death for the sake of us all.

The atmosphere is heavy, without help or hope. Mary stands outside the tomb. She has never felt like this before, tears are running down her face. She struggles to remember the events of the last few days; some she would rather forget. She has repressed them and is still in a state of disbelief. Picturing the last few hours and days, she recalls unbearable scenes: of the crowds who wanted to see Jesus on the cross and yelled out the death sentence for the person from whom Mary has learned so much in the previous months; of the road to Golgatha, which Jesus walked along to his own death. She did not see a single disciple in the city. No one supported him on his way – on the contrary, they left him on his own for fear of being linked with this criminal.

Mary feels helpless and despairing as she weeps at the grave. She cannot grasp what has just happened around her. In all her confusion and bewilder-



Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

ment she looks for Jesus' body and cannot find it. While doing so, she speaks to a man she takes for the gardener. Does he know where Jesus is? But the apparent gardener is none other than Jesus himself. Mary recognizes his voice and his way of talking to her. "Rabbouni" she calls him and wants to touch him one last time, to say farewell. But Jesus resists this touch, sending her to find the disciples and tell them what she has experienced. This encounter turns her sorrow into joy. Mary starts to sense the meaning what has just happened

The gospel vividly portrays the story of Easter morning in many different

versions. In John 20 Mary gets her very last chance to meet Jesus after his death. The Risen One encounters her in all her helplessness and despair, and opens up a completely new perspective. A light shines into the midst of her darkness - the divine light of resurrection, revealing that suffering has now been overcome.

The Cross shakes us awake

But we can feel hopeless and helpless all through the Church Year, not just in Holy Week and at Easter. We only need to look around and listen to

those in our neighborhood and in the world. On our doorstep we see children who, with sad faces, have traveled to strange places. They came here as refugees, and can now find new hope. Perhaps they will get an Easter feeling, and experience how their suffering is transformed into hope and joy. Now their prospects are brighter, and they can look forward to a future

with dignity. The light of resurrection is also intended for them in their everyday lives.

As Easter people, we are called to advocate for others. The cross of Christ challenges us to public advocacy, as General Secretary Martin Junge noted at the Consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. As we work for needy people in different

parts of the world the light of Easter can break through heavy, helpless and hopeless situations, and bring joy. May we all encounter this light in our daily life, wherever we are this Easter-tide. May we sense what the Golgatha events may mean for our own lives, thoughts and actions.

LWF General Secretary Martin Junge Attends Reformation Event in Goslar, Germany

Joint Commitment for Peace and Understanding

Goslar (Germany)/Geneva (LWI) – The strong link between the local history of the Reformation in Goslar and the world-wide impact of the Reformation was the central topic for a two-day international event organized in Goslar, Germany. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brunswick issued the invitations to this event which took place on 13-14 March 2014 with the title “Weltbürgerin Reformation” (Reformation as a global citizen).

Along with participants from Goslar, international participation was ensured by the involvement of Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation and

representatives of partner churches of the Brunswick Church.

The event highlighted the impact of the Reformation in the fields of education, politics and culture. Protagonists from all sections of civil society participated in the event, among others the grammar school *Ratsgymnasium* and the City of Goslar. Provost Thomas Gunkel, speaking as host in Goslar, explained the reasons for extending the invitation to civil society and to international partners: “We do not want to live out our faith as if in a separate compartment, but as global citizens, open to the world and in curiosity about what others have to say“.

Education, Politics, Culture

On Thursday the event included a procession-style walk through the city, with various stations along the route where the main themes of the Reformation were explained in detail. Pupils from the *Ratsgymnasium* had prepared short theatrical presentations for this in which one of the schoolgirls personified the Reformation as a global citizen. In these plays the pupils emphasized that education is a great step on the way to growing closer together and to overcoming our differences. In addition the figure of the Reformation as a global citizen acted as an advocate for religious tolerance and the equality of all human people.

The Lord Mayor of Goslar, Dr. Oliver Junk, praised the good cooperative involvement between politics and the church in Goslar. The relationship between the church and politics was also taken up by the Bishop of Brunswick, Prof. Dr. Friedrich Weber, in his address during the closing Eucharist. He saw it as a task of the church to make an active contribution to the city, “the Christian life is life only when set in the political framework, such as in the city of Goslar“. As a symbol of this strong link, a special Council candle has been placed in the central *Marktkirche* church, which is lit during every meeting of the city council.

