

Lutheran World Information

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In the midst of commemorating 500 years of the Reformation

General Secretary's letter to the LWF member churches

The Lutheran World Federation has selected the period from 2015 through 2017 to focus on the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and there is already much to announce this year. We are in the midst of the Reformation anniversary celebrations!

By way of reminder: All of our events and processes are carried out in accordance with the three basic principles being followed during the LWF's anniversary celebrations. As we mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we wish to emphasize the *polycentric character* of the Reformation and the various contextual realities that gave rise to the Reformation movement. We also wish to pay close attention and find out

which topics are able to move the people and societies of today, as part of an *ongoing Reformation*; and we will seek to celebrate the Reformation anniversary in a spirit of *ecumenical openness*, and deliberately take into account the results of ecumenical dialogue in the process of preparing the anniversary events.

A number of exceptional events of importance have already taken place within this context. Please allow me to mention a few of them in brief:

“From Marangu to Wittenberg”: In May 2015, 200 delegates from African LWF member churches celebrated the 60th



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anniversary of the historical conference held in Marangu, northern Tanzania in 1955. Leading representatives of Africa's Lutheran churches met back then for the first time, an occasion that continues to be viewed as the birth of the spirit of unity among African Lutheran churches. Participants in this year's conference, titled "Marangu to Wittenberg: Being a Reforming Church in a Changing African Context", raised awareness on the historical event and reflected on their unity and the African contribution to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

International conference of Young Reformers: From 22 August through 4 September, 140 "young reformers" from around the globe convened for a workshop in Wittenberg. Young people from the world over met in the historical Reformation center, representing a strong symbol of the impact that the Reformation continues to have on our world today. The theme of the workshop was "Freed by God's love to change the world". It featured a program that provided an opportunity to exchange ideas and to come together to learn about and discuss topics, including Lutheran identity, discipleship, youth participation, climate justice, the future sustainability of the churches, and mission renewal. The thoughts and ideas collected in Wittenberg will continue to leave their mark on the long road to the Reformation anniversary through the development of "Living Reformation" projects along the way.

Publication of topical booklets on the occasion of the Reformation anniversary: Four booklets have been published that I would especially like to recommend to you. The booklets focus on the main theme and sub-themes connected with the Reformation anniversary (*Liberated by God's Grace* with the sub-themes *Salvation – Not for Sale*, *Human Beings – Not for Sale*, and *Creation – Not For Sale*), and pro-

vide an opportunity to grapple with the central concerns of the Reformation in a framework relevant to our own times. The booklets, which appeared in June (2017.lutheranworld.org/resources), will be made available early next year in the LWF's official languages. Several translations into other languages are already on their way as well. The articles, written by authors from all parts of the global church communion, take on topics such as migration, climate change, land grabbing, prosperity gospel, and issues involving sustainable forms of human coexistence. The booklets are also to serve as preparatory materials for the 2017 LWF Assembly. I would again like to invite the LWF member churches to make use of the booklets as impetus for discussion, and would be particularly happy if the booklets were to be used in a dialogue among bilateral international partners. Could you imagine your church using them in that way?

Women on the Move – From Wittenberg to Windhoek: An international LWF working group launched a process in February to focus on the underlying contributions of women to church and society. At their first meeting, women theologians and church leaders from all seven regions of the LWF worked on a framework for this process to unfold. An important part of this involves the compilation of the stories of women who, through their activities, have left a lasting mark on their particular churches.

And exceptional events and projects are still to come:

Global theological conference: Around Reformation Day 2015, 80 participants will come together from around the world to reflect on the interplay between theology, politics, and the economy. The conference will take into account the effects of the 16th-century Reformation, which also had a fundamental influence on people's lives during its era. The main presentations will

be recorded and provided on the LWF Reformation website so that anyone interested can follow the discussions as well. (2017.lutheranworld.org).

Project fund for the Reformation anniversary: The LWF has set up a special fund to support member churches in the implementation of small projects with a thematic connection to the Reformation anniversary. Please pay attention to the correspondence you receive from the Communion Office, which will provide further details on this important measure of support.

The 2017 LWF Assembly: As you could read in various letters to the member churches, preparations are in full swing for the Assembly, which promises to be a joyous, transformational, and forward-looking event. The perspective is deliberately meant to be externally focused in order to be able to capture the significance of the Reformation message for today's world. The Reformation Sunday will be one particular highlight, with representatives of the 145 member churches coming together in a worship service to mark the Reformation anniversary.

As the representatives of our member churches, we encourage you to get involved! Come together with other churches and partners in thinking about what it means to be liberated by God's grace, and to join one another in following the call of Jesus Christ in establishing signs of his service and his love in the world. Take part in the variety of networks and get involved in projects at the local, regional, and global levels. Allow us to come together to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in a joyous spirit and in a spirit that encourages us to move forward so that the radiant force of the anniversary may continue to shine on, well beyond 2017.

LWF General Secretary
Rev. Dr Martin Junge
Geneva, 14 October 2015

Faith is based on communication and understanding, say German leaders

Workshop Wittenberg began with street parade, city tour, official greetings and worship

WITTENBERG /GENEVA (LWI) – “An important social aspect on our way towards the great Reformation commemoration in 2017,” is how Prime Minister of Saxony-Anhalt Dr Reiner Haseloff described the coming together of Lutherans from all over the world in Wittenberg for two weeks.

Welcoming the first global gathering of Lutheran youth to Wittenberg, the city of the Reformation, Haseloff said faith had to be continuously re-developed. In principle, faith is “always young, always up-to-date,” he said in his speech at the Wittenberg Townhall.

The Global Young Reformers Network (GYRN) workshop, held 23 August to 4 September brought together 140 young adults from more than 80 LWF member churches in 60 countries.

One challenge is how to “put faith in relation to the modern communication facilities and the reality of the globalized world,” the premier said. He noted that this task could be best entrusted in a special way to the young participants of the Wittenberg workshop. “That’s why I bid you welcome with great joy to Saxony-Anhalt and my home town of Wittenberg,” he added.

Earlier, Bishop Ilse Junkermann of the Evangelical Church in Central Germany (EKM) preached at the opening service in the Castle Church on the theme of the workshop, “Freed by God’s love to change the world”.

She said that freedom today is most often interpreted in an individual’s ability to manage oneself without having to depend on others. For people who are facing difficulties, that is the domi-



During opening worship in the Castle Church, young reformers were invited to bring to the altar symbolic gifts from their respective regions. Photo: LWF/Marko Schoeneberg

nant response in our society. There is “nothing worse, at least in Western societies, as to be dependent on others,” Junkermann added.

Unlimited Freedom

She described the notion of “unlimited freedom” as in fact an “illusion of freedom.” She reminded the congregation that Luther’s great achievement was the discovery that there is freedom only in the bond with God through Jesus Christ for those who turn freely to him.

The EKM bishop recommended this understanding of freedom as a motif for the joint work of the Wittenberg workshop, which focuses on the development of Reformation projects by the young reformers. “Yes, he [Jesus Christ] needs us, also you young reformers, to pass on this freedom that

springs from God’s love,” the bishop emphasized.

She expressed her hope that “the projects you create here breathe this spirit of freedom and love” and that God’s spirit would lighten our hearts to receive its creative power.”

The GYRN is a program of the LWF Youth desk at the Department for Mission and Development. As the Lutheran communion prepares for the 500th Reformation anniversary, the initiative will facilitate the greater involvement of young people in all aspects of church life.

Under its theme, the Wittenberg workshop offers mutual exchange and global learning. Participants will develop Reformation projects they want to implement by 2017 in their home churches.

Nurturing young Lutherans for service to the communion

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathering of young adults in Wittenberg, Germany, provides opportunity to learn how working together in the communion of churches nurtures individual life for service and transformation in the local and global church, as well as wider society.

“Being the youngest LWF Vice-President is a great blessing and at the same time a huge challenge for me. But I am motivated by the ongoing witness of Lutheran churches in our region,” said LWF Council member Eun-hae Kwon.

Kwon, 28, a member of the Lutheran Church in Korea, shared at an inter-generational talk show at the ongoing LWF Global Young Reformers Network (GYRN) workshop with Bishop Dr Tamas Fabiny, vice president for Central Eastern Europe and General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge.

Christian churches are in a minority situation in Asia, a region marked by obstacles such as religious persecution and exodus of young people to other countries, she noted. “When I visit the LWF member churches, see the gifts that men, women and youth bring to the churches, and see how their witness has survived, this gives me the motivation to serve and to continue more faithfully in my role,” she added.

The LWF leaders were among speakers at the gathering, supporting the 140 young reformers from 80 LWF member churches in envisioning how to strengthen existing youth ministries and create new ones across the communion. LWF Youth at the Department for Mission and Development organized the workshop.

Fabiny, bishop of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, explained how participation in the LWF from his youth days has shaped his leadership role and how global Lutheran communion solidarity can influence political change.

Critical attitude

Referring to a video recording of LWF assemblies from the founding assembly in Lund, Sweden in 1947 until 1984 in Budapest, Hungary, Fabiny highlighted youth and Lutheran churches’ contribution to evolving global contexts. The LWF provided opportunity for contact with other Christians and churches during the Cold War era, which was marked by suppression of democracy and movement and the lack of both freedom of religion and press, he said. “If we had not had organizations like the LWF, we

would not have had so much support for the critical attitude” that led to democratic change, he emphasized.

Fabiny, who was a 25-year-old youth delegate at the 1984 LWF Assembly, reminded the young reformers of the support and opportunities the LWF offers for critical response to today’s social political issues, such as the plight of refugees and migrants. He encouraged them to be more active in their churches and wider society and expressed his hope that in the next 30 years “you will be able to show some images from the Wittenberg workshop,” to young people in LWF churches.

Junge, an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile explained his first contact with the LWF was as a youth delegate to the 1990 pre-assembly for the Latin America and Caribbean region in Buenos Aires, Argentina. “I got to see people from all over the world I hadn’t seen before and never met. The LWF became a space of connecting to the world, to the churches; and to get an understanding which since then, has fascinated me,” he said.

Nurturing unity

In later years, the distinct contribution of the LWF was something Junge experienced as churches in his home country struggled with the reality of dictatorship, which resulted in a division in the Lutheran church. LWF’s intervention provided a space for reconciliation.

His message to the young reformers about one of the critical lessons he has learned: “It takes days, months, sometimes a few years for a church to loose unity, but it takes decades to come together.” He encouraged the young LWF member church representatives to “never forget that, and watch the step towards unity all the time.”

In earlier sessions, the general secretary responded to questions from



LWF Council member Eun-hae Kwon, right, with Sumita Chin, from Malaysia. Kwon says she is motivated to serve and to continue more faithfully in her role. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

the young reformers about LWF's work, membership, funding, advocacy and youth participation among others.

Some of the thematic discussions in group discussions includes Lutheran identity, renewal of mission, rethinking

church and creating community, empowering youth, networking, church sustainability and climate justice.

Youth should adopt Luther's "radical thinking, daring energy, rebellious inclination"

Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki, general secretary of the United Evangelical Mission, Germany, called on young Lutherans to courageously and urgently take up the mission of the church today in the confidence that "God has already accomplished everything for our liberation."

In his keynote address to delegates of the LWF Global Young Reformers workshop, Mwombeki reminded the youth of Martin Luther's "radical thinking, daring energy and rebellious inclination" in his late 20s, which led to the 16th century reformation of the church.

He encouraged them to have a sense of urgent mission and vocation, and assume the task of pushing the elders to discover new challenges and opportunities for the church as Luther and other young reformers did some

500 years ago. "Do not neglect the responsibility to reform the church on a permanent basis, since reformation never ends," emphasized Mwombeki, who is also incoming director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development.

Citing examples from across the world, Mwombeki noted that proclamation of the Christian gospel today is increasingly inundated by false witnesses who spread fear and the message of damnation. Lutheranism, he emphasized, is based on the understanding of justification by faith alone: that God's righteousness is not earned through what one does or fails to do. Rather, "it is like an open hand with which one receives what has been accomplished."

Tenets of Lutheranism

Mwombeki elaborated on the four main tenets (*solas*) of Lutheranism—grace, faith, Christ and scripture—according to which the gospel should be proclaimed. Through the crucified Christ, "we as human beings are offered forgiveness of sin and justification. We have no other message," he emphasized.

Mwombeki encouraged the young reformers to understand this unchangeable core of Lutheran identity, irrespective of the popularity of other theological interpretations. "We must stand firm and not allow anyone to deviate our convictions."

In group discussions after his presentation on 26 August, workshop participants shared insights on the impact of rising religious fundamentalism, the relevance of God in the lives of young adults, and Christian witnessing against a background of many competing claims of religious equality. They also discussed why people are attracted to the prosperity gospel and what Lutheran churches could do to accommodate young people's needs.

