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– A Communion of Churches**

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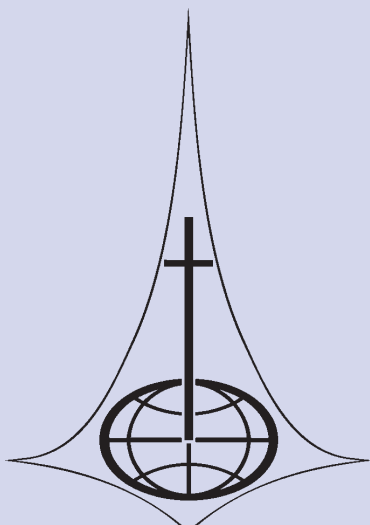
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Council of the Lutheran World Federation Meets in Jerusalem



LWF Council members who participated in the September 2004 meeting at Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva. © LWF/D. Zimmermann

The annual meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) begins with a festive worship service in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the old city of Jerusalem on Tuesday, 30 August, at 17.00 hrs. Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) will preach.

The Council, at the ELCJHL's invitation, will be meeting August 31 to September 6 under the theme, "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation." Plenary sessions will take place at the International Center of Bethlehem, which belongs to the ELCJHL.

(See page 6)

Highlights

Canadian Lutherans Reject Same-Sex Blessing Proposal in Close Vote..... 3

At its Tenth Biennial Convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) rejected a proposal to allow its pastors to perform blessings for same-sex relationships.

New Commission Studies Condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran Confessional Writings9

"The memories of the persecution and the killings of Anabaptists in large numbers so many hundreds of years back, are still very fresh and painful among Anabaptists/Mennonites today. Seeing church historians bring these issues to the fore emphasizes the importance of the work we have begun."

LWF General Secretary Urges Togo's Prime Minister to Facilitate Refugees' Return 10

The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, has urged Togo's Prime Minister Edem Kodjo to facilitate the return of thousands of refugees who fled the West African country in the wake of a political conflict that has gripped the nation since February.

FEATURE: Opening Books Opens a Whole New World..... 11

The group of women who attended the trauma counseling meeting in Bunia town, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, were all victims of sexual violence.

Contents

Communio

- 3 Canadian Lutherans Reject Same-Sex Blessing Proposal in Close Vote
- 4..... Internal Movements Threaten Future of Brazilian Lutheran Church
- 5 ELCA Assembly Addresses Variety of Topics
- 6 Council of the Lutheran World Federation Meets in Jerusalem

LWF Secretariat

- 7 LWF Calls for Trade Decisions that Promote Healthy Society
- 7 Potentially Church-dividing Issues Discussed at Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute Seminar
- 8 LWF Mourns Taizé Movement Founder Brother Roger Schutz
- 9 New Commission Studies Condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran Confessional Writings

Features & Themes

Inter-Faith Delegation Visit to Togo, July 17–21

- 10..... LWF General Secretary Urges Togo’s Prime Minister to Facilitate Refugees’ Return
- 10..... IFAPA Seeks Active Involvement of Togo’s Religious Communities in Reconciliation Process
- 11 FEATURE: Opening Books Opens a Whole New World

News in Brief

- 2 Media and Conflict, Focus of LWF Capacity Building Workshop for Field Communicators

Media and Conflict, Focus of LWF Capacity Building Workshop for Field Communicators

Since secular media rarely concentrate on conflicts that are not dramatic, faith-based organizations engaged in humanitarian work have a major role to play in developing alternative media. This was one of the concerns raised at a capacity building workshop attended mainly by communicators drawn from field offices of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) in Africa, and from partner organizations and agencies, and the Geneva headquarters. The workshop held June 27- July 1 in Kampala, was hosted by the DWS Uganda program, and co-organized by the LWF Office for Communication Services (OCS) and DWS Communication and Advocacy desk.

Around 30 participants from East, South and West African countries focused on the role of media in conflict situations, with study cases mainly on the northern Uganda conflict and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Experiences were also shared on the significance of communication and advocacy for Kampala-based local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and how they work with media to make their work visible.

As the workshop’s objective was to improve communication within the LWF/DWS network, and enhance the

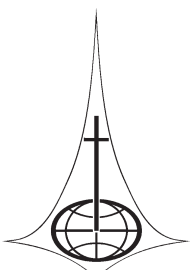


Participants in the DWS/OCS Kampala workshop. © LWF/B. Schneider

exchange of information and news between the LWF/DWS field offices, OCS, donors and LWF member churches, participants also learned practical skills on news and feature writing. They also discussed the major role played by field-based NGOs in providing first-hand information that would not be so easily accessible to mainstream media.

Similar workshops are planned for other regions in Africa, and for the Central American region in the next two years.

