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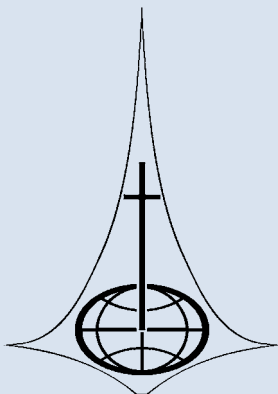
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## FEATURE: Church Is Wherever People Gather Together



*Young seekers on the path to Christian faith. Work with children and youth is at the center of a church planting project in Bergen-Rotensee on the island of Rügen, Germany. © Private*

### Visit to a Church Planting Project on the Baltic Island of Rügen

**BERGEN-ROTENSEE, RÜGEN, Germany/GENEVA (LWI)** – A breathtaking view greets visitors arriving on the Baltic Sea island of Rügen in Germany. Some 1,000 square kilometers of varied natural attractions encompass coastal cliffs, national parks, fine sandy beaches, inviting dunes and the at times thunderous sea. A tour of Germany’s largest island takes visitors through picturesque localities renovated at great expense, including imposing churches with richly decorated altars and ornate stain glass windows. Rügen is considered one of the most popular holiday destinations in Germany, with over one million vacationers each year.

Yet, there are pockets on Rügen that draw only a small number of tourists, such as Bergen-Rotensee, a community of around

5,000 people, pre-dating the 1989 political changes. Renovation work here is getting under way very slowly. Unemployment is high, affecting 19 percent of the population, while nearly 21 percent live at the poverty line. Nearly all inhabitants are dissatisfied with their housing situation.

This is a statistical glimpse into Rev Mathias Thieme’s working environment. Since early 2007, he has been in charge of the church planting project site in Bergen-Rotensee organized by the Stralsund Church District in an effort to bring the church into contact with people in their daily lives. Just

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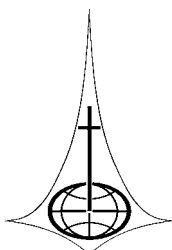
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## Public Act of Repentance: LWF President Hanson Washes Feet of HIV-Positive Women

MEXICO CITY, Mexico/GENEVA (LWI)

– In a “public act of repentance and humility,” Bishop Mark S. Hanson, President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), washed the feet of two women living with HIV.

“I am absolutely convinced that we as religious leaders and we in the religious community that so shunned and shamed people with HIV and struggling with AIDS, that we must begin first by engaging in public acts of repentance, because, absent public acts of repentance, I fear our words will not be trusted,” he said at the Ecumenical Pre-Conference “Faith in Action Now!” preceding the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City from 3 to 8 August 2008.

According to conference organizers, over 20,000 scientists, government officials and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, churches and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as community activists attended the biennial international conference.

As possible public acts of repentance Hanson named being tested for HIV, engaging in advocacy and accompaniment, and welcoming persons with HIV and AIDS into full participation and leadership in religious communities. People living with HIV and AIDS are not to be regarded as “objects of our compassion,” he stressed, but rather as “full members and participants” in religious communities.

### Hard Questions

Hanson underlined that full participation of persons with HIV and AIDS cannot be achieved unless male heterosexual religious leaders are willing to talk openly about their own sexuality rather than focusing



LWF President and ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson washes the feet of Herlyn Marja Uiras, Churches United Against HIV and AIDS in Southern and Eastern Africa, during the Ecumenical Pre-Conference on the eve of the August 2008 International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. © EAA/Paul Jeffrey

on people who are homosexual, bisexual or transgendered.

“If we are serious about ending such discrimination, we must reject the notion that human sexuality is a church-defining, and therefore church-dividing, issue. It is the good news of Jesus Christ that defines the church, not human sexuality,” he said.

The predominantly male religious leadership must ask itself hard questions regarding its preaching and teaching, and its understanding of God, Hanson insisted. Church leaders must examine the ways in which their views have contributed to continued discrimination against women and to women’s second-class status not only in society but in religious communities as well.

“Do we dare? Do we dare become as radical in our love and mercy and actions as Jesus was?” he challenged the ecumenical delegates.

Sophie Dilmitis of the World Young Women’s Christian

Association (World YWCA), one of the women whose feet Hanson washed, shared with delegates to the Ecumenical Pre-Conference her vision of the partnership between church leaders and persons with HIV and AIDS.

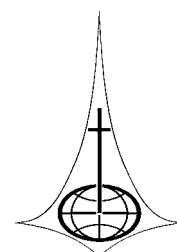
“Religious leaders hold the key to doing away with shame and guilt that destroy immune systems and fight[ing] back viruses like stigma and silence,” she declared.

“When we see religious leaders standing up and addressing these tough and very important issues, things will begin to shift,” Dilmitis commented. “We have to recognize these opportunities to work together. Religious leaders have the responsibility to challenge other leaders, to take risks, to form these kinds of relationships and stand in solidarity with people living with HIV.”

(A contribution by LWI correspondent Julia Heyde)



Sophie Dilmitis, HIV and AIDS coordinator for the World YWCA © EAA/Paul Jeffrey





## FIFA 2010 World Cup: South African Churches Warn About Human Trafficking

A South African Lutheran church leader says human trafficking is one of the greatest challenges for local churches with regard to the 19<sup>th</sup> International Federation of Association Football (FIFA—French acronym) World Cup, to be hosted by South Africa in June-July 2010.

Speaking at the 17<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference, Bishop Joe Ramashapa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) indicated that South Afri-

can churches were already preparing themselves to deal with the issue of human trafficking. He said ELCSA intends to work intensively on awareness-building in congregations, particularly with regard to so-called “passive human trafficking.”

He said FIFA was promoting the event by claiming the World Cup will benefit the entire African continent economically, and went on to explain the passive involvement. “Then [a] mother tells [her] daughter

... ‘Can’t you try and find out how we can be involved in these FIFA activities.’” The girl might then fall into the hands of human traffickers and into forced prostitution. “So, the mother has been a passive trafficker,” he said. “We’ll be dealing with such issues, in order to make people aware that poverty can drive you into this kind of situation.”

The churches in South Africa are already organizing consultations among themselves and with other faith communities to develop a common strategy to tackle the problem. A major focus will be advocacy work with the government.

In the past, churches have not been proactive, Ramashapa admitted. For 2010, however, the churches will come up with a very concrete program of activities.

Addressing the global Lutheran communion, Ramashapa said, “We are saying that our pain in South Africa should be the pain of all Lutherans, our joy in celebrating 2010 should be joy of all Lutherans, and therefore our concerns—our ethical concerns—should be the concerns of all the Lutherans in the world. We need both human and material support.”

*(A contribution by LWI correspondent Julia Heyde)*



*Joe Ramashapa, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, moderates a panel discussion on children and AIDS during the ecumenical gathering preceding the 17th International AIDS Conference. © EAA/Paul Jeffrey*

### FEATURE: Striving to Break Taboos

“The men treat us like beasts and animals. They come in, have sex, and leave.” This is how the wife of a Burkinabe Christian described her marital life, Rev. Kouliga Michel Nikiema told a workshop organized at the Ecumenical Pre-Conference “Faith in Action Now!” of the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.

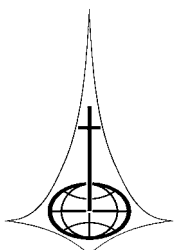
Nikiema is director of Vigilance, a Christian organization based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which strives to break taboos within the church on subjects such as sexual health and HIV and AIDS.