Under the day's thematic focus "To be Lutheran means to be theological," the young reformers participated in workshops on how to prepare liturgy and worship in a Lutheran church, which included preparation for the workshop's closing worship service and composing a young reformers' song. They also presented exhibitions on youth work in their respective churches.



United Evangelical Mission General Secretary Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki told the young reformers to have a sense of urgent mission and vocation. Photo: LWF/Johanan C. Valeriano

Youth must be strongly rooted in the church like life-giving trees

Youth delegates from LWF member churches across the world witnessed the first young adult to plant an LWF member-church tree at the Luther Garden in Wittenberg, Germany.

Benison Kachhap from the Gosner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam (GELC), India, planted the 263rd tree in the garden established in 2008 by the

LWF in collaboration with the City of Wittenberg as a living monument of the Reformation. Fellow youth from 80 LWF member churches, in the city for a two-week Global Young Reformers

workshop, applauded as the 27-year-old watered the tree dedicated by GELC Bishop Johan Dang.

“This is a life-changing moment. That I, a young Lutheran from India, am here today representing the Reformation that Luther started in Wittenberg in the 16th century,” Kachhap said, following the 27 August event.

He likened care for trees in a garden to nurturing youth in the church. “When we are strongly rooted, then we can grow and serve our churches. Like plants that need good ground and soil to grow, young people too need the church to be a place where we can grow in order for the church to be sustainable,” he said.

Kachhap expressed gratitude to the GELC leadership for entrusting one of its youth members with the responsibility of planting the church’s tree in the Luther Garden. “As a symbol of life, a tree is not planted for its own sake. It provides shade to those who need it, fruit and shelter. But it needs care to grow so that it can serve others. In a similar way, youth should be nurtured to serve the church for the sake of the church itself,” he added.

Aiming for 500 trees by 2017

Rev. Hans Kasch, director of the LWF Center in Wittenberg, which manages



Benison Kachhap contemplates the significance of being the first young Lutheran to plant a tree in the renowned Luther Garden, in Wittenberg. Rev. Hans Kasch, director of the LWF Center in Wittenberg, looks on. Photo: GNC/LWF, F. Hübner

the project with the city, presided at a prayer service for the tree dedication. He emphasized the global and ecumenical profile of the garden, which targets the planting of 500 trees by 31 October 2017. Some 80 countries from around the world are thus far represented in the trees planted since January 2009.

The dedication provided opportunity for the young reformers to tour the garden where leaders of Lutheran and other churches, representatives of the LWF and other Christian World Communions have planted Reformation trees.

The Wittenberg workshop includes discussion on climate justice, an LWF

advocacy area in which youth have played an important role representing the LWF at a number of high level meetings and initiating the global Fast for the Climate campaign.

Kasch called on the young reformers to encourage churches that have not yet participated in the project to do so. Each church that plants a tree in the Luther Garden is required to plant a matching one in their respective home country.

A member church of the LWF since 1947, GELC is one of the 11 Lutheran churches in India.

Ongoing Lutheran reformation needs young people’s creativity

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge encouraged young adults from the member churches to be creative in discerning ideas that will support the LWF as it projects its future.

“My pledge is that we will listen to what you will bring to us because when we take the next steps, we want to do that with the young people in the LWF,” Junge told the young reformers meeting in the city of the Reformation for their first international workshop.

In his presentation about the LWF, the general secretary reminded the

youth of their critical contribution to the LWF over the years, saying he considered the gathering in Wittenberg as a strong expression and embodiment of the communion of churches.

“Since its founding, the LWF holds fast to the vocation to come together, so we can meet one another, engage in mutual relations of conversations, and particularly in the present times marked by fragmentation and polarization,” Junge said. His address drew attention to the founding church leaders, who made a commitment to establish the LWF in 1947 in the the post-Second World context.

“They could have chosen to remain in the fragmentation then. But because of their calling of baptism as Christians, like us here, they had a particular insight into the gospel of Jesus Christ—to love and serve the neighbor,” he said.

He encouraged the youth to be guided by the fundamental message of justification by faith alone, to support LWF living out God’s call for mission and service in the world “not because of who we are and do but because of who God is and what God does.”

On how youth representation enhances their contribution in the



LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Martin Junge tells young reformers at Wittenberg to live out God's call for mission and service in the world. Photo: LWF/Marko Schoeneberg

LWF, the general secretary said the 1984 Assembly decision to ensure a 20 percent youth presence whenever the LWF comes together needs to be complemented in a meaningful way in which youth is also empowered to participate and take decisions.

He said he was convinced the GYRN process, which is built up on such repeated efforts, will help bring young people's ideas to the LWF for the next 500 years.

The general secretary reiterated LWF's continued commitment to support youth as already affirmed in their role as leaders of the LWF climate justice campaign, on the LWF Council and other processes.

Young reformers present innovative projects at global gathering

Young people at the Wittenberg gathering of youth from all parts of the world revealed the Reformation projects they will undertake when they head home.

Among the projects are the use of creative arts to promote inter-generational dialogue and reconciliation in Guatemala, "football for the climate" youth clubs in Indonesia, and a virtual networking platform linking young reformers in Australia, the United States and Germany. In all, some 76 "Living Reformation" projects are being developed by young Lutherans meeting in the Reformation city of Wittenberg.

Three delegates representing the LWF Global Young Reformers' Network unveiled their "Living Reformation" project ideas at a press conference on 3 September. The initiatives conceived at the workshop will be developed until the 2017 Reformation anniversary, and will involve fellow youth in local churches.

LWF Vice-President for Asia, Eun-hae Kwon, commended the young reformers for taking up the initiatives aimed at bringing changes in their churches and communities, and for addressing the current challenges faced by Christians globally.

The projects are being developed under the LWF Twelfth Assembly



LWF Vice-President for Asia, Eun-hae Kwon (left), with LWF Council member, Anna-Maria Klassen, praised young Lutherans for their efforts to address challenges faced by Christians globally. Photo: Johanan Celine Valeriano

sub-themes "Salvation not for sale," "Creation not for sale" and "Human beings not for sale." They will complement ongoing work in the respective churches.

"We are a communion of churches in ongoing reformation and in our journey young generations are the integral part of our communion that gives new inspiration and creativity," emphasized Kwon, a member of the Lutheran Church in Korea.

Explaining his initiative, "football for the climate," Pimpinan B. Sijabat

from the Indonesian Christian Church said he had opted for a popular youth sport in his country to engage young people to discuss and do something about the effects of climate change. He said the living reformation project would involve youth from the Lutheran and other churches, other religious communities and seek greater engagement across communities in activities such as tree planting, collecting litter and recycling waste.

Pablo Solórzano Gudiel, Guatemala Lutheran Church said creative arts—

drawing, music and dance among others—can help reconcile Guatemalans with the untold dark history of the 1967-1997 civil war in the Latin American country.

Sophie Louise Gerrie, Lutheran Church of Australia, wants to set up a networking platform using virtual post cards that will help participants share messages on the three Reformation anniversary sub-themes. She would invite friends across the world to join in. The modest fee to be requested for each card will go towards an LWF project to be decided.

Embracing young people's gifts

Kwon emphasized LWF's commitment to empower young people in all

aspects of church and communion life ahead of the Reformation anniversary. "In this process, we are increasingly learning to receive and embrace the gifts young people bring into discussions, decisions and leadership throughout our communion."

In her remarks, LWF Council member, Anna-Maria Klassen, reflected on the current discussion in Germany on refugees in Europe. She emphasized LWF's commitment to support refugees in its work across the world. "There is no question: as Christians we have to welcome the stranger," she added, referring to LWF's endorsement of faith-based organizations' collaboration with the United Nations refugee agency.

Joining the young reformers via skype, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr

Martin Junge reassured them of continuing support, prayers and engagement with the respective churches to secure greater youth participation including at the 2017 Assembly in Namibia. "What I saw among you is a great love for the gospel, for the church, for the world, and for creation. You need the space to share what you learned and experienced locally and globally."

Later in the evening, the young reformers celebrated the closing worship, for which they had prepared liturgy together during the two-week event. The workshop concluded with the young reformers mapping out the next steps for the global network.

Heading back home inspired to act for a just climate

Many of the LWF member church representatives at the young reformers' workshop in Wittenberg will be going back home with greater awareness and inspiration for climate justice advocacy.

During a 1 September Fast for the Climate prayer service in the Wittenberg Catholic Church, the young reformers reflected again on climate change, a major topic of the international workshop.

Jeff Buhse thanked those who had responded to LWF's invitation to join the once-a-month action of fasting in solidarity with the poor and marginal-

ized, who are the most adversely affected by climate change.

"What is most important in fasting is to use this time for some reflection and self-thought; to really think about what you can do differently in your life for the benefit of others," said Buhse, a member of the LWF working group on climate justice.

Here's what inspired young reformers from Canada, Indonesia, Russia and South Africa to join the Fast for the Climate campaign, as they count down to the December United Nations climate change conference in Paris, France:

Jacob Rempel, 19, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

I really felt inspired by the workshop. I know the world is changing through the climate and we need to take actions.

Though fasting may be a small way when it is one person, we can all work together in a larger movement, because it is not just the links of the chain that count, it is the entire chain.

When I get back home, working towards more green actions can include not having all the lights on during wor-



Jacob R. H. Rempel says he will work towards connecting "the links in the entire chain" in Canada to show solidarity with victims of the global climate change crisis.



Indonesian young reformer Pimpinan B. Sijabat explains his idea of "football for climate justice".

ship and possibly using candles instead, or relying more on sunshine for lighting.

I'll also encourage more outdoor activities instead of movie nights as a way of reducing our carbon footprint.

Pimpinan Brades Sijabat, 23, Indonesian Christian Church

This workshop has really inspired me; that's why I decided to join the "Fast for the Climate" campaign. At the Wittenberg workshop, I learnt a lot from all over the world about the situation of people affected by climate change. When I go back home, I can do more to raise this awareness and show solidarity with those suffering.

How will I do this? In my country, football is very popular. Through youth football clubs, we can talk about climate change and introduce practical projects like tree planting, collecting litter and recycling waste. The first challenge is to get youth together; because if we just say, "Hi there, come for tree planting," without a fun activity, no youth will join.

I'll invite not only youth from Indonesian Lutheran churches but other churches too and faith communities.

Vera Tkach, 28, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia

The Wittenberg workshop really inspired me. I learned that as Christians, we are responsible for taking care of our neighbors, our surroundings and nature. We also need to pray for and support those who suffer due to climate change. Although they live in other countries far from us, they are our neighbors: our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I'm already active in climate advocacy by signing petitions on environmental protection in the eastern part of Russia, and I will continue to do that. In my town, Smolensk, I'll continue in campaigns for tree planting, cleaning river banks and restoring Lutheran historical sites. I hope we can involve youth in planting a Reformation tree in Moscow to match the one the bishop planted at the Luther Garden in Wittenberg.

Cedric Boikanyo Kgwatlhe, 32, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa

I did not know much about climate justice before coming to Wittenberg. This

workshop has been a great inspiration. I joined in the first-of-the-month fast as a way of advocacy, awareness raising and solidarity for people affected by the global climate crisis.

When I get back home, I plan to begin a few projects; starting small so that I can get support from other people. The first step will be to gather a group of young people and educate them more about climate change and climate injustices.

I have realized that I use my car a lot, even when not necessary. With support from my friends, I'll introduce a car-free day or car-free Sunday, whereby we would use bicycles instead of motorcars or motorcycles. I'll need to engage the city authorities and non-profit organizations to donate the bicycles. I'm convinced we will get the support we need as some of our congregants work with these organizations. It's a small but meaningful contribution to lowering fuel consumption.

All photos: LWF/Johanan C. Valeriano



Vera Tkach, youth director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia promised greater advocacy and prayers.



South African youth ministry volunteer coordinator Cedric Kgwatlhe hopes to convince his Pretoria congregation to adopt a bicycle Sunday.

**More news on Workshop Wittenberg at
www.lutheranworld.org/content/workshop-wittenberg**

Tanzanian and Swedish church leadership give thanks for gift of communion

Joint meeting produces statement promoting partnership

RÄTTVIK, Sweden/Geneva (LWI) – Bishops from two of the largest Lutheran churches in the world met, held discussions and worshipped together in order to deepen relations between the two bodies.

In a four-day meeting in Rättvik, Sweden, 14 bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and all 14 from the Church of Sweden shared the gift of communion, worshiped and explored ways of strengthening relations as leaders in the one Church of Jesus Christ.

The meeting was hosted by the Church of Sweden with the aim of enabling the two churches to strengthen confidence in one another, and of understanding the contexts and challenges that each church faces.

Discussion covered leadership, common challenges, how to maintain and promote cooperation, as well as partnership between the churches.