The bi-lingual worship service included the active participation of



LWF General Secretary Martin Junge (right) with the Bishop of Brunswick Prof. Dr. Friedrich Weber (centre), Jan Waclawek (left), Bishop of the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic, and other guests during the walk through the city of Goslar (Germany). The meeting took place in Goslar on 13 - 14.3.2014 with the title “Reformation as a global Citizen“. Photo: DNK/LWF. Hübner

guests from the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and the Anglican Diocese of Blackburn in England. A musical program underlined the influence of the Reformation on culture.

Common Links expressed in Joint Commitment

“Three words have become important for the Reformation as global citizen:

justice, peace and reconciliation,” said LWF General Secretary Junge in a public address in the *Ratsgymnasium*. He emphasized the world-wide links between the churches that are united within The Lutheran World Federation and underlined their joint commitment, in which the Church in Brunswick is also involved as one of the 142 LWF member churches. “And so it is that your regional state church joins in harmony with 141 other churches all around the world in the song of loving our neighbor, of ecumenical understanding, of inter-religious dialogue and of caring companionship“.

At the close of the event, a tree was planted in front of both the *Ratsgymnasium* and the Marktkirche. These are two partner trees of the tree which a delegation from Goslar had planted a week earlier in the Luther Garden in Wittenberg. The apple tree variety “Nordhausen beauty“ bears the number 248 in the Luther Garden.

Read more about the LWF and Reformation 2017: www.lutheranworld.org/content/reformation-2017

German and Tanzanian Member Churches Consulting Together

“Unifying Force of Jesus Christ”

ARUSHA, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – A delegation from the conference of bishops in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) has met with bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) in Arusha to deepen partnerships between the churches.

In the consultations from 20 to 25 February 2014 the bishops discussed common challenges in their respective churches. “We had very deep discussions about these questions, and also about public theology,” Presiding

Bishop Dr. Alex G Malasusa of ELCT said. “The contexts of our churches are totally different, but as churches we can exchange our views.”

Long history of partnership

The ELCT and German Lutheran churches have a long history of partnerships on various levels, between churches, dioceses and parishes in both countries. Further planning and

shaping these relations was one of the visit’s objectives. “We have been having a good dialogue with the Tanzanian colleges for some years,” Bishop Gerhard Ulrich, presiding bishop of the VELKD, said prior to the meeting. “Because of our different cultural, religious and political backgrounds sharing is important for understanding each other and deepening a relationship of trust.”

Besides partnership work and the understanding of ministry, focus was put on social issues such as land justice and climate justice. Heavy rains and droughts have become more common in Tanzania over the last years destroying harvests and destabilizing food security. Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria (ELCB) interprets this as a consequence of climate change. “However the Carbondioxide emissions in Tanzania of 0,2 tons per capita greatly differ from those in Western Europe (9-10t per capita). This is a question of justice”, Bedford-Strohm remarked.



Consultation participants from Germany and Tanzania after the consultations. Photos: ELCB

Open discussion

Bedford-Strohm praised the feeling of a communion during the consultations.

“We discovered much common ground on our calling to spread the gospel and express the joy faith gives us, which is the foundation for our advocating for peace and justice”, he shared on

social media. The meeting ended with a church service where all participants shared in the Holy Communion. “In this service we very strongly felt the unifying force of Jesus Christ”,

Bedford-Strohm said. The sentiment was shared on the side of the hosts. “It was a very good meeting”, Malasusa added. “I am looking forward to future meetings like that.”

Implementing Gender Justice Policy in Africa

Workshop Discusses Action Plans for the Church

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – A four-day workshop with African participants in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia marked the beginning of the Gender Justice Policy (GJP) implementation process. The Gender Justice Policy, approved by the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2013, is a tool to enhance the communion’s journey towards inclusiveness, to promote equality and balanced power relations between women and men. Now, the process has moved on to apply policy to practice.

The workshop which is a collaborative initiative of LWF Departments for Mission and Development (DMD) and Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) is the first of many such events, planned in all regions. It addressed how to methodically introduce gender on the programmatic level and which structural changes are required in order to introduce gender justice in all aspects of church life. It also provided a platform to discuss the LWF Gender Justice Policy in relation to the experiences on the ground.

Institutional Commitment

“Issues of gender need to be seen from the perspective of doing justice,” said EECMY president Rev. Dr Wakseyoum Idosa, in his opening speech at the workshop. “To know God for us is not merely to worship God. It is not complying with certain doctrine and principle that we follow in our churches. It is an act of each one of us on behalf of *us* and *our* neighbors to seek for justice and righteousness to reign and flourish.”

Judith Nyaata was one of the participants in the workshop, which included men and women, ordained and lay



Caption: Rev. Dr Wakseyoum Idosa Negeri, president of EECMY, in discussion at the Gender Justice Policy workshop in Ethiopia, Feb. 2014. Photo: LWF/Elaine Neuenfeldt

persons, theologians and diaconal workers from the South African region. She is the project coordinator of “Say no to FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)”, a program run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) which is supported by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Her work is one of the many contexts where the LWF Gender Justice Policy will be implemented. The project is a women’s initiative and yet, Nyaata knows that in working with women alone, they will not be effective.