(263 words)



Canadian Lutherans Reject Same-Sex Blessing Proposal in Close Vote

National Bishop Schultz: The Church Will Have to Deal with this Issue

WINNIPEG, Canada/GENEVA, 11 August 2005 (LWI) – At its Tenth Biennial Convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) rejected a proposal to allow its pastors to perform blessings for same-sex relationships.

ELCIC delegates attending the July 21–24 governing body meeting voted against the measure in a resolution that fell short of the two-thirds majority needed for it to pass. Of 408 ballots cast, 183 (45 per cent) were in favor and 220 (54 percent) were opposed. There were five abstentions.

Delegates were voting on a recommendation from the ELCIC National Church Council to permit blessings for same-sex couples under certain conditions. The resolution would have allowed a “local option” for blessings for same-sex couples in committed relationships.

The National Church Council forwarded the resolution to the ELCIC convention after nearly a year’s study and debate. It was viewed as a compromise between allowing same-sex marriages and not permitting any rite for same-sex couples at all.

Coincidentally, the debate occurred during the same week as a federal law permitting same-sex marriage officially came into effect. Canada is the fourth country in the world to allow civil marriages for same-sex couples following the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. However, the Canadian law does not require churches to perform same-sex marriages, leaving that to their own discretion.

The same-sex issue dominated the four-day convention, with many predicting a close vote. Supporters argued that the only way to make gays and lesbians feel fully included in the ELCIC was to adopt the resolution. Opponents warned that passing it could split the church and lead to an exodus of congregations.

National Bishop Schultz Cautions Debate Will Recur

At a press conference following the debate, ELCIC National Bishop Raymond Schultz said he predicted the same-sex issue would come up again at future conventions. “The vote was almost a 50-50 split, which means that half of our church is not satisfied with the outcome. I can’t imagine this going on for very long without people in the church starting another initiative.”

Schultz pointed out that the changing political landscape for same-sex marriage meant the church would have to deal with the matter whether it wanted to or not. “The fact that we now have federal legisla-



ELCIC National Bishop Raymond Schultz. © Jill Gingrich

tion for same-sex marriage means that the church has to determine what marriage means inside the church as opposed to state marriage,” he said.

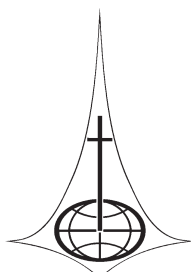
Officially, the ELCIC does not condone same-sex blessings, as a result of a 2003 letter from bishops stating that the church does not perform rites for same-sex couples.

The ELCIC also takes guidance from a 1970 statement by the former Lutheran Church of America on sex, marriage and the family, which refers to homosexuality as a departure from the norm. However, the National Church Council in its resolution called sections of that statement inadequate “in light of developing theological, pastoral and sociological scholarship.” It called for the ELCIC to suspend application of those references.

The ELCIC is Canada’s largest Lutheran church, with approximately 182,000 members in 624 congregations throughout five regional synods. It joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1986.

Also during the convention, Bishop Schultz was returned to a second consecutive four-year term as ELCIC national bishop. (550 words)

(By Winnipeg-based LWI correspondent Ron Friesen, who attended the ELCIC Biennial Convention.)



Internal Movements Threaten Future of Brazilian Lutheran Church

Former LWF President Brakemeier Stresses Investment in IECLB's Continuity

SÃO LEOPOLDO, Brazil/GENEVA, 24 August 2005 (LWI) – A former president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) has called for change within the Brazilian Lutheran church, saying its current structure was not viable for the church's growth and future.

Rev. Dr Gottfried Brakemeier, IECLB President 1985–1994, said the “feared division of the IECLB is in process,” due to different currents organized as movements within the church. He stressed the need to invest in the church's continuity, which implied eliminating internal barriers that were impeding growth, controlling its centrifuge forces and joining together in a common project.

Brakemeier, also former president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), 1990–1997, issued his remarks in an article sent electronically in June to leaders and movements within the church as “a contribution toward a necessary debate.” It became known to a wider public in July, weeks after the current IECLB President, Rev. Dr Walter Altmann had issued a pastoral letter warning that the church could face a “painful schism” impelled by a charismatic movement within it.

Altmann's pastoral letter, issued July 9, named four pastors who asked to be withdrawn from the church's clergy roster, and three congregations that have constituted themselves independently. The IECLB Council decided to distribute Brakemeier's article widely for discussion within the church that has around 1,200 congregations served by more than 800 pastors.

IECLB President Walter Altmann Affirmed Rejection of Re-baptism

Theological questions are at the root of the conflict. In December 2004, Altmann stated the church's rejection of the practice of re-baptism that pastors linked to the charismatic movement had introduced into Lutheran congregations. His recent pastoral letter clarified that the IECLB was opposed to the practice of re-baptism due to confessional issues, but did not reject the re-baptized people. The church, Altmann affirmed, “must be willing and be prepared to pastorally cope with all people who, for reasons of conscience, have submitted to re-baptism.”