From the meeting came a statement signed by ELCT Bishop Dr Alex Malasusa on behalf of the Tanzanian bishops present and by the Church of Sweden's Archbishop Antje Jackelén on behalf of the Swedish bishops.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge held up the meeting as an example of firm relations of member churches of the Communion.

“This is what LWF member churches stand for and are known for: mutuality and solidarity when they meet, respect for diversity and mutual accountability as they jointly discern their participation in God's mission, and inclusion and participation as they express communion relationships that are a gift before they are a task.

“I celebrate the ways in which leaders from Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania have embodied these values of the LWF com-



Bishops from Tanzania and Sweden deepen relations between the two churches during a four-day meeting in Sweden. Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON

munion as they discerned Scriptures and God's will in today's world,” Junge said.

Being a church in dialogue

Discussion focused on teaching and education, poverty, discipleship, modern communication and being a church in dialogue – both in society and with other religions, the statement that came from the discussion said.

The statement went on to list a series of calls to action by the churches. Among them were to give thanks to God for the gift of communion and for journeys of learning, to persevere with mutual prayer, ministry and diaconia to the world and to care for creation.

It also called upon the two churches to renew their relationship being mindful of generational inclusiveness, to encourage interfaith dialogue and friendly co-existence, to prioritize education and teaching of the Christian faith, and to promote women in leadership.

It set out a number of commitments for leaders of the church.

“As leaders of our churches we commit ourselves to promote mutual

learning through exchange of groups, personnel and programs at national, diocesan and parish levels, to nurture discipleship and ministry of all the baptised in accordance with the principles of the Lutheran Reformation, to fight poverty, both material and spiritual, and to share and respect theology shaped by our traditions and the contexts in which we live.”

Highlight our different conditions

Before the meeting, Archbishop Antje Jackelén said the Church of Sweden had a long-standing relationship with the ELCT. “We would now like to devote time to getting to know each other better as leaders in the worldwide church. We will highlight how our different conditions affect our way of being a church,” she said.

Discussion was guided by text from the Book of Acts of the Apostles which describes the life of the first Christians. In pairs – one from each country – the bishops led discussions, Bible studies, the Eucharist and prayers.

“We are doing this because there we find a story about people who tried to interpret their contemporary context and be a church in it. These Bible stories describe how completely new relationships were formed between

different languages and cultures, and we want to be inspired by this,” Archbishop Jackelén said before the conference.

The Church of Sweden and the ELCT are both members of the Lu-

theran World Federation. With 6.5 million members, the Church of Sweden is the largest in the Communion, while the ELCT is the third largest with more than 5.8 million members, according to LWF 2013 statistics.

“What have you done or failed to do for one of these?”

Finnish archbishop speaks out against harsh humanitarian cutbacks

HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA (LWI)— The Finnish Archbishop Kari Mäkinen has called for solidarity with refugees and encouraged parishes to raise their mission and diakonia allocations. The call from the Archbishop comes in the wake of the decision in July by the Finnish government to cut state funding to non-governmental organizations by 43 percent.

“This is about values,” the archbishop said in his opening remarks at the Church’s Council for International Relations seminar. “One of the world’s most prosperous countries is telling both its own citizens and the international community: ‘What happens in the rest of the world is not so important. The main thing is that we get by.’”

The drastic cut in funding will severely affect humanitarian church organizations such as the Finnish Evangelical Mission and Finn Church Aid.

“But the millions of people who are most affected are struggling with living conditions that are difficult for us to imagine,” Mäkinen said.

Uncertainty and a sense of insecurity lead people to forget the shared humanity in God’s creation, he warned. “Christ is the one for whom clean water in Ethiopia is the question; Christ is the one who speaks about education in Nepal; Christ is the one whose life is saved on the Mediterranean Sea,” the archbishop said. “At the end, when all the books have been opened, the Lord of the Church has but one question: What have you done or failed to do for one of these?”

The archbishop warned churches against taking up the antagonism of

domestic charity versus development aid, and encouraged parishes in 2016 to increase their allocation for mission and international diakonia. “The church can lead by example and give a clear message by its own deeds,” he said.

“If we are to be faithful to Our Lord, the church of Christ must fearlessly defend the inalienable and absolute value of each person created and redeemed by God. At all times and everywhere,” Mäkinen stressed.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the words of the Finnish Archbishop. Through its Department for World Service, the LWF works with over 2 million refugees in the world on a daily basis, in the areas they have fled to, and in the areas they came from. “The needs are enormous,” LWF World Service Director Maria Immonen said. “It is important that Europe has woken up

to the human tragedy on its shores and is beginning to react on a scale that is more appropriate, it is very encouraging.”

“At the same time it is crucial to remember that only a very small percentage of the 60 million refugees in the world even try to come to Europe,” Immonen added. “The vast majority remains in situations which are very difficult, further away from our cameras and media presence. We need to make sure that all refugees, wherever they are, are met with dignity, and their human rights are respected.”

“This crisis is going to be with us for a long time and the increasing humanitarian efforts must be complemented with political efforts to resolve the conflicts that are producing unbearable situations for civilians, and conflict resolution and peace building efforts at all levels need to be emphasised,” she concluded.



“The Middle East needs justice, not more arms”

LWF Council expressed concerns over ongoing violence

GENEVA (LWI) – At its 2015 meeting, the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council adopted a resolution on the Middle East, voicing concern about violence in the region, the vulnerability of religious and other minorities, and the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

“Religion has been used to legitimize much of the region’s violence,” the resolution states, citing the situation in Syria, Iraq and the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Religious groups have been targeted. In this context, efforts to promote religiously-identified political moderation are struggling against the growth of extremism.

“The region needs justice not more arms,” the resolution says.

Millions of displaced and refugees

It also mentions the millions of displaced people, who have sought refuge in Jordan, Turkey and other countries. “These host countries

cannot keep up this level of welcome indefinitely,” the resolution states.

LWF is assisting people who have been affected by all of these conflicts. In Northern Iraq, LWF is assisting internally displaced people from the Sinjar area who are now living in refugee camps and host communities in Dohuk, as well as in churches in the Jordanian capital Amman.

In Jordan, LWF is supporting refugees from Syria in Za’atari refugee camp, and in neighboring host communities. More than 80,000 people, many of them children, have been forced into this protracted refugee situation. As the war in Syria enters its fifth year, their future is uncertain.

The resolution also mentions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unresolved for 67 years. “In the latest Gaza war last year, more than 2,000 people were killed, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian civilians; 490 of these civilians were children,” the resolution reads.

Extreme needs

When violence erupted in Gaza in August 2014, the LWF-run Augusta Victoria Hospital sent two volunteer medical teams, totaling six doctors and six nurses, to Gaza to care for the increasing number of people injured in the ongoing conflict with Israel. The AVH team included specialists in emergency medicine, intensive care, surgery, internal medicine and pediatrics, with accompanying specialty nursing. The team also brought in much-needed medical supplies and medicines. Five hospitals and 34 clinics had been shut down in Gaza due to the insecure situation.

The medical team told harrowing stories about the situation in Gaza during the shelling. “There are people sleeping all around us in the hospital, on the floors, in the corridors, homeless, hopeless, with no families. Volunteers in the hospital do nothing but mop spilt blood covering the floors. The smell of blood is the only odour,” one of the nurses wrote.

Churches asked to advocate

The AVH also set up a department with 12 additional surgical beds and four intensive care beds to serve injured casualties and cancer patients trapped in Gaza.

In its resolution, the LWF Council urges the international community to “resolve the region’s conflicts through negotiation rather than further violence.” It calls upon member churches to “advocate with their governments to ensure constructive engagement and to address the causes of human suffering rather than addressing their effects only.”



Augusta Victoria Hospital staff before entering Gaza at the time of the 2014 conflict. The LWF Council has condemned the continued violence in the region. Photo: LWF Jerusalem

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Bishop Emeritus Niels Henrik Arendt (1950-2015)

Deep Commitment and Passion to Serve the Church

Leaders of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have expressed their shock at the sudden death of Bishop Emeritus Niels Henrik Arendt of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. He died on 24 August, aged 64, following a short illness.

Arendt, who was the chairperson of the LWF Committee for Mission and Development, and a member of the Council and the Meeting of Officers, served as bishop of the Haderslev Diocese of the Danish church from 1999 to 2013.

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, president of the LWF, said he had come to know Arendt as a good theologian whose love for the Lutheran church in Denmark led him to become a strong supporter of and actor in the LWF.

Arendt's passion for mission and understanding of accompaniment made him a good choice as chair of the Committee for Mission and Development, the LWF president added. "Bishop Niels will be missed both in the Meeting of Officers and the Council as well as in LWF circles."

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, who was participating

in the Global Young Reformers workshop in Wittenberg, Germany, when he heard of Bishop Arendt's sudden passing, said the gathering was deeply affected by the news along with all colleagues at the LWF Communion Office in Geneva.

"There are people who, no matter for how long or short we have known them, leave indelible memories with us, and Niels Henrik is one of them," Junge said. "His serenity, wisdom, warm smile, deep commitment and passion to serve the church made a great difference in the ministries to which he was called, among them as LWF Council member."

Bishop Arendt was a well-spoken and reflective theologian and he had a love for the Danish collection of hymns. One hymn in particular had taken on much meaning for him. "See, the sun is rising" from 1891, expresses a life journey that is in God's hand despite danger and death.

Reflecting on faith, doubt and life, Arendt said in an interview while still Bishop, "the hymn became permission to embrace life for better or worse with God's blessing. It taught me that

faith does not have to be compromised when met with challenges, doubt and anxiety. But it can be strengthened. A child's simple reception of the Kingdom of God is best for the child. But if you insist on staying in the chamber of simplicity as a grown-up, your life becomes untruthful. The beauty is that a grown-up can recover the simple piety of a child just by exposing his or her faith to life's joys and sorrows. When you have experienced life on the edge and is only upheld because God wants to uphold you, an almost childish gratitude and confidence may spring into existence."

Born in Copenhagen in 1950, Arendt served as a pastor from 1975 to 1992, when he became dean of Haderslev. Between 1985 and 1987 he was sent by Mission Afrika as a theological advisor to the Lutheran churches in Sierra Leone.

The time Arendt and his family – wife Birgitte, a theologian, and three small children at the time – spent in Sierra Leone offering theological training to pastors and studying Christian-Muslim relations shaped their outlook on life and the world.

After serving as bishop in the Haderslev Diocese, Arendt returned to pastoral ministry in Madum and Stadby and worked as the Danish church's theological advisor around the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Arendt volunteered for numerous organizations, including DanChurchAid, the Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture, the Ethical Council and the Forum for Islam and Christianity. He was chairperson of the Grundtvig Forum, which debates the thinking of renowned Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig.

Bishop Arendt grew up in a home where both parents were theologians. He had five brothers, and leaves his wife of 43 years, Birgitte, and four children.



Bishop Niels Henrik Arendt, right, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, addressing LWF Council participants during the panel presentation on 14 June 2013. Bishop Arendt died on 23 August 2015. Photo: LWF/Maximilian Haas

Dialogue among faith groups in Myanmar critical for nation building

LWF encourages initiatives that strengthen peace

YANGON, Myanmar/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has encouraged religious leaders in Myanmar to work together in initiatives that strengthen dialogue and promote unity among faith groups in the country.

Through its area desk for Asia at the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW), the LWF commended the Interfaith Dialogue Group of Myanmar (IDGM) for its efforts in promoting peace in the society, saying this adds value to ongoing developments in the South-east Asian country.

The IDGM and LWF jointly hosted a conference on 30 July to deliberate how faith leaders in Myanmar can strengthen religious harmony in society particularly at the grassroots. Around 40 faith leaders from the five major religions in the country namely the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim participated as well as government representatives through the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Even though in recent years the government of Myanmar has radically eased political, economic and social restrictions, the country continues to experience heightened tension as a result of religious and ethnic conflicts in some parts of the country. "Conversations between people of different faiths should be an ongoing activity. It is only on the strength of the friendships forged that conflicts—should they occur—could be quickly and peacefully resolved," said Rev. Dr William Chang, LWF area secretary for Asia at DMD.

Chang and Rev. Dr Simone Sinn, LWF study secretary for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations at DTPW presented LWF's work at the conference. In her keynote address focusing on "Religions' Joint Engagement



Faith leaders from Myanmar and LWF representatives at the July conference in Yangon.
Photo: LWF/S. Lawrence

for Justice and Peace," Sinn explained that dialogue with other faiths is an important aspect of LWF's public witness as a communion of churches. "Peace and reconciliation should not just be a general talk, but a very concrete task: religious leaders need to establish constructive relationships with each other and with their communities," she said.