Nikiema’s work focuses increasingly on traditional gender roles which contribute to the spread of HIV, he said. By merely changing the relationship between men and women, the AIDS pandemic could be successfully controlled, he noted.

With support from the British relief organization Tearfund, Vigilance has become actively involved in relationship counseling. Nikiema organizes training workshops and seminars in which topics such as gender roles and sexuality are discussed. The aim is to involve the

country’s Protestant churches in these activities.

The Vigilance director says new biblical interpretation can help call traditional role behavior into question. “Jesus came to reunite them. (...) Being united is answering the prayer of Jesus, who said, ‘Let them be one, like you and me, Father,’” he noted. He said he is convinced that the strategy is bearing fruit, citing feedback he has received that men are treating women with greater respect and that communication and sexual relationships have improved.



## Liberating Masculinity

Rev. Charles Klagba from Togo, theological consultant to the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), too, is convinced that AIDS prevention must address the gender problem. In this regard, EHAIA, a World Council of Churches project, has developed a new concept which he refers to as “liberating masculinity.”

“We need to question the role society presses on us. (...) We always preach to women, they are well equipped, but when they go back [home], they are in the same framework as before and can’t do much because men are still the same,” stated Klagba.



*Astrid Berner-Rodoreda, Africa HIV and AIDS advisor for Brot für die Welt © EAA/Paul Jeffrey*

The strongly patriarchal hierarchy makes it difficult or impossible for women to protect themselves, especially in African countries. According to the German relief agency Brot für die Welt and a position paper released by the Danish humanitarian organization DanChurchAid, the proportion of women who are HIV-positive is around 61 per cent.

“Women in these countries have no decision-making power. So they also cannot negotiate condom use or safer sex with their husbands,” said Astrid Berner-Rodoreda, HIV and AIDS adviser for Brot für die Welt. Polygamy, she added, continues to be a widespread practice in many African countries.

## New Position Paper

“Human Rights, HIV & AIDS Prevention and Gender Equality: An Impossible Cocktail for Faith Based Organizations?” is the title of a recent position paper for faith-based organizations. The paper was developed by DanChurchAid in collaboration with organizations such as Christian Aid (United Kingdom), Brot für die Welt (Germany), FinnChurchAid (Finland), Norwegian Church Aid (Norway), Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and Kerk in Actie (both in the Netherlands).

Jan Bjarne Sødal of the Christian Council of Norway and Martin Rosenkilde Pedersen, DanChurchAid program adviser for HIV and AIDS, presented the document at the Ecumenical Pre-Conference in Mexico City. The paper is intended as an incentive for other groups and organizations, in particular for partners in the South, Pedersen indicated.

The position paper calls upon faith-based organizations to strengthen women’s right to reproductive and sexual health. “The right to decide freely when not to have children, to be protected from sexual coercion, genital mutilation or forced pregnancy and to have access to safe contraception that prevents the

spread of HIV are key human rights and critical preconditions for any effective HIV prevention effort,” the paper states.

Sødal criticized churches for having frequently supported and upheld traditional roles and inequalities, but at the same time pointed out that changing traditional roles is a challenge for all human beings. “There are some deep-seated attitudes, stereotypes and patriarchal systems that are woven deeply into our being, into our social and cultural beliefs, traditions and norms. We are brought up with them. It is how we are socialized,” she said.

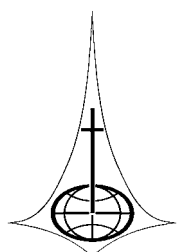
“Are we actually able to step out of that completely? Both men and women are consciously and/or unconsciously supporting them and keeping them up, the attitudes, the traditions and expressions of unequal gender roles,” she remarked.

*(A contribution by LWI correspondent Julia Heyde)*

The position paper “Human Rights, HIV/AIDS Prevention and Gender Equality: An Impossible Cocktail for Faith Based Organizations?” is available in English in PDF format at [www.danchurchaid.org/content/download/16610/130375/file/AidsPaper\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.danchurchaid.org/content/download/16610/130375/file/AidsPaper_WEB.pdf)



*Martin Rosenkilde Pedersen with a recent position paper developed by his organization DanChurchAid for use by faith-based groups © LWF/J. Heyde*



## Call for Recognition of Leadership Capacity of People Living with HIV

“To live a life centered in Christ means that I will find myself with people at the margins,” said Bishop Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), at an interfaith panel discussion at the 17<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference (IAC) which concluded on August 8 in Mexico.

Hanson underscored the importance of standing with marginalized people in the struggle for justice and full inclusion. “I am very weary of Christian leaders saying ‘I am called to be the voice of the voiceless.’ If we would be quiet, those we deem voiceless could find their voice, exercise their voice, and cease to be so marginalized,” he said.

He noted this would mean that religious leaders urge their communities to do the hard work of introspection and not just outward compassion, asking within their communities, “How do we perpetuate and contribute to patriarchal societal structures that continue to marginalize others?”

Affirming his support for interfaith work, the LWF president said the church has the capacity to change structures in society, and should use its potential to change discriminating policies and practices that continue to stigmatize. This means “that we must be willing to create tension within our own faith communities and in the relationship with each other for the sake of changing power structures,” he emphasized.

### The Wounded Healer

Baptist pastor Rev. Charles King from New York voiced criticism that



*Rev. Charles King, president of Housing Works, a ministry to HIV positive homeless people, urges churches to integrate the concept of the “wounded healer” in their theology.*  
© EAA/Anandi Smith

time and time again, the church would reach for the mainstream instead of going toward the margins. “That’s exactly the opposite of what we were called to do,” said King, who is president of Housing Works, an orga-

nization providing housing, treatment and employment for homeless people living with HIV. of the wounded healer: “You have to be open to the possibility that the people who you are serving are going to offer you healing. In order to be open for that you need to know that you are in need of healing, too,” he said.

### Voices from Islam and Hinduism

Mr Ehsan Matlabi, program assistant at Mashhad Positive Club in Iran, explained that religious leaders



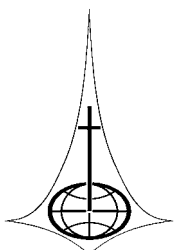
*Ehsan Matlabi of Mashhad Positive Club explains the educative role of imams in Iran.*  
© EAA/Anandi Smith

and scientists in his country were working together to set up a comprehensive HIV prevention program. Religious leaders play an important role in education, he said. “We ask them the questions: ‘What does Islam say about people living with HIV? What does Islam teach about condom use as a way of prevention?’”

Dr Richa Chopra, a representative of the Art of Living International Center in Bangalore, India, introduced a yoga breathing technique as a means of preventing HIV and AIDS.



*Dr Richa Chopra, Art of Living International Center in Bangalore, India, introduces yoga breathing techniques used to increase energy and well-being.* © EAA/Anandi Smith





This technique, the “Sudarshan Kriya,” explained Chopra, was revealed to His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the center’s founder. Its application is aimed at increasing energy and well-being, and bringing about behavioral change in people. “Religion is starting with us. So we first need to work on ourselves before we can help others better,” she stressed.

### Faith Leaders’ Involvement Essential

During the panel discussion, Bishop Emeritus Dr Gunnar Stålsett from Norway, insisted on the need to involve all faith leaders in the AIDS response. “Unless we bring in the imams, sheikhs, bishops and gurus, the efforts won’t be sustained in the long term,” said Stålsett, who served as LWF general secretary

from 1985 to 1994. He noted that while changes would mainly come from the informal leadership at grassroots level, the involvement of the formal faith leaders would make it a coherent struggle, “a struggle where we see convergence across dividing lines and countries and religions,” he added.