*IECLB President, Rev. Dr Walter Altmann.
© LWF/D. Zimmermann*

The forces Brakemeier was referring to are internal movements in the same structure including the Lutheran Grassroots Pastoral movement, Encontro Movement, the Christian Union Evangelical Mission, Martin Luther Communion, and Charismatic Renewal. He emphasized, however, that the differences were not harmful as long as the sectors remained integrated and focused toward the same direction.

He also cited the IECLB's three theological faculties, formation centers with different bibliographic references and theological orientation and the movements, which have their own devotionals, song books, publishing houses and administrative systems.

Brakemeier emphasized that the major victims of these discrepancies were the communities and parishes. “If they had opted in favor of one of the ‘lines’ in the IECLB, the rupture would have taken place long ago,” he remarked.

The Lutheran leader referred to a study by former IECLB secretary general, Rev. Gerd Uwe Kliewer, indicating that the church's membership barely grew 0.3 percent from 1997 to 2002. It had 715,000 members in 2002, less than 0.5 percent of Brazil's estimated population of 180 million.

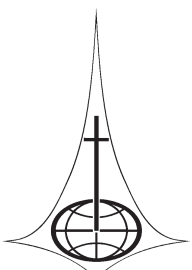
Brakemeier also challenged the IECLB about its role as a missionary church. Timid in the past, because it limited itself to offering pastoral support to German immigrants, the IECLB, in an increasingly multi-religious setting, must urgently define its identity in “rigorously confessional terms,” he said. He recommended “ecumenical learning” in the use of media for evangelization, without necessarily trying to imitate methods used by other Christians.

Brakemeier invited people to rediscover the delight of the Lutheran faith. “Its delight is not limited to some dogmas of faith. It is a way of being.” The Lutheran confession invites people to faith without prohibiting critical reasoning, he added.

The IECLB currently has 710,000 members. It joined the LWF in 1952.

(625 words)

(Latin American and Caribbean News Agency—ALC)



ELCA Assembly Addresses Variety of Topics

Voting Members Take Action on Sexuality Proposals, Churchwide Restructuring

CHICAGO, United States of America/GENEVA, 25 August 2005 (LWI) – The Ninth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) addressed a variety of topics including new worship resources, interim eucharistic sharing with the United Methodist Church, ethnic ministry strategies, churchwide structure and governance, sexuality proposals and a Middle East strategy.



ELCA Presiding Bishop, Mark S. Hanson responds to questions at a news conference after the Assembly decisions on the Sexuality Studies' recommendations. © ELCA

The assembly, ELCA's highest legislative authority met August 8–14 in Orlando, Florida under the theme, "Marked With the Cross of Christ Forever." ELCA Presiding Bishop, Mark S. Hanson, chaired the assembly attended by 2,300 people including 1,015 voting members. Hanson is also president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The ELCA voting members initiated "Interim Eucharistic Sharing" with the United Methodist Church (UMC). The agreement, approved by the UMC Council of Bishops in April 2005, fosters mutual prayer, support and study, and encourages joint services of Holy Communion following guidelines established by both churches. It is a step that may lead to a relationship of full communion.

Assembly Acts on Sexuality Proposals

The assembly considered three recommendations forwarded by the ELCA Church Council. The recommendations resulted from a multi-year study process on sexuality led by a task force.

By a vote of 851-127, the assembly adopted Recommendation One that urges the church to "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion we share as members of the body of Christ."

Recommendation Two was adopted by 670-323 votes as amended, asking the ELCA to "continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops," which found no basis for establishing an official ceremony for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. The assembly reiterated the church's welcome to gay and lesbian people and its trust in pastors and congregations as they "discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care for all to whom they minister."

Recommendation Three, which would have established a process by which a person living in a committed long-term homosexual relationship could seek an exception to current ELCA policy concerning rostered leaders, required a two-thirds vote to be adopted. It was defeated by 490-503 votes.

Churchwide Restructuring, Governance Proposals Adopted

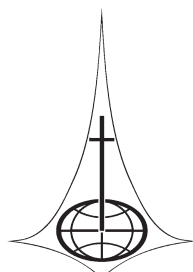
By a vote of 810-169, voting members adopted proposals in "Faithful Yet Changing: Design for Mission Through the Churchwide Organization of the ELCA." Three types of units are described in the approved design for mission: program units, offices and service units. Reorganization will begin immediately and be completed by the start of the next fiscal year, 1 February 2006.



The peace is shared at the Holy Communion service on August 9. © ELCA

Further, the ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop through its worship staff, was asked to complete the liturgical review of proposed content for a new worship book expected to be available by October 2006.

The assembly adopted new ministry strategies namely, the African Descent Ministry Strategy and an Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy, developed through the ELCA Commission for Multicultural



Ministries in consultation with representatives of each community.