Care for marginalized people

Dr Tin Thein Naing, representing the Buddhist community, said all religious leaders have equal responsibility in ensuring peace and the wellbeing of all people particularly in today's context of conflicts in society, growing individualism and further marginalization of already vulnerable groups.

Muslim leader Al Haj Mohamed Amin noted that "religious life is part of public life," therefore unity in diversity was key to strengthening common ground for collaboration. Mr Tin Kyine, from the Baha'i expressed appreciation for the opportunity to dialogue as faith groups and to plan joint actions.

The IDGM's initiatives include support for people affected by HIV and AIDS in a country with a relatively low HIV prevalence of less than one percent, but with potential for increase if the risk of the virus spread is not stemmed.

The Myanmar Council of Churches, to which the Lutheran churches in the country are affiliated, is a member of the interfaith platform, which was established in 2013 to promote collaboration on common issues relating to development processes.

Mr U Sein Maw, the Yangon Region head of religious affairs, assured participants of the government's willingness to work with all faith-based groups in their ongoing and future efforts in order to increase the quality of life in the country of 53 million people.

Delegates at the one-day gathering included representatives of the four LWF member churches there. LWF World Service also has a country program in Myanmar.

By Steven Lawrence, regional expression officer for the LWF Asian region.

Growing towards inclusive community in Finnish church

First Nordic translation of LWF Gender Justice Policy

HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA (LWI) – The first Nordic translation of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Gender Justice Policy will help make it part of the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), Helsinki Bishop Irja Askola predicts.

The Finnish translation of the global document, which was launched at a seminar attended by 60 participants in Helsinki on 24 September, underscores the inclusive principles of the LWF policy adopted in 2013, she added.

“Growing towards an inclusive community, one needs to communicate with the language that is known by the members of that community. Not everyone in Finland understands English! Sometimes the global document, which you read in your own mother tongue, invites you differently,” she noted.

“Well, this speaks to us and about us,” she emphasized.

The policy outlines the main steps towards reaching gender equality and justice. A number of churches in the worldwide LWF communion have already begun to use it as a tool in

their respective contexts. Other completed translations in addition to LWF’s English, German, French and Spanish include Japanese, Korean and Swahili.

Askola noted that many of the principles embodied in the LWF policy are already known to the ELCF. However, she added that having it in Finnish will raise new questions around inclusiveness.

“Do we invite into our processes only those whom we know as ‘safe

causes’ or do we take a risk? In other words, is there a possibility of learning from those who we do not know yet or whose questions might disturb us? Do we dare to ask?” she concluded.

The ELCF has over 4.1 million members in its 430 parishes. Askola, the country’s first Lutheran woman bishop, is among the nine diocesan heads of the church that is led by Archbishop Dr Kari Mäkinen.



“The gender justice policy “speaks to us and about us,” says Helsinki Bishop Irja Askola.” Photo: ELCF

Harnessing local resources for a sustainable church in Africa

Credibility and accountability urged at West African workshop

ACCRA, Ghana/GENEVA (LWI) – The President of the Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa Archbishop Christian Ekong, urged churches in the communion to set up structures that ensure credibility and accountability to help secure funding to sustain their ministries.

Ekong was speaking following a workshop on local resource mobilization held 2-7 August in Accra, Ghana, to address the issue of dwindling funding

from northern partner churches due to the global financial crisis, and the need to secure indigenous sources of support. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development (DMD) organized the sub-regional workshop, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana.

“The churches must not wait on anybody to come from elsewhere to do for them what they can do by themselves. Funds are everywhere. It is the

ability to tap them that the churches need,” said Ekong, who heads the Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN).

The LCN archbishop called on leaders of the Lutheran churches in Central and Western Africa to be agents of change and ensure accountability and credibility in their institutions.

The workshop drew 20 participants from LWF member churches in Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria, to discuss poverty and injustice, and how



Participants at a breakout session during the Luccwa training workshop in Accra, Ghana. Photo: Luccwa

churches might address these issues through improved fundraising, communication and transparency.

Participants agreed that donors are not willing to support projects that will not endure and that churches, therefore, must ensure that they choose sustainable projects. Transparency is crucial and churches should openly discuss their work.

“Churches or organizations must not wait for resources to be depleted before they can think of mobilizing funds, but must identify projects and mobilize resources for them,” noted Mr Geoffrey Kalugendo, a capacity building consultant for the LWF, who co-facilitated the workshop.

Kalugendo, who has worked with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

Tanzania, noted that sustainability is a continuous process. He said there are plenty of resources in Africa that churches can harness in order to become sustainable but they need to adopt appropriate ways of communicating how they use such funds.

Participants agreed that all are accountable to God first then to one another, adding that for accountability to thrive, there must be systems in place that offer good governance and decision-making.

Ms Simangaliso Hove, LWF secretary for planning and finance at DMD, who conducted part of the training, expressed appreciation for the workshop. “Participants were ready to discuss and find solutions. They are ready to deal with issues that will bring the needed change,” she added.

Felix Samari, communications officer for the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria contributed this story.

Solidarity for Ukrainian church diaconal work amid conflict

Assistance to the displaced and people with disabilities

ODESSA, Ukraine/GENEVA (LWI) – In the midst of the 16-month-old war in the Ukraine that has killed over 6,000 people and displaced 1.5 million, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Ukraine (GELCU) and the Living Hope diaconal organization continue to respond to the overwhelming needs of people affected by the conflict.

Members of a “solidarity group” of diaconal actors from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe visiting GELCU recently, witnessed the church’s diaconal work in the war pitting the Kiev government against pro-Russian separatists seeking control of the country’s eastern region.

There are waves of displaced people seeking new homes in dilapi-

dated towns, the four-person solidarity group reported on their 20-22 May

visit hosted by GELCU Bishop Serge Maschewski and Nicole Borisuk of



Humanitarian aid assistance to children in Donbas area. Photo: Janka Adameová

Living Hope. Water and electricity are scarce and the battle scarred infrastructure remains one of the biggest obstacles to bringing food and other basic needs to towns in the Donbass region, one of the most severely affected by the conflict.

In Odessa alone, the group noted, there are 20,000 officially registered displaced people though unofficial estimates suggest the numbers could be as high as 300,000 in the region of around 1 million inhabitants.

State support is paltry and those in need therefore turn to the churches and non-profit organizations. Injured soldiers show up at hospitals in their burnt uniforms and need clothes, shoes, blankets and dishes. Diaconal workers, non-profit organizations and volunteers respond, the four-person team reported.

They noted that people who are already vulnerable in society face particular difficulties as they try to find their place in the war-torn society. The report cites the situation of 1,500 people with disabilities who had been evacuated from Donbass to former sanatoria or recreation homes near Odessa, but are now threatened with eviction by the local authorities.

War trauma and deprivation

The diaconal workers noted that soldiers returning from the war suffer from physical and mental injuries,

have difficulty re-integrating into family life and frequently turn to alcohol and are physically abusive. Diaconal support in such cases includes pastoral care.

GELCU and Living Hope extend such care to the general population, with many people suffering from depression in the midst of the war and deprivation. While some stay in dangerous situations because they feel attached to the land, others suffer the frustration of looking forward to potential political change. A group of 46 psychologists supported by the diaconal center in Odessa provide counseling services on a voluntary basis, including in congregations where groups of displaced people have settled. Since April 2015 the church diaconal center has also established an SOS-telephone line to facilitate ready access to such help. In Odessa alone, more than 1,800 people who mostly suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome have been assisted.

As families are split on the validity of the war and the new patriotic movements, diaconal workers in light of the current situation urge the nurturing of solidarity, something the congregation in Dnepropetrovsk in the Donbass region is encouraging.

Signs of hope

Still, the group noted, out of this chaos of war, has risen a kibbutz—an agricultural enterprise with land, cows,

chicken, goats and ducks—that brings together 100 people in a former factory recreation center.

“This new future life is shaped by investing in the resources of the inhabitants themselves. Each of them, based on their gifts, creates employment possibilities. The fruits of participatory approaches for living together have already been experienced,” the solidarity group noted.

The group emphasized the urgent need for long-term peace building in the Ukraine. “Mutual understanding and tolerance should be the basis for creating new relations between the people,” the group stated in its report.

The solidarity group visit to Ukraine was part of the “Seeking Conviviality” initiative by the LWF member churches and diaconal organizations in the European region. The “conviviality” model of diakonia emphasizes social service work that includes participatory action by the people affected so that they can bring about their own transformation.

“In this light, the implications of the concept of conviviality seem to be legitimate. Peace-making as a concept is becoming more and more important for all age groups and diverse target groups,” the group concluded.

The group visiting GELCU included Rev. Avo Uprus (Estonia); Mag. Janka Adameova (Czech Republic), Rev. Martin Urdze (Latvia) and Ukrainians Ljubov Galimova and Nicole Borisuk.

French churches appeal for decisive action in Paris

Immeasurable suffering for the poorest and future generations

PARIS, France/GENEVA (LWI)—Alarmed by the impact of climate change on the environment and the most vulnerable people, French churches are urging decisive action from political and economic leaders who will gather in Paris this November.

In a statement issued on 29 September, the Council of Christian

Churches of France (CÉCEF) stated the urgency to work towards limiting global warming “so that the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters and future generations do not suffer more.”

France will host the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 30 November to

11 December. The meeting aims to achieve a new agreement on climate change, obliging all nations to keep global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius.

“We are aware of the grave threats facing the world due to climate change caused by the misuse by human beings of the resources with which they



LWF delegates and other advocates at the COP 20 climate change conference in Lima, Peru, in 2014. Photo: LWF/Sean Hawkey

have been provided,” the council said in the statement jointly signed by CÉCEF Co-Presidents Rev. François Clavairoly, Metropolitan Emmanuel and Archbishop Georges Pontier.

The ecumenical council represents churches from the Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions in France. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches are affil-

ated through the Protestant Federation of France.

“We feel compelled to tackle the causes of such destruction. We see the immeasurable suffering it causes. We are particularly concerned for the weakest and poorest among us,” the church leaders said.

Religious leaders in the country hosting the climate change conference

have been advocating for meaningful action at the meeting. In July, the head of the United Protestant Church of France (EPUF) Rev. Laurent Schlumberger joined faith leaders seeking the French government’s commitment in preparing a safe future for coming generations. They presented French President Francois Hollande with a statement on the spiritual and moral challenges of climate change.

LWF’s global advocacy for climate justice includes active engagement in the #FastForTheClimate initiative which it co-started in 2013 with other faith-based and civil society organizations. The campaign incorporates an invitation to observe fasting on the first day of each month until the COP 21 conference, at which the LWF will be represented.

The LWF has begun preparing for the Paris conference in collaboration with other ecumenical and interfaith actors. Its delegation drawn from all the seven LWF regions includes persons from climate-change affected countries such as Guyana, India, Russia and Senegal.

LWF welcomes new impulse towards sustainable development

Rights-based approach, gender justice and accountability key to ending poverty

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation welcomes the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a sign that the world community has not abandoned the vision that every individual should live in dignity.

“Lutheran churches and the LWF have for decades been involved in diaconal activities, seeking to improve conditions of communities. The SDGs represent a new impulse to join hands with other actors committed to the same purpose,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge.

“We look forward to using the SDGs as a compass to help direct our efforts to promote human dignity, to welcome



Thanks to an LWF-supported project to bring piped and clean drinking water to the Andean highlands, Filomena Huanaco Casilla (left) and Rosenda Challco Barrera will no longer have to depend on natural but unsafe water sources in their remote village. Photo: LWF/I. Dorji

the stranger, and to serve those who are the most vulnerable,” he added.

More than 150 world leaders attending the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York, 25-27 September, adopted the ambitious SDG agenda that includes 17 goals and 169 targets to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change over the next 15 years.

The UN stated that this “momentous agenda” would help launch action by the international community and national governments to promote shared prosperity and wellbeing for all people over the next decade and half.

Junge noted that the previous UN Millennium Development Goals helped

to focus attention and resources on improving lives. The SDGs, he emphasized, include elements that the LWF has found to be critical to development, including a rights-based approach, gender justice and accountability.

At its Council meeting in June, the LWF affirmed support for the SDGs, which include good governance (transparency, accountability, anti-corruption), justice for the poor and equality (equal access to essential services) and peacebuilding.

The governing body urged LWF member churches to stay informed about the SDGs and advocate for their full funding and implementation. Citing cooperation with several UN agencies

in humanitarian response and development work, the Council noted that the LWF as a global communion of churches is especially well placed to promote the SDGs from a diaconal or service perspective.

“The UN recognizes the critical role of faith-based organizations in the attainment of the 17 goals of the SDGs,” Junge said following the UN summit.

“It is important that faith-based organizations join this call, thereby offering their critical perspectives on what is being identified as development, and the premises on which such understanding rests,” he concluded.