*(A contribution by LWF correspondent Julia Heyde)*

## Kathryn Johnson Is LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs

**Dr Kathryn L. Johnson** from the United States of America is the new Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs at the Geneva headquarters.

Johnson, who has worked as interim ecumenical officer at the LWF since July 2007, was appointed in late June by the LWF Council at its meeting in Arusha, Tanzania. She succeeds Rev. Sven Oppgaard from the Church of Norway, who returned to his home country at the end of 2006 after serving for nine years.

A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Johnson has been involved at the international level as member of the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission and at the national level as a participant in



*Dr Kathryn L. Johnson*  
© LWF/H. Putsman

the bilateral dialogues between the ELCA and the United Methodist Church. She was active in local ecumenism in her home state of Kentucky (USA), where she took part in numerous regional dialogues and served as president of the Kentucky Council of Churches.

Johnson holds the position of Paul Tudor Jones Professor of Church History at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where she has been teaching since 1984. She has a doctorate in the history of Christianity from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, and a master’s degree in theology from Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.

## Silvio Schneider of Brazil Heads LWF/DWS Country Program in Colombia

As of July of this year, **Rev. Silvio Schneider**, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) representative to Colombia, is also director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) program in that country. Since 2007, the LWF/DWS office in the Colombian capital of Bogotá has been managed by national coordinator Doris Mateus Pérez in conjunction with the DWS Central America Program based in El Salvador.

Schneider, a theologian from Brazil, has been executive director of the Fundação Luterana de Diaconia (Lutheran Foundation of Diaconia) of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) since 2000. A member of the IECLB, he served as LWF Department for Mission and Development Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean between 1992 and 2000. He was director of the IECLB Office of Communication from 1980 to 1992 and served as pastor of the congregation in Curitiba (Brazil) from 1972 to 1980.

Schneider completed his theological training at the Faculdade de Teologia de São Leopoldo—today known as the Faculdades EST (Escola Superior de Teologia)—and was ordained in 1973.

He served on the LWF Standing Committee for World Service from 2000 until the end of June 2008; his membership on the planning committee for the Eleventh LWF Assembly



*Rev. Silvio Schneider*  
© LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

to be held July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany, ended at the same date.

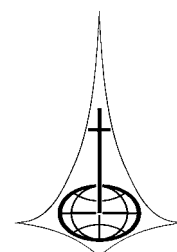
Rev. Schneider is married and the father of four children.

DWS has been involved in Colombia since 2001. At the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO), four emergency relief projects were initiated with support from ACT International (Action by Churches Together), a global network of churches and partner organizations. In 2004, the IELCO expressed interest in a long-term institutional presence in Colombia

on the part of DWS and, upon approval by the Standing Committee for World Service, the LWF opened an office in Bogotá in July 2006.

The office focuses on five objectives: community empowerment, human rights, peace building, advocacy and emergency aid. LWF/DWS Colombia is currently active in two regions of the country: Arauca, with a predominantly rural population, and Chocó, the country’s poorest region inhabited mainly by people of indigenous and Afro-Colombian origin.

For further information about the LWF/DWS country program in Colombia go to: [www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/DWS/Country\\_Programs/DWS-Colombia.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Colombia.html)



**EUROPEAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP CONSULTATION**

Greifswald, Germany, 11-16 September 2008

**Focus on Common Challenges in Church Life**

“Called to Grow, Lead and Nurture” was the theme of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) European Church Leadership Consultation held in mid-September in Greifswald, Germany.

At the invitation of the Evangelical Church of Pomerania (Pommersche Evangelische Kirche – PEK) and the LWF German National Committee (GNC), around 90 church leaders from Europe discussed the common challenges and difficulties in church life for the region’s LWF member churches. The 11–16 September meeting was organized by the Europe Desk of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and the host church.

While in Greifswald, the European church leaders hoped also to share experiences on successful models used in response to the emerging social and religious demands as a result of Europe’s transformation. While

globalization and secularization have an impact on both church life and society, there is also a growing interest in spirituality. Against this backdrop, participants focused primarily on diverse church leadership models and different forms of mission. They also visited several PEK mission projects and got a glimpse of church life in northeastern Germany.

On 14 September bishops of churches in which Pomeranian-born reformer Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) established the church order joined in a special service in honor of the Bugenhagen Jubilee in the St Nikolai Cathedral in Greifswald. After the service, the GNC/LWF chairperson and presiding bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich (Munich) de-

livered a celebration address about Bugenhagen.

“We are looking forward to an inspiring consultation that will not only charter new territory conceptually, but also bring us one step closer to communion among Lutheran churches throughout Europe,” said Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, LWF/DMD Secretary for Europe, ahead of the meeting. “The consultation agenda also included preparations for the next LWF Assembly to be held in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010,” she added.

The following articles provide a summary of the main issues discussed at the European Church Leadership Consultation. The complete articles are available on the LWF Web site at: [www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html)



More than 90 church leaders took part in the September 2008 LWF European Church Leadership Consultation “Called to Grow, Lead and Nurture” in Greifswald, Germany. © PEK/Rainer Neumann

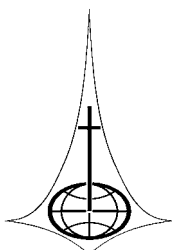
**LWF Regional Meetings Are Important for Common Identity**

Speaking to journalists at the beginning of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) European Church Leadership Consultation in Greifswald, Germany, LWF General Secretary

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko underlined the importance of such regional meetings for the organization’s work.

He stressed the encounters were beneficial in terms of mutual encour-

agement, sharing experiences and strengthening the sense of common identity. Over 90 representatives from the 44 European LWF member met in Greifswald from 11 to 16





September under the theme “Called to Grow, Lead and Nurture.” The Evangelical Church of Pomerania (Pommersche Evangelische Kirche – PEK) and the LWF German National Committee (GNC) hosted the meeting.

While LWF regional meetings were held for many years in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the first European meeting was held in 1988, noted Noko. He pointed out Greifswald would play an important role in preparations for the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly to take place in Stuttgart, Germany, hosted by the Evangelical Church in Wuerttemberg. The last LWF assembly in Germany was in 1952 in Hanover.

The general secretary expects from the German LWF member churches “important impetus for worldwide Lutheranism” along with indications on the ecumenical progress achieved in the last 50 years in the “motherland” of the Reformation. The deliberations in Greifswald focused on the LWF renewal process, a document on the episcopal ministry and the subject of “Family, Marriage and Human Sexuality.”

The GNC/LWF deputy chairperson, Bishop Dr Hans-Juergen Abromeit from Greifswald, had extended the PEK invitation at the last LWF European regional meeting three years ago in Iceland. He pointed out that the venue itself gave a sense of how the whole Baltic region is becoming a more cohesive unit, and challenging the church’s role as well.

Rev. Annika Laats from the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church



*Opening press conference in Greifswald (left to right): LWF Treasurer Peter Stoll (Germany); interpreter Margaret Pater; LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko; LWI German Editor Dirk-Michael Grötzsch; PEK Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit; and Rev. Annika Laats (Estonia) © LWF/C. Schubert*

also stressed this aspect of the meeting. The churches should get involved in the dialogue with their respective societies and become active players. It is particularly important for small churches in minority situations to attend meetings like the European regional consultation in Greifswald, where they could fellowship with other members of the worldwide communion of Lutheran churches, she said.

Abromeit reported that surveys among young people in Europe indicated there is a growing interest in religious questions—also in Germany. In Pomerania, services for tourists are in great demand but there are also strong misgivings about churches as a legacy of atheistic socialism.