Voting members also urged Lutherans to participate in a campaign, "Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land," designed to build awareness and encourage engagement in accompaniment and advocacy activities for "peace with justice" between Israel and Palestine.

Renewed Commitment to End Global Hunger

Responding to a variety of concerns that were addressed by various synods, voting members adopted a proposal for renewed commitment to end world hunger, and urged each synod to make this "core dimension" of the ELCA central to its ministry and mission.

On bio-ethical research, the assembly called for the development of a social statement that "addresses significant theological, ethical, public and pastoral chal-

lenges arising from developments in genetics" for possible consideration by the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

The assembly approved action to "welcome and encourage task forces to empower this church in its engagement with refugee and immigrant issues" and mandated strengthening the church's work with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. It also called on the US Congress "to end immediately the detention and imprisonment of non-criminal asylum seekers, undocumented laborers" and others who are incarcerated and to "implement just, consistent and humane practices regarding the treatment of asylum seekers."

The Tenth Biennial Assembly of the ELCA will take place 6–12 August, 2007 in Chicago, Illinois.

The ELCA has around 5 million members. It joined the LWF in 1988. *(718 words)*

Information about the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly is at www.elca.org/assembly/05 on the Web.

(Edited from the ELCA News Service.)

Council of the Lutheran World Federation Meets in Jerusalem

Highlights Include Strategic Planning and Decision on Eleventh Assembly Venue in 2010

GENEVA, 24 August 2005 (LWI) – The annual meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) begins with a festive worship service in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the old city of Jerusalem on Tuesday, 30 August, at 17.00 hrs. Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) will preach.

The Council, at the ELCJHL's invitation, will be meeting August 31 to September 6 under the theme, "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation." Plenary sessions will take place at the International Center of Bethlehem, which belongs to the ELCJHL.

The 49-member Council governs the LWF between Assemblies, held every six years. The current Council was elected at the July 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. It consists of the President, the Treasurer and 48 people both pastors and lay from the LWF member churches. Advisors, observers and guests will also attend.

A special highlight of this year's meeting will be a decision on the venue of the next Assembly. Following the 2004 Council decision to hold the Eleventh Assembly in 2010, the Council will on Monday, September 5, receive presentations from inviting churches and make its decision which invitation to accept and the possible venue.

Further highlights include reports on the Strategic Planning Process; the Future of the LWF in the Context

of Ecumenical Reconfiguration/Changing Ecumenical Landscape; the Proposed Ecumenical Alliance for Development (PEAD); and an Interim Report of the Task Force on Family, Marriage and Sexuality.

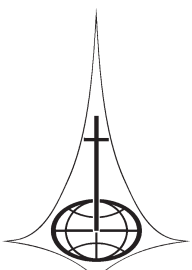
From Wednesday, August 31 to Thursday September 1, the Council agenda includes the Address of LWF President, Bishop Mark S. Hanson; Report of the General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko; Report of the Treasurer, Mr Peter Stoll; and discussion on these presentations.

Program Committees for Communication Services; Ecumenical Affairs; Finance and Administration; International Affairs and Human Rights; Mission and Development; Theology and Studies; and World Service will meet with their own agendas from Thursday, September 1 and report back to the Council for discussion and action on Monday, September 5 and Tuesday, September 6.

In addition, audience with representatives of Israeli and Palestinian authorities is planned.

During the Council meeting, the LWF Office for Communication Services will provide a daily news service in English and German, and also offer a photo service. News will be posted on the LWF Web site under www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html

(415 words)



LWF Calls for Trade Decisions that Promote Healthy Society

Ecumenical Alliance Monitors WTO General Council Meeting in Geneva

GENEVA, 27 July 2005 (LWI) – The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, called on members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council meeting in Geneva in July, to take decisions “that will create a healthy world and a healthy society.”

He challenged the global body dealing with the rules of trade between nations and regions, to seriously take into account the concerns of many communities worldwide that are affected negatively by unfair trade rules. Many of these mainly poor communities also offer basic solutions, and the WTO should listen to them, Noko said in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The WTO General Council met July 27–29 to discuss the progress of the so-called “Doha Round” of multilateral trade negotiations launched in Doha, Qatar in 2001, in preparation for the October 2005 Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong.

During the week, social movements and civil society organizations were called to form a “General Council of Peoples” in order to mobilize against the WTO corporate agenda. The group of non-governmental organizations stands up for the interest of developing countries and ordinary people around the world as well as the environment in light of increasing global trade liberalization. Their aim is to monitor the General Council negotiations, and in this way hold WTO members accountable.

One of the concerns of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) is the negotiation of the WTO Agriculture Agreement, as agriculture is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, especially in developing countries. On the basis of its “Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development,” the LWF advocates that peoples, communities and countries should define

their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances, explains Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, DWS Program Officer for Sustainable Development and Environment. “Food is a common good and the WTO should not regulate agriculture as a merchandise,” he added.

