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– A Communion of Churches**

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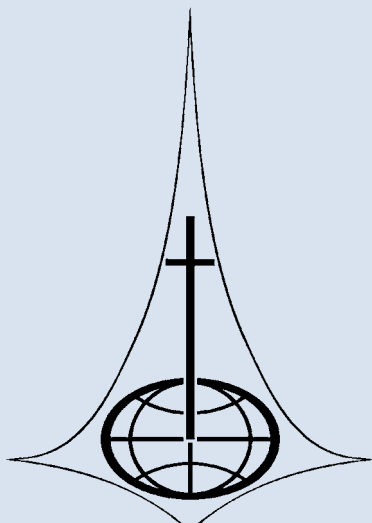
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## FEATURE: “Don’t Worry, I Was a Beggar Once”



The Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), one of Bangladesh’s longest-serving NGOs and a lead actor in rural development, is an associate program of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS). The RDRS supports a tiered network of federations, local groups, group member households and individuals in capacity building and empowerment. *(Above)* A trained group member vaccinates poultry. © LWF/RDRS Bangladesh/B. Ahmed *(See page 11)*

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### Tamás Fabiny Becomes Bishop of Northern District of Hungary's Lutheran Church

Rev. Dr Tamás Fabiny, a professor for New Testament theology at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological University in Budapest, is the new bishop of the Northern District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary. He was installed at Miskolc, Hungary, on 25 March, succeeding Imre Szebik, who retired on 1 March.

Fabiny, 46, was a student at Budapest's Evangelical Lutheran Theological Academy from 1977 to 1982, and ordained as a pastor in 1982. While assistant pastor in Siófok, Hungary, from 1982 to 1986, he also studied abroad, in Germany from 1984 to 1985, and in the United States of America from 1985 to 1986. Following his second theological examination in 1987, he worked as a parish pastor in Budapest-Köbánya from 1987 to 1999.

Fabiny received his doctorate from the Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, for his dissertation on "Dramaturgy and Communications in Jesus' Parables." He was appointed lecturer at Budapest's Evangelical Lutheran Theological University in 1999, and following his "Habilitation" (post-doctoral degree) from the Reformed Theological University of Debrecen, Hungary, he was again named professor for New Testament theology at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological University in Budapest.

Since 1996, Fabiny has been active as a producer of religious programming for Hungary's *Duna Televízió* television network, producing some 100 reports and documentaries on

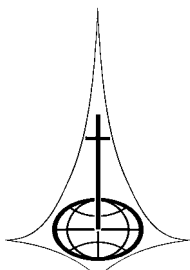


*Leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary at the installation of Bishop Tamás Fabiny in Miskolc, northern Hungary: from left to right, retired Presiding Bishop D. Imre Szebik; Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, Northern Diocese; and Bishop Peter Gáncs, Southern Diocese. © Kiss-Kuntler Árpád*

topics including church and society, Christians and Jews, the Bible, and congregational life. He has also chaired the media committee of Hungary's Lutheran church since 1997.

Bishop Fabiny is married with three children.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, with some 305,000 members, has been an LWF member church since 1947.



## LWF Mourns Head of Estonian Lutheran Church Abroad

Archbishop Petersoo “Brought a Strong Sense of Tradition”

GENEVA, 26 May 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has sent a message of condolence to the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) Abroad following the death of Archbishop Udo Petersoo in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. He died on 14 May, aged 72.

In a letter addressed to the Toronto-based EELC Abroad, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko described Petersoo as a partner in the joint LWF work, who understood the depth of the meaning of a communion of churches in view of the church’s close working relationship with sister churches in Europe. “Working with the community of believers in North America as archbishop, he brought a strong sense of history and tradition to the culture,” he said.

Noko paid tribute to Petersoo’s strong commitment to the gospel during his tenure as archbishop.



Archbishop Udo Petersoo, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, 1934-2006. © Private

“As a leader in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, he exhibited a strong faith and a love of God’s people. Many have been blessed by his service,” the LWF general secretary noted.

Petersoo was born in 1934 in Tallinn, Estonia. A graduate of the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, he was ordained in 1975. Prior to his September 1990 election as EELC-Abroad Archbishop, he was dean of Canada and pastor of Toronto’s St Andrew’s congregation.