The consultation participants had an opportunity to gain insights into church life in Germany’s north-eastern region through visits to

PEK missionary projects on Rügen Island.

The LWF Treasurer and Vice-President for the Central Western Europe region, Mr Peter Stoll, said it was essential to bring the common interests of the three sub-regions in Europe—Central Western Europe, Central Eastern Europe and the Nordic Countries—into the LWF renewal process. Europe constitutes the largest LWF church membership group, with over 37 million out of the total of 68.3 million Lutherans.

Stoll called on the German churches to be more self-confident and positive about their own situation and achievements over the past years. Looking at developments in the churches, and particularly in the Mecklenburg–West Pomeranian region since 1989, there was good reason to be proud of what had been achieved, he said.

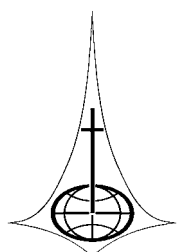
## LWF General Secretary: God Chooses People by His Love

“We are not great because of what we have achieved but because God achieves extraordinary things through us ordinary people,” was the message from Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), at the opening worship of the European

Church Leadership Consultation in the Cathedral of St Nicholas, Greifswald, Germany.

In his sermon, Noko focused on the question of the criteria by which God chooses people. He also criticized the tendency to judge a person’s value by their achievements. “We are

part of a society that has ‘altars,’ some of which are dedicated to the gods of ‘achievement,’” he remarked. God, he affirmed, did not choose people because they had achieved great things by their own strength. “From the scriptures it is clear that those heroes are not great because they are



great achievers of great things in life. (...) They are ordinary people like (...) us." He emphasized that God accepts people as they are through God's love, as "we are chosen purely on the basis of what Jesus did for us on the cross."

With respect to growing European integration, the LWF general secretary pointed out: "Whatever hap-

pens in the part of the earth we call Europe has a great influence on all world events. May God guide us as we address the relevant questions facing the churches and society in Europe."

Also attending the service was the Mecklenburg-West Pomeranian state premier Dr Harald Ringstorff and many congregational members



PEK Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit welcomes the consultation participants to Greifswald. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch



In his sermon during the opening worship service of the consultation, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko focuses on the question of the criteria by which God chooses people. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

of the host church, the Evangelical Church of Pomerania.

Pomeranian Bishop Dr Hans-Juergen Abromeit said it was a great joy to welcome leaders of the European LWF member churches to Greifswald in order to deliberate on questions about the shaping of Europe from a church standpoint. He underlined baptism as the link binding all Lutherans worldwide, for which an act of baptismal remembrance was celebrated during the service.

The Greifswald Cathedral Youth Choir provided music during the worship.

## German Leader Says Church and Government Face Similar Challenges

Premier Dr Harald Ringstorff of Germany's Mecklenburg-West Pomeranian state received participants in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) European Church Leadership Consultation during a festive reception at the Pommersches Landesmuseum (Pomeranian State Museum) in Greifswald, Germany, on 11 September.

The premier pointed out Greifswald's representation of the state as a whole, with its mixture

of tradition and innovation, and a combination of worldliness and hospitality. Ringstorff also expressed the connection between the state government and church through "close, constructive



Premier Dr Harald Ringstorff of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania pays tribute to the churches as "pillars of strength for society." © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

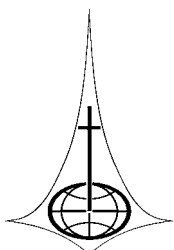
cooperation." He pointed to the similar challenges in "global networking, financial efficiency and demographic changes."

Paying tribute to the churches as "pillars of strength for society," the premier noted that in addition to pastoral care and a broad range of social services, "the churches stand for the communica-

tion of values, the maintenance and preservation of traditions and the foundation and strengthening of identity. It is precisely this that is of great importance in our times."

He noted that Mecklenburg-West Pomerania had become a favorite holiday destination for Germans for a number of years, as the state has much to offer including Brick Gothic architecture, a virtual landscape of church organs and pristine natural settings. Brick Gothic churches, he added, serve today as "signs of thought and action across borders," which indeed characterizes the Baltic region.

In his opening address, the Pomeranian bishop and the consultation's host Dr Hans-Juergen Abromeit, spoke of the church's role as a communicator of values, and of the secular state that "knows its limitations." The state, he said, depended on the existence of "values and standards, virtues and optimism." On behalf of the churches, he thanked the premier, who is set to leave office in three weeks, for his work and his strong presence as the state's leader.



## Leadership Urged to Take Seriously Young People's Involvement in Church Life

"We want to and we are able [with God's help] to change the Church, and to move forward our parishes. Just use us. Give us a chance." This was the appeal of a Polish youth delegate to a regional conference of Lutheran church leaders focusing on the common challenges in church and society.

Ewa Issel-Cieslar, a member of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, challenged the bishops, presidents and other representatives of the Lutheran World Federation



*Ewa Issel-Cieslar, student and Polish youth delegate to the consultation © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch*

(LWF) member churches in Europe to take seriously young people's active involvement in church life in order to ensure hope and a future for the Lutheran Church around the world. She emphasized the need to include youth in decision-making processes as early as possible, and endow them with responsibilities that prepare them for a future as church leaders.

The 22-year-old urged participants to reach out to young people and invite them to take part in meetings and other events, and also provide a good example for them in faith and life. Failure to involve them, she added, could lead to the departure of young people from Lutheran churches to other church groups, as was already being experienced in Poland.

### Emigration

On the challenges facing Lutheran congregations in Poland, the religious education student explained that emigration, especially of young people, posed a great burden on Poland's Lutheran congregations. This is all the more since Lutheran Christians are a minority in the country. "When your parish has 20 members, every single person, especially

a young one, emigrating makes a difference," she remarked.

She attributed the non-involvement of young Poles in the life of Lutheran congregations and poor church attendance also to the little attention given to their ideas and suggestions, making them feel unwelcome. "If this continues, Poland's Lutheran church should not be surprised if the young people leave to join independent churches where they are greeted 'with arms wide open'," she added.

With a view to her country's development since the political changes in the late 1980s, Issel-Cieslar pointed out that building a democracy with strong leadership personalities posed a significant challenge. "The Church may be involved in this process through education and Christian upbringing. Lutherans with their ethics, work ethos and tradition of education may take part in this process," she continued, pointing out that the Polish church had declared 2008 as the "Year of Christian Upbringing," signifying their responsibility for the country and its future.

She said that while living in the diaspora "forces people to search for their own identity," belonging to a minority, however, opens up the possibility of sharing a life of faith together and confessing this faith together. "People are interested in what the Lutheran church is, and why we are not part of the Roman Catholic Church," she said, pointing out that this often led to an intensive exchange.

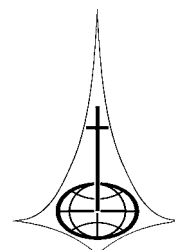
Life in the diaspora has convinced Lutherans in Poland to make use of new means of communication in their work, noted, Issel-Cieslar. "More and more parishes are using the Internet and have their own Web sites and forums. There are counseling possibilities through the Internet. Sunday worship services are also transmitted via Internet. These are some things which we young people really appreciate," she added.

### Denmark: Secularization

Reporting on the challenges facing the Lutheran Church in Denmark, Bishop Elisabeth Dons Christensen, Ribe Diocese, southwest Jutland, said secularization of society and the loss of religious values, traditions and rituals posed a great challenge for the Danish church, which comprises 82 percent of the country's population.