The coordinators of the “General Council of Peoples,” among them the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), of which the LWF is a member, organized discussion forums, workshops and plenaries on current trade policies. They were open to the public as were the music and cultural events July 27–30.

In order to raise awareness at community level about the WTO agenda, the EAA produced a sample letter that can be sent to trade ministers or WTO representatives, calling for increased transparency in WTO negotiations; respect for human rights obligations in trade agreements; and enabling poor countries to choose policies that help their small farmers. For more information please go to www.e-alliance.ch/wto.jsp

“The world is waiting for good news,” said Noko. “Especially economic refugees who hope that fair trade will bring about change so that they can start a life as dignified human beings,” he added. (488 words)

(By Julia Heyde, youth intern, LWF Office for Communication Services.)

(Available LWF resources: *LWF Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development*—www.lutheranworld.org/what_we_do/dws/DWS-Principles.pdf; LWF Documentation 50/2004 *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability, Responding as the Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization* at www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/Dts/DTS-Publications.pdf)

Potentially Church-dividing Issues Discussed at Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute Seminar

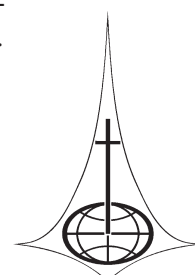
Varying Views on Bio-ethics and Homosexuality

STRASBOURG, France/GENEVA, 24 August 2005 (LWI) – A number of ethical issues are challenging the churches increasingly, some of them leading to tensions that threaten unity within and among churches. It is against this background that the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, focused its 2005 Summer Seminar, on two currently divisive issues, namely genetic engineering and homosexuality.

Sixty participants from different countries and confessions attended the seminar. Although opinions

were diverse, the participants engaged in an “open and charitable debate finding a great deal of consensus and identifying areas for further discussion”, said Prof. Kenneth Appold, research professor at the institute and the seminar’s coordinator.

Three keynote speakers addressed the issue of bio-ethics, agreeing on a number of important principles. One of these principles is the fundamental belief that human life is God’s creation and requires special protection at all stages of development. However, the



speakers could not agree on how to define the beginning of life. For Roman Catholic professor Eberhard Schockenhoff (Germany) the moment of fertilization is the definite point of beginning.

Lutheran professors, Klaus Tanner (Germany) and Rev. Dr Jean-François Collange, president of the Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine (France), were less precise in this regard, observing that rapidly evolving scientific knowledge made most such efforts problematic. Differing views on the beginning of life led to different positions on embryonic stem-cell research. Schockenhoff opposes this area of research, while the two Lutherans give their consent, albeit with rigorous ethical qualifications.

On the topic of homosexuality, the participants shared experiences from their various home churches. They especially focused on how to respond to homosexual partnerships; and whether to ordain homosexuals living in such partnerships. Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, director of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and

Studies proposed theological and methodological perspectives for engaging the differences on this topic without their becoming church-dividing.

Professors Eugene Rogers (USA) and Philippe Bordeyne (France), developed some creative understandings of marriage in general, and how these may or may not apply to same-sex relationships. Marriage, they agreed, is a part of the church's public witness; married couples contribute to the church's mission. They disagreed on whether homosexual partnership is capable of such a contribution. Bordeyne argued that it cannot, since marriage witnesses to God's will for sexual difference—male and female—at Creation. For Rogers, marriage is above all an exercise in spiritual asceticism, cultivating spiritual values of fidelity, self-sacrifice and love. In his view, any couple whose relationship embodied those qualities contributed to the church's mission to the world, hence, his call for allowing homosexuals to marry.

Participants left with a sense that it is possible and necessary to continue these discussions in their own churches. (469 words)

LWF Mourns Taizé Movement Founder Brother Roger Schutz

LWF General Secretary Noko Pays Tribute to an Icon of Peace

GENEVA, 17 August 2005 (LWI) – It is with sadness and great shock that the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) received news about the death of Brother Roger L. Schutz, founder of the ecumenical Taizé Community. Brother Roger, aged 90, was reportedly stabbed to death yesterday evening, August 16, during a religious service in eastern France.



*Brother Roger Schutz.
© Sabine Leutenegger*

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko hailed Brother Roger as an icon of peace who developed the monastic community that he founded in 1940 “into a world-encompassing movement inspired by strong and focused commitment to reconciliation and unity across religious and cultural barriers.”

Noko said the killing took on a broader dimension against the steady increase of violence in the world today. Taizé, he added, remained an embodiment of the fervent prayer for deliverance from forces of violence.

The Swiss-born Protestant pastor was reportedly attacked with a knife during evening prayers attended by some 2,500 young people in Taize, in France's eastern Burgundy region. He was seriously wounded and died from his wounds.