Action Plans for Different Contexts

Part of the time was dedicated for the sharing of experiences and knowledge regarding mainstreaming gender and women’s empowerment in programs set up by the LWF Department for World Service (DWS), projects supported by LWF and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)

women’s department and the church’s Development and Social Services Commission – DASSC. The workshop also included discussion on the gender justice policy and theological studies on gender justice and worship.

“There is a need to address the ownership related to gender,” Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, LWF Secretary for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) explained. “Issues and projects related to gender have become almost purely women’s issues, while the decision-making spaces and forums are still lacking the presence and participation of women. The goal of the implementation process is to design action plans which fit the context in which people live,”

Neuenfeldt pled for a different approach in women’s empowerment, using gender justice as theological and biblical grounding. “There is a necessary shift to be done, putting emphasis on changing the attitudes, organizations and structures. It is

about transformation and full participation,” she said.

Include All Aspects of Church Life

Therefore the group shaped practical recommendations for implementing gender justice in programmatic work. It was agreed that the Gender Justice Policy needs to be used, studied, translated and made relevant for the

different global contexts. For effective management of human and financial resources, there is a need for continuous collaboration and engagement between all departments in the church, the group said.

The workshop participants also recommended that there needs to be intentional effort from the church leadership to fully integrate women in the ordained ministry, and in all levels of decision making of the church. Par-

ticipants called on church leadership to ensure that there are appropriate structures and staff trained for the purpose.

As the church is an important moral institution in African countries, workshop participants believe that it is an important agent to advocating gender justice. They recommended to involve church leadership in order to achieve an effective result on how to develop structures which incorporate gender as a crosscutting priority.

A Call for Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala

Lutheran Church Leader Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Speaks on the Struggle to Protect People and Natural Resources

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala /GENEVA (LWI) – Guatemalan Lutheran church leader says neither threats to personal life, trumped-up charges in court nor other forms of intimidation will deter the church from speaking out for the rights of rural communities, access to their land and other natural resources, and for defenders of human rights in the Latin American country.

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera, president of the Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA) talked about the church’s work, and why it is important for the global church family and governments to support defenders of human rights in a society that is losing the significant gains it had made against impunity.

Why is the Lutheran church involved in the country’s struggle for human rights?

The Guatemalan Lutheran Church is a member of the Ecumenical Christian Council of Guatemala, an alliance of Catholic, Episcopal (Anglicans), Evangelical and Reformed churches, which collaborate in several areas of work including advocacy on human rights at regional and international levels.

For the last ten years, ILUGUA has been supporting the Zacapa and Chiquimula communities who live



Guatemalan Lutheran church leader Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera (middle), Mr Omar Jéronimo (left) and Ms Claudia Samayoa Pineda, during the visit to Geneva. Photo: LWF/M. Haas

around the Granadillas Mountain area in their struggles against deforestation and exploitation of the area, which is the main source of water, food and livelihoods for some 300,000 people. Despite these protests to safeguard natural resources, deforestation by outside companies has persisted, and we have learned that the intervention by the local authorities is not genuine. The Lutheran church and the ecumenical alliance agitate with the local communities in this struggle against companies who are waiting to exploit the forests and the rivers.

What kind of threats and intimidation do you face?

There are threats to individuals and communities in Chiquimula and Zacapa, and especially to the human rights defenders. People have died protecting the land and biodiversity of the Granadillas. The assassination of human rights defender Carlos Hernández Mendoza in March 2013 particularly stands out.

I personally have received assassination threats and have been publicly accused of crimes I have not committed. Recently we [ILUGUA] were accused of stealing a truck full of logs

from a public place, yet no truck had been parked there in the first place; these are just some of the baseless accusations we receive, but we will not keep quiet.

How do the local authorities respond to such threats?

The Constitution provides legitimacy for our work, but the local authorities support the big companies who have the money to exploit our resources. The threats to human rights defenders in the country are an affront to the significant gains made in reforming the justice system. Efficiency has increased during the tenure of the current Attorney General Dr Paz y Paz. Having the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala is also important.

However, the Attorney General's mandate has been challenged by the constitutional court, and she is being compelled to leave office in May 2014, seven months before her term expires.

Yet all she has done is applied the constitution to prosecute those implicated in serious violations of human rights and genocide during the dark past of the armed conflict. She has applied the law to prosecute crimes related to armed gangs and drug dealers, and she supports the work of human rights defenders like us.