*European Church Leadership Consultation participants learn about the challenges facing the different LWF member churches in the region. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch*





Dons Christensen explained that a growing apathy in society with regard to church-related matters added to these difficulties. It was, therefore, important that one meets people where they live.

“We and our church members must be deeply anchored in our own

faith. We must find peace there, as only with this peace can we find the strength to meet people in the places that they live,” said the Ribe diocese bishop. She singled out work with children and young people as particularly important, in order to communicate Christian values and

religious knowledge as early possible.

The ability to inform others about the Christian faith in clear and simple words takes on considerable importance, and would have consequences for pastoral training as well, she added.

## Discussion on Human Sexuality Reveals a Range of Viewpoints within the Communion

“Everything is permissible, but not everything serves the community. But love does, and always discovers new possibilities,” affirmed theology professor Dr Hans Klein from Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Romania). In his presentation in mid-September before participants of the European Church Leader Conference in



*Dr Hans Klein, theologian from Sibiu, Romania, stresses the need for “Christian love” in discussions on human sexuality and the Church. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

Greifswald (Germany), Klein spoke about “The Church’s View on Sexuality and Homosexuality.”

The consultation discussed the report “Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality: Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue,” which had been received by the LWF Council at its March 2007 meeting in the Swedish town of Lund. A task force appointed by the LWF proposed guidelines and processes to guide respectful dialogue among member churches concerning diverging and converging conceptions within the communion about marriage, family and human sexuality. In Lund it was decided that this dialogue was to take place over a five-year period, during which interregional and international consultations would be held to support the process.

In connection with the debate on human sexuality, Klein pointed to the



*Austrian pastor Hedwig Pirker-Partaj cautions against judging people based on their sexual orientation. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

promise leads in a very unexpected direction. “So, those opposed to innovations are also right to some extent,” the theologian explained. Christian love, especially, can help people to face the future together. Love is what counts, for love signifies a willingness to compromise and consideration for those who hold different points of view.

so-called Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29). He said he felt that this example showed how, in cases of dispute, one does not simply acknowledge one side as being right and condemn the other. Said Klein, “The opposing view must always also be taken into consideration.” This is equally valid when the com-



*Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis, Lithuania, raises questions about the report from the LWF task force. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

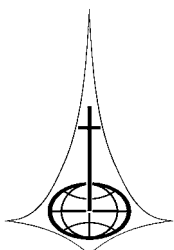
“Homosexual persons need support. As a church, we must take a leading role in this regard,” said Rev. Hedwig Pirker-Partaj of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria. She based her remarks on her experience in Austrian congregations.

“All of us search for truth; none of us has a personal claim to the truth,” she said. God’s truth is greater and more encompassing than humans can conceive. “What we see and recognize is merely a crazy quilt and so I beg you to be careful when you judge or especially condemn others,” the Austrian theologian pleaded. The homosexual person did not choose to be the way she or he is, nor is homosexuality an infection, the former youth delegate to the LWF Council insisted.

“Precisely in our Lutheran churches where we have painted justification through faith on our banner, we should strive to acknowledge our own ignorance, shortcomings and possible errors,” the Austrian pastor suggested with a view to future discussions.

Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania was critical in his reaction to the LWF task force’s report. The exegetical interpretation of churches who bless same-sex couples appears to be of an ideological rather than a theological nature. Interlinking theology and ideology has never borne good fruit, Sabutis stated.

According to his church’s understanding, the church’s main task is not to create new theologies, but rather to witness the truth revealed in Scripture, Sabutis continued. This biblical truth must always be a living truth for all generations



despite the mainstreams of so-called public opinion, he insisted. It is thus the responsibility of the church to maintain the apostolic way of dealing with questions related to family and sexuality. This means that for Lutheran churches, the one family possible is the union between a man and a woman as God willed it to be, the bishop emphasized.

Lutheran churches still cannot agree on what the concrete expressions of sin are, emphasized Prof.

Jan Olav Henriksen of the Church of Norway, who was also part of the LWF task force. There is, however, agreement with regard to the fact that sin in the secular realm is recognizable as injustice and the destruction of life conditions, and in the spiritual realm as lack of trust in the works of



Prof. Jan Olav Henriksen, Church of Norway, reflects on different forms of sin.  
© LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch

God, Henriksen said. Context and culture, especially, shape perceptions of the concrete expressions of sin. They challenge us to discuss why and how the different practices that exist in the various member churches came about.

## Reflection on Quantitative and Qualitative Growth Important for LWF

It is important to reflect on the growth of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) not only in terms of quantity but also quality, the head of the LWF German National Committee (GNC/LWF) told Lutheran leaders at the European Church Leadership Consultation in mid-September.

The GNC/LWF executive secretary Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke spoke of some of the major LWF landmarks. He said the organization's qualitative growth became particularly evident with the 1990 Assembly affirmation of the LWF's self-understanding as a "communion of churches." He pointed to the ecumenical significance of the October 1999 signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification [with the Roman Catholic Church], and the March 2007 Council adoption of

the document, *Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church – The Lund Statement by the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches*.

On the current LWF renewal process, Denecke said the decisive changes in politics, economics, and within the Lutheran churches called for changes toward a new LWF. An LWF Renewal Committee created in 2005 leads the process, aimed at developing ways to organize the common life and work of the Lutheran communion so that all churches and related organizations of mission and diakonia



Oberkirchenrat Norbert Denecke highlights important moments in the LWF's history.  
© LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch

take responsibility for these functions. It will present its recommendations to the 2010 Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany.

A survey carried out last year indicated the member churches' desire for increased participation in the renewal process, and their wish for a closer link between the

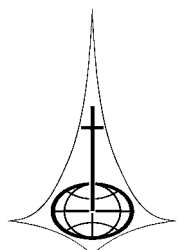
LWF's theological and ecumenical work. The need to maintain the humanitarian and development activities as important areas of work was also highlighted, as was better coordination and linkage of communications activities involving programs and projects with the Lutheran communion.

Denecke explained that the fall of the Iron Curtain had given way to new opportunities for church action in many parts of the world. Cooperation between church and state had also opened up new avenues of action. This new scope of freedom, as part of the globalization process, however, entailed new challenges for many churches as well, both economically and ecologically, he said.

The continually growing and thriving global community of Lutheran churches requires structures that enable the member churches to participate adequately, Denecke concluded.



Consultation plenary session and discussion at the Alfred-Krupp-Wissenschaftskolleg in Greifswald  
© LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch



## Churches Poised to Respond to the Challenges of European Secular Society

In Greifswald, the European church leaders also discussed the profile of churches in secular society. Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit of the conference host church, the Evangelical Church of Pomerania, called for closer attention to East-West migration.

More and more young, well-educated people are leaving the Baltic states, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in search of jobs in Scandinavia and Western Europe. This poses a particular challenge to the churches that welcome these people, and calls for a “close exchange” with the Eastern European churches, said Abromeit, GNC/LWF deputy chairperson.

Hamburg Bishop Maria Jepsen, North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church and member of the LWF Council, looked back positively at the consultation’s theme “Called to Grow, Lead and Nurture,” saying the meeting had provided a “helpful” exchange on how churches can present themselves in a secular society.

Church of Sweden Archbishop Anders H. Wejryd, also an LWF Council member, said the bishops’ role should be reflected more strongly since much was expected of church leadership. The meeting had provided a “re-



(Right to left) Archbishop Anders H. Wejryd (Sweden), PEK Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit, Dirk-Michael Grätzsch (LWF Office for Communication Services), Bishop Maria Jepsen (Hamburg), Bishop Dr Christoph Klein (Romania) and LWF Area Secretary for Europe Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfuto at the closing press conference © LWF/C. Schubert

markable openness toward rethinking one’s own positions,” he added.