(187 words)

The full text of the statement of LWF General secretary Noko follows:

Brother Roger Schutz 1915–2005 A Statement by Ishmael Noko, General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation

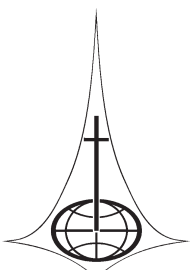
With great shock and sadness we have received the news that Brother Roger of the Taizé Community was stabbed to death yesterday, August 16, during evening prayer in the Church of Reconciliation.

After it was founded in 1940 Taizé provided a refuge during World War II for persons fleeing from conflict, irrespective of their religion. Under Brother Roger's leadership from the beginning, Taizé has developed as an ecumenical monastic community into a unique and vibrant center, visited every year

by tens of thousands of pilgrims, and a world-encompassing movement inspired by, and inspiring, strong and focused commitment to reconciliation and unity across religious and cultural barriers.

This act of extreme violence took place at an evening prayer, involving more than two thousand young people, in a sanctuary dedicated specifically to reconciliation, peace and unity within the human family.

This terrible event takes on a broader dimension as we witness the steady increase of violence in today's



world. Forces of violence are moving among us and within us, from which we must pray fervently to be delivered. Taizé is, and remains, an embodiment of this prayer.

Brother Roger, this icon of peace, was not immune to the forces of violence. Faced with this hard reality we must see before us Christ himself at Golgotha. There are many Golgothas in today's world. As we try and come to terms with the tragedy at Taizé last evening, may we have Christ and his atoning death

at the center of our minds and our prayer. And may the blessed memory of Brother Roger, more than ever before, inspire young people, and all of us, to engage with our faith fully on the path toward the peace and wholeness that are God's gift and will for our world.

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary

New Commission Studies Condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran Confessional Writings

Outcomes of National Dialogues Are an Important Resource

GENEVA, 24 August 2005 (LWI) – “The memories of the persecution and the killings of Anabaptists in large numbers so many hundreds of years back, are still very fresh and painful among Anabaptists/Mennonites today. Seeing church historians bring these issues to the fore emphasizes the importance of the work we have begun.” These remarks by Rev. Sven Oppegaard, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, pointed to the significance of the work of a study commission recently established between Lutherans and Mennonites.



Participants in the first meeting of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission in Strasbourg, France. © LWF

The mandate of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission which held its first meeting 27 June–1 July 2005, in Strasbourg, France, is to consider the condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran confessional writings and their applicability to the teaching of Anabaptists/Mennonites today. Wider issues pertinent to the Lutheran-Mennonite relations will also be included.

Oppegaard noted that this first meeting established a framework for study and discussion that is very hopeful for the years to come. Although the commission is not “a communion-seeking dialogue commission,” he said, “it would certainly bring Lutherans and Mennonites closer,” he added. Through its deliberations, the commission became more deeply sensitive to the lasting memory of the suffering of Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation as a result of persecution by civil authorities in Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed areas, a communiqué from this first meeting stated.

The commission pointed out that Christians of all confessions were victims of persecution during the sixteenth century reformation period. “Reflection on this matter raises serious questions concerning the theological rationale for pursuing religious and social goals by violent means, including torture and killing,” the communiqué stated.

At national level Lutheran-Mennonite dialogues have already been conducted in France (1981–1984), Germany (1989–1992), and the United States of America

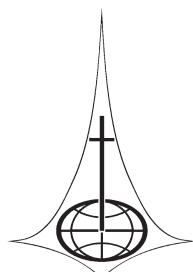
(2001–2004). To a certain extent these dialogues also considered the condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran confessions, and their outcomes constitute an important resource for the present, international commission.

The study commission's work is expected to take at least three years, and it is hoped that an official declaration concerning the condemnations can be made by the governing bodies of the two world communions.

Sponsored jointly by the LWF and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission is co-chaired by Rev. Rainer Burkart (Mennonite, Germany) and Prof. Gottfried Seebass (Lutheran, Germany).

Mennonite participants include also Prof. Claude Baecher (France); Ms Hellen Biseko Bradburn (Tanzania); and Prof. John Roth (USA). Lutheran participants also include Bishop Litsietsi M. Dube (Zimbabwe); Prof. Theo Dieter (Germany); Prof. Annie Noblesse-Rocher (France); and Prof. Timothy J. Wengert (USA). Oppegaard and MWC Executive Secretary, Dr Larry Miller serve as co-secretaries.

The next meeting of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission will take place in Strasbourg, France, 5–9 June 2006. (488 words)



INTER-FAITH DELEGATION VISIT TO TOGO

LWF General Secretary Urges Togo's Prime Minister to Facilitate Refugees' Return

LOMÉ, Togo/GENEVA, 22 July 2005 (LWI) – The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, has urged Togo's Prime Minister Edem Kodjo to facilitate the return of thousands of refugees who fled the West African country in the wake of a political conflict that has gripped the nation since February.