Archbishop Udo Petersoo is survived by his wife, Reet Petersoo, three children and one grandchild. The funeral service was held at St Andrew’s Estonian Lutheran Church in Toronto.

The EELC Abroad currently has around 6,600 members. It joined the LWF in 1947.

## Helsinki Bishop Hails Historical Value of Finland’s Porvoo Cathedral

Despite Fire Damage, Its Ecumenical Force Will Remain Intact

HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA, 2 June 2006 (LWI) – Bishop Dr Eero Huovinen, vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nordic region, says the medieval Porvoo Cathedral, partially destroyed in a recent fire, is a significant historical marker. Its importance is not only in relation to local congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and the country but also to global ecumenism.

The cathedral in Porvoo, 50 km east of the capital Helsinki, was damaged by fire early in the morning of 29 May. Reports from the Finnish media said police had questioned three suspects—two young men and one young woman, who had given themselves up claiming responsibility for the fire that burned the cathedral’s roof.

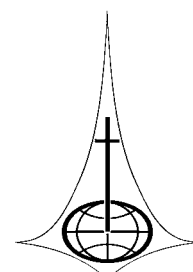
In a recent interview with *Lutheran World Information* (LWI), Huovinen, bishop of the ELCF Diocese of Helsinki, which covers Porvoo’s Finnish-speaking congregations, said Finland’s history was directly linked to the cathedral. In 1809, it was where Tsar Alexander I had declared Finland, then under the Swedish crown, an autonomous territory of the Russian empire. This opened the way to the country’s independence more than a century later.



The top half of the Porvoo Cathedral was destroyed by fire on 29 May 2006. © Sirpa Päivinen/KuvaKotimaa

Huovinen said he had joined Bishop Erik Vikström of the Swedish-speaking Diocese of Porvoo in a well-attended prayer service for the cathedral, held in the city’s market square in the afternoon after the incident.

Huovinen, a member of the LWF Council’s Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, underscored the cathedral’s ecumenical significance: Porvoo was the



venue for the 1992 historic agreement to the Porvoo Common Statement, between the British and Irish Anglican churches and Baltic and Nordic Lutheran churches. The agreement, which was subsequently signed, allows the churches to recognize each other's ordained ministry including at the episcopal level, and opens up closer church relations and co-operation.

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko told *LWI*, "The large, finely shaped cross in the

gable of the cathedral's western wall, has in a certain way, become the visual picture of the Porvoo agreement itself." The damage, especially to the roof, would sadden all those who loved the cathedral, he added, but "the ecumenical force that the cathedral represents will remain intact," he affirmed.

*(The ELCF Communications Center contributed to this article.)*

## Historic Visit of Greek Orthodox Archbishop Affirms Dedication to Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue

### Noko: Theological Dialogues Should Not Be Equated with Ecclesial Forms of Diplomacy

GENEVA, 9 June 2006 (*LWI*) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) considers the first-ever visit to the LWF Secretariat by the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece as a significant affirmation of the churches' "dedicated contribution" to the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue at regional and international level.



*LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (left) receives Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece (second from left) and his delegation at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko made these remarks when he spoke to *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* about the major issues discussed during the visit of Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece and his delegation to the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, from 28 May to 1 June 2006.

During an LWF luncheon in the archbishop's honor on 31 May, Noko said ecumenical dialogues were God's gift to enable Christians to "mutually contemplate the depths of our beliefs, and be reassured of the extent to which we share the fundamental apostolic sources of spiritual life."

"Theological dialogues are not negotiations by means of ecclesial forms of diplomacy," Noko said. "They are

spiritual exercises, carried out in trustful openness, whereby – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – the divine mysteries allow themselves to be searched in their boundless riches, for the building up in unity of God's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," he added.

Christodoulos noted that the doctrinal discussions

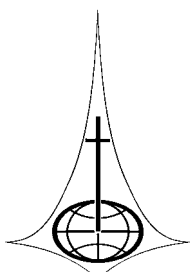
under the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, including issues such as salvation, grace, justification and synergy, among others, "have brought our [churches] closer together and increased our understanding and appreciation of one another."

He expressed his appreciation for the ecumenical partnership within the World Council of Churches, and urged increased bilateral contacts and cooperation on "burning social issues of mutual concern" including human trafficking and climatic change, among others.