Call for theology that engages with Asia’s realities

LWF co-sponsored consultation affirms continued dialogue at the grassroots of society

HONG KONG/GENEVA (LWI) – An international consultation deliberating the role of religion in the public space in Asia has called for religious leaders to urgently articulate theology “not only with our heads but with our hearts and bodies fully engaged in the world.”

The Lutheran World Federation organized the 3-7 September gathering, Religious Life and Public Space in Asia,

jointly with the Tao Fong Shan Christian Center and the Norwegian-based missionary organization, Areopagos. In a communiqué, the 30 theologians and scholars of religion who took part affirmed the significance of dialogue between people of different faiths as it occurs spontaneously at the grassroots of society and as it rallies community members around specific social issues.

This approach offered disadvantaged populations the possibility “to claim their voice and influence the discourse” while facilitating neighborly relations in “spite of very different religious beliefs,” they noted.

Speakers at the consultation included Prof. Anselm Min of Claremont Graduate University, California, United States, who reminded participants of the region’s rich

Lutheran theologians study Paul’s letters for the contemporary church

A group of 35 biblical scholars from Lutheran and other Christian traditions met in Aarhus, Denmark, for the fourth Bible interpretation conference hosted by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Aarhus University.

The 24-29 September event concluded a series of international hermeneutics (scriptural interpretation) conferences organized by the LWF since 2011. The program seeks to explore how contemporary Lutherans can interpret the Bible together in ways that are faithful to the text itself, relate to the Lutheran tradition and are responsive to different contextual challenges.

Under the theme “The Power of the Gospel: Developing Pauline Hermeneutics,” this year’s gathering brought together leading global scholars from different theological disciplines to read Paul’s letters in relationship to the Lutheran heritage and explore how these relate to today’s political and economic situations.

The phrase ‘the power of the gospel’, which comes from Paul’s letter to the Romans, reflects how he understood the value and meaning of the good news. “In times when highly ambiguous

global power plays gain traction in politics, the economy, sports and the military, it is perhaps not surprising that Lutheran theologians reflect on the power of the gospel,” noted Prof. Eve-Marie Becker of Aarhus University.

Bringing voices of theologians from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas to read Paul is significant for Lutherans, as Paul is considered as one of the important authorities in Lutheran theology.

As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 draws near, “it is appropriate that we go back to the scriptures and to Paul to be reminded of the foundations of the faith,” said Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, LWF study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice, who is responsible for this program.

The conference concluded the LWF hermeneutics process, which included the study of the Fourth Gospel (John), the Psalms and the Gospel of Matthew. The learning from this process will be consolidated in the publication of an LWF Hermeneutics Statement in 2017, Mtata added.

spiritual resources and the potential of those resources to help people connect more deeply with their daily realities.

Min encouraged faith communities in Asia to mobilize their profound spirituality to help communities transcend notions of identity based on gender, ethnicity, religion, ideology and culture. He emphasized the need to intensify mutual dialogue in order to avoid misunderstandings and instead promote collaboration to reduce suffering.

Creation and salvation—two different concerns?

Prof. Notto Thelle, University of Oslo, Norway, invited participants to reconsider the distinction between creation and salvation from a Lutheran perspective by highlighting the Trinitarian structure of both.

“The problem arises when creation and salvation seem to be isolated as two separate aspects of God’s involvement in the world.” Overcoming this separation implies openness to the wisdom and experiences of other religions, added Thelle, who has been involved in several LWF dialogues over the past three decades.

Respect for co-existence was cited as a common value in Asia’s widely diverse cultural, religious and political landscape. However, youth participants from LWF member churches in Indonesia challenged this perception, arguing that sometimes conflict can offer opportunity to deepen relationships with others.

Prof. Saw Hlaing Bwa of the Myanmar Institute of Theology in Yangon added that “it is not enough to co-exist peacefully in the passive sense.” He



Japanese theologian Rev. Dr Arata Miyamoto speaks at the interfaith consultation where Prof. Notto R. Thelle from Norway (right) encouraged openness to the wisdom and experiences of other religions. Photo: LWF/I. Benesch

stressed the need to move towards building healthy relationships in the public space that affirm the right to life for all with mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust that can fully protect us from any divisive and life-destructive forces.”

Prof. Lai Pan-Chiu, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, related the Christian doctrine of salvation to Chinese cultures and religions. Lai Pan-Chiu suggested that “the doctrine of justification by faith implies an unconditional acceptance [of each other] which is based on one’s being rather than having” and therefore liberates people from affirming their value by consumption.

Public dimension of spiritual practice

Christians can bear public witness by engaging in joint initiatives with other religious communities. Prof. Kajsa Ahl-

strand, Uppsala University, Sweden, described a joint Christian-Buddhist pilgrimage from Gothenburg to Karlskoga, Sweden, that illustrated the public dimension of a deeply spiritual practice.

Presenters from mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines reflected on various aspects of religious life, inter-religious dialogue, public theology and Christian engagement in the public sphere.

In her closing remarks, Rev. Dr Simone Sinn, LWF study secretary for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations, underlined the importance of joint responses to socio-political issues that especially affect vulnerable communities. Referring to earlier remarks by Bishop Ben Chang of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, she reiterated the value of encounters that “challenge us to move beyond the Christian space within our four walls to an open space.”

Reading the Bible with love and respect for different contexts

Divergent conclusions “will always” be part of biblical interpretation

AARHUS, Denmark/GENEVA (LWI) – An international Lutheran conference on Bible interpretation has recognized the importance of reading Scripture

with love and respect as well as building a link between the use of hermeneutical concepts of ‘suspicion’ and ‘trust’.

The fourth Lutheran World Federation (LWF) international conference on Bible interpretation, which was held 24-29 at Aarhus, Denmark, in partner-

ship with Aarhus University, discussed the Apostle Paul's letters.

"The Power of the Gospel: Developing Pauline Hermeneutics", which gathered 35 biblical scholars from 17 countries, affirmed that Lutheran biblical interpretation and theology should be based on sound scholarship informed by robust historical work, attentive to the Lutheran tradition and contextual concerns.

Divisive issues

Participants noted that despite careful academic work, there will always be divergent conclusions on how to apply certain Scripture passages to contemporary life in different contexts.

LWF Council member Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer, professor of systematic theology at the University of Augsburg, Germany, remarked that he was impressed by how intensively participants from very different backgrounds – Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas – dealt with the interpretation of Paul's letters.

"The conference provided a safe space where even controversial and sometimes divisive issues, such as sexual orientation could be discussed in an atmosphere of openness, mutual trust and respect," Oberdorfer said.

Old Testament theologian Prof. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina, concurred, adding, "After learning so much about Paul during these last few days, it has become clear to me that in ethical matters Paul can, at best, give us some partial answers.

"Perhaps the biggest challenge for us is how to be a Greek to the Greeks



Paul's letters that are used to enhance the exclusion of women should be read in the context of other writings that acknowledge women's contribution in spreading God's word, noted Tanzanian theologian Rev. Dr. Hoyce Mbowe. Photo: LWF/I. Benesch

and a Jew to the Jews without losing that which defines us" as Christians, Bachmann emphasized.

Observing that some of Paul's letters are used to exclude women from full participation in the church, Rev. Dr. Hoyce Mbowe of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania suggested reading such texts in the context of those in which Paul acknowledges women's contribution in spreading God's word.

Reformation: The Bible at the center

As Lutherans and other Christians commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, in which the interpretation of Scripture played a key role in the renewal of the church, the church should re-appropriate the Bible for its strengthening and as a resource for its mission in the world today.

"The Bible," said Prof. Anders Runesson, who teaches New Testament at the University of Oslo, "should be placed at the center in the dialogue with history, tradition, individual experience and other religious traditions."

In their concluding remarks, the co-organizers, Prof. Eve-Marie Becker of Aarhus University and Rev. Dr. Kenneth Mtata, LWF study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice, highlighted the cumulative learning that had taken place since the beginning of the hermeneutics project in 2011.

The project included the study of the Fourth Gospel (John), the Psalms, the Gospel of Matthew and Paul's letters.

Becker and Mtata pointed out that the LWF statement on hermeneutics emerging from this process will be a gift for the churches as they commemorate 500 years of the Reformation at the LWF Assembly to be held in 2017.

Piazza Martin Lutero in Rome, a reminder to care for the poor

An important ecumenical witness for Christians

ROME, Italy/GENEVA (LWI) – Rome's new Piazza Martin Lutero is not only a sign that Lutherans are welcome in the cos-

mopolitan Italian city but a reminder of Luther's call for Christians to proclaim the gospel together by serving the poor.

Rev. Jens-Martin Kruse, pastor of the German-speaking congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

Italy (ELCI) made these remarks following the 16 September inauguration of a central square named after the Reformer Martin Luther. Civic and church dignitaries attended the ceremony to officially recognize the Piazza Martin Lutero, located near the historic Colosseum amphitheater.

“And at the same time this place is also a bit troubled. Here live many refugees, the homeless. For us, there is a reminder that we have an obligation to care for these people,” said Kruse, who serves about 500 Lutherans in Rome.

Piazza Martin Lutero is the result of five years of work by a group of Protestants, including Adventists, Baptists, Methodists, Waldensians and Lutherans, who collaborate in helping the city’s migrants, children and the unemployed.

They decided to lobby the local council to name a place after Martin Luther. At first there was no interest because only a few people knew who Luther was, so the group started a campaign to inform people about his life and theology.

“At the end—after a period of intense work—the council was convinced and they found a very nice central local, the Colle Oppio, where we celebrated with the mayor of

Rome, Ignazio Marino, and about 500 members of our parishes at the official opening of the new Piazza Martin Lutero,” he said.

During the ceremony a plaque was unveiled reading “Piazza Martin Lutero – German Theologian (1483-1546)”.

Rev. Heiner Bludau and Rev. Jakob Betz, the dean and vice dean of the 4,000-member ELCI, said the naming of the square after Luther marks an important moment for Christianity. “It has high symbolic value and fills us with joy. And we believe that it also constitutes an ecumenical witness in the daily life of the citizens of the capital and its many visitors,” they said.

Diverse ecumenical relations

For Kruse, Piazza Martin Lutero is a significant ecumenical development, illustrating that in Rome today Lutherans and Catholics can speak together about Luther and that they can proclaim the gospel together.

“In Rome we have very good relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Rome is not only the center of the Roman Catholic Church but also a city where all the other churches have parishes, and so we have very diverse ecumenical relationships,” Kruse noted.

To commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation triggered by Luther, there will be a series of ecumenical worship services, prayers and meetings in Rome in 2017. The year will also mark 200 years from the time German Lutherans first began worshipping in the city.

On 15 November this year, Pope Francis will follow in the footsteps of his two predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and take part in an ecumenical worship service at the Lutheran church in Rome. This will give expression to the good ecumenical relations in the city, Kruse added.

“Here in Rome we live as Christians together as much as possible and our little Lutheran parish is one important element of the city’s ecumenism,” he concluded.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), of which ELCI is a member, will mark the 2017 Reformation anniversary in a spirit of ecumenical accountability, highlighting also the 50th anniversary of the ongoing international dialogue with the Roman Catholics.

One of the outcomes of this bilateral relationship is the publication “From Conflict to Communion” in which Lutherans and Catholics for the first time, tell the history of the Reformation together. A joint working group of Catholics and Lutherans is developing liturgy for a joint commemoration of the Reformation anniversary, and this material will also be available for use by churches.

2017 site: www.lutheranworld.org/reformation-2017



The Piazza Martin Lutero constitutes an ecumenical witness in the daily life of residents and visitors to Rome, says Lutheran pastor Rev. Jens-Martin Kruse (right), who witnessed the inauguration of the public square with hundreds of parish members including Rev. Per Edler (left) of the Swedish-speaking congregation. Photo: Silke Kruse

European member churches respond to refugee crisis

“Situation has become especially dramatic”

BUDAPEST, Hungary/ GENEVA (LWI) – With thousands of refugees arriving in Hungary every day, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) mobilized resources and volunteers to provide help to refugees in Hungary and Budapest especially.

“Over the past few days, the situation in Hungary has become especially dramatic,” Bishop Tamas Fabiny, responsible for foreign affairs in the ELCH, and vice-president of the LWF said in early September. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 2,000 refugees mostly from Syria are crossing the border from Serbia to Hungary every day. Thousands are waiting around railway stations and on public squares in Budapest to board a train which would take them to Northern European countries such as Germany.

Blankets and hot meals

ELCH is collecting clothes, blankets, sleeping bags and first aid material in parishes and among church employees, and is offering 150 warm meals to refugees gathered around Keleti train station in Budapest every day. “This service is provided in cooperation with the student home located nearby,” Fabiny says. “A group of pastors and employees of the administrative center of the ELCH is distributing the food together with volunteers on site.”