What do you see as the way forward?

It is important to sustain concerted advocacy to uphold the constitution and to protect citizens who are being denied their rights because of the commercial need to exploit our natural resources—cutting down forests, excavating minerals and so on.

Our recent (March 2014) ecumenical tour to Europe was one such effort. We met with church and government representatives in Germany, Norway and Sweden and international human rights organizations. We informed them about the serious setbacks we are experiencing in the promotion of human rights, and asked for their

support through the EU and United Nations mechanisms.

In meetings at the Ecumenical Center with different global church leaders including Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation, we appealed for the solidarity and accompaniment of the global ecumenical family with Guatemala's Christians and human rights defenders.

We need the global churches' support to give us strength to continue providing pastoral care to communities that are fighting to protect their resources and their very own lives.

(Mr Omar Jérónimo, coordinator of the indigenous community organization Central Peasant Chorti New Day and Ms Claudia Samayoa Pineda, coordinator of the Unit for Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala, accompanied Rev. José Pilar Álvarez Cabrera on the 21 March visit to the Ecumenical Center, as part of meetings in Europe from 5 to 24 March.)

Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion

Working Group Meets In Bossey, Switzerland

GENEVA (LWI) – The working group on the Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion held its initial meeting on 18-21 March 2014 at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey near Geneva, Switzerland. The group was formed following a decision of the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2013 in Geneva to deepen the understanding of what it means to be a communion of churches among the LWF member churches.

As outlined in the briefing to the working group, in 2013 the LWF Council decided that contemporary discussion on the nature of the LWF as a communion needed to respond to new contextual realities. Therefore members of the working group prepared and presented papers addressing different aspects of being a communion. Together they studied biblical texts and LWF documents and shared examples



*The working group on the Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion at its initial meeting.
Photo: LWF/C. Kästner*

from their national backgrounds. Participants then discussed aspects such as the tensions between the churches' rights to make their own decisions and

their accountability to the communion, solidarity and finding a structure which accommodates different regional circumstances and customs.

Communion More Than a Concept

The working group consists of seven persons representing different regions and different theological expertise: Prof. Dr. Guillermo Hansen (Argentina), Dr. Minna Hietamäki (Finland), Rev. Dr. Allen Jorgenson (Canada), Bishop em. Dr. Hance Mwakabana (Tanzania), Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Parmentier (France) and Prof. Dr. En Yu Thu (Malaysia). They were accompanied by LWF staff Rev. Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, Rev. Dr. Simone Sinn, Rev. Dr. Patricia Cuyatti and Rev. Dr. Kenneth Mtata. The working group member from Eastern Europe was not able to attend.

According to the participants, the initial meeting was held in a very

constructive and mindful working atmosphere. “The contexts of the different members of the working group are so different that I expected endless discussions without a possibility of convergence,” working group participant Elisabeth Parmentier remarked afterwards. “But we actually did not compete in the arguments for or against socio-ethical decisions. From the beginning we put the focus on the gift of the communion that we already share.”

Allen Jorgenson afterwards expressed his hope, that “behind the document we prepare readers will discern the communion we experienced as we shared stories of hope,

of worry, of confusion, of God’s grace. (...) Communion was experienced in this gathering as an event more than a concept; not so much a meeting of like-minds as a soulful grappling together”.

A document from this meeting will be presented to the LWF Council at their annual meeting in June. The working group will work together for 18 months jointly formulating a study document on the “Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion”. An accompanying publication will present the papers from this first meeting in 2015.

[Read thoughts from working group participants on the LWF blog:](#)
www.lutheranworld.org/blog

Freedom of Religion: Liberated From the “Embrace of Power”

LWF Reflects on the Report by the Special Rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Council

GENEVA (LWI) – How do churches become perpetrators of conflict? How can they serve as mediators for peace? As the Special Rapporteur (SR) for freedom of religion or belief gave his report in the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council, The Lutheran World Federation hosted a side event focused on freedom of religion or belief. In an interview with Lutheran World Information (LWI), the Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights Ralston Defenbaugh talks about areas and causes of religious hatred, the role of churches, being a nervous system and the difficult task to escape the “embrace of power”.

In terms of freedom of religion or belief, what are your areas of concern right now?

One of the countries we pay most attention to is Nigeria. One of our member churches is based in the Northeast of the country where the Boko Haram (militia) has made attacks. There is a lot of tension. How can that church and its leaders be a force of peace and restrain

people from revenge or retaliation? How can they build relationships among communities? That’s a huge challenge.