Noko also spoke of the urgent need to promote interfaith relations and dialogue worldwide, and stressed the churches' role in building "vital bridges within the human community" and providing spiritual strength to processes of reconciliation and conflict resolution.

The LWF general secretary said he anticipated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint Commission to be marked in November 2006, to be an opportunity "toward increasing closeness and cooperation between our traditions," and to consider other means of collaboration in a world suffering from natural and human made catastrophes, conflicts, environmental destruction and widespread poverty.

High level visits and separate deliberations between the LWF and the Ecumenical Patriarchate began in



1967. Apart from the international dialogue under the Joint Commission, which met for the first time in Espoo, Finland, in 1981, there are various regional Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues dealing with specific themes.

More information about the Lutheran-Orthodox is available on the LWF Web site at [www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/OEA/Bilateral\\_Relations/OEA-Lutheran-Orthodox.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OEA/Bilateral_Relations/OEA-Lutheran-Orthodox.html)

## Lutheran Churches in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania Plan Merger

### A Single Church Is the Only Practicable Solution

GREIFSWALD and SCHWERIN, Germany/GENEVA, 26 June 2006 (LWI) – If all goes as planned, the synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg (ELLM) and the Evangelical Church of Pomerania (PEK) will come together in late August for a first common assembly to sign a framework agreement to merge the two churches.

Talks on a possible union began in 2003, with the leadership of the two churches reaching a breakthrough in negotiations early this year. Both church synods have since agreed to the merger in near unanimity.

The territories of the two churches are roughly coextensive with the federal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, which has comprised the northern section of eastern Germany since 1990. But the Mecklenburg church, based in the state's capital of Schwerin, is roughly twice as large in area and membership, some 212,000, as the Pomeranian church, based in Greifswald.

While the territory encompassed by both the church and state of Mecklenburg has not changed much over the centuries, the Pomeranian section of today's federal state and the Pomeranian church reflect only a small remainder of the state's territory before the Second World War. Nearly four fifths of the former territory of Pomerania, an area that was once Prussia's largest church province, are now part of Poland. The name Pomerania was not permitted for use during the years of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) so the church was forced to go by the name of the Evangelical Church of Greifswald.

### A Lack of Creedal Differences Crucial

A lack of creedal differences was crucial to progress in the merger talks. While the Pomeranian church is in fact Lutheran, it is also a member of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK), which comprises the 13 member churches of the Arnoldshain Conference and the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU). Its purpose is to promote the unity of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

The different sizes of the two churches and the frequent question of the identity of the Pomeranian section of the state have, on the other hand, not



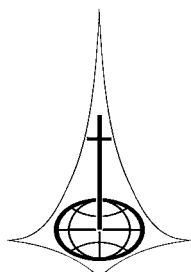
From left to right: Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit, Evangelical Church of Pomerania; Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania Prime Minister, Dr Harald Ringstorff; and Bishop Hermann Beste, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg.  
© Mecklenburgische & Pommersche Kirchenzeitung/Rev. Tilman Baier

always proved conducive to the merger and have at times slowed negotiations down.

The view that a single Evangelical Lutheran church in Mecklenburg and Western Pomerania is the only practicable solution has, however, now gained currency within both churches. The churches are too small to carry out the tasks of a full regional church on a long-term basis. The two areas are actually very similar; they are both sparsely populated with Rostock being the only city in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with more than 100,000 residents. The state's economy is based chiefly on agriculture and tourism.

The up-and-coming tourism industry on the Baltic coast and the numerous Baltic islands has not, however, been able to prevent Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania from suffering Germany's highest rate of unemployment at just under 19 percent, with a high rate of emigration, particularly from rural areas. Only around 20 percent of today's population of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania are now church members, making it particularly difficult to maintain the upkeep of the region's relatively large number of medieval churches, a challenge faced by both of the state's churches.

Although the upcoming merger is the result of a three-year dialogue, the road toward greater coopera-



tion goes back to the mid-1990s. Since that time, the two churches have shared a common women's organization, academy, and church newspaper. The churches have also long since combined their efforts in police ministry, representation before the state government, and in other areas. The two churches have held their *Kirchentag* (church convention) together, and have already merged their pastoral training programs.