Bishop Dr Christoph Klein, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania and LWF vice-president for Central Eastern Europe, stressed that many problems are no longer limited to the East or West, as the current challenges can be both common and different.

The LWF area secretary for Europe, Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfuto, said she was convinced progress could be made toward deepening the Lutheran communion through

consultations such as the one in Greifswald. This had been a task, she added, since Martin Luther’s Reformation. The process of growing together would still take some time, as many conversations still demonstrated that people still need to work toward dismantling the “Iron Curtain” from within.

The final message of the European Church Leadership Consultation is available in pdf format on the LWF Web site: [www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald\\_2008/LWF\\_Greifswald\\_Message\\_EN.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald_2008/LWF_Greifswald_Message_EN.pdf)

## European Church Leaders Pay Tribute to Reformer Johannes Bugenhagen

Church leaders from Europe, German political leaders and academicians were among the hundreds of people who in mid-September participated in the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Johannes Bugenhagen’s death.

“The Evangelical Church of Pomerania owes the Reformation to Johannes Bugenhagen,” said Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit in his sermon during the Sunday worship anniversary in Greifswald’s St Nicholas Cathedral. “It is no exaggeration to say that the political and ecclesiastical landscape of Northern Germany and Northern Europe today would look different

without Bugenhagen,” Abromeit told the over 500 worshippers.

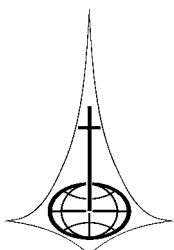
Bugenhagen was born in 1485 in Wolin, Pomerania and was for many years a respected school headmaster in Trepow (Pomerania, today in Poland). As of 1520 he got to know Luther’s writings, became his friend and counselor and then took over the Wit-



PEK Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit: Johannes Bugenhagen was key figure in the Reformation in Northern Europe. © LWF/D.-M. Grätzsch

tenberg city parish. According to Abromeit, the theologian whom Martin Luther called the “Bishop of the Reformation” performed “at least 1,470 ordinations of pastors” in Wittenberg alone.

Abromeit explained Bugenhagen’s work on church order, which the reformer understood as the “ministry of [an] evangelist,” notably in Brunswick,





Lubeck, Hamburg, Schleswig, Holstein, Denmark and Pomerania. He noted the reformer emphasized the responsibility of church leadership as “primarily preaching the gospel and celebrating worship ... [as] that is where the heart of the church beats.”

With reference to the planned merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Mecklenburg, North Elbia and Pomerania, Abromeit said it would be of benefit if some of these German churches unite in a Church of the North.

### Realist

In his tribute, Munich Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich pointed out that Bugenhagen, unlike the visionary Martin Luther, had been the realist among the reformers. Bugenhagen “did not write any revolutionary, programmatic documents like his close friend Luther,” said Friedrich, chairperson of the LWF German National Committee.



*Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich, Munich, pays tribute to Bugenhagen's pragmatic approach. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

“His most significant merit is considered to be the painstaking, detailed drafting of Protestant church constitutions (“orders”) in which the theological insights and goals of the Reformers were translated into a form suitable for practical implementation,” he added.

According to Friedrich, Bugenhagen was preoccupied with the answer to the question, “What should I as a Christian do concretely?”—which was of timeless relevance. “The modern forms of positive thinking that are so popular today—the endeavor to succeed by presenting oneself in a good light, the planning of one’s life in the certainty that it is feasible, together with the related exaggerated opinions of the self—would have seemed extremely strange to him,” said Friedrich.

Bishop Dr Christoph Klein, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg

Confession in Romania, said, “Until we received our own Protestant bishop in 1533, Bugenhagen ordained the pastors of our Lutheran church in Transylvania, and was thus a kind of bishop for our clerics at the time.”

Klein pointed out that Bugenhagen’s connections with churches beyond Pomerania and Central Europe nearly



*Bishop Dr Christoph Klein, Romania, identifies Bugenhagen as a forerunner in the linking of Western and Eastern Europe. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*

500 years ago demonstrated the lively exchange within Europe long before the accession of numerous Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union.

“May Bugenhagen’s efforts to this extent remain an encouraging inspiration for our commitment to the greater Lutheran church worldwide,” added Klein, LWF vice-president

for Central Eastern Europe. Erwin SELLERING, the Mecklenburg-West Pomerania minister for health and social affairs and

designate-premier, praised Martin Luther and his fellow reformers for their message of “courage to change,” which is still relevant in view of today’s challenges at local, national and global levels.

The dean of the Theological Faculty of Greifswald’s Ernst Moritz Arndt University, Prof. Michael Herbst, spoke of Bugenhagen’s commitment to education and Bible scholarship. He mentioned the Bugenhagen monument near the university, which depicts Bugenhagen with an opened Bible on his knees, his gaze focused on the main building.

Bishop Dr Hans-Jürgen Abromeit’s sermon can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at

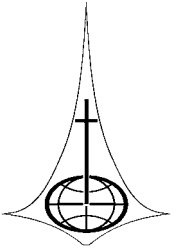
[www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald/LWF\\_Greifswald\\_Bugenhagen-Abromeit\\_DE.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald/LWF_Greifswald_Bugenhagen-Abromeit_DE.pdf)

Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich’s lecture is available at

[www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald/LWF\\_Greifswald\\_Bugenhagen-Friedrich.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/Events/Greifswald/LWF_Greifswald_Bugenhagen-Friedrich.pdf)



*Consultation participants take part in a worship service commemorating the 450th anniversary of Pomeranian Reformer Johannes Bugenhagen’s death. © LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch*



## Women's Ordination a Highlight of Bolivian Lutheran Church Anniversary

Noko: Strong Expression of Men and Women's Participation in Church Life

LA PAZ, Bolivia/GENEVA (LWI) – The Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Boliviana – IELB) celebrated 70 years of existence on 7 September. At a special liturgy marking the event, several women were ordained pastors while others received the authorization to administer sacraments and proclaim the Word.

During the celebration, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and Bishop Jessica R. Crist, Montana Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), ordained two women and five men, and authorized three women and ten men to carry out church functions.

“It is an encouraging sign and strong signal that 15 out of the 16 LWF member churches in the Latin American and Caribbean region now ordain women. The LWF has accompanied the discernment of the Lutheran church in Bolivia in a respectful way over the last decades. The values of inclusion and participation of men and women in the full life and ministry of the Church are thus given strong expressions,” noted Noko in view of the first women's ordination in the IELB.

For IELB president Rev. Luis Cristóbal Alejo Fernández, women and men stand on equal ground. There is a balance between them and neither is subordinated to the other, he emphasized. “Based on the principle of duality, it is only that after 70 years, we open our eyes and accept that we are all part of this inclusive church and that we can thrive together in harmony,” said Alejo in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

Berta Uturnunco, one of the three women who received authority to carry out church functions, pointed out that the fact that women were being admitted to ordained ministry and allowed to share their experiences constituted



Rev. Maritza Castañeta (left) and Rev. Erlini Tola (right), the first women to be ordained in the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELB) © mission 21/Heinz Bichsel

“an historical moment” in the building of an inclusive communion. “Many women in leadership positions in rural areas, too, find this to be important,” said Uturnunco, who has been IELB vice-president since February 2007 and was the church's national coordinator for women between 2003 and 2006.