Another place would be Indonesia. The Lutheran churches are large in members but fairly small given the total population of Indonesia which is mainly Muslim. Again, how can they live peacefully with their neighbors, especially now that there’s a lot more migration in the country, with Christians going into Muslim areas and Muslims trying to come into Christian areas, how can they live together in a way that there are equal rights and opportunities for all?

We are also concerned about the situation in India. We have some fairly large Lutheran churches in India mainly consisting of Dalit people, the so-called Untouchables. They are suffering from discrimination which is partly caste based and partly also religion based, being prejudiced against by the majority Hindu community in India. If a Dalit is a Hindu, they are entitled to certain affirmative action benefits like scholarships and job preferences. But

if a Hindu Dalit converts to Christianity, they no longer qualify for those benefits. So there is a direct price for one’s religious freedom, which the government is imposing on the people.

And of course there is the conflict in the Central African Republic. The country is now basically in a chaotic situation with at least a quarter of the population if not more displaced from their homes. A lot of ethnic/religious violence has taken place, most of the Muslim population in the capital Bangui has had to flee from their homes. A big question is how we can be supportive of our member church there in the efforts to try to speak with each other, to help for people to overcome this hatred.

Power and Money “Clothed in Religion”

Do you think religion is the cause of the conflicts in all places?

It is very difficult to identify a conflict that’s purely a religious conflict.



Caption: Being an agent of peace: Church service in celebration of the 100 years anniversary of The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN). Photo: Felix Samari LCCN/LWF

We sometimes use the words “conflicts clothed in religion”. Usually there are other causes at the root of this, to do with power, with money or with fear.

How does it happen that churches and religion become perpetrators of conflict?

The majority of believers are genuinely striving for love and compassion and doing good. Most religious people around the world are living fairly decent good lives. The the Special Rapporteur Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt today quoted the philosopher Friedrich Hegel saying that “the pages of good in history books are blank”. But religion can be exploited to be a force for evil.

One of the dangers for churches and other religious groups is that they would allow themselves to be identified with a particular ethnic or political group or government, and thereby allow themselves, as Prof. Bielefeldt said, to be “taken into the embrace of power”. For us Lutherans it’s very important that the church have a healthy relationship with the government. We can work with governments when the interests coincide, but we also have to be prepared to be critical of governments. If we’re going to be truly free in our religion, we need to be liberated from this “embrace of power”.

Most of the countries you mentioned already have freedom of religion writ-

ten in their constitution and laws. What is missing?

There can be prejudice or even persecution that is state based, legally based, but there is also socially based prejudice. It is first up to the government as the duty holder with regard to human rights to work for equal treatment and non-discrimination. But there is also the responsibility of members of the society and in particular religious leaders to speak out on freedom of religion. Freedom of religion is not something which relates only to a few minorities. It’s a core human right. Almost all human beings adhere to a religion and want to practice it as they wish.

Explaining “Religious Hatred”

In his report, the SR concentrated on manifestations of “collective religious hatred”, joint manifestations of intense and irrational enmity and animosity towards a specific target group or individual which are proclaimed in the name of a religion or belief. What are the causes for these manifestations?

There are several factors. One of them is corruption. If there is endemic corruption in a country, you don’t have a way of people dealing with each other and with authorities in a way that they

feel they can trust. Often that causes them to withdraw into their own communities whether defined by family, by ethnicity or by religion, and see their identity that way. From that, fears develop about “the other”, about people that are different.

Another factor is political authoritarianism. When people are discouraged from having an open debate with each other, when it is not safe to talk freely about things that are bothering you and that you want to see changed, that leads to mistrust and suspicion within society.

A third factor is narrow identity politics. Some political groups or governments try to exploit religion for their political purposes in order to win support from the majority religious group by discriminating against the minority.

How is it possible to counter these factors that may lead to religious violence?

The Special Rapporteur’s recommendations to the Human Rights Council were based on building trust in communities and societies. For us in the LWF, a lot of it is about how Christians and Muslims relate. LWF is the largest faith-based implementing partner for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Most of the refugees we work with are Muslim. I think the key there is respect for the other. This is something we as Lutherans feel very strongly about. We are all created in the image of God, we are equal. That perspective goes a long way. We also make sure that any sort of assistance provided is not discriminatory, just as with the Good Samaritan in the Bible. He obviously didn’t ask for credentials. He didn’t check the person’s religion or if he had the right papers. He just attended to a person in need.

Hope from Liberia

Where is the LWF advocacy work on freedom of religion or belief focused?

We try to be aware of situations where freedom of religion is under threat. We're trying to understand ourselves, and help our member churches to understand, what some of the principles relating to freedom of religion are, what makes for societies where religion is free and what puts that freedom at risk. So one of our roles is being kind of a nervous system in the body of Christ and just like any good nervous system we want to be able to feel the pain, but we also want to be able to celebrate where things have gone well, and share that within the communion and be of assistance to one another.