Earlier, the ELCH donated about 4,000 USD to Hungarian Interchurch Aid for child care products which were distributed to refugee children in the temporary reception center in Nagyfa near Szeged, closer to the border to Serbia. The Diaconal Service of the



Refugees are boarding a train to Northern Europe in Keleti Station, Budapest, Hungary. Photo: MTI

ELCH is also donating medicine to refugee children in need. The Roma College in the city of Nyiregyhaza has also sent volunteers. ELCH is currently designing software to better coordinate volunteer activities.

“Several parishes and pastors participate in the volunteer activities,” Bishop Fabiny says, naming the Lutheran communities around Keleti Station and the nearby Pope John Paul II-square. The ELCH is also advocating against xenophobia. “The tension is tangible particularly in Hungary,” Fabiny says. “We are doing everything we can to fight anger and harmful preconceptions, and to promote a culture of mutual respect, inclusion and love instead.”

“Open hearts and doors”

Like ELCH, many LWF member churches are reaching out to refugees in Europe in the wake recent events. With initiatives to welcome refugees in their parishes and communities and public statements they are encouraging Lutherans to support those who have fled war and oppression.

“Open your hearts and doors” is a document issued by Lutheran and Reformed pastors in Austria on 2 September 2015, which asks Austrians to “receive people who had to flee. They should have shelter and support, which respect their dignity and are conforming to human rights.”

Austrian protestant congregations are asked to discuss if they have the possibility to host refugees, how they can support refugees and how to raise awareness and advocate against xenophobia. “No child should be unaccompanied and unprotected, no woman or man should be exploited or in danger, no human being should be denied humane opportunities and procedures,” the declaration reads.

“Ring of joy” to protect refugees

In Jutland (Denmark), residents and pastors in their cassocks joined hands in a “ring of joy” to protect a local asylum center which had been vandalized repeatedly in previous weeks.

In Germany, many Lutheran congregations are hosting refugees or exploring ways to provide shelter. The Evangelical Church in Bavaria has formed a task force and plans to build 100 apartments for recognized refugees until the end of 2016. Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm has asked congregations to explore possibilities of hosting some of the up

to 2,000 refugees which are currently arriving in Munich every day.

Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien, Presiding Bishop of the Church of Norway and vice-president in the LWF, issued a statement calling to support refugees arriving in Norway. “They carry the hope of safety and aid in a desperate situation,” Byfuglien says.

“We must accept those who come and meet them with respect.”

The Norwegian Church urges people to support Norwegian Church Aid and other organizations working nationally and internationally to alleviate suffering: “The situation calls upon our efforts, our prayers, our care and our donations,” Byfuglien says.

“Duty to protect refugees is not only a moral obligation”

LWF General Secretary encourages efforts to address the current crises

GENEVA (LWI) – The refugee crisis in Europe is a pivotal moment in which churches can demonstrate values of solidarity and human dignity, the LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge said in a 4 September letter to LWF member churches in Europe.

Junge commended the response of the many churches in Europe to the current crisis and recalled the strong statement from the LWF Church Leadership Consultation in May in which church leaders committed Lutheran churches to increase efforts to welcome refugees in their midst.

The General Secretary strongly lamented the failure of European political leadership. “Shocking images

convey to us that the current stalemate among European countries to jointly address the rights of refugees translates in human lives being lost every day, including children,” Junge wrote.

“The current situation reveals the crossroads at which the human family finds itself: will solidarity, mutuality and human dignity still matter? Will the notion of human beings – including refugees – as right-holders still matter? It is decisive to get the answers right.

“The protection of refugees is not only a moral obligation,” Junge reminded member churches. “As signatories of international law, in particular the Refugee Convention, European nations have committed to the duty to protect refugees.”

Important role of churches

The LWF is urging member churches to continue upholding their diaconal vocation to advocate for refugees. In a briefing on 3 September in Geneva, the UN refugee agency reported on the pressure on reception capacities in Europe to cope with the influx of refugees.

The UNHCR has declared a level-2 emergency for Greece, Macedonia and Serbia. It also underlined the role of churches and church leaders in responding to the crisis.

Junge said churches must speak out in favour of a generous welcome “that recognizes each refugee’s human dignity and that counteracts the populist messages of fear and exclusion.”

LWF member churches in Hungary, Austria, Germany and Norway, among others, have started to assist refugees arriving in their communities.

“It has been inspiring to see the numerous ways in which Lutherans and other people of goodwill have reached out to show hospitality and welcome for those who have had to flee. On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, the global communion of churches, I want to express my deep appreciation for this prophetic presence, as well as affirm and encourage you in those efforts,” Junge added.



Refugees lie exhausted in a public place in Hungary, en route to northern European countries.
Photo: MTI

“This is a shameful situation”

Advocacy initiatives to welcome strangers are not only coming from the European churches.

In an open letter to leaders of the world on 1 September, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land asked political leaders to address the causes of forced displacement. He called on those countries receiving refugees to create a culture of welcome.

“I myself am a refugee,” wrote Younan, who is also President of the LWF. “My faith and my history oblige me to speak up for these women, men and children who are washing up on beaches, are found decomposing in trucks on the highway, are crossing borders of barbed wire, and are barely surviving in makeshift camps.”

“This is a shameful situation,” Younan wrote. “It must be remembered that refugees are not vacationers. They did not leave their homes because they were looking for adventure.

“This humanitarian crisis requires even stronger actions. These people, our brothers and sisters, are crying: “Who will welcome us? Where is justice?” Younan asked.

“God hears the cries of the poor, the oppressed, and the refugee,” Younan reiterated. He called on leaders to approach refugee communities not merely as problems to be solved, but as fellow children of God deserving accompaniment, dignity and human rights.

A more just world includes care for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers

German and global partner churches affirm “the way of justice”

BREKLUM, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – Solidarity with people who have been displaced and marginalized by conflict and poverty is part of the church’s calling to create a more just world, participants at a global consultation in Germany said.

“We are called to stand alongside those who are vulnerable, to foster in our communities a culture of welcome, and to encourage political solutions and systems, which enable people to live life in dignity, peace, and harmony,”

delegates attending the 12-20 September consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany (Nordkirche) and its global partner churches stated in a communiqué.

“Walking together the way of justice” was the theme of the gathering of 60 representatives from 32 churches that are in partnership with Nordkirche, a member church of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Their reflections focused on a fresh articulation of the biblical vision of justice and the Chris-

tian calling to promote reconciliation and healing in order to transform unjust situations and structures in society.

The consultation included exposure visits to witness the challenges that churches across northern Germany face, as well as the sharing of experiences from the different continents. “Meeting refugees and listening to the stories and experiences of asylum seekers has been a heartbreaking experience for us,” the participants said.

The communiqué gathered the experiences and concerns “that we have shared in the last ten days. Now each church has to find ways of putting the proposals into practice,” remarked Dr Klaus Schäfer, director of Nordkirche’s Center for Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations.

Global solidarity and responsibility

“We all share responsibility in this matter. Every church can contribute something to the solution in its own context. It is not a question of money,” said Bishop Zacharia W. Kahuthu of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC).



Affirming global solidarity with asylum seekers, migrants and the poor, from left: Bishop Gerhard Ulrich, United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany; LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan; Nordkirche’s Synodpräses Dr Andreas Tietze; and Tanzania’s Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa, LWF Vice-President for Africa. Photo: Nordkirche/Eberhard von der Heyde

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, who is also LWF President, emphasized that “The main reason for poverty is economic injustice.”

Rev. Luke Mwololo, KELC general secretary, noted that “poverty has different dimensions in every society” and “we must fight it as a church.”

“We affirm that the notion of justice embedded in the scriptures seeks the wellbeing of all, and particularly for those regarded as the most vulner-

able—the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the captive,” the communiqué stated.

Commitment to climate justice

Delegates also addressed churches’ commitment to human rights and climate justice, including the disproportionate impact of climate change on the poor, developing countries and future generations. “We affirm responsibility of people living in west-

ern industrialized countries for unsustainable patterns of consumption, production and lifestyle and the need of a radical transformation,” they said.

A similar consultation was last organized in 2005 by the then North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, which merged in 2012 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg and the Pomeranian Evangelical Church to form Nordkirche.

(Adapted from a press release of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany)

Seeking a common Lutheran approach to Europe’s refugee crisis

Nordic and Central Western Europe leaders in solidarity visit to Hungary

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) leaders in Europe paid a solidarity visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), 2-3 October, as the region deals with the crisis of refugees and migrants fleeing war and persecution in parts of the Middle East and Africa.

Norway’s Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien and Württemberg Bishop Dr Frank O. July, LWF Vice-Presidents for the Nordic and Central Western Europe regions respectively, discussed with ELCH Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny the need for a coordinated Lutheran response in Hungary and across Europe.

Fabiny, LWF Vice-President for Central Eastern Europe, welcomed this additional expression of support from the Lutheran communion leaders. The refugee situation concerns not only the individual countries receiving those seeking refuge but it also needs a unified viewpoint on the European level, he noted.

The Hungarian Lutheran church support to the refugees includes, among others, provision of basic needs such as food, water and clothing; accompanying persons needing special assistance; and offering information in different languages.



The ELCH offered 150 daily portions of warm meals to refugees at Kelati Station, the main train station in Budapest. Photo: Zsuzsanna Bolla

“It is important for the churches across the Lutheran communion to have a common understanding of their responsibilities towards refugees,” Fabiny said.

The idea of the solidarity visit was developed during LWF President Munib Younan’s recent visit to Stuttgart. The Lutheran leaders emphasized the need to support and encourage the Hungarian church as it reaches out to the refugees, and to also advocate against tendencies that promote hostility, making the refugees feel unwelcome.

The delegation also included Mr Ralston Deffenbaugh, LWF Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, and LWF Council advisor Rev. Klaus Rieth, head of the unit for mission, ecumenism and church development at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Germany.

They traveled to Budapest as the LWF concludes an assessment mission exploring possible humanitarian response support to the ELCH and other ecumenical actors. The LWF has

urged its member churches to continue upholding their diaconal vocation by advocating for refugees, noting the efforts of churches also in Austria, Germany and Norway, among others.

“Such practical exchange with the LWF and other partners such as the World Council of Churches (WCC)

is highly important for this church,” Fabiny added, referring to the recent WCC visit there, led by the General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

[More about the European refugee crisis](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/european-refugee-crisis) www.lutheranworld.org/content/european-refugee-crisis

[Read the WCC feature story](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/the-churches-walk-with-refugees-in-hungary) www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/the-churches-walk-with-refugees-in-hungary

“It is right to provide shelter”

Focus on refugee crisis at Budapest Diakonia Day sermon

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI) – The service began with the clergy placing a diaconal cross in a prominent place. Seven pictures hung from the light-colored wood, illustrating gestures of compassion and assistance. In his sermon, Hungarian Lutheran Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny emphasized the duty of Christians in particular to help put diakonia into practice.

“Giving support and solving problems are not only matters for political and economic organizations: we have to do our part as well,” Fabiny, said at the service marking Diakonia Day in Budapest. He called for more solidarity with the refugees.

Observed on 25 September annually, Diakonia Day was more relevant this year in view of the refugee crisis and the untiring efforts of church aid agencies to reach out to the refugees mainly from countries in the Middle East and Africa, who have been streaming into Hungary for weeks.

Fabiny is bishop of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, and responsible for the church’s international relations. He is Vice-President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for Central Eastern Europe.

In his sermon, he quoted how Isaiah (58:7) describes actions that are pleasing to God: “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” These words were more



Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, speaks to an ecumenical group of church leaders visiting Hungary, 26 September 2015. File Photo: Paul Jeffrey/WCC

important than ever, Fabiny underlined in his sermon. “We must take God’s Word seriously and help all those in need, whether they are homeless, persecuted, migrants or refugees. ‘Only those who cry out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chant,’ as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said.”

About 200 diaconal and other church staff attended the service in the over 200-year-old Evangelical Lutheran episcopal church at Deák square.

International guests included Mr John Damerell, who was on an LWF humanitarian assessment mission with Hungary’s diaconal ministries, Birgit Löwe, board member of Diakonie Bavaria and Rachel Eskesen, country coordinator for Hungary in the Global Mission program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Bearers of hope

Fabiny referred to a painting reproduced on the first page of the service booklet: the famous scene of Jesus kneeling in front of Judas to wash the feet of his betrayer, the only one without a halo. “May this action be an example to us in 2015 in Hungary and the European Union. We are only credible as congregations and as believers if we engage in diaconal service and provide loving support.”

György Kramer, president of Diakonie Hungary, underlined this in his words of gratitude adding: “Hungarian diaconal ministries are trying harder than ever to find ways to help.”