## Location of the Bishop's Office

One of the greatest tasks, currently, is to harmonize the structures of the two churches. Their financing systems and a number of regulations still differ so greatly that transitional arrangements will have to be introduced in the relevant areas. While the new united church will be led by a single bishop, the old churches' differing terms of office will make it necessary to find a temporary solution for this as well. The location of the bishop's office will also have to be determined as well as that of the church administration, previously located in Schwerin and Greifswald. A precise timetable for the merger also needs to be developed; 2010 has already been suggested as a possible date for the full merger.

Another matter that is often discussed is whether the merger of the two churches could at some point



Already united: Paintings of Pomeranian missionary, Otto von Bamberg (left), and Berno von Schwerin (right), Mecklenburg missionary, in the church in Semlow, Western Pomerania. © Mecklenburgische & Pommersche Kirchenzeitung/Rev. Tilman Baier

represent a first step toward an even larger fusion of Lutheran churches in northern Germany to the inclusion of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Talk of a "Northern Church" has been circulating since the 1990s and could become a practicable option over the next two decades.

Both churches are members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). While the PEK joined in 1956, the ELLM was an original member of the LWF at its founding in Lund, Sweden in 1947.

(Reported by PEK spokesperson, Rev. Torsten Amling.)

## Lutheran Paul Johnson to Serve as a Vice President of Canadian Council of Churches

Rev. Paul N. Johnson, assistant to the bishop for ecumenical relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), has been elected for a three-year term as one of three vice-presidents of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The elections took place at the CCC's biannual governing board meeting in Toronto on 24 May.

Johnson has worked in the ELCIC national office since March 2003. He has served on the CCC governing board, and has also assumed numerous ecumenical responsibilities including serving as the ELCIC staff person on the Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission, and



Canadian Lutheran pastor, Paul N. Johnson, is a CCC vice-president. © LWF/D. Zimmermann

participating in the ecumenical officers group of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The newly elected CCC President for the 2006-2009 triennium is Rev. Dr James T. Christie, dean of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Winnipeg, and dean of the university's Global College. He is a United Church of Canada minister.

The ELCIC has around 182,000 members and has been a CCC member since 1986. It has been a member church of the Lutheran World Federation also since 1986.

(ELCIC News)

## Errol Inshanally Elected President of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana

Rev. Errol Inshanally is the new president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG). Inshanally, a 45-year-old theologian, was elected to succeed Rev. Roy K. Thakurdial at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Church Assembly in early May at the ELCG Camp and Retreat Center in Skeldon, Corentyne, Berbice, Guyana. Thakurdial had served as president for ten years.

Inshanally was ordained in 1985 after completing his theological studies in Jamaica. He is the

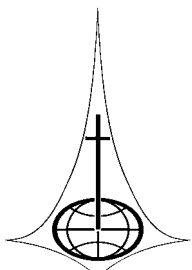


Rev. Errol Inshanally, ELCG president. © ELCG

pastor of St John Lutheran Parish on the River Corentyne. He and his wife have two children.

In recent years, the ELCG has had several seminary graduates take their places among the pastoral staff, bringing new life to the church. The church ordained its first female clergy member in 1993.

The ELCG, with some 11,000 members, has been an LWF member church since 1947.



# Christian Bodies Look at New UN Human Rights Council with Cautious Optimism

## Concern for NGO Participation

GENEVA, 20 June 2006 (LWI) – Five international Christian bodies this week expressed expectation that the newly elected UN Human Rights Council will grant a “truly open space” for non-governmental organization (NGO) participation on behalf of victims of human rights violations, as well as address the shortcomings of its predecessor and bring to completion pending issues, particularly in the field of standard-setting initiatives.

In welcoming the establishment of the new organ, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International expressed optimism, and affirmed that “on paper,” the new UN body “may have some additional potential” for implementing human rights standards—a task in which the former UN Commission on Human Rights accomplished “too little and often too late.”

In their first written submission to the new body, the five Christian organizations expressed “their support for a strong, independent and adequately resourced system of special procedures” that both addresses the shortcomings of its predecessor while it ensures the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.

The Christian organizations hope that during its first session, the Council will “extend for at least one year all of the mandates inherited from the Commission, in order to avoid ‘protection gaps’ and procedural lapses during the review period” of the system of special procedures.

In addition to considering and acting upon pending reports of the Commission’s five intergovernmental working groups, the Christian organizations expect the Council to adopt the draft international convention on enforced disappearances and the draft declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. “This would bring to a successful conclusion the pending standard-setting initiatives,” the written submission affirms.