Where did you have reason to celebrate?

In Liberia which suffered a very long and bad civil war. Thankfully it was not religion based. One of the main groups that helped bring peace to Liberia was an interreligious women's group that was led by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee who is a member of the Lutheran Church in Liberia. She brought together women from various Christian churches and from various Muslim communities. They started a campaign, as they put it, to "Pray The Devil Back to Hell",

which consisted of protesting and insisting that the political groups and the warlords continue negotiating and make peace agreements. This was a wonderful example of where people could work together across religious lines for peace. Some of the male religious leaders were also doing that, there is an interreligious council in Liberia. That was a good example where religion could work for peace.

[Read more about the LWF and advocacy: www.lutheranworld.org/content/international-affairs-and-human-rights](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/international-affairs-and-human-rights)

Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement Would Be a Sign of Hope to the World

Lutheran Bishops Join US and Jerusalem Church Leaders Commending Secretary Kerry's Peace Efforts

GENEVA (LWI) – A peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians would be a sign of hope for the entire world, says Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

"Surely a generations-old conflict within a family—in this case the children of Abraham—can be achingly painful and seemingly intractable. But with God all things are possible," Eaton added.

The ELCA presiding bishop was commenting on a 19 March letter, which more than 40 Christian leaders in the United States and Jerusalem wrote to US Secretary of State John Kerry, commending his efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Eaton noted that the conflict had caused suffering for Christians, Jews and Muslims, and said Christians are praying for the people of Israel and Palestine and for Kerry "that God might grant him wisdom and stamina."

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), who was among the signatories to the letter said



Christians in the Middle East were tired of the unsettled political situation and are praying for peace based on justice as soon as possible.

"We pray that the leaders of the world and the leaders of Palestine and Israel will look to international law for the peace and justice. The people are looking for a solution now. People want a dignified solution based on international law," said Younan, who is President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The letter marks the first time the Catholic, Coptic, Lutheran and Episcopal heads of churches in Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custodian of the Holy Places are joining US Christian denominations and groups to support urgent efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Christian leaders commended Kerry for his active efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the

long-standing conflict with the mutual recognition, dignity, justice and security that each side in the dispute deserves.

“Lack of resolution will have negative consequences for both Israelis

and Palestinians and exacerbate other grave problems in the region,” the church leaders said. “Failure would have detrimental consequences for the entire international community.”

Read the letter at <http://cmep.org/content/christian-leaders-commend-sec-kerry-active-efforts-reach-comprehensive-agreement>

General Secretary Junge: The Cross of Christ Calls for Advocacy

Finnish Church Hosts Global Partner Consultation on Mission and Partnership

JÄRVENPÄÄ, Finland/ GENEVA (LWI) – “Your Kingdom Come” was the theme of the partner consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) held in Järvenpää from 31 March to 4 April, 2014. The consultation brought together more than 35 ELCF partner churches, ecumenical organizations and mission societies to consult on partnership and mission in a globalized context.

Prophetic Dimension of the Church

The meeting was meant to strengthen the cooperation between the partner churches and to give them an occasion to discuss the challenges and opportunities they face in mission today, said the organizers.

“Understanding the public dimension of the church will lead to an understanding of its local, national and global

‘citizenship,’ thereby providing ways to reach out to the people in the pews,” said Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) addressing the conference. “The cross of Christ is a reminder of that prophetic dimension,” Junge said.

“There is still a widespread self-understanding of Christian faith as something pertaining strictly to the private, inner sphere. How relevant can such a church be?” he asked.

“Particularly in the European context, one can still observe hesitation and difficulties to use the concept of mission, and sometimes even to engage in mission,” said Junge.

Partnership in Mission

Several LWF member churches were represented at the consultation. Church leaders shared their reflections on part-

nership and mission from their respective contexts and their appreciation for coming together for a global consultation.

Rev. Berhanu Edossa Ofgaa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) stressed the need for partnership among churches while reaching out to those “who have not yet heard of the gospel.”

“Partnership means helping one another, sharing each other’s burden and joining hands in mission,” he said. Referring to Martin Luther, he emphasized the need to “go out and tell the good news to all.”

“Christianity is about faith and hope, and expectation of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the heavenly kingdom. I hope that God who is bringing His kingdom to pass is on the way, on the move. The kingdom of God is the coming and the present.”

Coming from a different context, Rev. Tadahiro Tadeyama, President of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, described a similar approach in witnessing in a minority situation. “The church has the word of encouragement, the word of God. Mission is for those who hunger for hope. The word of God can give this hope. We need to tell people that this is what we offer them.”