During the service, Diakonie Hungary also presented prizes to its staff and sponsors, including Diakonie Bavaria. In her response, Löwe underlined the work of inclusion for

people with disabilities. The annual watchword from Romans 15:7 “Welcome one another,” was no empty phrase, she said. “We must accept ourselves and one another as Christ created us.”

Refugees in Hungary, too, should be received in a spirit of openness to their gifts and not of fear of their difference, Löwe continued. “The challenge lying before us is great, but it is right and good to provide them with shelter.

Refugees are also bearers of hope and they bring with them important experience in the field of culture and work from which we can benefit.”

(LWI correspondent Lisa Erzsza Weil wrote the original German story.)

“We cannot afford to be divided as Christians”

Young reformers at the global gathering in Wittenberg, Germany, heard from speakers from different Christian traditions on ways in which other Christian communities express the ongoing search for the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ.

“To be Lutheran means to be ecumenical” was the theme of a panel presentation at the LWF workshop of the Global Young Reformers’ Network. The LWF is approaching its Reformation anniversary in 2017 in the spirit of ecumenism.

The panelists were Erin Clark from the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom, Brother Jasper from the Community of Taizé, in France, and Judith Königsdorfer, representing the World Council of Churches Executive Committee. They offered insights on the Reformation anniversary and how ecumenism is expressed in their respective communions.

They agreed ecumenism was a positive challenge.

Jasper emphasized Christ’s call to Christians to pray together. “We all have prayer in common; this is something we can continue to do together.” He noted that brothers from different Christian traditions and cultures live together in Taizé, “not because it is very easy to live together but because we believe God has called us here.”

On ways in which the forthcoming Reformation anniversary can be marked in an ecumenical way, he encouraged workshop participants to read the joint Lutheran Catholic publication *From Conflict to Communion*. In it, Lutherans and Catholics describe for

the first time together the history of the 16th century Reformation, including the wrongful and hurtful portrayal of each other and ongoing efforts towards church unity. The publication includes five ecumenical imperatives.

Königsdorfer noted that, “we still cannot afford to be divided as Christians. We have to step out and have dialogue also with people of other faiths.” She described the solidarity of prayer as one of the most powerful affirmations of faith. “When someone whose country was experiencing difficulties comes to me and says, “Thank you for praying for us, for my country,” that’s very powerful,” she said.

Clark emphasized how Christian unity should also express itself in the way churches respond to current challenges in society.

“The way churches respond to people fleeing their homes because of religious and other violence will show what the churches really are. How we speak or not to our governments prophetically on asylum seekers is a big challenge,” Clark said.

Reflecting on mutual relations between Christians and people of other faiths, she explained that tolerance alone goes only as far as “listening without acting.” However, meaningful dialogue needs to move beyond tolerance and actively seek the good of the other “even when we may not agree with each other.” She emphasized that Christian traditions including Anglican, Catholic and Lutheran “equip us to be both tolerant and to serve.”

Strengthening the vision and practice of transformative church leadership

Newly elected Lutheran church leaders from around the world gathered in Geneva and Wittenberg, 28 September to 9 October, to strengthen their vision and practice as transformative leaders, able to offer strong leadership to their churches and in the Lutheran communion.

This first “Induction of Newly Elected Leaders” program of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) brought together 20 leaders from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The two-week event focused on Lutheran identity, ecumenical commitment and witness, diakonia and leadership.

The program also looked at management, accountability and transparency, and addressed relationship building, ecclesiology,

liturgy and development, said Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF coordinator for Church Growth and Sustainability.

“In Geneva, leaders will improve their knowledge of the operation work in the LWF Communion Office including its strategic alliances with the World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance and the United Nations,” Cuyatti noted.

The new leaders debated and reflected on issues related to holistic mission, development, public witness and service, while creating a community of peers able to support one another.

The program coordinated by the Department for Mission and Development included visits to the UN in Geneva and to Luther Town in Wittenberg, Germany.

Solidarity with Thai people and church following deadly bombing

The LWF upholds in prayers the people of Thailand and the Lutheran church there, following the 17 August deadly bombing of a shrine in the capital Bangkok.

In a letter of solidarity to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT), the LWF expressed shock over the attack that killed over 20 people and injured scores others near the popular Erawan Shrine in downtown Bangkok.

“We want to assure you that the LWF communion, particularly the churches in Asia, is upholding your church and the people

of Thailand in our prayers,” stated the letter, sent to the head of the Thai Lutheran church, Bishop Banjob Kusawadee.

Through its area desk for Asia, the LWF expressed concern that the bombing happened as Thailand deals with the aftermath of violence last year amid demonstrations over political leadership. “We pray for God’s mercy and intervention to bring stability and reconciliation to the country,” the letter stated.

The ELCT has over 3,500 members. It joined the LWF in 1994.

LWF Nepal reaches out to Dalit earthquake survivors

“No power in this world”

KUSUNTHALI, Nepal/ GENEVA (LWI) – “What am I supposed to do now?” Rosni Paryar, 19, looks worried and disheveled when she shows us her collapsed house in Kusunthali village in the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal. The top floor of her brick house is almost fully destroyed and the ground floor is filled with rubble. “Me and my family have been hit by the earthquake in two ways,” she says.

Paryar is the first young woman in her village of 75 people to finish high school. She was preparing for the final exam in April when the earthquake destroyed all but one house in Kusunthali. She now lives with her parents and three siblings in a temporary shelter. As her father is the only provider for the family, Paryar has also been looking for work for the past two months. She applied to work as a teacher in different schools but has not yet been hired. “Without connections a person like me will not be selected,” she says, despondent.

Lack of connections and support

Paryar belongs to the caste of the tailors, together with other artisan groups,

termed Dalits, the lowest Hindu caste. Formerly referred to as “untouchables”, members of this caste are tainted by birth in a system that deems them impure. Although discrimination was outlawed in Nepal by the 1962 Civil Code and 1990 Constitution, Dalits still face many obstacles to social, economic and political equality.

They are therefore one of the five vulnerable groups which receive special attention from Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal. “Dalit artisans do not have equal access to services even in normal times,” says LWF Nepal Country Director Prabin Manandhar. “They usually live in less accessible places, on hill tops for instance, and lack the political connections that are helpful to get support.”

During the first relief phase, immediately after the earthquake, LWF Nepal used a “blanket approach” of reaching out to all households in allocated areas. “Dalit communities like Kusunthali received the same support as other villages,” Manandhar says. As LWF relief work now focuses on recovery, special emphasis is given to women-headed households, elderly people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and Dalits.

Different needs

In the fourteen districts affected by the earthquake, 13 percent of the population belongs to artisan castes such as tailors, cobblers, blacksmiths and “washer men”. As Dalits, they had a difficult life even before the earthquake. With Nepal connecting to international markets, their homemade goods face competition from cheaper ready-made goods, making it harder for them to sell their products. It is estimated that 41 percent of Dalits live below poverty level.

In Kusunthali, it becomes clear that artisans have different needs from other groups. None of the Dalit families own any land beyond that on which their houses are built. Almost all of them depend on tailoring and daily wage labor to survive. Owning no land, only very few are eligible for a loan to rebuild.

The income from tailoring has been sharply reduced since the earthquake. Almost all sewing machines were buried in the rubble. A few women continue to sew by hand and one surviving sewing machine was recently repaired. Still, clients have stopped visiting the village. Private customers need all their money for rebuilding after the damage and therefore do not often order new clothes. Many business customers are still closed mostly because staff has not shown up for work – they help their families in the villages planting and harvesting, or constructing better shelter.

Paryar wonders how her people will recover from the earthquake. “In my parents’ generation almost nobody can read or write,” she says. “They have no power in this world and depend solely on manual work. My father has six mouths to feed. Without me having a job, how on earth can he manage?”

LWF support

Manandhar says the story of Paryar can be repeated all over the country.



Rosni Paryar, in front of her partially destroyed home. She fears she will remain unemployed because she is of the Dalit caste. Photo: LWF/Lucia de Vries

“While other families will soon be harvesting crops or get back to work and out of dependency, landless artisans will need much longer to recover. That is why we are committed to provide the tools and other kinds of support needed to get Dalits back on their feet.”

In July, LWF’s corrugated iron sheets arrived in Kusunthali. They will enable the families to build a stron-

ger roof on their temporary shelter. Livelihood support and psychological counselling will follow soon. With the extra support from LWF Nepal, quake-affected Dalit families stand a chance of rebuilding their lives.

In the immediate response to the 2015 earthquake, LWF Nepal, with the support of ACT Alliance members, supported over 110,000 families with

emergency relief. The organization is committed to helping families in five affected districts to rebuild their lives through food security, shelter, water and sanitation and psychological assistance, and link this with long-term development.

*Contribution by Lucia de Vries/
LWF Nepal.*

Myanmar: Relief goods for people affected by devastating flood

“Everything is damaged by the water”

SITTWE, Myanmar/GENEVA (LWI) – U Kyaw Thein has planted again. After a flood destroyed the livelihood he had built for years, his family intended to move away from his home village. Support by The Lutheran World federation (LWF) however has given him the hope and courage to start anew.

The 61-year-old subsistence farmer and his family live in Bauk Ywar village, Mrauk-U township, Rakhine State – the region most heavily affected by the floods that hit Myanmar in the wake of Cyclone Komen.

U Kyaw Thein’s house still bears the marks of the water long after it receded. There is a dark line, and missing planks although the house is built on stilts already. Worse however is that the family’s livelihood is gone. “I couldn’t save my cows,” U Kyaw Thein murmurs.

When the water was already chest-deep, he tried to pull them to safety. “I was very tired from pulling them; I thought I would drown as well. I was very afraid. I was not able to save them,” he recounts that fateful day.

As the water kept rising to the second floor of his house, U Kyaw tied bamboo poles together for a makeshift raft. Together with his wife and three youngest children, they floated to a nearby monastery, where they survived on food donations for the next five days.



U Kyaw Thein and his family in front of their flood-affected home. Photo: LWF Myanmar/ M. Celiz

Livelihoods destroyed

Coming home, the full extent of the damage became visible: Seven acres of my farmland were destroyed,” U Kyaw says. “The water also ruined 50 bags of our paddy seeds. We had them in store for the next planting season. The water also carried away most of my farming tools, so what can I do now? I can’t harvest. I also lost 12 of my chicken,” he continues with a shaky voice.

The water also damaged the family’s latrine, one of his daughters lost all her school books and supplies. “Everything was damaged by the water, my school was closed for two weeks,” she says.

According to an assessment by LWF, the school, two bridges and 35 percent of the houses in the village

were severely damaged. 6,200 baskets of paddy seeds were lost, and the two village ponds, used as a freshwater supply, had been contaminated with flood water. The paddy fields were submerged under 8 feet of water. Rakhine state was declared a national disaster zone by the Myanmar government.

LWF response

LWF Myanmar mobilized an emergency response team which conducted rapid needs assessments and engaged in distributions of relief goods in 18 villages. One of them was Bauk Ywar, where U Kyaw Thein’s family lives.

As part of a 1-month food ration, the family together with 42 other

households in Bauk Ywar received rice, cooking oil, salt and beans.

“I was so worried,” U Kyaw recalls. “After the flood we returned to our house. We could not eat. We could not sleep. How would we survive? My family wanted to leave this village and move far away – somewhere the flood would not reach us if it happened again.”

The relief goods gave U Kyaw Thein and his family the courage to make a new start in their old village. The family has started to plant again. “The rice is slowly growing,” U Kyaw says. His daughter was one of the 9,000 students to receive some of the 43,390 exercise books which LWF provided to enable students to continue their education.

LWF Myanmar has to date distributed relief goods, food and school supplies to more than 2,000 families in five townships. Their work will now focus on early recovery.

Contribution by John Martin Celiz, translations by Sam Sam Yibn and Win Shwe Yee. Edited by LWF Communications

Myanmar: Support to people affected by monsoon floods

“Massive devastation”

SITTWE, Myanmar/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Country program in Myanmar has formed an emergency response team to support the people affected by the monsoon floods in Rakhine state. “The devastation caused by the flood in Rakhine State is massive,” LWF staff member Bhoj Raj Khanal says. “We have formed emergency response teams in Yangon and Sittwe. Four states within the Republic of the Union of Myanmar have been declared emergency areas.”

Exceptionally heavy seasonal rains at the end of June and throughout July caused flooding in Rakhine State, Chin State, Sagaing Region, Magway Region, in the west, and in other parts of the country. As of 3 August, the Relief and Resettlement Department (RRD) of the Myanmar Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement reported that over 200,000 people have been affected and 39 people have been killed across the flooded regions. These figures are expected to rise in the coming days as the full extent of the damage becomes visible.

Core relief items

LWF Myanmar has formed an emergency team and started to hand out core relief items, blankets and school books. LWF Myanmar has been asked by UNHCR to assist with distributing more core relief items in Rakhine state.