“We expect that the Human Rights Council will... offer a truly open space for NGOs and for the voices of the victims of human rights violations, the poorest and the most vulnerable,” the five organizations affirm, surpassing the “important precedents” established in this regard by its predecessor.

The five nonetheless highlighted the significant “contributions to the struggle for human rights” of the former UN Commission on Human Rights, particularly in creating foundational human rights instruments that contributed to the development of international law and global governance.

*This press release has been jointly issued by the WCC, the LWF, Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International.*

The full text of the joint written submission is available in English and other languages at: [www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/UN\\_HR\\_Council\\_2006\\_EN.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/UN_HR_Council_2006_EN.pdf)

*More on the work of the Lutheran World Federation in International Affairs and Human Rights: [www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/OIAHR/OIAHR-Welcome.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIAHR/OIAHR-Welcome.html)*

## Maintaining Churches’ Multidimensional Ministries Is a Major Challenge

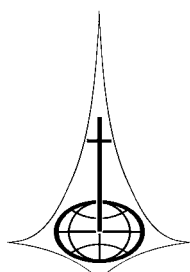
### LWF Project Committee Discusses Sustainability of the Church and Its Mission

MONTREUX & GENEVA, Switzerland, 30 June 2006 (LWI) – The leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (ELCC) says the greatest challenge for the Cameroonian church is how to support its multidimensional ministries in a sustainable way. Many churches of the South including the ELCC, still depend on foreign subsidies to keep their church institutions running, Rev. Dr Thomas Nyiwe, president of the ELCC told participants in the May 2006 meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Project Committee in Montreux, Switzerland.

As they had the previous year, Committee members discussed sustainability of the church and its mission during the three-day meeting.

“The debate on sustainability inevitably involves the issue of strategies [to] overcome underdevelopment, enabling individuals as well as communities to live fuller and more satisfying lives,” explained Nyiwe. He noted that this would have to take into account the contextual reality and address the root causes of dependence accordingly.

Dependency, according to the ELCC president, emphasized the “donor-recipient dichotomy in partnership,” which had, in the past, provided some Northern partners with decision-making power while weakening the capacity of the “recipient-church” to work toward sustainable development.



## Ensuring Sustainability

Nyiwe noted that the intervention of some Northern partners had not been clearly understood. “The [assumption is] that the Northern partners always have the solutions for their Southern partners” and that the situation in the Southern churches “can be quickly mended,” he said.

He said ensuring sustainability was difficult especially for many Southern churches that were struggling with issues of poverty, corruption, and the maintenance of church-related institutions and structures, among other challenges. For the Northern partners, he noted, it was equally difficult in view of “the complex challenges of globalization and secularization and the negative implications these ideologies bring to the Western societies.”

The ELCC president stressed the need to develop a mutual relationship between the Northern and Southern partners. As a communion of churches in the Lutheran tradition, “we are called together to promote a ‘globalization of solidarity’ in fostering common strategies for the sustainability of Lutheran churches throughout the world,” he concluded.

## No Universally Applicable Model of Sustainability

There “is no universally applicable model of sustainability,” according to Knud Jørgensen, director of the Areopagos Organization, a foundation based in Denmark and Norway that supports theological studies and interreligious dialogue. Sustainability, he told participants in the Project Committee meeting, cannot be exported. It must instead take shape and form in each local setting. It is also “a matter of a spirituality, where we meet one another at the foot of the cross and learn to receive and grant forgiveness.”

He noted that sustainability requires that each church develops its own identity such that “a contextual understanding of itself and its mission becomes the center of the self-understanding of the church.”

Jørgensen pointed out that sustainability “depends on participation both in the design and implementation of actual projects and on participation in the governance and decision making of the organization.” Sustainability thus calls for giving priority to the development of contextually relevant leadership within the larger framework of organizational development.

## Call for Greater Exchange of Experience

At its Montreux meeting, the LWF Project Committee said room should be made for project holders and their partners within the same regions to meet and exchange experience, identify common challenges, and develop new project approaches.

It was, furthermore, decided that the LWF Project Committee’s current decision-making criteria should be elaborated to focus more on the missional, diaconal and spiritual dimensions.