From left to right: ENI editor, Stephen Brown; IFAPA coordinator Sheikh Saliou Mbacké; Ms Soumahourou Maco Cissé, Islamic Council of Ivory Coast; LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko; Mr El Hadj Abass Bonfoh, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Togo; Sheikh Saleh Habimana, Mufti of the Republic of Rwanda; and Ms Gbeffa Houtinme Hounon, Vodun African Traditional Religion. © LWF

"The Prime Minister said the government was doing everything it could to ameliorate the situation and to give guarantees to the refugees to enable them to return," Noko said after a meeting with Kodjo in the Togolese capital, Lomé, July 20.

The Prime Minister requested the help of leaders of all religious traditions to help create a climate of security when the refugees returned, noted the LWF general secretary, who was leading a seven-person delegation drawn from the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA).

IFAPA, of which Noko is convenor, was created at a pan-African summit of religious leaders in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, and has sent delegations to a number of conflict areas on the continent, supporting inter-faith co-operation and action for peace.

IFAPA Seeks Active Involvement of Togo's Religious Communities in Reconciliation Process

LOMÉ, Togo/GENEVA, 22 July 2005 (LWI) – The Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) delegation on a peace mission to Togo, July 17–21, urged the country's religious communities to join forces to promote a "healing process" to overcome a political

crisis that began this year, but whose root causes go back much further. Political tension in Togo re-emerged after the death in February of President Gnassingbe Eyadema who had governed for 38 years. In April, violence broke out after Eyadema's son, Faure Gnassingbe, was declared the victor of a presidential election which the main opposition coalition denounced as unfair. An estimated 38,000 people fled to neighboring Benin and Ghana reportedly fearing political persecution, abduction or arrest.

Kodjo, who was appointed Prime Minister in June, had pledged he would ensure that no Togolese was threatened by the military, Noko said of their meeting. The government was also preparing legislation that would grant an amnesty to facilitate the return of refugees.

The IFAPA delegation included Christians, Muslims and members of African Traditional Religion. During the July 17–21 visit, it met representatives of Togos' religious communities, government officials and leaders of the multi-party opposition coalition whose candidate lost the presidential election. The group also visited a camp for Togolese refugees in Benin.

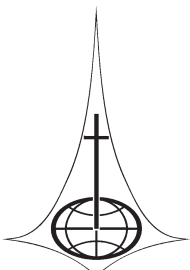
Leaders of the opposition coalition said religious leaders in the country could provide a much-needed "moral authority" that would help create a climate of confidence. They expressed concern for the lack of justice in Togo, and a concentration of power in the presidential office. They also warned of a "tribalization" of the security apparatus mainly drawn from one ethnic group.

In meetings with religious leaders, the delegation stressed the need for an inter-religious forum that would be inclusive of all the faith traditions and religious denominations in Togo.

"Peace in Africa can only be achieved by the collaboration of all religious traditions, and peace in Togo will be achievable when all religious communities make a collaborative contribution," Noko concluded. (480 words)

crisis that began this year, but whose root causes go back much further.

"Our assessment is that working together will strengthen the hope and willingness we sensed on our visit that people are ready to move forward," the



delegation leader, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, told a news conference in Lomé, July 21.

But the LWF general secretary told the news conference that he sensed the various parties were now willing to move forward. “For the first time I was able to hear from a representative of the Togolese government that there are problems in the country,” he said, referring to his meeting with Prime Minister Edem Kodjo.

“In the past we were told there were no problems. This is a step toward opening up dialogue at the national level.” He stressed “the culture of political denial of existing problems needs to be broken in Africa,” and commended Kodjo and others who “are beginning to take that step.”

While the delegation was presenting its report, President Gnassingbe and exiled opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio were meeting in Rome where they agreed to condemn and stop violence back home.

“This meeting between President Gnassingbe and Gilchrist Olympio in Rome is most welcome,” Noko said. “It confirms our reading of the situation that Togolese political leaders, civil society, and religious communities are ready to work together for a peaceful Togo.”

The delegation said it had seen at first hand the plight of Togolese refugees outside the country’s bor-

ders, and heard reports from some religious leaders that human rights abuses were continuing.

“On the basis of what we heard, the Prime Minister said that the government is ready to provide security, resettlement and amnesty for those refugees who come back,” Noko observed. “He also said the government was committed to the protection of human rights under the [African Union’s] African Charter [on Human and Peoples’ Rights].”

The delegation said Africa needed “transparency, good governance, respect for human rights, the rule of law, social justice, and gender equality” and to have leaders “who are accountable, not to outsiders, but truly accountable to their own people.”

In its findings, the inter-faith delegation encouraged religious groups to promote a healing process for peace and reconciliation, noting that healing had a spiritual dimension.