Aid agencies provide aid in a camp for internally displaced people before the monsoon season. Many IDP camps were set-up on paddy fields which are prone to flooding in the rainy season. Photo: Evangelos Petratos EU/ECHO, CC-NC-ND (archive photo)

“Immediate needs include food, shelter, water and sanitation, as well as access to emergency healthcare,” LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Roland Schlott says. In the medium term, education and livelihoods will face additional challenges as farmland has been flooded and schools have been destroyed by the water.

LWF has been working in Myanmar since 2008. Coordinated from the country office in Yangon and the field office in Sittwe, Rakhine state, main activities have been emergency response, livelihood and food security, water, sanitation and hygiene, disaster risk reduction, and human rights advocacy. Community-based field staff

help improve community organization, health, education, agriculture and climate change adaptation.

Disaster overwhelms government structures

“The members of the Myanmar ACT Forum have issued an alert today”, LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Schlott says. “It is clear is that the scale of the disaster surpasses the ability of the government structures to respond, especially since the affected areas have previously been affected by civil conflict or decades of underdevelopment.”

The LWF will use available stocks of non-food items such as blankets, hy-

giene kits, cooking utensils and shelter materials to help the disaster affected people, Schlott says. However, to meet

the immense needs of the people affected would “require the mobilization of significant resources,” he adds.

“We welcome any donation large or small to support our relief efforts in Myanmar.”

Praise for LWF staff on World Humanitarian Day

“We know and appreciate the commitment from each one of you.”

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) country program staff are courageous and compassionate in their efforts to bring life-saving relief to refugees and forcibly displaced people, said the LWF General Secretary.

To mark World Humanitarian Day on 19 August, Rev. Dr Martin Junge wrote to all staff thanking them for their outstanding service on behalf of the LWF Communion.

Staff of the Department for World Service contribute to relief efforts in 23 Countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The LWF responded to all four of the world’s largest and most complex crises in 2014.

In a video greeting to all staff, World Service director, Maria Immonen, especially thanked staff in hardship locations, far from family and friends, and in dangerous situations. “We know and appreciate the commitment from each one of you.”

World Service remains committed to serving the displaced, no matter

where these people were and without discrimination.

“In this vein our work has expanded and grown over the past years at the rate of about 10 percent a year, with new country programs and new emergency operations being opened, ensuring we remain relevant and address these crises globally,” she said.

Dr Junge said the LWF Communion appreciated, valued and celebrated their work. “Our prayers continue to be with you for your own safety and that of your families. We pray for your continued commitment, courage, creativity, skill, wisdom, and yes—joy in the work!—as you continue to carry out your vocation to serve the neighbor in need.”

Despite the efforts of humanitarian workers the world over, the need for assistance continued to outstrip supply of resources. The world’s humanitarians were over-stretched and unable to properly respond, Dr Junge said.

The UNHCR says nearly 60 million people in the world have been forcibly

displaced from their homes as a result of conflict, persecution and human rights violations.

“The scale of suffering and the necessary response is overwhelming the system. We experience this also at the LWF,” Dr Junge said. World Service was working with victims of violence from, among others, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Central African Republic, Mali, DR Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda Myanmar, Colombia, and Central American countries.

The cost of humanitarian work

This year’s World Humanitarian Day (WHD) campaign aims to inspire people around the world to become involved in creating a more humane world.

It also recognizes the toll of humanitarian response. In 2014, there were 329 aid workers who were victims of attacks, according to figures compiled by independent analysts for Aid Worker Security Report 2014. While this is roughly 30 percent fewer than last year’s all-time high, the number of incidents is alarming, WHD organizers say.

Dr Junge underscored the fact that country program staff worked in difficult and dangerous environments. “None of the places where you serve are safe places. Some of them, however, are particularly precarious when it comes to security issues. I remain deeply concerned for your wellbeing and safety,” he said.

It was unacceptable that aid workers and the people they served should be targets and victims. The LWF remained committed to speaking out more clearly and loudly against this practice while the international com-



A World Service staff member vaccinates a dog belonging to a refugee as part of an animal vaccination campaign at the Dosseye camp, southern Chad. The LWF celebrates the work of staff around the world on World Humanitarian Day. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

munity needed to take decisive steps against perpetrators, Junge said.

Immonen said that in the face of worsening security challenges, World Service had put more resources into ensuring its programs remained as safe as possible

and that it had done what could be done to improve security in difficult situations.

World Service will continue to step up efforts to reach more people, provide quality assistance, and remain accountable for resources entrusted to it.

“As a faith-based organization, our motivation comes from seeing each human being as the face of God – unique, special and irreplaceable,” Immonen said.

“Are we seen as neutral?”

Interview with LWF security adviser Susan Muis

The earthquake in Nepal, carjacking, abduction and detention. In the past six months, LWF staff have faced many challenging situations. Susan Muis, Program Officer for Central Africa and newly appointed security adviser for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) talks about how insecurity has changed the humanitarian work and the importance of good preparation and staff care.

Lutheran World Information (LWI): In your experience, how has the work environment for aid workers changed in the past years?

Susan Muis: It has changed a lot. The humanitarian principles of being impartial and neutral are, in certain contexts, severely challenged by perceptions of us. Are we seen as being neutral? A turning point was the attack on the United Nations in Baghdad in 2003. That day it became clear that the UN was not seen as neutral by certain parties. Twenty years ago aid workers could safely deliver humanitarian assistance by maintaining good relations with local communities and leaders in insecure environments. Today aid workers have become a soft target for criminals because they are not armed and carry valuable laptops and cellphones. When looking at the statistics, I also find that national staff are more at risk

What makes the position of national staff more difficult?

The statistical increase is partly due to the fact that organizations invest in local capacity-building by employing more national staff. So there are more national aid workers in comparison with

international aid workers. But national staff are also vulnerable due to their status as employees of an aid organization and the additional risks they might face due to ethnicity or gender.

National staff often work close to the local population in areas that are also potentially dangerous for them. For example, in South Sudan the situation for our staff became very threatening when a refugee camp was suddenly surrounded by rebels. As the conflict was around ethnic lines, that meant a specific threat to national staff belonging to certain groups. In these situations we need to relocate national staff to another area in the country, which requires a lot of flexibility and stress tolerance of our staff.

Which situations would you consider most dangerous?

In my experience, and confirmed in the Aid Workers Report 2014, aid

workers are most vulnerable when travelling on the road, because that makes them possible targets for ambush and road side attacks.

In the past six months LWF also had incidents where staff were abducted, detained, and even shot at. Worldwide the number of conflicts and the humanitarian needs have increased dramatically. We cannot respond to all but we try to serve people as best as we can. We know we ask a lot of our staff and churches who sometimes take high risks to help people in need that are located in a dangerous area.

How do we mitigate risk?

One of our risk reduction strategies is the so-called acceptance strategy. We work with local structures, churches and others close to the communities we serve. When the team is accepted by the communities, the locals will tell you sooner when something goes



*The security of aid workers is increasingly under threat in dangerous environments such as South Sudan.
Photo: Paul Jeffrey*

wrong. They might hide you when armed groups enter the village.

However acceptance is not sufficient today, so more and more organizations like LWF are focusing on putting protection mechanisms in place for staff and assets. These include access to local security networks, security awareness training for field staff, safety and security policies, plans and procedures, and guards in front of field offices. Nevertheless, we work hard to balance this with the fact that we are there to serve and be alongside local people. We don't want to shut ourselves off.

How does this work environment affect staff?

LWF works in many high risk countries with a rapidly changing security situation – e.g. the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, northern Kenya, Iraq and Colombia. In most of them we have complex conflicts with many parties and rebel groups which make the working environment very stressful and unpredictable. We are aware that this rapidly changing environment needs a lot of flexibility from our staff, donors and beneficiaries. I have a lot

of respect for people who work under this constant pressure.

Four months ago, LWF staff in Nepal faced insecurity caused by a natural disaster. What specific risks did they have to deal with?

During natural disasters, there might be looting and violent attacks. That happened after the Haiti earthquake, and our staff in Nepal also faced critical situations when people wanted to steal relief goods. In Nepal most of the safety and security risks were in relation to aftershocks and landslides. LWF staff have experienced more than 50 aftershocks in the months after the earthquake. These cause not only dangerous situations like collapsing buildings but can also have a big impact emotionally. An earthquake can be a very traumatic experience, and that memory comes back with every aftershock.

In Nepal many members of our team and the local ACT forum were directly affected. Their houses had been damaged or had even collapsed, so they were staying with relatives in very crowded apartments. Their loved ones were injured. They were worried about children or elderly parents who had to live in the open air. Yet they

showed a lot of commitment and drive, coming to the office every morning and on the weekends to help others.

How were staff supported in this situation?

In life-threatening crisis situations you see two different types of people – those who are very active, who use their own trauma to help others as a healing mechanism. Others might be more afraid and passive and could get psychosocial problems like depression, insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder. Both need support, and we take that very seriously.

In Nepal, apart from material support to help people find shelter and rebuild their lives, the ACT Nepal forum recruited a Security Focal Person to provide travel advice, and develop safety and security instructions. A team of psychosocial support staff was sent to Nepal soon after the earthquake to support the team. This “aftercare” is crucial for the healing process. Humanitarian workers are very committed people, they believe in the work they do, and when something happens and they are involved in an incident, we should give them all the support we are able to provide.

International organizations condemn surge in Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes

LWF rejects the use of threat or violence

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was among 31 aid, faith, human rights, and development organizations in Jerusalem that called on world leaders to take urgent action to halt ongoing demolitions and hold the Israeli government accountable for the wanton destruction of Palestinian property, as well as projects funded by international aid in the occupied West Bank.

During a surge in demolitions in August, the Israeli army flattened at

least 63 homes and basic structures across 10 Palestinian communities in Area C, the 60 percent of the West Bank where Israel has maintained full military and civil control. Among the demolished structures were 12 basic humanitarian necessities, including a solar panel, a portable latrine, animal pens, and tents financed by the European Union.

In a joint statement on 21 August, the organizations urged international donors to seek to recover the financial

costs of their destroyed structures from Israel and commit to resupplying the aid. The demolitions, which in one week have rendered 132 people homeless including 82 children, accounted for a quarter of the displacements from demolitions in 2015, the highest such number in nearly three years.

Affirming LWF's support for the joint statement, the LWF Representative in Jerusalem Rev. Mark Brown said the recent surge neither contributed to

promoting peace nor showed respect for human dignity. “The demolition of Palestinian homes and basic structures, such as animal pens and portable latrines instills fear, creates hardship, and undermines prospects for peace. The bulldozing and confiscation of homes are acts of violence,” he added.

Brown, who heads the LWF World Service regional program in Jerusalem, said it was critical for all parties concerned in the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict to take concrete action to protect and preserve internationally-recognized human rights.

He underlined LWF’s deep commitment for the respect of human rights and human dignity, irrespective of where violations occur. “Whether in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world, the LWF rejects the use or threat of violence as a means for the settlement of political disputes.”

At the June 2015 meeting of the LWF Council in Geneva, the governing body reiterated LWF’s continued support for a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, along the 1967 borders, as the



People pick through rubble at the site of a demolition in Wadi Sneysel, in the West Bank near East Jerusalem.

best way to ensure the security and well-being of both states. The call includes a demand for the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories and a clear focus on the status of Jerusalem in all proposals to resolve the conflict, with special attention to the religious significance of the city.

The LWF has been serving the needs of Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian Territories through its World Service

program for more than 65 years. This includes provision of essential health care at the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, vocational training, scholarships and material aid, and initiatives that promote justice, peace and reconciliation. The LWF member church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land also provides education through its schools and promotes peace building.

Explore the new Reformation 500 booklets

The LWF has published four new booklets on the 2017 Reformation anniversary theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace” and its three sub-themes on salvation, human beings and creation.

Available on the LWF website the publications are intended to trigger discussion in seminaries, church peer groups and with partner churches ahead of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, which coincides with LWF’s Twelfth Assembly.

Under the main theme, a subject closely linked to the doctrine of justification by faith, relevant questions that triggered the 16th century movement to reform the church are explored. Insights on new challenges over the course of time are also discussed.

The overarching questions in the booklet *Salvation – Not for Sale*, offer reflections on human beings’ expectations about salva-

tion. Practices and theological concepts that could be described as attempts to commodify salvation are also discussed.

Human Beings – Not for Sale provides perspectives on Lutheran anthropology, human trafficking, migration and sustainable ways of living together, among other topics.

With subjects varying from genetic engineering, climate change and climate justice, to land grabbing, the essays on *Creation – Not for Sale* emphasize the need to pay attention to God’s entire creation in light of today’s massive exploitation of natural resources.

The French, German and Spanish versions of the booklets will be published early next year.

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