The project monitoring and evaluation process was also a matter of deliberation at the meeting. The Committee decided that an expanded regimen of monitoring and evaluation in project work should focus more strongly on the the three dimensions. The Committee also planned to initiate a process to elaborate on guiding principles for sustainable partnership.



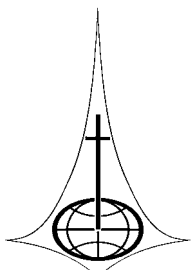
*Rev. Dr. Thomas Nyiwe, president, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, addresses participants in the May 2006 LWF Project Committee meeting in Montreux, Switzerland. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

## Help for Earthquake Victims in Indonesia

The LWF Project Committee members expressed their deep sympathy to all those affected by the earthquake in Java, Indonesia, late May. They called for all LWF member churches to pray for the victims of the natural disaster and to take the necessary action to meet their needs. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health, nearly 5,800 people were killed and some 38,000 others were injured in the early hours of 27 May in Yogyakarta and in the nearby villages of the Bantul area in



*Mr. Knud Jørgensen, director of the Denmark and Norway-based Areopagos Organization, during the LWF Project Committee meeting. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*





the south. Between one and two million people were rendered homeless by the catastrophe.

### Project Supervision and Approval

The LWF Project Committee recommends to the Council, after consultation with member churches and partners globally, the criteria for projects within the Department for Mission and Development (DMD). It also approves projects and authorizes DMD to seek funding.

The Committee reports to the LWF Council through the Program Committee for Mission and Development.

Further information about DMD's work is available at [www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/DMD/DMD-Welcome.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-Welcome.html)



The chairperson of the LWF Project Committee, Church of Sweden Archbishop-elect Anders Wejryd (left) addresses participants in this year's meeting. Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke (right) is director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

## André Golike Is President of Lutheran Church in the Central African Republic

Rev. André Golike has been elected president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic (EELRC). The 46-year-old was named as successor to Rev. André Zoulé at the church's general synod meeting held at the end of April in Baboua. Zoulé has led the church for the past eight years. Golike assumed office on 2 July, and will serve a four-year term, which is renewable once.



Rev. André Golike assumed office on 2 July as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic. © EELRC

Following his election, Golike said that during his term he will lay emphasis on strengthening the faith of church members, educating youth, and establishing good management of resources and finances.

From 1981 until 1983, Golike worked as an assistant catechist at the Lutheran Center in Baboua. He then entered

the seminary in Baboua and was ordained in October 1994. He went on to study the English language from 1994 until 1995 in Accra, Ghana, and completed his studies in theology at the Makumira Faculty of Theology in Tanzania. From 2000 until 2005, he was co-director of the seminary in Baboua, as well as a part-time director of school projects. He is married and has six children.

The EELRC was established in 1930 and became independent in 1973. It has been a member of the

LWF since 1974.

The church has seven regions and 27 districts. More than 60 pastors are responsible for around 55,000 members in 555 congregations.

## Church of Sweden Ordains First Deaf Pastor

Rev. Johan Selin, the first deaf pastor in Sweden said he hoped his ordination would mark the beginning for many more deaf people willing to work within the Church of Sweden.

Ordained together with his fellow hearing colleague, Greger Larsson on 11 June 2006, Selin "wants to develop [a] church for the deaf within the Church of Sweden, and create a church for deaf people on their own conditions," a Church of Sweden press release stated.

The ordination service in the Cathedral of Härnösand, northern Swe-

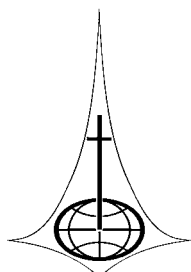


Rev. Johan Selin (left) and Härnösand Diocese Bishop Tony Guldbrandzén, after the ordination. © Church of Sweden/Mari Eddebo

den, was the first of its kind. It was celebrated entirely in sign language and no hymns were played. There was dancing and poetry in sign language. Interpretation into Swedish was provided for the hearing part of the congregation.

During his first year as a curate, Selin will work part-time in the parish of Säbrå and the remaining part at the Härnösand Diocesan Office.

The Church of Sweden has around 7 million members, representing nearly 80 percent of the country's population.



## FEATURE: Confirmation Training Is Central to the Culture of Finnish Youth

### Guidance and Accompaniment for Life

*HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA, 23 June 2006 (LWI)*—As many as nine out of every ten 15-year-olds attend the confirmation classes provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), making it central to Finnish youth culture in the predominantly Lutheran country.