Newly ordained theologian Erlini Tola said she sees a new age dawning for the Bolivian church in terms of its own history and the personal destinies of its members. While both Bolivia and the church face great challenges, the changes that are needed will only be possible if each and every individual experiences an inner transformation and all members become aware that they are the ones who make up the church. “This is an opportunity to set ourselves goals for the future toward the attainment of a church which is a reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth,” Tola stressed.

The Bolivian church ordination of women reaffirms the LWF's steadfast commitment “to continue working on this specific issue of women's ordination and in a more broader sense on the ques-

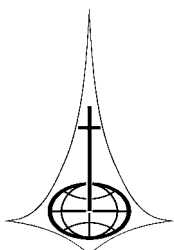
tions of gender equity in the church,” said Rev. Dr Elaine Gleci Neuenfeldt, executive secretary for the Women in Church and Society desk of the LWF Department for Mission and Development. A future task will be to further the discussion on women in ministry so that their full inclusion and participation can be sustained in an ongoing way.

### 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The beginnings of the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church date back to missionary activities in the area inhabited by the indigenous Aymara people and in the Andean highlands in 1938. The IELB was established as an autonomous church in 1972, the same year missionaries from the United States of America left Bolivia. It joined the LWF in 1975, and currently has around 22,000 members comprising mainly indigenous people. The church has 130 congregations and 35 preaching posts served by five ordained pastors and 90 preachers.

More about the IELB at [www.ielbbolivia.org](http://www.ielbbolivia.org)

8 September 2008



# LWF and WCC Call for Government Intervention in Ending Orissa Violence

## Churches Asked to Pray and Fast in Solidarity

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) appealed for the Indian government’s intervention in ending ongoing violence in the country’s northeastern state of Orissa.

In a joint letter on 4 September addressed to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, LWF and WCC General Secretaries Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, respectively, appealed to the prime minister “to ensure an immediate cessation of violence, the restoration of law and justice and sanctuary for the displaced.”

Citing information received from the LWF and WCC member churches in India, the general secretaries pointed out that indiscriminate killings, burning of church buildings and destruction of institutions continue in the Gajapati and Khandamal districts and other parts of Orissa.

Noko and Kobia stated, “It is the most vulnerable sections of the population who are worst affected by the violence,” and urged more long-term support to such communities so that they could reconstruct their lives.

According to Rev. Dr A. G. Augustine Jeyakumar, Executive Secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI),

the communal violence, which reportedly started following the 23 August murder of a Hindu spiritual leader, targeted the Christian community, with “fundamentalist groups going from village to village destroying churches, burning houses, attacking and killing Christians.”

### Prayers and Fasting

Meanwhile the WCC called on its member churches and partners to join in a 7 September prayer and fasting initiative of the National United Christian Forum, which groups the National Council of Churches in India, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India and the Evangelical Federation of India.

In a letter to the WCC member churches in India, the general secretary welcomed the Forum’s initiative and urged solidarity in “praying for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of this violence and for all those who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.”

Some 20 people had been killed, 50,000 displaced and 4,000 homes

destroyed over a period of ten days, as a result of the “worst ever communal riots against Christians,” according to a report by the Forum. Of those who fled their villages, some 13,000 were living in nine government-run relief camps. Around 200 villages were affected, with hundreds of churches burnt down.

On 29 August church-run educational institutions were closed and demonstrations held across the country as a sign of solidarity with the suffering people and protest of the violence against Christian minorities in Orissa.

Jeyakumar underscored the need to also initiate interfaith peace groups that would be sensitized to address issues of communal violence. “We all need to be united in our efforts to curb this carnage,” he added.

The UELCI comprises 10 Lutheran churches, and belongs to both the LWF and WCC as well as the national Christian Forum.

The full text of the LWF-WCC letter to the Indian Prime Minister is available at [www.oikoumene.org/?id=6267](http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=6267)

The full text of the WCC letter to the churches in India is at [www.oikoumene.org/?id=6266](http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=6266)

4 September 2008

## Brazilian Pastor Elaine G. Neuenfeldt Is New LWF Secretary for Women in Church and Society

Brazilian pastor **Dr Elaine G. Neuenfeldt** is the new executive secretary for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) of the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Geneva. The 40-year-old theologian from the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) joined the LWF on 1 August, succeeding Rev. Priscilla Singh of India who led WICAS from 1998 to 2008. An ordained pastor of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church since July 2008, Singh continues her collaboration with DMD through involvement in the project “Gender and Power.”



Rev. Dr Elaine G. Neuenfeldt  
© LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

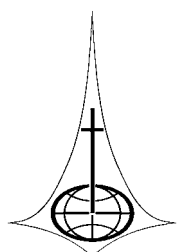
From 2005 to 2008 Neuenfeldt was professor of feminist theology at the Faculdades EST (Escola Superior de Teologia) in São Leopoldo, Brazil, where she also taught Old Testament courses.

Ordained in 1994, Neuenfeldt received her doctorate in theology in 2004 at the Instituto Ecumênico de Pós-Graduação (Ecumenical Institute of Graduate Studies) in São Leopoldo, Brazil. She earned her master of theology from the same institute in 2001.

In addition to her theological studies, Neuenfeldt served as the volunteer pastor of the IECLB congregation of Floresta Imperial in the town of Novo Hamburgo, Brazil, specifically working with women’s groups and Bible study workshops.

Neuenfeldt served as pastor of the IECLB congregation of Lucas do Rio Verde in the state of Mato Grosso between 1992 and 1995. In 1989 she took part in an academic exchange in Nicaragua.

Rev. Dr Neuenfeldt is married and has one daughter.





## LWF Urges Ecumenical, International Community Support for Zimbabwe's Reconstruction

### General Secretary Noko Welcomes Political Agreement

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomed the recent agreement for a unity government in Zimbabwe as “a reasonable compromise for peace” and an opportune moment that demands an ecumenical response from the churches at national and international levels.

leaders in Zimbabwe, the international community must put other considerations aside, and focus on the welfare of Zimbabweans,” urged Noko.

The LWF general secretary paid tribute to the role of African regional leadership, especially South African President Thabo Mbeki, in broker-

the implementation of the commitments the parties have made.”

The agreement effectively ended a standoff over the winner of disputed presidential elections in March 2008, which significantly aggravated an already serious political and economic crisis. Under the deal, President Robert Mugabe remains head of state while MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai assumes the new position of prime minister.

Noko urged solidarity with the country's churches, which have been caught up in the crisis “and have all suffered together with the people.” He underlined the prophetic calling of the national and international ecumenical community to exemplify unity and compassion in the complex process of national reconstruction. The people of Zimbabwe “deserve our support in this long-awaited but fragile moment of hope,” he added.

The LWF is present in the country through its member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, and Lutheran Development Service – Zimbabwe, the Department for World Service associate program.



*Victims of Zimbabwe's post-election violence camp outside the United States embassy in the capital Harare in early July 2008 hoping for refuge. © Reuters/Philimon Bulawayo*

In a statement issued on 18 September, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko noted that while the wider global community had indicated it would wait and see how the agreement works in practice, such a position was “a strategy for failure” during the opportune moment. “Like the political

ing the 15 September power-sharing deal between the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties. He underscored continued accompaniment of the process “to encourage and support

The full text of the General Secretary's statement is available on the LWF Web site at, [www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/LWF\\_Statement\\_on\\_Zimbabwe-09-2008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF_Statement_on_Zimbabwe-09-2008_EN.pdf)

18 September 2008

### Church of Sweden Celebrates 50 Years of Women's Ordination

This year the Church of Sweden is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its decision to ordain women. Festivities were launched on 23 September with an anniversary service in Uppsala Cathedral in conjunction with the Church of Sweden's annual assembly.

