

Lutheran World Information

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(Left to right) Speakers at the 1955 conference in Marangu included Dr Emmanuel Abraham (Ethiopia), Ms E. M. Marealle (Tanzania), and LWF Executive Committee President Dr Franklin Clark Fry (USA). Photo: LWF Archives

‘Marangu at 60’: Celebrating Growing Lutheran Solidarity in Africa

Tanzanian Church Hosts Historic Reformation Preparation Event

MARANGU, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – “This is an opportunity to celebrate growing Lutheran solidarity, unity and courage.” This is how Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) describes the forthcoming 60th anniversary of the first meeting of all Lutherans in Africa in Marangu, northern Tanzania.

From 20-25 May 2015, over 200 delegates from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa, LWF global leaders and invited ecumenical guests will gather at the Marangu Teachers’ College in northern

Tanzania, the venue of the first such gathering in 1955.

“Marangu to Wittenberg: Being a Reforming Church in a Changing African Context,” is the theme for this year’s jubilee, which will also map the churches’ contribution to the global Reformation anniversary in 2017. Delegates will reflect on the churches’ journey together since the first all-Africa Lutheran leaders’ conference 60 years ago, and address relevant theological, socio-economic and political issues.



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Dr. Prabin Manandhar Joins Disaster Committee in Nepal

Dr. Prabin Manandhar has been appointed to the "Disaster Management Coordination Committee" in Nepal. The first of its kind, the Nepalese government formed the high level national committee on May 3. The purpose is to respond to the recent earthquakes in Nepal. Comprised of key ministries, social welfare councils, international non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations, the committee will focus on relief and reconstruction activities.

Dr. Manandhar currently serves as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Country Director in Nepal and is already on the ground in Nepal, working together with members of the ACT Alliance Forum and LWF. The team has already distributed relief materials to almost 13,000 families. Dr. Manandhar will be one of four people representing the committee on behalf of international NGOs in Nepal.

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At the Marangu founding conference, only the Malagasy Lutheran Church was a full LWF member church. Other delegates at the time came from so-called “non-LWF member churches” in Northern Tanganyika, South Africa and Ethiopia, and from mission societies.

Today, the Lutheran communion in Africa includes 31 LWF member churches in 23 countries, representing more than 21 million Christians, with several emerging Lutheran bodies across the region.

This year’s jubilee will be hosted by the ELCT and the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA). Malasusa, LWF Vice-Pres-

ident for the Africa region will officiate at the 20 May opening ceremony.

“It all began in Marangu. Inspired by the Lutheran communion spirit of our forefathers and foremothers, we come back to this very place with thanksgiving to God for giving us the strength to nurture the seed of African solidarity and unity that they planted,” Malasusa told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The participants in Marangu will include heads of churches, women and youth leaders, academicians from theological institutions, representatives from churches in other LWF regions and related agencies, as well as officials from the Tanzanian government.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge will deliver the keynote address on 20 May. He will provide orientation

for the Reformation anniversary and the LWF Twelfth Assembly to be held in May 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia.

LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan will preach at the eucharistic service on Pentecost Sunday, at which 1,500 worshippers are expected.

“Celebrating the Marangu jubilee especially with our brothers and sisters from the global Lutheran communion is an opportunity to also affirm the relevance of the LWF for its member churches,” Malasusa emphasized. “Belonging to the global communion of Lutheran churches strengthens our vision for holistic mission, mutual accompaniment in joyful and difficult times, and spirituality which is reflected in worship and theological formation,” he added.

Climbing to Kilimanjaro’s mountain top as stewards of God’s creation

An opportunity to raise awareness about environmental destruction

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – Experienced mountain climbers begin a four-day trek to the highest peak of Mt Kilimanjaro today as part of 60th anniversary celebrations of the Lutheran communion in Africa.

“We’ll make sure we get to the top of the mountain to represent the Lutheran church in Africa,” said 26-year-old Harold Minja at a send-off blessing service on 19 May at the Marangu Teachers’ Training College in Moshi. The college grounds was the venue of the first All-Africa Lutheran Conference in 1955.

The climb starts as over 200 delegates from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa and global Lutheran leaders gather, 20-24 May, in Moshi to celebrate 60 years since the first Marangu gathering. Hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), participants will also prepare for the 500th Reformation anniversary and the LWF Twelfth Assembly under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

ELCT district pastor Rev. Winford Mosha presided at the service for the Marangu-Kilimanjaro climb by ELCT members Minja and 32-year-old Dawson Chonjo. They will climb under the theme, “We are called to be stewards of God’s creation,” highlighting the need for urgent attention to environmental

destruction that has contributed to the reduction of Mt Kilimanjaro’s ice cap.

Representing the African Lutheran church as witnesses of the gospel, the two climbers will carry the “stewards of God’s creation” banner to Uhuru peak, the highest point of Mt Kilimanjaro at 5,892.8 meters.



Members of the Marangu Conference pose for a group photo after the blessing for the two climbers with the LWF banner. Photo: David Adgea/ELCT

The climbers' theme resonates with the Marangu jubilee and Reformation discussions. Focus on the 2017 Reformation and LWF Assembly sub-themes

will articulate that creation, salvation and human beings are "not for sale."

Minja and Mosha will be received back on 24 May by Lutheran church

leaders in the context of the Pentecost Sunday celebratory eucharistic service at the Marangu college grounds.

Malasusa: Challenges in Africa need special attention from Lutherans

Hundreds attend Marangu anniversary opening worship

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – Tanzania's Presiding Bishop Dr Alex G. Malasusa inaugurated African Lutheran anniversary celebrations with a call for greater unity among the churches.

Malasusa urged The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches on the continent to revitalize the Reformation spirit in anticipation of the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 and beyond. "As Lutheran churches in Africa, we need to reach people rather than people reaching us. We need to have a strong base of diaconal activities at the grassroots level," said Malasusa, who is LWF Vice-President for the African region.

Over 200 delegates from the 31 African LWF member churches are meeting 20-24 May, in Moshi, to mark the first gathering of African Lutherans in Marangu, in 1955. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) is hosting the event which is also attended by global LWF leaders and representatives of mission partners.

The ELCT presiding bishop delivered the keynote address at the conference opening worship at the Moshi Lutheran Cathedral. Malasusa called on African Lutheran churches to engage people in civic rights "so that our Christians can actively participate in bringing about transformative leadership and good governance in church and society."

He expressed the joy of African churches in hosting the LWF 12th Assembly and the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia. The current Marangu anniversary meeting symbolizes "African



From left: ELCT Bishop Dr. Fredrick Shoo (Northern Diocese), Bishop Em Dr. Martin F. Shao, and Presiding Bishop Dr. Alex G. Malasusa lead worshippers into the Moshi Town Cathedral for the Marangu anniversary opening worship on 20 May 2015. Photo: LWF/Allison Westerhoff

happiness that the most known Reformation anniversary will be taking place on the soil of Africa," he added.

The LWF vice-president said there are signs that Africa is changing, and encouraged churches to honor and acknowledge such progress. He cited pioneer Africans like NKwame Nkrumah (Ghana) who ignited the vision of uniting Africa.

South Africa's anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela was an outstanding role model, who lived Jesus' teaching of "loving our enemies and praying for our prosecutors," the ELCT bishop added.

There are many other reasons to celebrate, he continued. "We congratulate President Jonathan Goodluck, the outgoing President of the Republic of Nigeria, for showing maturity in politics and conceding defeat when it happened."

Still, Malasusa said, there are major challenges facing Lutherans in Africa

as a growing church. The themes that will be discussed in the conference: 'creation is not for sale', 'human beings are not for sale' and 'salvation is not for sale' need special attention.

He asked the conference participants to discuss one of the major concerns for the church in Africa—commercialization of religious services. "They are no longer a free gift, and not as God's providence by grace."

The LWF vice-president asked the church in Africa to make itself available, not only by preaching the Word of God but also by "offering itself as the voice for the most vulnerable of our society, especially women and children."

Bishop Dr Fredrick Shoo of the ELCT Northern Diocese presided at the opening worship, which was attended by around 400 people. Retired ELCT Northern Diocese Bishop Dr Martin F. Shao delivered the sermon, reminding Christians

that they are called to be servants and not masters. Invited guests included the Catholic Bishop of Kilimanjaro region, Dr

Isaac Amani Massawe, who emphasized Christian unity as “we all claim one Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit.”

(ELCT communicator Nengida Lairumbe contributed this report for LWI)

Assurance of solidarity in the LWF communion of churches

LWF’s President Younan encourages African member churches in their Lutheran journey

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – African church representatives meeting in Moshi, Tanzania, expressed appreciation for the critical role of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in nurturing unity and strengthening solidarity among the communion’s members.

“We have hope. We are ready to go forward,” said Malagasy theologian Dr Mariette Razivello. She was responding to the message of LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan to participants in the conference to mark the 60th anniversary of the Lutheran communion in Africa.

Razivello recalled that she was just six years old when delegates from the Malagasy Lutheran Church travelled to Marangu in then Tanganyika to attend the first gathering of all-Africa Lutherans in November 1955, envisioning a Lutheran communion on the continent. “You have rekindled our hope for the fu-

ture, and encouraged us to draw closer to one another and to God,” she said.

In his message, the president thanked the African member churches for their contribution to the LWF, a communion in which all churches are interdependent. He encouraged them to “together reaffirm our confidence in our global communion, seeing it as a vital means for us to participate fully in God’s holistic mission.”