*Confirmation in the Church of Olari, Diocese of Espoo, Finland.  
© Matti Karppinen/KuwaKotimaa*

“In confirmation training, the youth’s questions about life are taken seriously, and kept close to the worldview of a 15-year-old,” says Rev. Jarmo Kokkonen, the ELCF coordinator of the training program. He credits the program’s success to the crucial role played by the “young confirmed volunteers,” who participated in the training one or two years ago, and received additional skills training for group leadership. Up to a third of the confirmed youth join the volunteer program. “Their own good experience in the confirmation camp inspires them to become young confirmed volunteers,” he says, referring to the program’s self-sustaining cycle. As tutors of confirmation candidates, throughout the training, the volunteers guarantee ongoing contact with the world of future participants.

The six-month training includes 80 mixed lessons for girls and boys, and usually a youth

camp lasting from five to 12 days. Individual contact is also established with their families, for example, through parents’ evenings. The training has become a major part of parish youth work, in which nearly all staff members participate, Kokkonen explains. The ELCF employs thousands of well-trained professionals in youth work.

The program coordinator describes the training as a fitting representation of Finnish Lutheranism. “Earlier in Finland,” he continues, “the central meaning of confirmation training within society was that reading skills and knowledge of the Catechism could be addressed, which led to the right to get married.” Although today the target is mainly young people, the program still incorporates essential civil rights. Only those who have been confirmed can be married in the ELCF, serve as godparents, participate in Holy Communion, or stand for office in church elections, he adds.

But the fact that the majority of those in the targeted age group attend the training does not necessarily mean that Finnish youth are more spiritually active, Kokkonen says. The church does not “meet young people in confirmation training with the wish that they become model church members.” The aim is to guide them and to provide life-long accompaniment.

The training is also offered to non-ELCF members, including adults. Every year, 3–4 percent of them become members of the church, which has some 4.6 million members, representing 84 percent of Finland’s population.

The ELCF joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1947.

*(The ELCF Communications Center contributed to this article.)*



*Rev. Jarmo Kokkonen, coordinator, ELCF confirmation training program. © ELCF Communications Center.*

### Bishop Andreas Stökl of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia Dies

**Rev. Dr Andreas Stökl**, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia (ELCG), has died at the age of 67. The pastor from Hamburg, Germany, suffered sudden heart failure on 2 May during the meeting of the Bishops’ Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) in Omsk, Siberia.

Stökl was elected bishop by a vast majority, and installed into office at the Sixth ELCG Synod in September 2004. He succeeded Bishop Dr Gert Hummel, a theo-

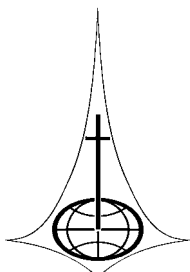


*ELCG Bishop Dr Andreas Stökl  
© ELCROS*

logian from Württemberg, Germany, who died in March 2004.

The Lutheran parishes of Georgia, which can be traced back mainly to Swabian immigrants who left Württemberg at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, today make up a growing church, which enjoys a lively congregational life with regular worship services, Bible study, and a youth program.

It is an autonomous regional church of ELCROS, with 16,000 members.



## FEATURE: “Don’t Worry, I Was a Beggar Once”

LWF World Service Associate Program Empowers the Marginalized Rural Poor in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Bangladesh/GENEVA 26 June 2006 (LWI) – “Don’t worry, I was a beggar once.” Sakhina Khatun comforts beggars with these words whenever she meets them on walks around the countryside near her village, Uttar Singargari, in Bangladesh. This is what she was, but no longer.

A few years ago her husband died, leaving her destitute at the age of 40. As her grown-up children were unable to give her more than just a roof over her head because they had their own families to support, her only option was to beg for a living. She was already too old to work in the fields and, because she had no skills training, there was no other job to go to.

But in 2003, Sakhina’s life made an about turn. She heard of the United Nations World Food Programme Integrated Food Security (IFS) program with the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), an associate program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS).