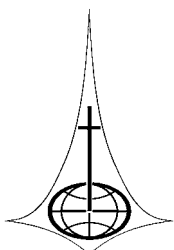
On 27 September 1958, the church assembly passed a resolution that women could also be ordained as priests in the Church of Sweden. The first three women to be ordained for pastoral ministry in the Church of Sweden, on 10 April 1960, were Elisabeth Djurle, Ingrid Persson and Margit Sahlin.

According to sources in the Church of Sweden, festivities surrounding the anniversary will celebrate both women and men, since the matter of the ordination of women is both a theological issue

and a question of democracy. As part of the commemoration, a number of worship services, an anniversary book, an exhibition and the publication of a scholarly work on the topic of ordained women are planned. With the anniversary festivities, the church wishes to celebrate that it is a church of equality and, simultaneously, indicate its intention of strengthening that conviction in the future.

An increasing number of women have been ordained since 1960. As of the year 2000, 31 percent of all pastors in the Church of Sweden were women.

With just under 6.9 million members, the Church of Sweden is the largest Lutheran church in the world and has been an LWF member church since 1947.



## FEATURE: Church Is Wherever People Gather Together

*Continued from p. 1*

one out of ten Rotensee inhabitants has a church affiliation and, of these, only a small number seek any contact with the church.

“For me, the greatest challenge is to reach people who are separated from the church or in whose daily lives the church plays no role,” Thieme explained to a group of 90 European church representatives visiting Rügen in mid-September, in the context of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) European Church Leadership Consultation in Greifswald, Germany.



*A festive program with music and games took place following the open-air worship service held in Rotensee last summer in conjunction with the European Football Championship. © Private*

### New Approach

Interesting people in religious topics and establishing long-term contacts with the population can be a difficult task, remarked Thieme. “It has become clear to me that, in the case of Rotensee, we must rethink our way of proclaiming the gospel. Particularly in a context in which people have little interest in academic lectures, the ‘church of the Word’ must take a new approach. In order to transmit Christian values, it must address people without using big words,” he explained.

There is still no church building, but for 19 months there has been a local

church interlocutor. “Church is where one encounters people and comes into their lives. The physical place is not the determinant. What matters is that I have time for people and that they know I am available,” asserted Thieme. Consequently, he spends most of his time about town, meeting people. “I visit them at home. Sometimes we meet in the park or at the neighborhood center,” he said, describing a typical working day. He realizes that his efforts are beginning to pay off as people are gradually starting to seek dialogue with him.

The wave of reconstruction sweeping the rest of the island seems to have by-

passed Bergen-Rotensee. “On many days, the lack of future prospects hits one right in the eyes,” the pastor admitted.

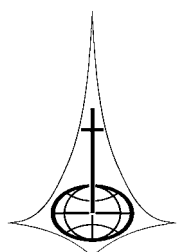
High unemployment and poverty “eat away at people, sometimes sapping their strength to face the future,” explained Thieme, pointing out that even those with diplomas are often unable to find jobs. Every household is short of money for daily existence—in some cases, even for mere subsistence. Alcohol abuse has become a major problem in Rotensee, and violent behavior has increased, as is evident in the willful destruction of telephone booths and bus shelters. This could be due to the fact that adolescents in Rotensee have no place to meet. “Out of frustration, some youth have already turned to heavy drinking,” he said.

Thieme indicated that the lack of financial means contributes to the social isolation of the population. “For that reason, I am on the road all day long visiting people who are lonely. I listen to them and sometimes help with administrative formalities,” he said.

Giving people an alternative to their seemingly futureless situation is the overriding objective, according to the Rotensee pastor, who hopes that renewed emphasis on church life would help in realizing this. He pointed to the extremely encouraging example of



*Rev. Matthias Thieme (left) with a worship service guest © Private*



collaboration with St Mary's parish in Bergen and the Rotensee neighborhood center which offers a meeting place and activities for children and youth.

"The open-air worship we held last summer was a complete success. A hundred persons took part. This was totally unexpected. The atmosphere

was simply excellent," said Thieme. He is enthusiastic about the interest shown in one of the two worship services held in Rotensee so far. He plans to organize regular worship for children and youth in the future, and joint services with St Mary's congregation in Bergen. And perhaps no longer in the neighbor-

hood center, but rather in a church with its own team of volunteers.

*(A report by Claudia Schubert, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover, Germany, currently doing a pastoral internship in the LWF Office for Communication Services)*

30 October 2008

## Erwin Buck Is LWF Assembly Content Coordinator

**Rev. Dr Erwin Buck** is the new assembly content coordinator for the Eleventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The assembly, hosted by the Evangelical Church in Württemberg, will be held in Stuttgart, Germany, from 20 to 27 July 2010 under the theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread."

As content coordinator, Buck's task is to implement LWF Council and Planning Committee decisions with regard to the content of the next LWF assembly. He is responsible for the production of materials such as Bible studies and resources for the "village groups" which will meet daily during the assembly, and discuss biblical texts and reflect upon their relevance to the assembly theme.

Buck is *professor emeritus* of New Testament at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon (Saskatchewan, Canada) and has at various times occupied different positions within the seminary, including that of president.



Rev. Dr Erwin Buck  
© LWF/D.-M. Gröttsch

He earned his master of theology degree from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (USA) where he also received a doctorate in New Testament. He was employed as a *Wissenschaftlicher Assistent* (research associate) for three years at the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum of the University of Münster, Germany.

Before being called to the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Buck, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, served for three years as pastor of St Peter Lutheran Church in Medicine Hat (Alberta, Canada).

Since retiring, Buck has taught at various theological schools around the world as visiting professor, for example, the *Seminari Theoloji Malaysia* (Malaysia Theological Seminary) in Seremban and the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, India.

Rev. Dr Buck is married to retired pastoral theology professor Gertrude Buck and they have three grown children.

## Württemberg Bishop Says Authorities Will Ensure Entry Visas for LWF Assembly

**Bishop Frank Otfried July**, Evangelical Church in Württemberg, informed representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches that entry visas would be facilitated for participants from around the world attending the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany. Talks were being held at the "highest level" with authorities in Berlin, and the Assembly host church had received assurance that all delegates would be given a heartfelt welcome, July told participants at the September 2008 European Church Leadership Consultation in Greifswald, Germany.

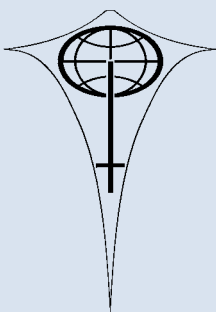
The visa issue remains a major concern in view of Canadian authorities' refusal to grant visas to some 50 potential participants to the July 2003 Tenth Assembly held in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Württemberg bishop spoke of his church's eager anticipation to host the 20 to 27 July LWF Assembly whose theme is "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread." The theme presents a specific

challenge for the host church which is located in an economically stable region with many global links resulting from the presence of large companies, said July. "On the other hand, however, we know a different kind of global sensibility and global impact through our missionary and ecumenical engagement and the development work of our church," he added. Ongoing preparations include plans for a pre-assembly program giving participants the chance to visit the most important Luther sites in Germany.

Kirchenrat Klaus Rieth, responsible for the church's mission, ecumenical affairs and development work, said Stuttgart is home to numerous companies including leading automobile manufacturers, thus opening up the opportunity to "get in contact with members of these companies, which are very important for our region."

Rieth spoke of the host church's important ecumenical relations with Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists and Moravians.



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