“In Japan, less than one percent of the population is Christian,” Tadeyama remarked. “The kingdom of God will be realized by inviting more people into the Christian church.”

“In our world we have many interpretations of the Bible,” Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and Rev. Berhanu Edossa Ofgaa, General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus at the Partnership Consultation. Photo: Marianne Ejdersten/WCC

Holy Land said. “We have challenges of poverty. We have issues of justice. I think it is very important to understand that we have one mission, which is meant for empowerment, for transformation and for reconciliation. If we

can comprehend that, then we can make a change,” said Younan, who is the President of the LWF.

“For us in the LWF, partnership can only be defined as accompaniment,” the LWF General Secretary Rev. Junge

said. “In times of fragmentation and communication breakdowns our ability to work and stand together as partners in mission becomes a telling witness to the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our hearts.”

Church Leaders Join in Fast for the Climate

“Promote an Economy That Places Life First”

JÄRVENPÄÄ, Finland/GENEVA (LWI) – Church leaders from Asia, Africa and Latin America today joined Fast for the Climate.

The fast, which takes place the first day of every month is meant as a regular day of prayer and spiritual reflection to express solidarity with those who are most vulnerable to climate change.

It was launched by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) together with many other global organizations on 1 January 2014, following an initiative of the LWF delegation to COP 19 in Warsaw, Poland last year. The delegation comprised young people from all LWF regions.

Church leaders from LWF member churches presently convening at the Partnership Consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland joined the initiative by fasting over lunch time. “In Taiwan, the reality of climate change is really serious,” ex-

plained Rev. Chen Shu-Cheng Selma of The Lutheran Church of Taiwan, when asked about her motivation. “People don’t recognize it, because in modern society we have technical equipment to mask its effects. But as a church we should do something about that. That’s our responsibility,” she said.

The situation in her home country propelled Ms. Mabel Madinga, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi to join the fast. “In Malawi, we are experiencing climate change. We are having extreme weather,” she said. “Before we could say: ‘This month, the rain will start.’ Now we can’t tell anymore. I feel churches should take a leading role, knowing that it’s the same people who are coming to church who are being affected by climate change.”

“Be part of it – at least once a month!”

Bishop Eduardo Martinez of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia also sees the spiritual benefit of the campaign. “Fasting enables us to temporarily put aside our own needs and to think about the needs of others,” he said. “Fasting will help us to change habits and to promote an economy that places the life of the planet and of human beings first, instead of thinking first of generating wealth.”

Rev. Dean Annah Nguvauva, Deputy Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, explicitly thanked the youth delegates for starting the initiative. “It is very important that you took this action. Please continue,” she said. Nguvauva also promised to share the idea with other churches.

Bishop Shekatumba Nambala of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia joined in the call. “Climatic change is affecting the whole planet on which we live. It destroys the balance of nature and also affects our communities,” he explained. “We urge everyone, wherever you are and whatever your belief, as long as you are on this planet, to be a part of fasting – at least one day a month!”

Share your story on climate change with the LWF on the Facebook page “LWF for climate justice”: <https://www.facebook.com/LWFforclimatejustice>

Read more about the Fast for the Climate: <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/fast-climate-april>



LWF church leaders #fastfortheclimate at the Partnership Consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Photo: LWF

LWF Deeply Concerned about Suspended Activities' Impact on Communities in Myanmar

Safety and Protection at Stake for 140,000 IDPs in Rakhine State

YANGON, Myanmar/GENEVA – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is deeply concerned about the safety and security of the communities it serves as well as staff persons throughout Rakhine State, western Myanmar, after it temporarily suspended its activities following an outbreak of violence against humanitarian agencies.

Mobs targeting international organizations in Sittwe (Rakhine State capital) on 26 and 27 March attacked the premises of 14 organizations including LWF. They ransacked the offices, warehouses and residences, and destroyed equipment, furniture and documents.

The LWF Myanmar program has since evacuated both its national and international staff from Sittwe to Yangon. All the employees are safe. However the temporary suspension of essential operations in and around Sittwe has critically impacted the lives of the vulnerable people.

“This mob violence is linked to long standing, deep seated and complicated communal tensions. We therefore remain very much concerned about the safety and security of our staff members as well as the IDP’s access to humanitarian services.” says Mr David Mueller, LWF regional representative in Myanmar.

Mueller says the LWF is committed to return to its work in camp coordination and management, education, fire safety and psychosocial support to 18,000 IDPs in four Muslim camps and another 4,000 in two Rakhine camps in Sittwe. “We will return as soon as the safety and security of the aid workers is restored,” he adds, noting that the government has enacted a 6 pm to 6 am curfew in the township and has established an investigation commission.