Sakhina Khatun prepares her basket of bread and sweets, to sell in her village in northwest Bangladesh. © LWF/RDRS Bangladesh/S. Sharmin

### Challenging the Causes of Poverty

The RDRS, one of Bangladesh’s longest-serving and largest NGOs and a lead actor in rural development, has been an LWF/DWS associate program since 1997. Since beginning as a DWS program in 1971 following the war of independence, the RDRS has continually challenged the causes and effects of poverty, ignorance and powerlessness. The program now covers 9,902 square kilometers, and works in 46 contiguous *upazilas* (sub-districts) in northwest Bangladesh, far from the economic and political power centers in Dhaka, Chittagong, and even Rajshahi. The aim is to provide knowledge and create access to skills and resources for all. The program focuses on agriculture, community development, and health and economic activities, reaching some one million villagers through its work. A very important branch is the Eye Care and Rehabilitation Center for the visually impaired, where blind chil-



A young beneficiary of the RDRS Eye Care Program. © LWF/RDRS Bangladesh/S. Sharmin

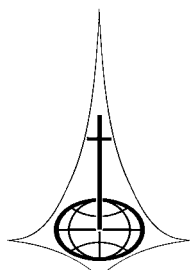
dren are trained to live with their disability. Over 30,000 patients are treated annually.

The IFS program, in which Sakhina is now involved, is backed by the engineering department of the Bangladesh local government. It aims to improve food security and the nutritional well being of poor rural households. During the lean season, families with little income, and who would otherwise go without food, are employed to build roads, playgrounds, flood shelters, plant trees, and so on. They do this

according to the “food-for-work” principle. In the long run, it is hoped that their situation will have improved enough to enable them to join the standard RDRS group development activities.

This is how Sakhina came to build roads, working hard but also earning money, much more than she had ever had. After two years of hard labor building roads, she became strong, and had saved BDT 600 (USD 9). She not only acquired skills, but also joined in the training offered by the RDRS, leaving begging behind her.

Her efforts were worthwhile. When the project came to an end, Sakhina joined an RDRS group activity, borrowed BDT 2,000 (USD 29) from the organization, and started her own business. She



bought two goats and lent some money to her children who had supported her as best they could. They invested the money, and were soon able to repay the debt to her. Today, Sakhina has her own business. She sells bread, sweets and groceries, in a roadside shop in her village.

Sakhina's story is only one of many success stories of which the RDRS can be proud. Thanks to its long-term commitment in the Rangpur Dinajpur area, the NGO has earned the trust and confidence of the people there.

*(Contributed by the RDRS, with reporting from Iris Kohler, a trainee in the LWF Office for Communication Services.)*

More information on the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service can be found at: [www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/DWS/Country\\_Programs/DWS-Bangladesh.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Bangladesh.html)

**\*This article is part of the ongoing LWI Features on Healing focusing on the LWF Tenth Assembly theme,**



*A blind woman and man working on a fishing net and handicraft.  
© LWF/RDRS Bangladesh/S. Sharmin*

**“For the Healing of the World.” This theme continues to be an important aspect of the LWF’s work worldwide even after the 21–31 July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.**

## Canadian Lutheran World Relief Appoints Daranne Mills as Communications Director

**Ms Daranne R. Mills** has been appointed as the new Director of Communications and Education of Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR).

Starting in August, she will be responsible for leading and working with the CLWR communications team in the development of tools and materials to challenge and educate the constituency it serves. Her role will also include ensuring that the organization is well represented in the public media, as well as development of effective fundraising initiatives.

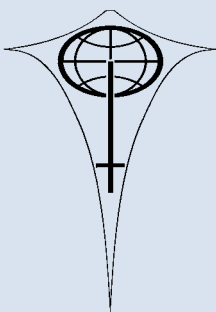
A student of the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Mills aged 29, has participated in CLWR cross-cultural programs in Peru and India. She is currently serving an internship at the Hope Lutheran Church in Calgary, Al-



*Ms Daranne Mills will assume the position of CLWR Director of Communications and Education in August 2006.  
© LWF/D. Zimmermann*

berta. From 2002 until 2003, prior to entering the seminary, she served as an intern with the Lutheran World Federation Office for Communication Services (LWF/OCS) in Geneva, Switzerland. She also participated in the 2005 workshop of the Youth Leadership Training in Communication program “Towards a Communicating Communion – A Youth Vision,” a joint undertaking of the LWF/OCS and LWF Department for Mission and Development.

As the service delivery arm for overseas development programming and relief of the Lutheran Church-Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, CLWR works in partnership with community-based organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.



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