Younan noted that the series of church leadership conferences that grew out of the first Marangu gathering have strengthened the global commitment of unity in the LWF expressed since 1984 in pulpit and altar fellowship. “We learned from Marangu that without communion, we can have a tendency to become individualistic. With the communion, we each grow in faith, independence, and inter-dependence.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) hosted the 20-24

May conference attended by over 200 participants including heads of the 31 LWF member churches in Africa, women and youth leaders, and representatives of theological networks and institutions. Global Lutheran leaders and mission partners also took part.

Indigenous Lutheran church

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) paid tribute to prophetic Lutheran church leaders such as former LWF president Bishop Josiah Kibira of Bukoba, who advocated an indigenous African Lutheran church, relevant to the contexts in which people live.

Comparing the challenges in pre-independence Africa to today’s, the ELCJHL bishop reminded churches that God’s grace has liberated them from the bondage of colonization and domination to work together with other Christian churches to realize an abundant life for all people. Churches’ prophetic diakonia must seek to “transform hatred into love, violations of human rights into respect for all rights, poverty into equal opportunity, and injustice for women into gender justice,” he said.

In his response to Younan’s message, Bishop Dr Jensen Seyenkulo recounted how the Lutheran Church in Liberia experienced the global Lutheran communion solidarity during the Ebola crisis last year. “Many times we wondered why us, had God abandoned us for something we did? And then we learned that in this communion we are not alone,” he said.



LWF Council member Ms. Titi Malik and LWF President Bishop Munib A. Younan plant a commemorative tree for the 60th anniversary of the first Lutheran conference in Marangu. Photo: LWF/Tsion Alemayehu

He recalled a message from the Lutheran Church of Senegal, saying “they were praying for us and had raised some funds. They demonstrated to us that we were not abandoned.” Seyenkulo thanked the many other churches that made contributions, “giving us the energy to fight Ebola,” and Younan for “reminding us that we cannot care for ourselves alone.”

Ubuntu

Ms Blessing Shava, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, expressed

gratitude for the LWF president’s reminder that an abundant life for all is possible. She stressed that working together as churches and engaging with other stakeholders was essential in dealing with challenges such as HIV and AIDS, poverty and other economic injustices, trafficking of persons and armed conflict.

“A lot more can be achieved through cooperation, dialogue, mutual assistance and encouragement,” said Shava, a member of the LWF Global Young Reformers Network. She referred to

the notion of *Ubuntu* (humanness) to underline the need for solidarity in tackling issues that “are central to the survival of our communities.”

She encouraged churches to remain prayerful and trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Allison Westerhoff, a member of the Africa Lutheran Information and Communication Network (ALCINET) contributed to this article. Westerhoff is the communications officer for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA).

Lutheran Church unity in Africa strengthens advocacy for justice and peace

General Secretary Junge encourages churches to build on Marangu uniqueness

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge has called on African Lutheran churches to use their sense of “togetherness and strength” to advocate for justice, peace and reconciliation in the continent.

Speaking on 20 May at a gathering to celebrate the first meeting of all-Africa Lutherans in Marangu, Tanzania, 60 years ago, Junge said the conviction that “being together means being

stronger” was the impulse for the historic gathering in 1955, in Marangu.

He expressed his growing respect for the pioneer Lutheran church leaders who defied the strain and burdens of pre-independence Africa to make Marangu the birth place of “a unique togetherness” of Lutheran churches on the continent.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) is hosting the 20-24 May Marangu anniversary meeting, taking place in the context of the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Conference (ALCLC). Participants include

some 200 delegates from the 31 LWF member churches in Africa and global Lutheran leaders, representatives of mission partners and invited ecumenical guests.

Junge’s address included reflections on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the LWF 12th Assembly in 2017 under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.” The ALCLC plenary and group deliberations focus on “Being a reforming church in a changing African context.” Participants will discuss the significance of the assembly sub-themes—“creation, salvation and human beings are not for sale” for the mission of the Lutheran church in Africa today.

In his address, the general secretary reminded the church delegates of the fundamental understanding of Lutheran identity – justification by faith alone —“not because of who we are and what we do but because of who God is and what God does.” He urged the African churches to remain grounded in “Christ, scripture and faith alone” and the common values of compassion, inclusion, dignity, commitment, respect, participation and diversity as they contribute to the global Lutheran communion.

On salvation, Junge said there is a general opinion that there is something



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge delivers his presentation during the Marangu anniversary conference on 20 May 2015. Photo: LUCSA

wrong with the notion of “prosperity gospel.” He encouraged Lutheran churches to make a distinction between the concept of “prosperity” and “life in abundance” as explained in the Gospel of John. The latter emphasizes solidarity and the dignity of every human being including those who are poor, sick and marginalized.

He elaborated on “human beings are not sale” by drawing attention to the increasing violence against women not only in Africa but in other parts of the world. “There is always a woman crying in Africa—sexual violence, rape, customary land and property disinheritance. Nothing justifies such suffering,” Junge said. “What is the culture that the gospel wants us to promote when

it comes to the question of violence against women?” he asked.

On creation, Junge said African Lutherans are called to be a prophetic church in a context in which communal land ownership is threatened by land grabbing, extractive mining industry and the impact of climate change.

He commended the African Lutherans for their collaboration with other churches and faith communities on the continent. However, he called for more attention to interreligious tension in the face of new dimensions of violence that is perpetuated in the name of religion. “We should not be derailed in our interfaith efforts,” Junge said. “Let us not allow extrem-

ism to claim the space to define what faith and religion is all about.”

Connecting the Marangu meeting today to the 1955 founding, Junge paid tribute to former LWF President Bishop Dr Josiah M. Kibira for his vision, affirming the unique contribution and interdependence of every LWF member church. He encouraged churches to avoid situations of competition and exclusion and instead relate to each other in a spirit of mutual support.

Discussions in plenary and group sessions in the coming days will focus on stewardship of creation, faith and public responsibility, and preparations for the 2017 LWF 12th Assembly to be hosted by the Lutheran churches in Namibia. The ALCLC concludes with

Support from church leaders critical for gender justice integration

Women’s recommendation to African Lutherans

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – Members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) women’s network in Africa have called on the leadership of the continent’s churches to facilitate the integration of gender justice in all ministries of the church.

Presenting their recommendations to church leaders at the 60th anniversary of the Lutheran communion in Africa, the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) coordinators also asked for greater support towards women’s participation in the 2017 Reformation anniversary and the LWF Twelfth Assembly. They spoke on behalf of women representatives at the conference in Moshi.

The WICAS coordinators requested the Lutheran Council in Africa (LUCA) to appoint African women theologians who are biblical scholars to prepare and present exegetical papers on the assembly theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

Visibility and recognition of women’s contribution to the church is critical, especially in preparations for the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 and the assembly. The coordi-



Lutheran women take to the airwaves in Moshi, Tanzania, with a message that women’s rights must be upheld. Photo: LWF/Tsion Alemayehu

nators urged all church leaders and pastors to support the “Her-Stories” initiative documenting the contribution of women to the global Lutheran church. “Every story is special. This is a unique opportunity for cross-cultural exchange.”

The recommendations to the heads of churches at the Marangu anniver-

sary and Africa Church Leadership Conference included calls for support for a strategic meeting for women in the region in 2016. The aim the forum is to enhance structures for women doing theology, provide mentorship, offer continuous opportunities for capacity building and empowerment, and a platform to dialogue with the men.

Elaborating the women's recommendations, Rev. Jeannette Ada Maina (Cameroon) said it was significant that an increasing number of churches in Africa are ordaining women. "However, recognition of the priesthood of all believers in leadership is not yet a reality for the majority of women theologians in Africa. Ordination is not automatic for women, despite attaining the same academic degrees as their male colleagues."

Rev. Dr Magdalena Ya-Shalongo (Namibia), Deaconess Alice Mwaringa (Kenya), Rev. Solange Yumba Wa Nkulu (Democratic Republic of Congo), Colleen Cunningham (South Africa) and Maina were among participants in a women church leaders' workshop prior to the 20-24 May anniversary celebrations in Moshi.

Maina, who was among the first women to be ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon in 2012, is the WICAS coordinator for the Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa (LUCCWA).

"In a region where illiteracy is one of the major challenges, specific efforts are needed to encourage women to take up leadership roles," added Maina, who serves on the LWF Council.

Women's rights

Mwaringa, from Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church and regional coordinator for the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA), noted that women's involvement in the African church goes back several decades but it is not often recognized. They have made important contributions to advocacy for the rights of women and girls, education and health issues, she explained.

Wa Nkulu, who studied theology at the Makumira University in Tanzania, expressed appreciation for the accompaniment from other churches in Africa and the global Lutheran communion. "The DRC church grew out of partnership and support from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)," added the women's coordinator for the

Solidarity, skills and advocacy are particularly important in the case of DRC, where women experience high levels of sexual and other forms of conflict-related violence. "Thanks to the opportunities available through WICAS, we can empower our women to speak out about rape and other forms of abuse," Wa Nkulu added.

Accompanying women theologians

Ya-Shalongo is a member of the women theologians working group that supports the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) regional coordination work. She elaborated the LWF "Women on the move: from Wittenberg to Windhoek, global initiative, aimed at encouraging women's participation in the Reformation anniversary and assembly, which will be hosted by the three Lutheran churches in Namibia.

Ya-Shalongo noted the network is an important platform to uplift and develop women's theological reflections in the region.

"We look forward to welcoming the global Lutheran communion to Windhoek in May 2017. We will mobilize and encourage the women to be actively involved in this historic events taking place in our country," she added.

Cunningham, a member of the LWF Council and Meeting of Officers, emphasized the need to institutionalize a mentorship process in the region to accompany women who are nominated to the LWF Council and as delegates to the assembly.

Africa's spiritual gifts enrich the global church

Over 2,000 attend Lutheran anniversary celebrations in Tanzania

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA (LWI) – The 60th anniversary celebrations of the Lutheran communion in Africa concluded with an affirmation of the continent's strong contribution to the global Reformation.

"There is a spiritual richness and freshness of the Gospel alive in this place," The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan told over 2,000 worshippers at the closing Eucharist service commemorating the 1955 gathering of African Lutherans in Marangu, Tanzania.

In his Pentecost Sunday sermon (based on Romans 12:1-5), Younan commended the African Lutheran churches for working tirelessly to preach the gospel and making the Bible accessible

in several local languages, which has contributed to fast church growth in the region. "These gifts of the African church are exactly the Reformation the rest of the world needs. The global church needs you in as much as you need us."

Paying tribute to African Christians and their missionary companions who met in Marangu 60 years ago, the LWF president underlined the challenge then as now—to "empower African Christians to more fully contextualize the gospel."

Religious extremism

The growth of religious extremism is a reality in many parts of the world, Younan said. He named the persecution of Chris-

tians in a number of African and Middle East countries as a "dangerous situation which breeds the fear of the other." As Christians, he stressed "we are called to see the image of God in the other" and therefore "denounce such expression of violence, exclusivity and denial of the other."

He commended the Lutheran churches in Africa for their powerful witness of engaging with people of other faiths not only through verbal dialogue but also by action and living side by side.

Commemorative celebration

Several choirs and brass bands of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) accompanied the Eucharist



Bishop Younan (fourth from right) stands among Lutheran leaders welcoming a group of young Lutherans who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro. He told worshippers at the close of the Marangu conference that the challenge for Lutherans was to empower African Christians to more fully contextualize the gospel. Photo: LWF/Tsion Alemayehu

worship ceremony, which began with processions and tree-planting, symbolizing the commitment to climate justice. This was followed by the unveiling of a commemorative cross at the Marangu Teachers' College grounds as a reminder of Lutherans' connection to the public educational institution.

As the three Lutheran churches in Namibia will host the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF in 2017 and the 500th Reformation anniversary, the service included the handing over of a cloth imprinted with African Leadership Conference of the Lutheran Communion (ALCLC) participants' signatures

to the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUSCA) delegates.

Marangu message

ELCT Presiding Bishop and LWF-Vice President for the Africa region Dr Alex G. Malasusa officially closed the Marangu 60th anniversary celebrations by reading out the final message of the ALCLC.

The message affirmed the African member churches' commitment to strengthen theological education and pastoral formation in order to address the continent's contextual realities. The delegates stressed the need to empower congregational and national church sectors to actively engage in mission and diaconal activities. They pledged to work for service-oriented leadership that is accountable, transparent, with active gender and intergenerational participation. Resource mobilization locally and beyond was identified as important for ensuring a church that can sustain itself into the future.

At the age of 102, Marangu 1955 delegate reminds African Lutherans of unity of purpose

Emmanuel Abraham reflects on the 1955 all-Africa Lutheran conference

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – Dr Emmanuel Abraham, former President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), was one of five chairpersons of the first conference of all-Africa Lutherans in November 1955 in Marangu, Tanzania.

Lutheran World Information (LWI) interviewed Abraham, now aged 102, prior to the 20-24 May gathering of African Lutheran church leaders in Moshi, Tanzania, under the theme: "Being a reforming Lutheran church in a changing African context." He shared some impressions from that first meeting 60 years ago, and his thoughts on the African Lutheran church of the future.

What was Lutheranism in the context then?

The evangelistic work performed by the followers of Luther in Africa was discussed in detail at the conference. However it was evident that African Lutherans in some countries faced many challenges and obstacles of race and color in their lives and work.

The Africans from Lutheran churches who gathered at Marangu had a single purpose—they wanted to be together, to get to know one another and to express their expectation of freedom for the Africa of the future.

What was the feeling when the African Lutheran church leaders gathered for the first time in Marangu?

The feeling was that Africa would get together in the near future as one continent and most of Africa would be

free of colonialism. It wasn't so much that there was excitement about this, but more that the people wanted to be one. They wanted to get together for the future unity of Africa. Even before the Organization of African Unity (predecessor of African Union) was formed, African Lutherans got together—freedom was the word.

Why do you think Marangu is important today?

The very purpose of the meeting—of getting together—would indicate that African Lutherans got together and acted together for the future of Africa. The importance of Marangu is that its aim has been achieved: to get together and to know one another, and to become a free continent.



Emmanuel Abraham, when he was one of the five co-chairs of the Marangu 1955 conference.
Photo: LWF Archives

Many of those who were present at Marangu are no longer alive. But their vision of unity of purpose is still there. There are many today who do not have Africa's best interest at heart.

When you met in Marangu, most of the African countries were under colonialism. What is your advice for this generation of African Lutherans?

My advice to them is to strengthen their independence and act like people who say they are independent, and to continue to strengthen their faith. There are many pitfalls and people who want to destroy our unity of purpose, and take Africa back. The key issue is oneness and unity of spirit and action. Africans have power if they use it properly.

Finally as a word of encouragement, if I may, I would like to quote from my keynote address in Marangu delivered on 14 November 1955, as I believe it is still pertinent today:

"...Fellow Christians from whichever part of Africa you may be coming, be of good cheer for your salvation in the fullest sense draweth nigh....Whatever the odds, it is incumbent on each and every one of us as followers of Christ to tackle the task before us in the spirit of Christ. If we do so, it is my firm belief that we shall get through triumphantly to the glory of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us and to the good of our fellow humans everywhere..."

God bless you all!

(Ms Tsion Alemayehu, a member of the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET), and EECMY public relations officer, conducted this interview in Addis Ababa. Our gratitude to Ruth Emmanuel Abraham for facilitating the conversation in view her father's advanced age.)

Tribute to Dr Tawfiq Nasser

"Long and faithful service" to the Augusta Victoria Hospital

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – With great sadness The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has learned of the death of Dr Tawfiq A. Nasser, the Chief Executive Officer of the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Dr Nasser passed away on the morning of 16 May 2015. He had been the hospital's Chief Executive Officer since 2001 and was instrumental in shaping its medical orientation.

"Dr Nasser was a man of compassion and service who cared deeply about others," LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge wrote in a condolence letter to Dr Nasser's family. "In the LWF, we are particularly grateful for the long and faithful service Dr Nasser gave in the development of the Augusta Victoria Hospital."

"He cherished and loved AVH"

Dr Nasser, who was born in the AVH in 1964 when the hospital still had a maternity ward, had been the hospital's administrative director since 1997. He took over as Chief Executive Officer in 2001, at the age of 36. Dr Nasser shaped the hospital into the leading center for nephrology and oncology in the Palestinian territories.

He graduated in biomedicine and hospital administration at the Old Dominion University in Virginia, USA. Before taking a position at the AVH, Dr Nasser worked at Sentara Health System, USA, as well as at Bir Zeit University and with Arab Care Medical Services, both in Ramallah.

Colleagues and friends praised Dr Nasser's commitment to the AVH and

its patients. "Tawfiq worked at AVH on the Mount of Olives for 18 years," Bishop Munib A Younan, Chairperson of the board of the AVH and President of the LWF, said. "He cherished and loved AVH. Tawfiq did not want it to be just a hospital. He wanted it to be a community of healing on the Mount of Olives."

LWF General Secretary Junge said of Dr Nasser, "As a medical doctor, he learned the healing arts and applied them to relieve human suffering. As a gifted administrator, he organized the staff, the resources and the supporters to bring the Augusta Victoria Hospital to even higher levels of service. As a Palestinian, through his words and actions as a consummate professional, he was a powerful witness for justice, peace and an end to the occupation."

Continue delivering services

Dr Nasser continued working until early May. He had been gradually handing over his responsibilities to his deputy, Walid Nammour, who will continue to ensure professional delivery of services.

Located on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, the AVH serves thousands of patients annually. It provides specialized medical services that are either unavailable elsewhere or not readily accessible to Palestinians, including facilities for dialysis, cancer and surgery, as well as special clinics, laboratories and medical equipment. One of Dr Nasser's achievements was to have the hospital awarded the prestigious Joint Commission International accreditation for health care quality, patient care and organizational management in 2013. He also took the decision to send volunteers medical

teams into Gaza to treat the wounded during the conflict of August 2014.

"We stand by his wife and his family," Rev. Mark Brown, Country Representative of the LWF program in Jerusalem, said. "Please keep them in

your prayers. Wholly in keeping with Tawfiq's commitment to AVH, the family requested that friends wishing to honor Tawfiq send contributions to Augusta Victoria Hospital in support of its cancer work, in lieu of flowers."



*Dr Tawfiq Nasser, 2014.
Photo: LWF Jerusalem*

Rural Communities in Nepal Receive Aid

LWF Development Work Has Helped People Cope with the Disaster

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been reaching out to rural communities in Lalitpur district with distributions of blankets, tarpaulins and food. LWF has been working with those communities for 8 years and is now standing with them as they are among those most affected by the earthquake that hit Nepal on 25 April, 2015.

"It was noon, I was in the kitchen," Maili Pakhrin recalls the event. "Suddenly the kitchen started sinking. I was petrified. I didn't know what it was. Then I started running. When I came down the stairs, I saw the houses shaking from side to side. I heard the kitchen collapse, and saw how every house in this street broke down."

Utter Devastation

Maili's village, Dhusel, is located on a precipice in the mountains which

surround Kathmandu valley. The only way of coming and transporting goods to her home is by using the narrow dirt roads on the steep mountain side. On clear days, you can get a clear view of Dhusel village as you travel the dirt road up the mountain. Currently it's a view of utter devastation. Piles of red bricks and wooden structures are all that are left of the dainty blue houses that formerly constituted the village. Not a single house is undamaged. 300 out of the 338 houses have collapsed entirely. Four people have died in the earthquake, and many animals – the wealth and livelihood of people.

Toy cars, picture frames and household items are sticking up from the debris, from which villagers are digging to salvage their belongings. "Everything I had was in this house," Maili says. "Even most of my food is buried here. Neighbors helped me dig out some of my clothes, but they

are torn." Maili now stays with her brother's family in a shelter made of plastic sheets from a greenhouse. .

Having known the community for years, the LWF was one of the first to provide life-saving aid to those affected. Together with ACT Alliance partners the LWF has distributed 400 blankets to the people here, who have lost their homes. Now the LWF is discussing with the community how to best provide medium-term shelter. "Instead of just tarpaulins, we thought of giving people tin sheets," LWF Regional Project Coordinator Nibha Shrestha says. "When the monsoon starts in a few weeks, tarpaulins are not enough. With tin sheets they can build provisional houses until their housing is re-built."

The community however is divided on the question, some want to focus on re-building, hoping they will have proper housing before the monsoon again. Re-building a village reduced

to bricks within weeks seems unlikely, though. "Everything is destroyed," LWF staff Shresta says with a tone of desperation in her voice. "How will the people find the money to rebuild an entire village?"

Rush of Solidarity

"The government should pass a law that all houses have to be earthquake-proof," Rardlika Sanggel Mahat states. She is the treasurer in the local women's cooperative, a credit union set up by the LWF through the local partner organization "Solve Nepal." A small loan gave her the opportunity to buy a buffalo and create income from selling its milk. The buffalo was buried under the collapsing house in the earthquake. "We only saw a hoof and a piece of rope," Rardlika says. "So we started digging and pulling, and managed to get it out alive. It was bucking with fear, and we had a really hard time tying it up. All of my family helped."

It is small blessings like these that keep people going. That and the project work the LWF has been carrying out in Dhusel. Since 2011 inhabitants have been trained in "tunnel farming," in which you use greenhouses to speed up the harvest. "People told me: it's good we had built the greenhouses.



LWF staff offer blankets to earthquake survivors in Lalitpur district.
Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

We could use the plastic sheets for shelter," Shresta says. "Also, the community already has access to the local authorities. They know their rights and how to access help mechanisms."

The people of Dhusel have already started to organize themselves. Neighbors help each other trying to rescue personal belongings from the ruins; men are patrolling at night to prevent children stealing items from the debris. Across the village, hammering is heard as people are constructing shelter of debris wood. "I have shelter, so I am helping my brother build some for his family," Manbahadur says, sitting

perched on a skeleton of wooden frames. "This trauma has not only happened to me. We are all suffering."

The earthquake has caused a rush of solidarity among the Nepali people. As offices and universities are closed, volunteers have organized help. In Dhusel it is young men and women of the "Everest Motor Bike Club" Kathmandu who are assisting the villagers in building toilets. "We felt the need to do something, so we built a group on Facebook and just came here," club member Rakish Rai says. "When so much disaster happens, you just have to help."

Distributions Starting in Most Affected Districts Outside Kathmandu Valley

Relief Goods for People in Gorkha, Dahding, Kavrepalanchok and Sindhupalchowk

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is extending its emergency aid to earthquake survivors outside Kathmandu valley. After delivering aid to urban and remote rural areas of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, distributions will now start in Sindhupalchowk, Gorkha, Lamjung and Dahding districts.

Since disaster struck with an earthquake the magnitude of 7.9 on

the Richter scale, Sindhupalchowk has been in the headlines in Nepal. The district suffered the highest number of casualties, surpassing even the badly affected districts in Kathmandu valley. Gorkha, where the epicenter is located, is said to be even more damaged. Many communities are difficult to access because of landslides and poor or damaged roads. Relief goods had to be airlifted and dropped over

the affected areas by national and foreign army helicopters.

In Gorkha, the LWF will respond in the area around Barpak, close to the epicenter of the earthquake. Rapid assessment in Jhingate and Chanapani communities carried out last week provided an impression of the response needed. Although located further from the epicenter, more than 80 percent of the houses in these villages have

been damaged and many houses have collapsed entirely.

More than 80 percent damage

An assessment team travelled to the affected areas last week to understand what kind of support was needed.

It takes more than half a day to travel from Kathmandu to Jhingate, often on narrow dirt roads. On the way there, the LWF team passes two trucks with relief items which are stuck in the mud. Many communities are not even accessible by road. People walk hours to the few distribution points for a tarpaulin or a mattress, which they then carry back to their homeless families. “Nobody has been here yet to help,” a woman says.

“We were working in the field and had left the small children with their grandmother,” Saida, a young mother, says. “My mother-in-law was cooking lunch when the earthquake started. The children did not know what it was, but they were scared and ran outside.” The elderly woman was not able to get out fast enough. The house collapsed on top of her. “When we found her body, she was still holding the cooking spatula,” Saida adds.

While she speaks, an elderly man climbs the rubble of his house, spreads a scarf in what used to be

the yard and performs his prayer. It is Ahlad Bakos, the owner of the house, and husband to the woman who perished. He has tears in his eyes. Ahlad Bakos did not only lose his wife, but also a cow and six goats – everything the family had. His house is the first in a row of buildings which have collapsed into mounds of bricks and wood.

Vulnerable Communities

The most vulnerable have also been most affected by the earthquake. Often it is houses made of cheap mud mortar and located on mountain slopes, which have suffered the worst damage. Two hours’ drive from Saida’s and Ahlad Bakos’ village Jhingate, the community of Chanapani provides a similar picture: The houses further up the hill are standing but damaged, those further down have been reduced to dust. “We had very little, and now what little we had is gone as well,” a village elder says.

Chanapani is a Dalit community. The people who live here belong to the lowest Hindu caste. Although most districts in Nepal have officially abolished the caste system and its inherent discriminations, it unofficially persists especially in remote areas, causing poverty and vulnerability. Many people in Chanapani used to work on a daily

basis. After the disastrous earthquake nobody is hiring them anymore, as even well-to-do people have no money to spare. Nobody in the village has relatives employed abroad. Basic sanitation is a challenge: The only toilet is a ten minutes’ walk away. Three to four families huddle under one tarpaulin sheet, the national army provides people with two glasses of beaten rice a day – less than a kilogram.

“We were so lucky to be outside when it happened,” Songam Roka says. “It was lunchtime, so the children were with us. We were able to protect them.” The fact that the earthquake happened on a Saturday afternoon proved to be a lifesaver. Many people were working in the field when their houses collapsed. “We were lucky it wasn’t a school day,” Babu Ram Pande, a local school teacher, says pointing at the badly damaged Shree Saraswati Higher Secondary School in Chanapani. “There wouldn’t have been a way to get the children out of the building fast enough.”

Comprehensive Support

LWF will provide integrated support, meaning it will provide all the relief a village needs. In Gorkha, this will most likely cover a wider range. With the monsoon rains about to start, shelter is the most urgent priority, followed by reconstruction. Since some people’s livelihoods are gone, food assistance will be needed in a few weeks’ time as well. Where toilets and water pipes have been damaged, LWF will provide water, sanitation and hygiene. Psycho-social support will help people deal with the trauma of the earthquake and make sure that vulnerable people are not overlooked.

A first assessment also showed remarkable resilience and coping mechanisms among the rural people. “They are not just waiting for aid to come, they are organizing themselves”, Bed Prakash Bhatta Lulani, member of the LWF assessment team to Gorkha,



Sapana Roka Sarki, nursing her youngest child in front of her house. She has three children, since their livelihood is gone her husband is looking for work abroad. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

says. “Neighbors help each other; relatives support those who have lost their homes.” In Chanapani, the community is exploring shared labor as a way of reconstructing the village.

Volunteers help people who are too afraid salvage their belongings from damaged houses.

“Everybody is still in shock, nobody has much to spare,” Songam

Roka says. “When the children see the wind rustling the leaves, they are afraid because they think it’s another earthquake.”

Nepalese government asks LWF to help coordinate relief efforts

Team in Nepal continue emergency response

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – The Nepalese government has asked the Lutheran World Federation to take a seat on its emergency coordination group, a note of appreciation for the LWF’s rapid response to the earthquake.

The newly-formed Kathmandu Valley Relief Taskforce is expected to coordinate the relief work of international NGOs and civil society organisations.

A place on the taskforce was clear recognition of LWF’s response to the disaster, Dr Prabin Manandhar, LWF country director said.

Within hours of the 8.9 earthquake just before midday on April 25, LWF staff had issued an alert through ACT Alliance, a network of church-based humanitarian organizations, and begun distributing food and other relief goods in three of the camps in Kathmandu that emerged in the wake of the disaster. Teams have been delivering ready-made meals, shelter materials, and hygiene kits in Kathmandu and rural areas in the days since.

“We were among the very few international NGOs on the ground. We set

up emergency operations on day one,” Dr Manandhar said. Having worked in Nepal for over three decades, “we were already on the radar of the government.”

The LWF is present in all United Nations clusters (groups of humanitarian organizations working in the main sectors of relief work) and is the lead implementing agency for ACT Alliance.

Dr Manandhar said it was the first time the government had set up an emergency taskforce and it would be an influential body to be part of.

“This is definitely a privilege. It was because of the fact that we acted very quickly and our long experience in the country. This will be a very high-level forum in which we might be able to influence policy,” Dr Manandhar said.



LWF staff member Yadu Lal Shresta (centre), of the LWF Asia emergency hub team, talks to survivors about their living conditions in a camp in Bhaktapur, the worst-affected district of Kathmandu valley. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

LWF Scales Up Support in Nepal’s Moment of Devastation

The Communion Stands with the Church and People in Their Pain and Loss

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is scaling up its support for survivors of the catastrophic 25 April earthquake in Nepal, which killed around 7,000 people, destroyed homes and reduced historical sites to rubble.

As the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) program in Nepal increases its emergency assistance, General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge has expressed the Lutheran communion’s solidarity with the people in Nepal.

“On behalf of the LWF communion, I want to assure you of our solidarity with the church and the people of Nepal at this moment of pain and loss of innocent and precious lives. I share your fear and anxiety in the aftermath of the

worst earthquake in 80 years,” Junge said in a 27 April letter to the president of Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC) Rev. Joseph Soren.

The 7.8-magnitude tremor that hit Nepal has left more than 14,000 people injured with thousands of villages devastated. As many as 90 percent of clinics and schools in some districts are unusable.

At NELC’s congregation in Bhaktupar, 14 kilometers east of the capital Kathmandu, the pastor, some congregation members and their families are sleeping in the streets and are in need of food. When the earthquake struck, they were holding a prayer meeting in the church building, which suffered cracks. The pastor’s house and homes of congregation members were also damaged.

In his letter to the NELC leader, Junge affirmed LWF’s commitment



LWF staff discuss the needs of survivors.
Photo: LWF/C. Kastner

“to provide our best support for the affected people and their families.” He encouraged the church to continue to offer pastoral care to those affected.

“We will continue to uphold the nation, those who are affected and the rescue efforts in our prayers,” the LWF general secretary added.

LWF reaches rural areas of earthquake-hit Nepal

Over 800 households receive life-saving essentials

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation has managed to distribute essential relief items to over 800 households hard-hit by the devastating April 25 earthquake.

Ready-to-eat-food, tarpaulins and blankets have been distributed to 820 households in Kathmandu, Lalitpur

and Bhaktapur districts, the worst affected in the Kathmandu valley. The LWF team has formed intervention units for each of the three districts.

Teams have been sent out to assess damage and the need for relief work in the remote villages of Sindhupalchowk, Dahding, Kavra and

Gorkha. With more than 3000 people still missing, Sindhupalchowk district has had the highest death toll for the past week, followed by Gorkha district.

The official national death toll has reached 6,200. An estimated 70,000 houses have collapsed and more than 600,000 have been damaged, many to an extent they are no longer fit to live in. Some remote districts are still only accessible by helicopter.

The LWF delivered life-saving aid in close coordination with government and district disaster management bodies, LWF emergency team coordinator Gopal Dahal said. “We have started by working in government-managed camps but as we saw a great need for assistance in self-managed camps, we have also started to cover these camps and the affected population.”

Self-managed camps are run by residents themselves, rather than the government.

Six days after the earthquake, an estimated 900,000 people are still



LWF assessment team talking to people affected by the earthquake in Gorkha district.
Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

sleeping outside because another, even more devastating earthquake, is rumored to be coming. More than half a million people have fled the city. Many shops and businesses remain closed, including factories producing relief goods, such as tarpaulins.

“There is a shortage of relief items in Nepal, which has affected the humanitarian response,” Dahal adds. “We have now established a communication with our LWF associate program in India and the ACT Alliance India Forum to ensure supplies.”

The LWF Nepal team has expanded its humanitarian capacity. Some 100 local volunteers have been mobilized to join the 40 LWF Nepal staff in Kathmandu in their relief work.

“They have come from everywhere,” Dahal said. “There are university students because classes have been suspended and private business people, whose business is closed. We even have government officials who are supporting us.”

The volunteers are helping in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur camps, as well as in the Kathmandu head office compound, where a workshop has been set up to pack relief goods for distribution. Each package contains 2kg of rice, six packs of ready-to-eat noodles, two packs of biscuits, a tarpaulin and a blanket. The biscuits have been added for the elderly and children, who cannot eat instant food.

Lack of shelter remains the biggest challenge. The need for tarpaulins by

far exceeds the number given out. “You have up to five families sheltered under one of those sheets,” Dahal said. “They are thin and definitely not a permanent solution. With monsoon starting soon, we have an urgent need to provide a medium-term solution.”

With partners in ACT Alliance, the LWF has issued a preliminary ACT appeal calling for donations to support the Nepal earthquake response. Emergency needs besides shelter include water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, psychosocial support, food and other relief items, as well as education support as many schools have been destroyed.

Heavy Aftershock Rattles East of Nepal

LWF Nepal Earthquake Relief to 44,000 People

KATHMANDU, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI) – An earthquake of the magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale has caused destruction in Eastern and Central Nepal on 12 May. The epicenter was located close to Mount Everest on the Chinese border in the already affected Sindhupalchowk and Dolkha districts. The earthquake is shaking a country still in shock from the magnitude

7.9 earthquake on 25 April, which killed more than 8,000 people and destroyed more than 70,000 houses.

All of the LWF staff, including two teams who had been doing assessment work in rural areas of Sindhupalchowk and Rasuwa, are well and accounted for. A team which was out on an assessment mission in Sindhupalchowk district east of Kathmandu, however,

faced challenges getting back to the office, as the road was blocked by a landslide. “Our relief operations continue,” LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Roland Schlott says. “Despite the fear this most recent quake has caused among the Nepali population, all our staff are in the office and working.”

Relief goods for almost 9,000 households

LWF Nepal is the leading partner within the ACT Alliance Nepal response. “We have the largest reach and capacity and will take on the additional work necessary to address the needs of the people affected by yesterday’s earthquake,” Schlott adds. “We are there, we will do it.”

To date LWF has distributed relief items to 8,957 households, covering a total of 43,703 individuals in Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk and Kathmandu districts. Assessment teams have been sent to Kavre and Gorkha districts. “We have distributed about 25 Euro worth of relief goods per



A street in Dhusel village, Lalitpur, which has been entirely destroyed by the April Earthquake. Most people had just started to pick up the pieces when the second tremor hit. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

family”, LWF Nepal Emergency Response Manager Gopal Dahal explains. “In the distributions we handed out 96 tons of rice, 24 tons of lentils, 6,100 tarpaulin sheets, 7,000 blankets and 1,200 bars of soap, and many other items such as solar lamps, hygiene packs and food for children and the elderly.” 36 Nepali volunteers many of them young people, have been recruited to assemble relief parcels and help with distributions in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.

Shelter most urgent

The Nepalese government has asked The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to take a seat on its emergency

coordination group. “When the 25 April earthquake happened, we were among the very few international NGOs on the ground. We set up emergency operations on day one,” Dr Prabin Manandhar, LWF country director said. Having worked in Nepal for over three decades, “we have longstanding relationships and are a recognized partner of the government in disaster response, refugee assistance and rights based empowerment work.”

While considered an “aftershock”, the new quake on 12 May caused damage in areas less severely affected by the previous earthquake. “With the monsoon starting in a few weeks, shelter is the most urgent need now,” LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Roland

Schlott says. “The second earthquake has collapsed many houses which were already damaged. People are frightened and weary, since 25 April there have been more than 50 aftershocks and tremors of a magnitude of 4.5 and above.”

In the urban centers including the capital Kathmandu many people started camping outside again although they have houses to go back to. “Until the aftershocks decline in intensity and frequency, many will prefer to brave the elements rather than risk being trapped in a building,” LWF Humanitarian Coordinator Schlott adds. “The reality, however, is that no one can predict earthquakes”.

Norway’s Lutherans Co-Host LWF Church Leadership Gathering

“Liberated by God’s Grace” for Witness in Europe

TRONDHEIM, Norway/GENEVA (LWI) – What does “liberated by God’s grace” mean for Lutheran churches and societies in Europe? How do the region’s experiences and challenges provide new perspectives for church engagement in community life and in the care for creation?

These are some of the questions that The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe will discuss at this year’s Church Leadership Consultation, 11-14 May, in Trondheim, Norway. Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway will jointly host the conference, focusing on the 2017 LWF Assembly theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

“The theme of the Twelfth LWF assembly provides a solid framework to reflect on specific and relevant topics related to society and challenges for Christian witness in the region today,” said Rev. Dr Eva Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, LWF area secretary for Europe.

The 80 participants in this year’s meeting include heads of churches and synods, ecumenical officers,



Participants at the 2014 LWF European church leadership gathering in Rome, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy. Photo: Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

theological educators, and women and youth coordinators from the 40 LWF member churches in Europe.

“The regional LWF gathering helps the wider church leadership to gain understanding about LWF’s present work and deepen motivation to take up opportunities for participating more broadly,” Vogel-Mfato added.

Plenary and group discussions at the conference will include advocacy for boat people on the Mediterranean Sea, accompanying the afflicted in the Ukraine crisis and other conflict areas, solidarity with people affected by calamities such as the earthquake in Nepal, and support to refugees across the world.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge will deliver greetings. His presentation will provide orientation for the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017 and the Twelfth Assembly to be held the same year in Namibia, Windhoek.

Church of Norway Presiding Bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien, who is LWF Vice-President for the Nordic region will preach at the opening eucharistic service at the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim.

The four-day gathering will also feature an intergenerational dialogue on climate justice, and a presentation on the contextual concerns of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway.

Perspectives on church witness in European society today

Panelists at LWF European church gathering describe varying contexts

TRONDHEIM, Norway/GENEVA (LWI)—“From what have we been liberated, and how do we use that freedom?” That was the question discussed on 12 May at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regional church gathering in Trondheim, Norway.

German, Norwegian and Polish panelists shared stories of how they have seen liberation expressed through various experiences of individual and communal salvation. They are among 80 representatives of LWF member churches attending the European Church Leadership Consultation (ECLC), 11-14 May.

Rev. Siv Limstrand of the Open Church of Trondheim City Mission described Easter celebrations that include her community’s most marginalized members—refugees, people with mental illness, and injecting drug users.

“There was a procession of Good Friday experiences through our streets—human beings who have experienced betrayal, humiliation, torture,” said Limstrand. “We were following the same cross. We were the cross. We could feel the solidarity coming from it.”

Noting the human tendency to remain in Good Friday’s darkness, Limstrand declared, “The light of Easter is stronger. Resistance and hope and courage grow again and again.”

Church-state relationships

Shifting from the personal to the political, Svein Arne Lindø, Moderator of Church of Norway National Council, detailed the



Rev. Siv Limstrand, Open Church of Trondheim City Mission, speaks at the LWF Europe panel during the church leadership gathering in Trondheim, Norway. Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

reforms that are changing church-state relationships in the country.

“We have different relations but we are still financed by the state,” said Lindø.

Constitutional amendments in 2012 affirmed Church of Norway’s unique role while enshrining equal support for all religions and beliefs. Greater church administrative independence from the state is set for 2017—as the church celebrates 500 years of Reformation.

“Could we call it a new Reformation in Norway?” asked Lindø.

New social and economic pressures

In his presentation and response to an audience question, Bishop Jerzy Samiec, Evangelical Church of

the Augsburg Confession in Poland, recounted the dramatic changes in church life before and after the fall of communism. Liberation brought great wealth to some, but many suffer from poverty and unemployment. Younger generations have done much to broaden the horizons of those who grew up behind the Iron Curtain, but they face pressures to focus on material success.

“Of course we had problems under communism,” said Samiec. “Now we have freedom, and we have to try and reach the people and see how they need our church.”

Reconciled diversity

Bishop Jan Janssen, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, concluded with an outward-looking ecu-

menical perspective on liberation. Describing relationships among different traditions in Germany that extend to partners in Ghana and Togo, he said, “We thank God for this liberation from our own house and home to the open horizons of our distant neighbors.”

“The seed of the gospel has grown although sometimes it has seen differ-

ent flowers than those [from] our own traditions,” said Janssen. “A diversity of species in creation and many different languages of faith are gifts from the creative spirit of God who liberates us to come together in reconciled diversity.”

A second panel led by the Norwegian Free Church will take place today.

Discussions at the LWF regional gathering are guided by the Reformation and Twelfth Assembly theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.” This year’s meeting is hosted jointly by Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway.

(A contribution by freelance journalist Ryan Rodrick Beiler)

Active Lutheran participation in Norway’s ecumenical life

Ecumenical, advocacy and interfaith perspectives at LWF Europe gathering

TRONDHEIM, Norway/GENEVA (LWI)—A second panel discussion at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regional consultation in Trondheim, Norway, offered ecumenical, advocacy and interfaith perspectives on church witness in European society today.

Mr Terje Solberg, chairperson of the LWF National Committee in Norway, told the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway. He described how, during meetings in 1876 that led to the founding of the Free Church, the question was asked if it was possible to reform the Church of Norway as a state church, but in a proper way. “Their answer was no.”

He said for many decades that followed, the Free Church’s ecumenical

relations were difficult, in a context with a state church [Church of Norway], while also remaining distinct from other new denominations.

“However, times have changed,” said Solberg. “And now we are taking an active part in the ecumenical work in Norway.”

Local Bishop Bjørn Roger Stien, discussed the current challenges and successes of the church in northern Norway. “It’s about reaching the people’s hearts, reaching the people’s lives where they are,” he said. He talked about theology expressed through relevant preaching and contemporary worship for the growth seen in the congregations of the Free Church.

While expressing appreciation for the ecumenical orientation of Norwegian

churches, the Free Church president, Rev. Jarle Skullerud said, “I would like to see a higher awareness of Lutheran doctrine within our denomination.”

One symptom of this challenge, according to Skullerud, is the “steep fall in Bible knowledge and faith practice even in Christian homes. The church has to help parents to be church in the family, to teach their children and be good examples to follow.”

Skullerud also affirmed the need for an outward-looking missional orientation: “In Norway, we still need more congregations reaching out to the neighborhood and especially to the margins of society.”

The Free Church and Church of Norway hosted LWF’s Europe member churches for the 11-14 May leadership consultation. The panel and other discussions were held under the Twelfth Assembly and 2017 Reformation anniversary theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

Advocacy for the environment in Romania

Rev. Dr. Elfriede Dörr, of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, presented a visual tour of her church’s context in a talk titled, “Liberated to ecological commitment in education, health and social development.”

In one example, she showed images of protests that erupted after a



Patricia Sophie Böckmann, during the Trondheim Church Leadership Consultation, Norway.
Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Canadian mining company proposed a project that would have turned the area into a crater, forcing residents to be resettled elsewhere.

“The waste would be very destructive to the environment and people would no longer have the proper basis for their lives,” said Dörr. “So there were very major protests all over the place and the women came from the Bible group to protest.”

Patricia Sophie Böckmann, a German living and studying in Strasbourg,

France, closed the session with reflections both as a member of the Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine as well as a Global Young Reformer, a network connecting young adults from all over the world.

She talked of Strasbourg’s cosmopolitan context where many different cultures, religions and beliefs meet. “Living together makes it necessary to interact with each other and to help each other to define our own identity in and through this interaction,” she said.

Through interfaith initiatives that bring together Christians, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, Muslims, atheists, and agnostics, Böckmann has reached two conclusions: “One is to be open to what the other has to tell you.” The other: “You also have to be true to yourself and to appreciate your own unique beliefs,” she added.

(A contribution by freelance journalist Ryan Rodrick Beiler)

Europe’s Lutherans pledge increased efforts to welcome refugees

Governments urged to create safe passage corridors

TRONDHEIM, Norway/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe have declared their commitment to increase efforts to welcome refugees “in our midst.”

In a resolution at the end of the LWF European Church Leadership Consultation (ECLC) in Trondheim, Norway, representatives of the 40 LWF churches in the region urged the European governments and European Union to establish a program like the Mare Nostrum initiative “to search and rescue the refugees in the whole Mediterranean Sea.”

The Lutheran church leaders also called for the creation of “safe passage corridors for refugees especially from countries like Syria and Iraq.” A system for a more just distribution of refugees within Europe should also be developed, they said. They called upon other churches in the region to support “these urgent requests to their governments.”

They recalled LWF’s connection with displaced people since the organization’s very founding in 1947. Many of the churches in Europe integrated refugees from the Second World War.

“It is for us as churches crucial and natural from our theology and from our understanding of church that migrants and refugees are our brothers and sisters and that we have to support them in all possible ways,” the ECLC resolution stated.

They noted that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons across the world was “now at the highest level since World War II, with more than 50 million people forcibly displaced.”

Some of those fleeing are risking their lives as they try to reach Europe, the church leaders said. This year alone, more than 36,000 migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean Sea by boat into Southern Europe according to the United Nations refugee agency. However 1,600 lost their lives while making this journey.

Discussions preceding the resolution included a presentation by LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge on the 500th Reformation anniversary and LWF’s Twelfth Assembly in 2017. Elaborating on the issue of refugees and migrants coming to Europe, he said the “churches’ moral voice was more important than ever in helping European societies to face the region’s



Delegates of the Trondheim Church Leadership Consultation at Nidaros Cathedral.
Photo: LWF/Ryan Rodrick Beiler

biggest refugee and migration challenge since world War II.”

Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway

jointly hosted this year’s gathering, 11-14 May. The 80 participants—heads of churches and synods, ecumenical officers, theological educators, and

women and youth coordinators—discussed LWF churches’ witness in Europe under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

Getting ready for an intergenerational dialogue on climate justice

LWF European ‘Young Reformers’ explore questions on Lutheran identity

TRONDHEIM, Norway/GENEVA (LWI) – Participants in the first meeting of young reformers from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe have begun exploring how they can strengthen and shape Lutheran identity globally.

“The church changes with the people. The people who are part of the Church are the reformation,” said Triin Salmu, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, at the regional Global Young Reformers Network (GYRN) meeting in Trondheim, Norway.

Salmu and 14 other GYRN members are preparing their contribution to an intergenerational dialogue on how LWF member churches can address the injustices of climate change. The panel in the context of the 11-14 May European Church Leadership Consultation (ECLC), will focus on “Creation: not for sale,” a sub-theme of the 500th Reformation anniversary and the LWF’s Twelfth Assembly theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

For the 27-year-old Salmu, the GYRN provides an opportunity for people to come together and reform together. “The network can implement change on a global level that one church can’t do alone,” she added.

The LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and its Youth desk established the GYRN in 2013. Inspired by the Reformation anniversary theme, the network coined the catch phrase, “Freed by God’s love to change the world,” to encourage young people (18-30 years) to contribute actively to the 2017 Reformation anniversary and LWF assembly.



Europe’s Young Reformers at their first meeting in Trondheim, Norway.
Photo: LWF/C. Richter

At the 13 May panel session, the GYRN members will engage the European church leaders in intergenerational conversations about theological insights on climate justice, and about action that churches could take to initiate or strengthen policies to become carbon neutral by 2050. They also want to learn about practical measures that could be adopted including re-learning good practices from the older generations.

Always seeking to be reformed

The understanding of *ecclesia semper reformanda* (a church always seeking to be reformed) generated a variety of responses in the preparatory meeting. “I understand the ongoing reformation in the churches as a vibrant and living development. The spirit of reform

lives on in the generations that see things differently from the past generation. This is how all new generations and the previous ones have explored and changed their churches,” noted 25-year-old Andreas Alexander Fosby, Church of Norway.

Fosby expressed appreciation for the GYRN, saying it “crosses the borders between the different churches and makes the idea of a communion of churches possible.” Young people today already live in a world with less borders and more openness, and are in contact with people from all over the world. “With that aspect, we can change and relate to each other at so many levels,” he added.

Game changer

For Tim Sonnemeyer, 22, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany),

ecclesia semper reformanda involves ongoing rethinking about Lutheran identity, with a perspective on the diverse global contexts. “Each generation is challenged by different cultural, political, social, and as Christians, theological questions. Being Lutheran is different today than it was 500, 100 or even 50 years ago. However we are all united in Christ, no matter which year we live in or what continent we live on,” he said.

The GYRN changes the game of rethinking Lutheran identity, said

Sonnemeyer. “By using modern communication methods we have the possibility to get to know young Christians and their background easily. We engage in a dialogue that reaches out to what is probably the largest group of young Lutheran adults ever addressed. That is impressive and means: We can shape the Lutheran identity of tomorrow.”

At the meeting in Trondheim, the young reformers also “discussed new ideas for discipleship and mission in

shrinking churches, the place of the church in a secular society, political engagement as Lutherans and other perspectives that shape our Lutheran identity today,” explained Caroline Richter, LWF Youth secretary.

Richter organizes the regional meetings of the network in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America. The series of training workshops will culminate in a global GYRN workshop, 22 August – 4 September 2015, in Wittenberg, Germany.

Czech Church advocates for a society that is more open to refugees

Ruml Welcomes ‘First Step’ for Syrians, Expects More Intervention

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (LWI) – A group of 70 Syrian refugees were granted asylum in the Czech Republic earlier this year following a public outcry over the government’s initial refusal on the basis that the sick children and their families posed a security risk. The protest included an open letter from the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB), a member church of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

In this interview, the ECCB Moderator Rev. Joel Ruml explains the church’s rationale for reaching out to migrants and refugees, and its advocacy for a society that is more open to people in need.



ECCB Moderator Rev. Joel Ruml. Photo: ECCB

What prompted your church to write the open letter to the Czech Republic Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior last December?

In our open letter to the government, the Synod Council of the ECCB was reacting to the situation in the Czech Republic at the time. The government of our country was very distant to the situation of people who were [are] suffering under a brutal regime. We were, and still are, of the opinion that our society had and still has to intensively help these people, because we had experienced a similar position. During the communist time,

many countries (mostly from Western Europe) helped our citizens to leave the former Czechoslovakia, although they were not suffering like the people in the Near East now.

What was your reaction to the granting of asylum to the 70 Syrians; was this sufficient?

We said: well, finally! We think it was the first step and we are expecting other steps in continually finding ways to help more children and their families. Now the government has begun preparing a structure for such

help. It is going slowly. Therefore we continue to keep an eye on this issue and where we can, we try to encourage people to get a new experience by meeting with people of different cultures and religions. This is needed, not only for migrants and refugees but for us as well.

Is the ECCB directly supporting migrants/refugees in its local diaconal work?

Compared to other European countries, the Czech Republic does not have a lot of migrants and refugees. But many of the migrants, who stayed

here with a wish to become integrated in Czech society, were [or still are] supported by churches and their diaconal services. Local communities of ECCB are helping people who came from Belarus, Myanmar, Pakistan, Ukraine and other countries.

What is the ECCB's rationale for reaching out to refugees/displaced people?

It is easy to answer: firstly, it is a command not only from Gospel, but from the Old Testament as well. Secondly, we have a historic experience;

our citizens received help and more than half a million Czech people could be integrated in democratic countries around the world. We should now give back what we received. The people now are suffering more than the Czechs did 30 or so years ago. Thirdly, our society needs to become more open to people in need. That isn't possible only theoretically. There are opportunities to be more open in practical experiences and in engaging at a personal level. Fourthly, we can learn from the many experiences and

methods in other countries. Therefore, our help should be more effective now.

The ECCB Diaconia office has supported LWF's humanitarian response for Syrian refugees in Jordan, with financial assistance from the Czech Foreign Ministry. In a 2013 letter acknowledging the church's partnership, the LWF described this support as "a beautiful expression of the international solidarity that has characterized the work of LWF World Service since its very beginnings."

Lutheran-Orthodox Commission to Celebrate Reformation Anniversary

Preparations towards Final Statement on Ordained Ministry/Priesthood

RHODES, Greece /GENEVA (LWI) – The international dialogue between Lutheran and the Orthodox churches in 2017 will include a celebration to mark 500 years of the Reformation.

Members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission made this decision at the 16th Plenary session, held 28 April-5 May, in Rhodes, Greece. "It is an important ecumenical signal that the Lutherans and Orthodox will be celebrating the Reformation together," said Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF

Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations.

She noted that theological inputs of the Reformation have also influenced eastern Christianity and reshaped societies both in the east and west. "It is good that we are able to acknowledge these influences and to celebrate the Reformation anniversary together," said Hintikka, who serves as the commission co-secretary.

The commission said its 17th Plenary session in 2017 will also publish

the final statement on "Ordained Ministry/Priesthood," which both dialogue partners have been discussing since 2012 under a wider study on the "The Mystery of the Church."

The Rhodes meeting was originally planned to conclude the present study process. However the commission members noted it was necessary to continue the ongoing discussion until the next Plenary session, in order to guarantee sufficient attention to the challenging topic of 'Ministry'.

"The topic of ordained ministry or priesthood as the Orthodox frame it is a challenging one," said the LWF assistant general secretary. Despite a three-year preparatory process for a final statement, "we still decided that further studies and discussions are needed to clarify some crucial issues for this topic."

Hintikka noted that the commission meetings have over the years become an important place to share and reflect together "as members of the one body of Jesus Christ, in spite of our diversity" in theological and historical perspectives.

"The local Orthodox church was enormously hospitable and the atmosphere among the participants was very good," Hintikka said. Conversations also outside the plenary discus-



Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission co-chairperson Bishop em. Dr Christoph Klein (left) and Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, at the Rhodes meeting. Photo: Koufos Images

sions resulted in “some potentially concrete ideas on practical cooperation between local Orthodox and Lutheran churches,” she added.

This year’s plenary was hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and H. E. Metropolitan Kyrillos of Rhodes. Com-

mission members discussed three Lutheran and Orthodox presentations, responding to draft statements of the 2012-2014 preparatory meetings.

The current Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission is co-chaired by Bishop emeritus Dr Christoph Klein

(Romania) and H. E. Metropolitan Dr Gennadios of Sassima.

The international bilateral dialogue between the LWF and Eastern Orthodox churches began in 1981, and several reports have been produced from its commission meetings.

Increasing Mutual Understanding between U.S. Lutherans and Catholics

Study Guide to *From Conflict to Communion* Helps Movement toward Unity

PITTSBURGH, USA/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutherans and Catholics in the United States are discussing how to mark the common commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 using a new Study Guide on the historic document *From Conflict to Communion*.

The report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on Unity, released in 2013, is the first attempt by Lutherans and Catholics to jointly describe the history of the Reformation. The 48-page Study Guide on the report, published in March, is the work of Pennsylvania-area Lutherans and Catholics.

It was written by representatives of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Diocese of Greensburg and The Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh.

“The Study Guide is designed to increase mutual understanding between Catholics, Lutherans and other friends. It may also be a catalyst for healing and reconciliation communally and individually,” the Introduction states.

“The goal of our mutual commemoration must include remembering our history and continuing our movement toward the unity that Christ wills for His followers.”

In the first meeting using the new Study Guide for *From Conflict to Communion* on 29 April, more than 100 Lutherans and Catholics met at St. Paul Seminary in Pittsburgh to discuss how to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

“Although we cannot change history, we can determine how we tell the story,” said Bishop Kurt Kusserow, head of the Southwestern Synod of

the ELCA. “One of the ways we are determined to tell that story is to begin with the point of unity.”

Rev. John Crossin, director of the U.S. Catholic bishops’ office for relations with other churches and faiths, noted that such unity would have shocked past generations. Growing up in Philadelphia, he said, “We played basketball together but never visited each other’s churches.”

Bishop Emeritus Donald McCoid, head of the ELCA’s national office on ecumenical and inter-religious relations, said the new guide, which is being distributed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is intended for national distribution.

“The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue has yielded excellent fruits over many years, including the historic report, *From Conflict to Communion*,” said Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations for The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

“We are thrilled to see that this is helpful for ongoing dialogue among the LWF member churches and their partners. It offers yet another excellent resource to help us continue the dialogue,” Hintikka added.

The Study Guide for *From Conflict to Communion* includes seven sessions rooted in prayer and silent reflection as well as discussion on the theology of Martin Luther, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, the Second Vatican Council, and Baptism and Unity.



Bishop Emeritus Donald McCoid. Photo: ELCA

Salvadoran Catholic Archbishop Romero: a friend and a great ecumenist

Lutheran Bishop Gómez reflects on Romero's influence on the global church

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador/GENEVA (LWI) – Salvadoran Lutheran Bishop Medardo E. Gómez was among church leaders who witnessed the beatification of Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero at a ceremony attended by tens of thousands in the capital San Salvador on 23 May 2015. In an interview with Lutheran World Information, Gómez explained the significance of the global Catholic Church recognition of Romero. The bishop who was assassinated in March 1980 is considered a martyr of the Christian faith for his open advocacy for the poor and marginalized during El Salvador's civil war, which lasted from 1979 to 1992.



Bishop Medardo Gómez, right, watches theologian Pablo Richard greet Rev. Vilma Rodríguez from the Salvadoran Lutheran Church, who took part in the beatification of assassinated Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero. Photo: R. Menjivar

What was your reaction to the invitation to attend the beatification ceremony of Archbishop Oscar Romero on 23 May?

I was worried when I heard the first reports from the Auxiliary Bishop that the ceremony would not have special guests because it would be a mass of the people. I thought it would not give an ecumenical testimony. However, my idea was to have an opportunity for ecumenical testimony, and I requested that together with me, 20 persons from other Lutheran churches and ecumenical partners in Latin America could participate. It was accepted.

It was a great event with the participation of many priests, bishops and national and ecumenical delegations. I am very happy because it was worthy to be held in that way. The Roman Catholic Church has a great opportunity to strengthen relationships. On the other hand, this event showed that sectors that were contrary to Monsignor Romero have changed. The Mayor of Santa Tecla announced that the city will erect a bust of Romero. This is a sign of change and recognition of Romero's ministry.

For my part, I have given declarations expressing respect and admiration for Monsignor Romero. His beatification is a source of pride for Salvadorans. As a Christian church, it is important because Romero was very ecumenical. I have made known our Lutheran understanding that we all are saints by receiving the Holy Spirit and by receiving God's forgiveness during baptism. So Romero's greatness is not for his actions, it is only God's action in him that made Romero a prophet. This is a call of God to which Romero said: "here I am Lord."

What was the significance of the presence of Lutheran church representatives from Latin America in the beatification ceremony?

Ecumenism is one of the subjects that has to be practiced. To give that testimony by participating in actions such as the beatification of Romero is important for me. It demonstrates to the world and sister churches the promotion and strengthening of the fact that we are brothers and sisters. I considered it a duty to participate,

representing other churches and expressing fellowship with other faiths. Since the beatification was announced, I participated in many events preceding the ceremony on 23 May.

How does the Salvadoran Lutheran Church and you as its leader identify with the cause that he stood for and for which he was killed?

This moment excites me because Romero was my pastor too when I was a child being prepared in the catechism for confirmation, as he served as a pastor at the Cathedral of San Miguel. I remember well, not knowing at the time of his greatness—a man with joy and very communicative. Children were invited to memorize a Bible verse; he was a friend. Then, when I was at school, Romero was a chaplain and there is an experience that helps me to talk about his conversion. When the evangelical churches were growing, evangelical students in Romero's class questioned the Bible class. He did not like it and attributed the resignation to the presence of evangelicals.

Romero was conservative while still being charismatic, and in his own way drawing people to the faith. The journey towards his role as bishop, along with the people, transformed him to embrace pastoral leadership in an ecumenical way.

When he was murdered, we were already having ecumenical meetings (for example, in the Baptist Church, for the prayer of Christian unity) in which Romero participated. The churches were already walking together. His death shocked us so much, especially me. The Salvadoran Lutheran Church was still small. The war started and we had suspended our meetings. With his death, many of us decided to take up the burden of Romero—the Episcopal Church, the Emanuel Baptist Church and others. At that time, I was about 33 years old.

In January 2012, on the 20th anniversary of the 1992 peace agreement, you wrote an open letter to President Mauricio Funes, calling for a new accord to return the country to the path of peace and social justice. What progress has been made?

In life I have learned that it is easier to build processes than rebuilding peace. The new government of El Salvador is rebuilding peace amidst the dominance of the traditional power. Its cost is huge but there is change. President Funes has a different approach; it is more democratic in fulfilling people's dreams of respect and peace. He focuses on planning and establishing fairer systems to help the poor. The government has social services like access to free education up to high school (uniforms, food etc.), services to the elderly, health, etc. However, reconstruction has its costs; still, the dream of peace is being met.

How does the 2017 Reformation anniversary theme “Liberated by God’s Grace” speak to the Salvadoran Lutheran Church from the social and ecumenical perspectives?

The new mayor of San Salvador will receive me in June to discuss our church's request to have a space (an evangelical square) to erect a bust of Martin Luther. I am sure that other ecumenical churches will also be pleased to participate in this initiative

that is linked to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The purpose of our church is to make visible the Reformation not only from the Lutheran perspective but also ecumenically. We are promoting it through our pastoral work, sharing the historical and social elements of the Reformation especially in our family ministry.

Will Lutherans and Catholics commemorate together the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017, and how?

We will have a meeting with Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas, and hopefully with the Conference of Bishops, to talk about how to commemorate it. The Lutheran-Catholic document *From Conflict to Communion* will be of great importance for this proposal of a joint study. The important aspect is that both churches can see each other as brothers and sisters in dialogue. On the other hand, our pastor Cecilia Alfaro who is the national coordinator of the Council of Churches in Latin America has put the topic on the agenda. The ecumenical conversation is the space for dialogues with the Catholic Church.

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Violence in DRC Causes Immense Displacement

Congolese Refugees Pour into Uganda

RWAMWANJA, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI) – “I had five children. All of them were killed,” Bernadetta Myanura says. The elderly woman has a scar on her arm. Her granddaughter is all the family she has left. The 14-year-old-girl is standing beside her and looking at the floor. The clothes they are wearing are the only things they could save when they fled violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). That, and their lives. As they tell their story to a team of LWF visitors in late April, they are sheltered in a crowded reception center at Rwamwanja refugee camp, western Uganda.

The situation has worsened since then. For weeks, the number of refugees from the DRC has been increasing. According to UNHCR Uganda, thousands of people are pouring into Uganda each week from the eastern DRC, fleeing rape and abduction by Mai Mai militia, which claims to fight for the independence of the DRC’s Katanga province and is displacing thousands of families. In less than two weeks, 3000 Congolese refugees have arrived in Uganda. According to camp authorities, they tell stories which suggest a total breakdown of law and order in the eastern DRC.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has received 1600 Congolese refugees at Mahane reception center and is



Bernadetta Myanura and her granddaughter Feza in the few square meters they have to themselves in the reception center. Photo: M. Renaux

expecting 1000 more this week. Most of the people are women and children. The LWF team in Rwamwanja camp supplies the new arrivals with relief items, such as blankets, pails and cooking pots, as well as pit latrine excavation kits. When the refugees are registered, the LWF staff also identify people with special needs, such as pregnant women and new mothers, people with disabilities, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, unaccompanied minors and separated children. The LWF team also established a counseling desk at the reception center.

The Ugandan government has designated a new refugee settlement

within Rwamwanja camp. The LWF is one of the main implementing partners at the new refugee settlement site called Mahiga. Covering 7.7km², it is expected to accommodate 15,000 refugees. Each household will be allocated a 250m² plot of land. The LWF, among others, will supply the refugees with shelter, agricultural support, protection and community services.

Nobody can tell how long they will have to stay. “People had started to go back to DRC, now they have to flee again,” a LWF staff member at the reception center says.

Uganda: Boreholes for Education

Schools Profit from LWF Motorized Water System

ADJUMANI, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI) – Benjamin Makoor, head teacher of Njumanzi Primary 1, is not the person who waits for things to happen.

In his hometown Bor, Jonglei, he used to work for the South Sudanese government. “I was training teachers, he said. That was also the first time he heard of The Lutheran World Federa-

tion (LWF), who are running schools in Bor as part of their development work. “These schools had a good reputation,” he says. It was however not with a school, but a borehole, that the LWF ensured his employment and the education of South Sudanese children.

When fighting broke out in South Sudan, Makoor fled to Uganda. In

Adjumani refugee camp, he again met many students from Jonglei, some even from his hometown. “We have to do something,” he told the parents. “The children need an education.”

There was no Primary school in Njumanzi settlement back then, just trees, grass and bush. “That’s enough for now,” Makoor said, “learning starts



Benjamin, head teacher of Nyumanzi 1 primary school, at the borehole built by LWF with BPRM support next to the school. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

when there are students and teachers.” The tall man cleared an area with his Panga bush knife, and assembled students and teachers under two big trees. Flat stones in a semi-circle still indicate where the students used to sit. On a big branch, he hung a tire rim with a piece of string. To call his students together, he beat it with a spanner. The sound of the improvised school bells can be heard in the mountains three kilometers away.

Soon after, international agencies discovered the teacher’s initiative and built a proper school building with black boards and desks. Soon the school was overcrowded, with up to 160 students per class. In the dry sea-

son, however, Makoor still had trouble keeping them at school.

“There was no water,” Makoor says. The children were needed to fetch water from distant boreholes for their families and would wander off after a lesson or two to quench their thirst. “They had to walk to the distribution center half a kilometer from here,” Makoor says. “There were few boreholes in this settlement, and women and children are always the most affected.”

In February 2015 however, Nyumanzi Primary 1 was connected to a motorized borehole system set up by the LWF. The school received its own tap stand. Students only need to press a button to drink or wash their

hands after using the latrines on the compound. “Hygiene and attendance has increased greatly,” Makoor says.

The borehole has also made life easier for people in the settlement across the road. Instead of walking 500 meters, Amer Jok only has to carry the water across the road, less than a hundred meters. While hauling water looks very elegant in pictures, the 20-liter-cans are extremely heavy. “It’s so much better now,” the young woman says.

Even in the late afternoon, there is activity at the school. The borehole is a meeting point for the settlement, so instead of running away early, Makoor’s students linger long hours after school.

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