“You can never reconcile people unless you tell the truth,” Noko said. “You need the truth to be told. But you need reconciliation, and for that you need forgiveness. That is where religious communities have a role,” he concluded. (471 words)

(Both articles were written by Stephen Brown, *Ecumenical News International* editor, who accompanied the IFAPA delegation to Togo at LWF’s invitation.)

FEATURE: Opening Books Opens a Whole New World

Women in Northeastern DRC Empower Themselves Through Literacy

BUNIA, Democratic Republic of Congo/GENEVA, 24 August 2005 (LWI) – The group of women who attended the trauma counseling meeting in Bunia town, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, were all victims of sexual violence. It was also an opportunity for them to tell staff of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) program in Rwanda and the DRC what kind of recreational activities they wished to have organized as part of the trauma counseling program.

Discussion centered on games, music and theater, but the women could not reach consensus on what they wanted as a group.

Then 58-year-old Marie-Therese Oloi suggested that reading books would be a good recreational activity.

The rest burst out laughing.

But Oloi insisted, asking the women how many among them could read and write. Out of the 42 participants, only three said they could read and write without difficulty, 17 had a basic knowledge of words, while the remaining 22 could barely differentiate between numerals and letters of the alphabet.

An Opportunity to Fill Life-long Void

Oloi again surprised everyone when she proved that she could still read and write the letters she had learned

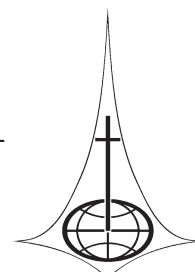


An instructor at the LWF-supported Bunia literacy center works with Marie-Therese Oloi. © LWF/DWS Rwanda/E.Mpanya

when she was about 12 years-old—all vowels—a, e, i, o, and u. But she explained that her education had stopped there, as her parents had felt it inappropriate for girls to attend school. She estimated her age, as she had been told that she was born just after World War II.

Little as it was, and so many years later, she was still proud of her knowledge. She saw literacy lessons as an opportunity to fill the void she had felt for so long.

The group found it difficult to resist this kind of enthusiasm and agreed to have literacy as a recre-





In Bunia, Ms Josee M. Katembo runs a literacy class.
© LWF/DWS Rwanda/E.Mpanya

ational activity. At first, this writer was not convinced that these lessons could possibly be recreational, but the women persisted, wondering for instance whether illiteracy could be one of the reasons why so many of them had been so unfortunate in life.

Enthusiastic Enrollment

A few days later, the “center of literacy for women” was opened in Bunia, the main town in DRC’s Ituri district. The first week saw more than 200 women of all ages rush to enroll in the program—a problem, as the center’s resources simply could not accommodate so many people. Selection criteria had to be set up, which essentially gave preference to girls and younger women.

But there was simply no getting rid of Oloi, who had been yearning for this very opportunity for so long. “You have to push me out by force to prevent me from attending the lessons,” she stated, and literally fought her way into the classroom.

She was, however, not the only person to force her way in. Everyone was astonished to see a 13-year old boy, Kawaya, insisting that he too be enrolled in the class meant for women. (He had lost his parents when he was very young, and his grandmother who brought him up, could not afford to send him to school.) The women sympathized with him and recommended his

participation. Two classes with 80 participants would be conducted.

Three months after the original meeting that decided on the center’s setting up, the results were quite interesting: 15 percent of the young students had dropped out and had been replaced by older women. In general, it seemed that the older women were more motivated. Oloi was one of them.

I Can Write a Letter and Read the Bible

When visiting the center, she rushed up to this writer saying: “Now I can write a letter and I can read the Bible myself!” Indeed, she could, and proved it by writing a few words in Kiswahili. They were words of gratitude to all those people who had contributed to realizing her dream.

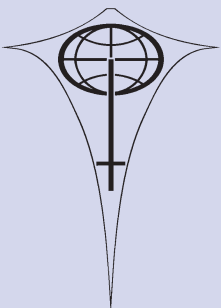
Another student Anto Malimba, widowed at 24, said: “When my husband was alive, he was helping me to count the money from my petty trade. Since he died, my nephews have been cheating me, but no one will cheat me now.”

The women attending these classes now believe illiteracy had exposed them to many difficulties in life. Being together and learning to read and write together, they say, will enable them to better stand up for their rights, and protect themselves and other women from acts of violence and rape in the future. (749 words)

(A contribution by Emile Mpanya, emergency officer, LWF/DWS Rwanda-DRC.)

*The LWF/DWS Rwanda-DRC Program provides emergency assistance and relief in partnership with member churches of the Christian council in the DRC.

***This article is part of the ongoing LWI Features on Healing focusing on the LWF Tenth Assembly theme, “For the Healing of the World.” The series highlights the relevance of the Assembly theme in the different contexts of the worldwide Lutheran communion by presenting projects and activities aimed at promoting reconciliation and healing. This theme continues to be an important aspect of LWF’s work even after the 21–31 July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.**



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