LWF focus group discussion with 11-17 year-olds in a Sittwe IDP camp, Rakhine State. Photo: LWF/Myanmar

Fire Volunteers' Training

Although 154 fire safety volunteers (148 male and 6 female) were trained last year, twice as many are needed to ensure realistic preparedness and response capabilities in the current dry and windy season. Further training has been disrupted by the suspension as have the regular awareness and orientation programs in both urban and rural camps, covering all the IDP camps throughout Sittwe township.

Education

The suspension also affects the education of over 7,200 children. The early childhood development program for 1,500 three to five-year-olds will be delayed. Similarly 3,000 primary school children, aged six to ten, will miss important exams that would allow them to mainstream into the Department of Education system, and an additional 2,000 will lose the chance to start their primary education.

Non-formal education for 700 students aged 11 to 17, who have never attended school or dropped out early, will also be delayed. The construction

of additional learning facilities that were schedule to begin in April has also been disrupted.

Psychosocial Support for Vulnerable Groups

Putting activities on hold will have significant impact on the already inadequately served protection sector. This includes protection and psychosocial support to over 1,900 people comprised of marginalized groups of women and girls, elderly, people with disabilities, single parents and child-headed households, as well as unaccompanied minors among IDPs in the camps.

Camp Coordination and Management

The monitoring of basic services has been disrupted. This means water, sanitation and health (WASH) and other services are severely impacted due to lack of access to information. There is a risk of insufficient food supply, as the latest distribution will last until the third week of April.

Mueller underlines that the “LWF will monitor all sectors in the camps and keep in close contact with the cluster and sector leaders and members to continually try our best to get services flowing as soon as possible.”

The LWF Department for World Service started in Myanmar in 2008, and entered Rakhine state in 2012. The country program works with the government to support vulnerable communities with initiatives to improve food security, liveli-

hoods, WASH, and disaster risk reduction through rights-based empowerment.

[Read more about the LWF's response in Rakhine State: www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-assistance-idps-rakhine](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/emergency-assistance-idps-rakhine)

Join the LWF on a Unique Visit to Nepal

Trekking Expedition Offers Insights from Host Communities and Tibetan Refugees

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – Sixty-five-year-old Tasha Tsering vividly remembers the day he began his new life as a refugee. He was ten when he fled from Tibet to Nepal with 15 members of his family following the failed uprising against Chinese occupation in 1959.

“My house was in East Tibet and we had quite a good life before fleeing to Nepal. I crossed the Tibetan border in 1959 and reached (the) Mustang district of Nepal,” says Tsering, who is board president of Dhoto Chhugang Welfare Association, and now lives in Kathmandu. “We were very happy to reach Mustang but we had the fear (at first) that the Chinese may come there and take us back to Tibet. When we reached Nepal we felt very free.”

“LWF [The Lutheran World Federation] Nepal started supporting us in 2010 by providing solar lights, constructing toilets and providing farming tools and tractors for tilling land in Dhorpatan area,” Tsering adds.

The work among Tibetan refugees will be part of an LWF-led Backstage

Pass trekking expedition to Nepal, from 25 October to 7 November 2014. The initiative offers a unique opportunity to encounter the mountainous parts of the country while gaining insights in other aspects of LWF’s collaboration with the refugees and host communities.

Rural Communities in Remote Areas

Established in 1984, the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) Nepal program began work with rural communities in the remote mountain regions. In later years the program has provided services for Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees, and since 2010 has been helping families like Tsering’s through income-generating opportunities, education and training skills as well as clean water, electricity and adequate sanitation facilities.

The LWF trekking route will offer participants “the opportunity to interact with Tibetan refugees who

are being assisted by the LWF Nepal country program, and see what impact these assistance activities are having on their lives,” says expedition leader Duane Poppe, program officer for Climate Change and for East and Horn of Africa at the LWF Communion Office in Geneva.

“I’m excited about leading the LWF Backstage Pass in Nepal, a country where I have spent 17 years of my life,” adds Poppe, a former LWF representative in Nepal, and coordinator for LWF country programs in other parts of Asia and in Africa.

“The trekking route will enable us to experience the highs and lows of Nepal’s topography and explore the livelihoods, culture and spirituality of a cross section of its peoples,” he notes.

[Register for the Backstage Pass Trek in the high mountains and raise funds for World Service programs](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-backstage-pass-expedition-nepal)

www.lutheranworld.org/content/lwf-backstage-pass-expedition-nepal

More LWI News at
www.lutheranworld.org

Published and distributed by:
The Lutheran World Federation
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel. +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION