

Highlights

LWF Executive Committee Pastoral Message on Global Financial Crisis..... 3

The Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation issued a pastoral message denouncing the collective failure of responsibility and accountability on the part of governments, financial institutions and business leaders...

Malaysian Lutheran Bishop Julius Paul Dies..... 6

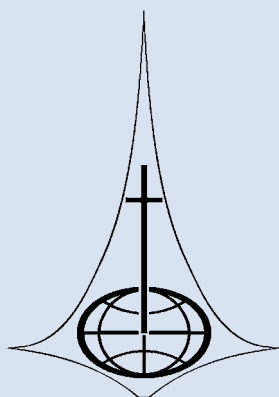
Bishop Julius D. Paul, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, died on 22 November in a boat accident in Guatemala...

Lutheran Leaders, Government Representatives Confer at International Debt Symposium .. 15

Representatives of governments, churches and their partner agencies, United Nations bodies, civil society organizations and legal experts participated in an international symposium on illegitimate debt co-organized by the Lutheran World Federation...

FEATURE: Nourishment for the Body and Soul 23

At around 5 p.m. every Thursday, rain or shine, the guests start arriving outside Trinity Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Bismarck, North Dakota, USA, for a banquet...



Participants in LWF Global Consultation Favor a Redefinition of Diakonia



A glass of water is a sign of the life-giving service Christians are called to offer to those in need, explains Rev. Sabina Kibiyo Lumwe from Tanzania. Participants in a recent LWF global consultation on diakonia were invited to share personal symbols of diakonia during the gathering. © LWF/T. Miller

See pages 9-14.

Serving the Whole Person Is a Distinctive Nature of Church-Based Action

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia/GENEVA (LWI) – Participants in a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation on diakonia in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa said they favored a redefinition of diakonia to fit the world today. They also agreed to look into ways of resolving the dilemma of divisions between the diaconic, development and evangelism work of the church.

In his welcoming remarks, Rev. Iteffa Gobena, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), said the first evangelists who spread the gospel in Ethiopia in 1900 found it necessary “to help the sick and educate children as a means to actualize service in Christian love.”

Describing such acts as “gospel in action,” Gobena explained to around 60 participants attending the LWF Global

Consultation on Diakonia that “the knowledge of the gospel and the experience of God’s love is the power that moved the evangelists to face the challenge of their days; hence they permeated God’s love through their actions.”

The EECMY leader said the commission of Jesus Christ was to serve the whole person—body and soul. Instead of sub-dividing the work, “challenges should be addressed by the message of the gospel, which is to free the people from evil [whether] spiritual or physical,” he said.

The director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke said the purpose of the

Continues on page 9

Contents

Communio

- 3.....Costa Rican Lutheran Leader Underlines Holistic Accompaniment of Faith Communities
- 3.....LWF Executive Committee Issues Pastoral Message on Global Financial Crisis
- 4.....Theologians Explore Further Possibilities for Interfaith Dialogue with Islam
- 5.....African Religious Leaders Seek Urgent Intervention to End Resource-Based Conflict in Congo
- 7.....Lutheran-Reformed Talks Continue in 2010
- 7.....Malaysian Lutheran Bishop Julius Paul Dies
- LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia
- 1, 9Participants in LWF Global Consultation Favor a Redefinition of Diakonia
- 10Deliberation on Interrelation Between Gospel Proclamation and Human Development
- 11Development Workers Urge Churches to Mobilize Local Resources
- 12New, Changing Focus of Diakonia in Europe
- 13Latin America: Church Has Mobilized Society Against Unjust Economic Policies
- 14Global Consultation Articulates Road Map of New Paradigm for Diakonia
- International Symposium on Illegitimate Debt
- 15 Lutheran Leaders, High-Ranking Government Representatives Confer at International Debt Symposium
- 16 Calls for Creditor Co-Responsibility at Historic Meeting on Illegitimate Debt
- 17Norway Affirms Support for Debt Cancellation Initiatives, Urges Developing Countries' Involvement
- 18Lutheran Leader Hanson Insists Church Voice Must Be Heard in Complex Situations
- 19Symposium Calls for Further Political and Legal Action on Illegitimate External Debt

LWF Secretariat

- 21.....LWF Congratulates Former Finnish President Ahtisaari for Winning 2008 Nobel Peace Prize
- 22.....Global Lutheran Communion Congratulates New US President-Elect

Features & Themes

- 23.....FEATURE: Nourishment for the Body and Soul

News in Brief

- 8.....Project on Digital Age Handwriting Presented at LWF Geneva Meeting
- 20.....New LWF Publication Explores the Spiritual and Moral Dimensions of Illegitimate Debt
- 24.....Lutheran Church in Diaspora Merges with Mother Church in Lithuania

Lutheran World Information Subscription 2009

Lutheran World Information will continue to provide information about the various activities of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), its member churches and related partners and organizations worldwide. Subscriptions will be automatically renewed unless otherwise indicated, and will be invoiced in the first quarter of 2009.

The subscription rates including mailing remain the same at CHF 75 per year. As printing and mailing costs are based on the Swiss franc, the equivalent in Euros and US dollars for 2009 will be EUR 50 or USD 68.



The staff of the LWF Office for Communication Services wish all LWI readers a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

The Lutheran World Federation

– A Communion of Churches
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2,
Switzerland

Telephone +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org

Editor-in-Chief
Karin Achtelstetter
ka@lutheranworld.org

English Editor

Pauline Mumia
pmu@lutheranworld.org

German Editor

Dirk-Michael Grötzsch
dmg@lutheranworld.org

Layout

Stéphane Gallay
sga@lutheranworld.org

Circulation/subscription

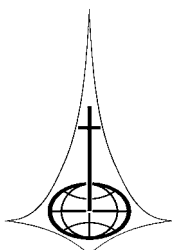
Colette Muanda
cmu@lutheranworld.org

Lutheran World Information (LWI)

is the information service of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Unless specifically noted, material presented does not represent positions or opinions of the LWF or of its various units.

Where the dateline of an article contains the notation (LWI), the material may be freely reproduced with acknowledgement.



Costa Rican Lutheran Leader Underlines Holistic Accompaniment of Faith Communities

Bishop Jiménez: Defining Identity and Priorities Supersedes Structural Issues in LWF Renewal Process

GENEVA (LWI) – “The strength of the Lutheran church lies essentially in the mutual fellowship among all its members,” said Bishop Melvin Jiménez Marín of the Lutheran Costa Rican Church (ILCO) in an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* during a recent visit to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) headquarters in Geneva. The main role of the church, he emphasized, is to be a communion of believers and to strengthen the faith.

The church’s steadfast and holistic accompaniment of newly formed faith communities is of fundamental significance for the well-being of the global church, said Jiménez, who was consecrated as ILCO’s first bishop on 27 April 2008, having served as church president since 1998. Fledgling churches, he noted, would especially be strengthened by the proclamation of the Word of God and diaconal work.

As ILCO marked its 20th anniversary in 2008, one of the central concerns is its support toward the country’s indigenous people and migrants. To do this, it is crucially important that the church profiles its advocacy efforts in Costa Rican public life. “My voice as bishop is valued, and in this position I can more effectively fulfill our church’s fundamental mission,” Jiménez emphasized.

One of the challenges facing the Lutheran church relates to its co-par-



Costa Rican Bishop Melvin Jiménez Marín
© ILCO

ticipation in the national ecumenical movement. ILCO, a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Costa Rica, has to deal with the oftentimes conservative positions of the Roman Catholic Church on one hand, and the neo-Pentecostal movement, on the other, said Jiménez. However, there is encouraging evidence of positive collaboration between the various denominations.

The bishop noted however that he particularly appreciated the successful cooperation with the Roman Catholics with regard to strengthening the rights of indigenous people and migrants. “As a church, we must also

speak out for people, including in the political arena,” he stressed. Jiménez considers it as a positive development that the Government of Costa Rica is interested in the church’s position with regard to national legislation and proposals for possible reforms.

Referring to the LWF renewal process, the ILCO bishop advocated giving precedence to establishing an identity and defining priority themes rather than structural issues. The LWF must not lose sight of its priorities in the heat of discussions over structural matters, he remarked. Equally important for the renewal process, he added, is the need to ensure that faith becomes more active, expressing itself in diverse forms.

The Lutheran Costa Rican Church was constituted in 1988 at the initiative of a group of former Lutherans and members of other confessions seeking to create a church which responded to spiritual needs at the grassroots level and that pursued an integrated ministry of the Word, the sacraments and diakonia. ILCO, which joined the LWF in 2002, currently has 1,324 members throughout its 30 parishes.

(The interview with Bishop Melvin Jiménez Marín was conducted by Claudia Schubert of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover. Schubert is doing her special pastoral internship in the LWF Office for Communication Services.)

9 October 2008

LWF Executive Committee Issues Pastoral Message on Global Financial Crisis

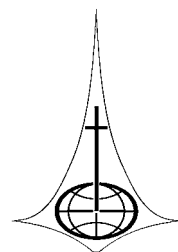
Humanitarian Budgets Likely to Face Greater Pressure

HELSINKI, Finland/GENEVA (LWI) – In the context of the current global financial crisis, the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) issued a pastoral message denouncing the collective failure of responsibility and accountability

on the part of governments, financial institutions and business leaders, and urging the LWF member churches to stand in solidarity with the people most affected.

In the message following the 24–26 October meeting in Helsinki, Finland,

members of the Executive Committee, led by LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson, said they “are deeply disturbed and moved by the suffering, fear and helplessness experienced by people and communities” in the respective contexts throughout the world.



The committee members pointed to the current crisis as the “catastrophic” consequence of non-sustainable economic, social and environmental processes, and expressed regret that it was the poor and vulnerable who bear the greatest burden in a crisis such as the current one. “We find it painful to note how quickly massive financial resources could be mobilized to prop up the financial markets and institutions in this moment of crisis, when in much better economic times a fraction of those resources could not be found to eliminate extreme poverty around the world,” stated the pastoral message.

The committee noted that while banks and financial institutions would benefit from unprecedented rescue packages, humanitarian aid and development budgets were likely to be placed under greater pressure. Churches were therefore challenged to maintain their commitment to support and give hope to the poorest and most vulnerable in their communities and throughout the world.

The representatives of LWF member churches from across the world underscored the churches’ obligation to join with others in rebuilding trust in community, “and in creating new economic institutions and forms of governance that are more responsive to the claims of justice and thus worthy of trust.” They reminded churches of their prophetic role to challenge the “idolatry of riches [and] unconstrained greed and its consequences.”



LWF President Mark S. Hanson preaches at the ELCF’s Helsinki Cathedral. Finnish Archbishop Jukka Paarma honored both Hanson and General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko with the Agricola medal for outstanding service to the Lutheran communion. © ELCF

The committee members affirmed the LWF leadership’s pastoral concern and accompaniment, inviting member churches to share their experiences and responses, and support each other in the midst of the current crisis.

Hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), the Executive Committee meeting started with a half-day seminar on missiology and an exchange with Finnish Lutheran communion partners. The program included a dinner reception hosted by His Eminence Metropolitan Ambrosius at the seaside Orthodox Cultural Center Sofia, some 15 kilometers from Helsinki.

The LWF vice president for the Nordic region Bishop Dr Eero Huovinen, ELCF Helsinki diocese,

hosted the committee members at a dinner to which 2008 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari (former Finnish President) was invited.

The LWF Executive Committee comprises the President, Treasurer, Vice Presidents, and chairpersons of the seven program committees that evaluate the work of the Geneva headquarters’ departments and units. It normally meets twice a year.

The full text of the Executive Committee’s pastoral message is available on the LWF Web site at, www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF_ExecCmte_global-financial-crisis_Oct08.pdf

27 October 2008

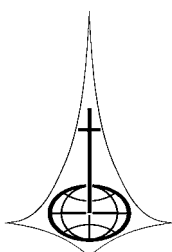
Theologians Explore Further Possibilities for Interfaith Dialogue with Islam

Lutherans Contribute to Ecumenical Reflections on Christian-Muslim Relations Today

GENEVA (LWI) – A group of 50 theologians from a broad range of Christian traditions and scholars in Christian-Muslim relations met in Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva, to deliberate Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam and Christian-Muslim relations today. The 18-20 October consultation was a joint initiative of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a number of Christian world communions including the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and the World Evangelical Alliance.

Trinitarian reflections were prominent throughout the consultation, and dimensions on the study of spiritual beings (pneumatology) and incarnation with regard to the Christian faith

were highlighted. Papers on various Christian approaches to Islam were presented—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Evangelical. Contextual experiences were shared through two panel discussions—Christians living in majority Muslim contexts, and Christian-Muslim relations in plural contexts.



In his keynote address, Catholicos Aram I, head of the Armenian Apostolic Church (See of Cilicia), stressed, "I believe that for both Christians and Muslims, living-in-community must become the real objective of their dialogue." Against the Middle East background, he argued, "These two monotheistic faiths are not monolithic. Therefore, generalizations must be avoided; contextualization is the right way of assessing and organizing Christian-Muslim dialogue and relations."

Moderating the consultation's opening session, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said the "conference is part of the new era of Muslim-Christian relations responding to initiatives like 'A Common Word'. It is important for us as secretaries of Christian world communions to work together with specialists in interreligious dialogue."

LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson was among Christian leaders who responded to the October 2007 letter "A Common Word Between You and Us" written by 138 Muslim scholars to Christian leaders around the world. (*See www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/2104.EN.html*)

In her presentation, Rev. Simone Sinn, theological associate in the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, highlighted the relational dimension of Christian faith. Referring to a basic insight of Martin Luther, she pointed out that justification was not a substance or quality that Christians own, but a living relationship between God and the hu-

man being. "Christian-Muslim encounters have a rich potential not only for deepening our relations to one another, but also in deepening our understanding of God's relation to us. Important theological and spiritual formation takes place in these encounters."

Reflecting on Christian-Muslim dialogue in his context and beyond, Rev. Dr Oddbjørn Leirvik, who teaches interreligious studies at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway, stressed the importance of the "humanization of theological ethics." He cited Swiss Muslim academic Tariq Ramadan's call for a moratorium on the death penalty and corporal punishments as an example from a prominent European Muslim leader. He cited initiatives of the Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council in Norway, as a forum through which concern for the 'vulnerable other' had gradually become a shared religious commitment.

The group's joint engagement includes the formulation of a joint declaration on an individual's inviolable right to adopt a religion of one's choice; addressing family violence and gender relations; and starting a dialogue about the highly controversial question of homosexuality.

Participants said they recognized dialogue as an aspect of spirituality, and acknowledged the virtue of patient listening in Christian-Muslim dialogue. They stressed the need for sensitivity when referring to key religious terms such as mission, wit-

ness and conversion. Identified as equally important was the diversity and wealth of attitudes among Christians and the need to pay attention to questions raised by people from different places, circumstances and generations, especially the youth. Christian-Muslim collaboration was recommended on issues such as social and economic justice, climate change, peace and healing of memories.

Opportunities

"This consultation demonstrated some of the distinctive possibilities of approaching interfaith questions with the resources of broad ecumenical collaboration," said Dr Kathryn Johnson, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs. "The range of Christian positions at the conference was very large—but at every point where there might have been an 'either/or' division into camps of opinion, the participants instead sought ways to balance complex realities," she said.

Johnson said the intense informal conversations between distinguished scholars of Islam and eminent church leaders at meal times expressed the need for more opportunities where both groups could share their experiences. "I hope that the WCC and the Christian world communions, including Evangelicals and Pentecostals, will find ways to continue this sort of collaboration," she concluded.

28 October 2008

African Religious Leaders Seek Urgent Intervention to End Resource-Based Conflict in Congo

IFAPA President Noko Says Crisis Can Be Prevented

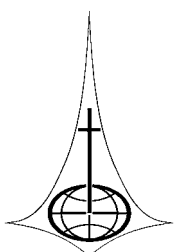
KAMPALA, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI) – Representatives of a Pan-African grouping of faith leaders say the mineral resource-based conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) could be prevented if signatories to peace agreements honored their stated commitments.

Key leaders of the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA)

also appealed to the continent's religious leaders to urgently engage political leadership in the DRC and neighboring countries to end a crisis for which civilians continued to suffer the greatest atrocities.

"Are we not moved by the inhuman conditions of those [internally displaced] mothers and children? Is it not correct to say that while this war is

raving, the mineral resources are being taken out of the country for the benefit of others other than the citizens of the DRC?" remarked IFAPA president and general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, in his keynote address to the third IFAPA Commission meeting, taking place, 10-13 November, in Entebbe, near the Ugandan capital





LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko speaks to retired Anglican Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola (right) of Kitgum, northern Uganda, during the third IFAPA Commission meeting in Kampala. © LWF/F. Nzwili

Kampala. Established in 2002, IFAPA comprises representatives of Africa's seven main faith traditions.

Since early October, fighting has intensified between government soldiers and rebels allied to dissident general Laurent Nkunda in the mineral-rich eastern DRC region, especially North and South Kivu, with relief agencies reporting massive displacement of civilians. Nearly 200,000 people, according to United Nations' relief agency reports, were receiving emergency assistance early November, near the city of Goma, while an unknown number was said to be cut off in the nearby forest.

Decisive Action

Noko urged fellow religious leaders "to have the courage and take leadership" in meeting with leaders of the parties in the DRC conflict "for the sake of our children and their future." He emphasized decisive action was urgently needed "for unless we do so, war and conflict are gradually becoming part of the DNA [intrinsic characteristic] of politics in Africa. "Will we allow that transformation to become complete?" he asked the commission members.

"This is not a political problem. It is resource-based conflict on who occupies vital points. Some people are looking for key geographical area," said IFAPA

Commission member Rev. Gilbert Boissa, president of the National Inter-Religious Forum in the DRC. He noted that peace agreements, especially the December 2006 pact on security, stability and development signed in Nairobi, Kenya, had been broken, giving groups reasons to resume fighting.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the fighting in eastern DRC has displaced an estimated one million people since 2006, with various clashes pushing more than 300,000 Congolese to neighboring countries, while the DRC itself hosts almost 300,000 refugees who have fled war in neighboring countries.

"New groups are emerging in the district of Ituri. It also indicates the presence of foreign armed groups who continue to compete with the national army on several fronts, attacking defenseless civilians," said Boissa.

Rape

"Sexual abuse and forced recruitment of children into armed groups are reported in areas of conflict. Rape continues to be used as weapon of war. Many women are subjected to attack," noted Boissa.

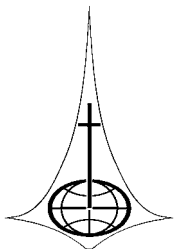
He said the DRC IFAPA network was working with other faith-based organizations in advocating the protection of civilians, reuniting families and lobbying for peace and the peaceful delivery of humanitarian aid.

Boissa urged the IFAPA Commission to agree on a special committee to look into the DRC issues, including the convening of a peace conference to help the Great Lakes region heads of state to revisit the Nairobi peace pact. He proposed the establishment of an interfaith observatory mechanism which could monitor, control and audit the regional situation.

"It is in the implementation where the problem is. The pacts get blocked," added the DRC religious leader.



Internally displaced persons wait for humanitarian aid in downtown Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. © ACT International/Tarik Tinazay



The LWF is present in the Central African country through its member church, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Congo, and the Department for World Service country program for Rwanda and DRC.

(By Nairobi-based LWF correspondent Fredrick Nzwili)

12 November 2008

Lutheran-Reformed Talks Continue in 2010

Commission Calls for Imaginative Initiatives at All Levels

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina/GENEVA (LWI)

– There are no “church-dividing differences” between Lutheran and Reformed Protestants, the third meeting of the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission re-affirmed in meetings in October in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“At many points difficult issues run through each of the two families rather than between them, and in other areas there are differences between the traditions which are to be not merely accepted but valued,” the commission stated in a communiqué.

“The commission expressed the hope that member churches would claim as gift the implications of the reformers’ view that there could be multiple ecclesial shapes in which the church of Jesus Christ could be recognized, according to the *satis est* principle discussed at the first meeting,” stated the communiqué.

The Lutheran-Reformed Commission also examined the factors which have impeded a closer relationship between the two groups, recognizing that they are often connected to local history and current realities.

According to the communiqué, “At the same time the commission identified a certain ‘ecclesial deficit’ which has beset our traditions from the beginning as an unintended consequence of the freedoms claimed in the Reformation.”

“Emerging regional and national church identities in both traditions lost a full sense of catholicity beyond their



The commission called for imaginative initiatives at all levels. © WARC

own borders; in many places it has been easy to respond to theological or cultural difference with a separate church.

“There has been too weak a reception of the implications of the unity of the church confessed in the creeds. As this deficit has undermined the visible unity of the church, it demands not only theological clarity but even more, a repentance and conversion of heart.

“Christian life is life in the church, and the traditions of the Reformation need to embrace anew this common life as integral to life in Christ,” the commission stated.

The commission, which will meet again in 2010, called for

imaginative initiatives at all levels – including from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)—to help bring the two traditions closer.

(From WARC UPDATE, the information bulletin of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches)

The communiqué from the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission meeting is available on the LWF Web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Luth-Ref_Communique-Oct_2008.pdf

12 November 2008

Malaysian Lutheran Bishop Julius Paul Dies

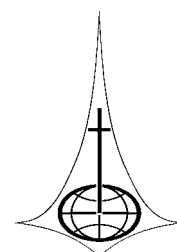
Noko Pays Tribute to LWF Council Member Who Served with Dedication and Humility

GENEVA (LWI) – Bishop Julius D. Paul, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM), and a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council, died on 22 November in a boat accident in Guate-

mala. He was attending a meeting of the LWF Standing Committee for World Service of which he is chairperson.

“It is with great shock that I learned of the tragic death of LWF Council member Bishop Paul, especially fol-

lowing a very successful Standing Committee meeting, which was also an opportunity to learn about LWF’s work in Guatemala,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, in Geneva. “His tragic death is a devastat-



ing loss for his family, and for the LWF which he diligently served through its governing bodies. Equally tragic is the death of the two other persons who died in the accident, and our prayers go to their families as well," he added.

Paul, 63, and two other passengers died when their boat capsized while on an excursion to Panajachel on Lake Atitlán in Sololá, western Guatemala. He was traveling together with LWF Standing Committee member Peter Schirmer from Australia and an English-speaking tour guide, who were reportedly among the 12 survivors. The Malaysian bishop was scheduled to travel back home on 23 November.

As chairperson of the Standing Committee for World Service, Paul had led the 19–22 November meeting in Guatemala City. The committee which convenes twice a year comprises persons with relevant expertise drawn from agencies and/or specialized development arms of LWF member churches. It reviews DWS work and deliberates policy and guidelines for the department which serves as the organization's humanitarian and development arm globally.

Paul has been a Council member on the Program Committee for



Malaysian Lutheran Bishop Julius D. Paul (1945–2008) © LWF/Asia Lutheran News

World Service since 2003, the same year he was appointed chairperson of the Standing Committee. In the early 1980s he served as a youth intern in the then LWF Department for Church Cooperation.

Paul was born on 14 July 1945. He had served as ELCM bishop since April 1988, and was due to retire in July 2010. His successor Rev. Dr Solomon Rajah had been appointed at the 1 November 2008 extraordi-

nary assembly of the church, held in Kuala Lumpur.

"Bishop Paul served his church, the Asian region and the entire Lutheran communion with humility, courage and a deep sense of commitment. We give thanks to God for his life and witness, and offer our special prayers and condolences to the family, friends and the church in Malaysia," said Noko.

The LWF general secretary said it was a very difficult moment to break the news of Paul's tragic death to his wife Alice Paul, who asked him to request "Lutherans and friends around the world to pray for the family especially as we wait for the arrival of his remains in Malaysia."

The funeral for Bishop Julius D Paul was held on 9 December at the Zion Cathedral in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, followed by burial at the Subang Lutheran Garden, Malaysia. He is survived by his wife and three adult children.

The 3,000-member ELCM joined the LWF in 1968.

Additional information

at: www.asia-lutheran.org

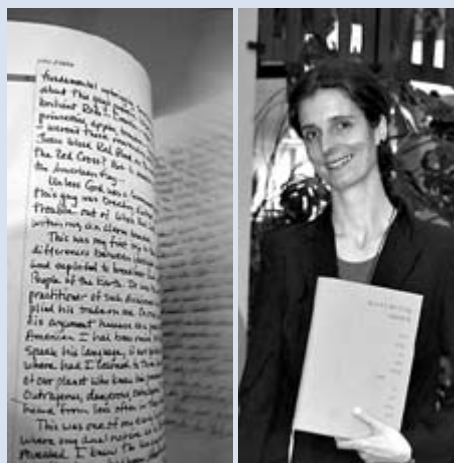
24 November 2008

Project on Digital Age Handwriting Presented at LWF Geneva Meeting

At the invitation of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the artist-theologian Dr Benita Joswig from Heidelberg, Germany presented the transnational writing project "Books Writing" in Geneva's Ecumenical Center.

The presentation took place in early November as part of the annual LWF Week of Meetings, bringing together all staff of the Geneva Secretariat and directors of the Department for World Service field programs, to share experiences and new ideas. Joswig's sermon at the opening worship service was a meditation on the theme "Handwriting – A Gift of God," which was followed by an introductory presentation on "Handwritten Books in the Digital Age."

The "Books Writing" art project consists of ten books with titles such as *Healing*, *Waiting*, *Joy*, *Color* and *Border*, each of



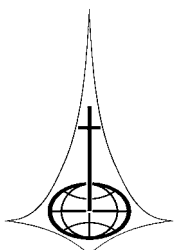
Artist, theologian Dr Benita Joswig shows one of the volumes of the "Book Writing" project. The image on the left displays a handwritten page of one book. © Private

which is repeated as a chapter title in each volume.

The goal of the project, which began in 2003 in New York, USA, is to create a dialogue in which those participating at the many stopping places all over the world juxtapose their handwriting, their thoughts and especially their contrasting texts. LWF staff and guests were invited to contribute to the project.

According to Joswig, Geneva represented a tremendous opportunity for the art project. "Many persons originating from all over the world consigned their thoughts to paper, adding their witness to this micro-library," she said.

Further information about the "Books Writing" project can be obtained at: www.benita-joswig.de



LWF GLOBAL CONSULTATION ON DIAKONIA

13-17 October 2008, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Participants in LWF Global Consultation Favor a Redefinition of Diakonia

Continued from p. 1

consultation was, among others, to enable participants reach a common understanding of the term diakonia, explore its theological foundation and its potential to conceptualize the distinctive nature of church-based action and development work.

"All over the world churches are involved in diaconal work, even if the term 'diakonia' is not used. The advantage of this concept is that it establishes a solid bond between what we as Christians *are* and what we *do*, between our identity and our service in the world. The consultation in Ethiopia provides an excellent opportunity to relate this understanding to concrete experiences in different parts of the world, and to the challenges in what some describe as 'post-secular society,'" Nordstokke told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The consultation is one of DMD's efforts to implement a recommendation of the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, calling for the prioritization of diakonia. A November 2002 global consultation on "prophetic diakonia" in Johannesburg, South Africa, established a solid platform for the present program, identifying diakonia as "a core component of the gospel" and an "essential part of discipleship." That meeting underlined the challenges of poverty, violence and HIV and AIDS as the three major issues that today challenge churches to move into more prophetic expressions of their role as key actors in civil society.



Rev. Iteffa Gobena, president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, stresses the continued relevance of holistic mission © LWF/T. Miller



The sounds of diakonia: a children's choir from an EECMY project sings during the LWF consultation opening session. © LWF/T. Miller

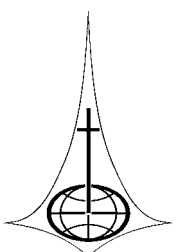
According to the DMD director, the Addis Ababa meeting would seek to respond to some key questions on the relationship between diakonia and missionary outreach: Can diaconal work be religious neutral? Does diakonia give added value to the church's emergency and development work? What is the distinction between the role of agencies/specialized ministries and that of the local church/congregation in diaconal work? How is "prophetic diakonia" as elaborated by the Johannesburg consultation performed, for instance in relation to the principles "transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment," which form the core of a significant LWF mission document?

Nordstokke pointed out that the 2004 LWF document, *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution*

to the Understanding and Practice of Mission, presents a holistic understanding of mission, encompassing proclamation, service and advocacy. He noted, however, that the document formulates the vision but does not broaden reflection on the different forms of diaconal work, thus the need for follow-up processes such as the current consultation dealing with pertinent issues.

Through DMD's program "Understanding Diakonia and Its Guiding Principles" started two years ago, regional and sub-regional consultations have taken place in order to collect input from different contexts on the understanding and practice of diakonia, Nordstokke explained.

He said Addis Ababa was chosen as the venue for such an important meeting because EECMY is preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary next year. He pointed out that at the time of registration in 1959, the Ethiopian church had only 20,000 members, and has since grown to become the second largest LWF member church with nearly 5 million members.



The venue also provided an opportunity for participants to get inspiration and learn from the host

church's experience, including the successful establishment of its impressive Development and Social Services

Commission, responsible for implementing various diaconal projects, noted Nordstokke.

Deliberation on Interrelation Between Gospel Proclamation and Human Development

A May 1972 letter from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on the "Interrelation Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development," was the subject of a major discussion at the LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia.

The director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, responsible for organizing the consultation, urged the 60 participants, who included mainly people responsible for diakonia (church social services) work among LWF member churches and their partners, to revisit the EECMY letter and discuss it retrospectively and examine if it was still relevant in the context of today's international diakonia.

Describing the letter's contents and background, Rev. Paul Hoffman, who was associate director of the then LWF Department of Studies 36 years ago, said when the letter was received, there were tensions at the LWF, concerning resources between the then Department for World Service and the Department for Mission.

He paid tribute to former EECMY General Secretary Rev. Gudina Tumsa, who was responsible for some of the statements in the 1972 letter. Hoffman later assisted with the compilation of Tumsa's writings into books for the Gudina Tumsa Foundation, set up in honor of the church leader, assassinated in 1979 by Ethiopia's revolutionary government.

Holistic Personality

During a panel discussion at the diakonia consultation, Ms Yenenesh Geleta, an instructor at the EECMY Management and Leadership College, explained that the letter came about as a result of the imbalance of funding that existed between development projects and evangelistic activities, which were connected to human development.

She said the letter somehow was an appeal to put things right at the time by addressing the partners abroad. She however pointed out that church members at grassroots were not informed about the challenges the

church was facing.

"Africa needs to go back to the heritage of holistic personality as well as value where the physical is related to spiritual. [As] Protestants we need to see God in our work, money and services," said Geleta.

EECMY pastor Megersa Guta said the rapid growth of the Ethiopian church was one of the major factors that compelled the church to ask missionary societies and donor agencies to offer direct support for congregational work and leadership training.

The director of the Development and Social Services Commission Mr

Deed Jaldesa, referring to excerpts of the 1972 letter said "there are values in life beyond that of economic betterment and getting hold of modern technologies."

Jaldesa said the "EECMY strongly believes that an integral human development is the approach to development needs of our society." He said his church approaches social development and other humanitarian activities by addressing the needs of communities in a holistic manner without discriminating beneficiaries on ethnic or religious grounds.

Respect for Other Faiths

The director of the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) Rev. Eberhard Hitzler said churches and their agencies have over the last decades articulated a deeper understanding of development, of human beings and their needs. There is no question and no difference of opinion on the view that human development means much more than technology, progress, material and economic betterment, he explained.

"People should be in the center as actors for development. A common understanding is that people themselves should not be the objects of charity but should be in the center as actors of their own development. They should not be seen as beneficiaries, as receiver of goods

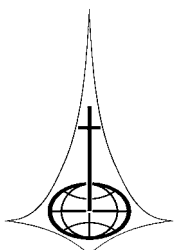
and objects of charity: there is no development and no peace coming from outside, only from within. Nobody can develop people; only



DMD director Rev. Dr. Kjell Nordstokke addresses consultation participants.
© LWF/T. Miller



Speaking to the church representatives, DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler called for a living witness of the gospel through diakonia.
© LWF/T. Miller



people and communities can develop themselves,” added Hitzler.

While agreeing that material, mental, social, cultural and spiritual needs and development belong together, the DWS director said he was cautious about issues pertaining to holistic development. “The respect for different cultures and also for different denominations and even religions today makes us reluctant to put as much

emphasis as the EECMY letter did on the spiritual dimension—especially with regard to verbally preaching the gospel to people of other faith—in connection to assisting them in bodily needs,” he said.

Hitzler pointed out that “the need to extend assistance to non-Christians out of Christian love and of God’s love to all people is not contested. But how to respect other

faiths by not combining verbal proclamation of the gospel with giving a living witness of the gospel through deeds is still an issue which is heatedly debated within the LWF and the ecumenical movement.”

See also: www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-Ethiopia-2008.html
[#Why_Ethiopia](https://twitter.com/LWF_Ethiopia)

Development Workers Urge Churches to Mobilize Local Resources

In Africa, diakonia (church social service work) initiatives are integrated within the concept of *ubuntu*—which emphasizes “I am because you are and you are because I am”—hence fulfilling the exhortation to be ‘my brother’s keeper,’” said South African church development worker White Makabe Rakuba, at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Global Consultation on Diakonia.

Presenting a report on diaconal work in Africa, Rakuba explained that church initiatives at both congregational and institutional levels target mainly vulnerable groups including the elderly, people with disabilities, orphans, the mentally sick, the homeless and unemployed. But there are several challenges, not least because of the competition at both levels, but also as a result of the increased vulnerability of communities to the impact of climate change manifested by recurrent floods and drought. Equally crucial in some countries is the tendency by political leadership and policy to curtail church freedom, thus leading to decreasing institutionalized diaconal work.

Mr Deed Jaldesa, director of the Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC) of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus said some communities found themselves so dependent on donations that they no longer did things for themselves. The DASSC director urged churches to increase efforts in mobilizing local resources to enable the vulnerable groups become self-sustaining.

The African group panelists urged the LWF to accompany member



Young women from the EECMY gave an Ethiopian welcome to consultation participants with Bible readings in Amharic, Oromo and Harari languages. © LWF/T. Miller

churches in reviewing or developing policy and guidelines on diakonia and facilitate networking at sub-regional and regional levels. They also challenged the region’s churches to take a more active leading role in engaging governments and international agencies to influence development direction and mobilize resources. They noted that African churches relied mainly on their Northern partners to finance their diaconal activities, while failing to recognize and mobilize local and regional resources, including volunteer contributions.

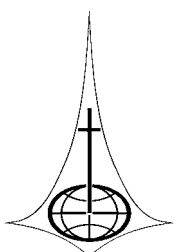
Religious Pluralism

Reporting on their diaconal work experiences, LWF member church representatives from Asia said they had not been sufficiently vigorous in speaking out or advocating for the disadvantaged

and powerless members of society subjected to all forms of injustices.

The report compiled by Rev. Dr Ginda P. Harahap, Asia secretary in the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), pointed out that some of the Lutheran churches in the region found it difficult to carry out diaconal programs as they were a minority in a pluralistic society. The reality of religious pluralism, secularism, fundamentalism, marginalization, militarism, terrorism, oppression, exclusion, discrimination and HIV and AIDS was cited as one of the major challenges seriously affecting the life of the Asian churches.

Churches in the region recognize diaconal ministry as an important dimension of their witness in society, as pointed out by Ms Naoki Asano from the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. However, brutality against



Christians was the order of the day in parts of India, according to Ms Smriti Deogam, Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam, Ranchi city, northern India. She cited incidents last December in the state of Orissa, in which more than 140 churches were damaged and 300 houses of Christian families burned down, forcing people to flee to nearby forests where they had no access to humanitarian assistance.

Deogam gave a moving account of other incidents against the church in Orissa such as the closure of many Christian hospitals and schools; the torching to death of pastors and members of their families for attempting to preach the gospel; and several attempts to burn Bibles in Ranchi city, among other acts.

Participants from Africa and Asia said power struggles between diakonia actors and local civic leaders, donors and sometimes politicians



Rev. Nelson Siregar (left) highlights the link between poverty and the denial of land rights in Indonesia. On the right is Man Hei Yip from Hong Kong. © LWF/T. Miller

interfered with the processes of administering public or donor funds, thus hindering the smooth implementation of church programs.

While acknowledging the “minority status of the church in Asia” was

an impediment to churches’ active involvement in diaconal ministry, participants in the LWF global consultation called for the Lutheran communion’s solidarity in advocacy initiatives both at sub-regional and regional levels.

New, Changing Focus of Diakonia in Europe

In Germany, diakonia occupies a unique place in society, and should be seen as a means to fulfill ethical principles.

Speaking at the mid-October global consultation on diakonia, Wolfgang Vogelmann, North Elbian

Evangelical Lutheran Church, Germany, said the diakonia agenda in his country includes political debate and advocacy, enabling the church to use this platform to “influence and as a voice to advocate for those who have not been heard.”

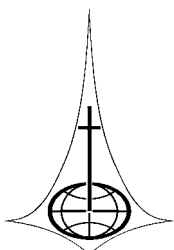
Until the second half of the 20th century, diaconal initiatives were separated from the church and were carried out as acts of individuals guided by their faith confession and “work out of love,” noted Vogelmann.

Dr Antje Fetzer, Evangelical Church in Württemberg, Germany, explained the set up before the 1990s in Germany, when diakonia was an institution closely linked with the German Evangelical Church and its welfare work on behalf of the state. But since the mid-1990s the situation has changed significantly with more and new actors in diaconal work, consequently creating competition for state funds.

Commercial motives have also found their way into this area of work, with some of the new actors offering low-cost services while compromising quality. According to Fetzer, there are people in the country who argue that the church should scale down its diaconal focus to include only the materially poor in order to enable diakonia find its roots and regain credibility.



In Poland, a diaconal Christmas candle burns on nearly every table nationwide, reports Wanda Falk, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The 2008 ecumenical action supports anti-domestic violence work. © LWF/T. Miller



However, diakonia remains a “costly gift, a wonderful witness for the church and a trademark of the church,” added Vogelmann.

Paradigm Shift in Nordic Countries

In the Nordic countries especially Finland and Sweden, there is a paradigm shift from institutional to congregational diakonia, explained Rev. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, associate professor at the Diakonhjemmet University in Oslo, Norway. She cited the example of Finland where the church requires every congregation to have at least one diaconal worker.

Originally the diaconal movement in Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Denmark was influenced by the 19th Century revival in Germany when diaconal centers were established to address society’s needs and challenges

at the time including the impact of urbanization and industrialization.

Dietrich summed up the Church of Norway’s definition of diakonia: “The acting out of the gospel as expressed through love for fellow human beings, inclusive community, care for creation and fighting for justice.”

Nordic participants at the five-day consultation urged the LWF to provide a forum to exchange views concerning important social challenges at local and global levels, and assist in capacity building in the field of diakonia.

Eastern Europe: New Challenges

In Eastern Europe diaconal services were prohibited during the communist regime, and were only introduced 19 years ago. Some churches have managed to set up diakonia

departments to help in building the congregations’ capacity.

Explaining the diaconal ministry of the church in the Czech Republic, Ms Eva Grollova, director of the diaconal unit of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren said there are diaconal institutions established by churches as non-governmental organizations, associations or foundations. They provide services such as elderly people’s homes and shelters for the homeless; centers where people suffering from drug or alcohol dependency can seek assistance; and specialized medical and palliative care, among others.

While the former communist regime controlled service provision, the situation today challenges churches to strengthen their diaconal ministry by motivating people to act and by advocating for those who cannot raise their voices, added Grollova.

Latin America: Church Has Mobilized Society Against Unjust Economic Policies

Member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Latin America and the Caribbean singled out neo-liberal globalization as one of the major challenges that the church has had to respond to from a regional context.

In presentations at the mid-October LWF global consultation on diakonia, church representatives from the region said they put emphasis on incorporating the church social service (diakonia) ministry in advocacy campaigns calling for fair global trade rules and the cancellation of illegal external debts. The church also mobilized civil society to speak out against the use of land mines.

Ms Hellen Rios Carrillo from the Nicaragua Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope summarized the core value of diakonia and its central place in people’s daily lives: “Being church is being diaconal.” Rios said deregulation of markets, the diminishing role of the state in ensuring justice, stiff market competition and the degradation of relationships and value of human beings were some of the factors that had led to the erosion of the



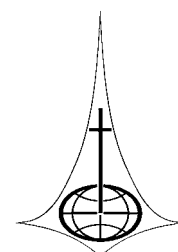
With his mate cup, Argentine Fabian Dinamarca Espinoza regularly puts into practice diaconal values of sharing and community. © LWF/T. Miller

social, economic and environmental fabric in the region.

Participants urged churches in the region to strengthen communication, cooperation and exchange among the member churches. This would help them draw from experi-

ences, materials, projects and other resources accumulated by churches in the field of diakonia, instead of merely depending on assistance from abroad.

The Latin America group urged the LWF to accompany and support



the churches in their efforts to constantly strengthen the theological and spiritual dimensions of diakonia.

Like their African and Asian counterparts, church representatives from Latin America said they often struggled with the question of power in setting the agenda of their programmatic work, funded through international and ecumenical cooperation.

ELCA: Promoting Justice

The motivation behind the social ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is embedded in the church's statement of purpose, said Ms Ruth Ann Reko, ELCA Church in Society unit.

Reko spoke of the ELCA's commitment to support the church and its

members, and partner with others in a ministry of mission in domestic and international contexts. Through Church in Society, the ELCA studies social issues, prepares social statements for consideration and action, and promotes moral deliberation. Congregations receive assistance in developing programs and strategies that help people in poverty, in caring for creation, and in developing their communities.

Diaconal work in the USA is pursued through direct human services or by "addressing systems, structures and



Ruth Ann Reko lists an aging population, increased ethnic diversity and a widening income gap as some key domestic diaconal challenges for the ELCA. © LWF/T. Miller

policies with a view to promoting justice, peace and care of the earth," Reko explained. She cited numerous structures and affiliated associations collaborating with the ELCA, enabling the church to effectively engage in the social ministry or diakonia at local, global and international ecumenical levels.

(The stories in this section were written by Elizabeth Lobulu, LWI African region editor. Lobulu is the communication coordinator of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.)

Global Consultation Articulates Road Map of New Paradigm for Diakonia

Representatives of member churches and related agencies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) who gathered 13-17 October in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the global consultation on diakonia affirmed the existing church-based social and development ministries while at the same time identifying a number of growth areas for the future.

In the message from the consultation, participants elaborated objectives, actions and theological points comprising a common understanding of diakonia. Building on recognition of diakonia

as a core dimension of being church as stated in the LWF meeting on prophetic diakonia in 2002, the statement from the 2008 consultation underlines the centrality of diakonia in the holistic mission of the church, and highlights the prophetic and transformative nature of diaconal action. Diakonia is an expression of solidarity and mutual responsibility rooted in contextual realities, the LWF representatives noted.

At the same time, consultation participants acknowledged an underlying tension with regard to the interrelation-

ship between proclamation and diakonia, and called for continued dialogue on the ways in which the church can carry out these two core elements of its mission in an integral manner. The question of the role religion plays—or does not play—in a given society or specialized ministry was cited as equally important.

Further, the message called for increased training and information in order to bring learning on diakonia to all levels of the church. The participants stressed the need for more emphasis on utilizing local capacities, as well as networking, particularly in view of advocacy work. Through the message, participants requested the LWF Secretariat in Geneva to assume a stronger function as convener and facilitator within the Lutheran communion, giving clear guidelines for the continued development of the LWF Handbook on Diakonia slated for publication in early 2010.

(By Terri Miller, web editor, LWF Office for Communication Services)

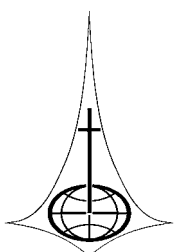
The Message from the LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia is available on the LWF Web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF-Diakonia_Consult_Oct08.pdf

5 November 2008



Yeneqneshe Kassabun (far left) with her eight-year-old-daughter Selam Fetena (second from left) in front of their rainproof home. Before Fetena was enrolled in the EECMY home-based support project for AIDS orphans in Babir, her widowed mother had to use pots and pans to collect rainwater leaking through her roof. © LWF/T. Miller



Lutheran Leaders, High-Ranking Government Representatives Confer at International Debt Symposium

Church-Based Actors Seek Concrete Measures to Guarantee the Poor's Rights

OSLO, Norway/GE-NEVA (LWI) – Representatives of governments, churches and their partner agencies, United Nations bodies, civil society organizations and legal experts participated in an international symposium on illegitimate debt jointly organized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Church of Sweden and Norwegian Church Aid, 20-23



Bishop Victoria Cortez Rodríguez, LWF Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean © LWF/J.H. Rakotoniaina

October in Oslo, Norway.

Co-sponsored by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the symposium's aim was to seek to define the general legal principles that may be applicable to sovereign debt and its impacts on human development. Participants including LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson and General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko would also examine relevant political initiatives in this area, with the aim to developing proposals for future multilateral political action to bring the subject of sovereign debt under the rule of law, justice and ethics.

In anticipation of the symposium, the organizers pointed out that foreign debt continues to threaten the rights and dignity of millions of human beings all over the world especially in poor countries, because of the failure to address the systemic problems and contradictions of lending and debt management practices at a global level.

However, there are encouraging exceptions on the agenda of the three-day meeting. These include the Norwegian government's decision in

2006 to write off the debt of five African and South American countries, and Ecuador's establishment in 2007 of a 'debt audit commission' to consider the relevant legal, political and social factors that led to the country's accumulation of illegitimate debt.

"It is the hope of poor countries that through the Oslo symposium, the world will recognize the immorality of

such debts and how external debt... saps the lifeblood of poor countries," Bishop Victoria Cortez Rodríguez, LWF vice president for the Latin America and Caribbean region told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

The LWF program on illegitimate debt, launched in 2005, is located in the Latin American region.

While commending the symposium organizers "for bringing together so many important people from Norway and around the world to discuss the debt burden that affects so many poor countries," Norway's Minister for Finance Kristin Halvorsen emphasized the need to "look at the conditions that were attached to such loans when they were issued, and identify who it is that actually benefits from these."

Ecuadorian Minister of State Ricardo Patiño commended

the Rafael Correa government for its "political courage" to carry out a comprehensive audit of Ecuador's public debt and analyze its legitimacy. During the 1976-2006 period covered by the audit, the debt grew from USD 1,174.6 million to USD 14,245.6 million, he told *LWI*. Yet, only 14 percent of this amount was invested in society, said Patiño, who chairs the government's Commission for a Comprehensive Audit of Public Debt.

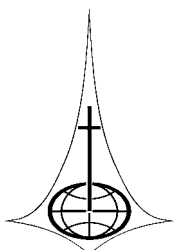
"We have a situation of outright robbery of the country and its citizens by international financial institutions and the former public officials involved," he said. Ecuador, he added, was counting on the international community's support as it defends its historical right to recover not only its legitimacy, but also its dignity.

Norway's Minister for Environment and Development Erik Solheim said discussions on creditor co-responsibility, illegitimate debt and responsible lending were important elements of the international debt debate, which his country actively supports. "The discussion of odious and illegitimate debt [is] important to ensure more responsible lending in the future and avoid a new debt crisis," he noted.

Liberia, represented at the symposium by the Deputy Minister for Finance Hon. Tarnue Mawolo, owes more than USD 3 million, which were not spent on development projects "but went in the wrong directions," according to Bishop Sumoward E. Harris, Lutheran Church in Liberia.



Norway's Minister for Finance Kristin Halvorsen © Rune Kongsro



Harris cited an April 2008 letter which he wrote with Church of Sweden Archbishop Anders Wejryd to the Swedish government, requesting

cancellation of debt incurred through the sale of two naval boats to Liberia's previous government. He urged debt cancellation to enable Liberia, and

other countries in similar situations to carry out their crucial poverty reduction strategies.

Calls for Creditor Co-Responsibility at Historic Meeting on Illegitimate Debt

Leaders in the fields of government, policy, law, religion and ethics meeting in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, for a historic symposium on illegitimate debt began their deliberations with calls for far-reaching international legal mechanisms to protect ordinary people from repaying sovereign debts that were neither legitimately contracted nor directed at the people's best interests.

Many members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) constituency living in heavily indebted developing countries have personally experienced the unjust effects of illegitimate and unsustainable foreign debt, said LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko in his opening remarks.

"They have seen how scarce public revenue is diverted to debt service obligations and away from social welfare and infrastructure investment ... [and] observed the ways in which the lives of successive generations of children can be mortgaged to the greed of a dictator," noted Noko. He said lenders who offer loans under conditions that do not guarantee democratic account-



From left to right: Henrik Harboe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway; Roger Schjerve, Norwegian Deputy Minister for Finance; NCA General Secretary Rev. Atle Sommerfeldt; and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko during the symposium's opening session. © NCA

ability, "should bear the risks of their decision, and should not be entitled to 'bailouts' from the international financial institutions."

More than 60 representatives of governments, churches and their partner agencies, United Nations bodies, civil society movements and legal experts attended the symposium, of which input in plenary

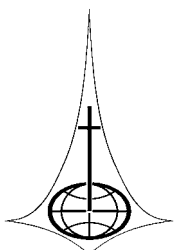
presentations, panel discussions and group work would help formulate proposals that among others, ensure mutual responsibility and accountability between creditor institutions and states seeking loans.

The general secretary also spoke of the LWF's active engagement in global efforts against illegitimate debt, including the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of unsustainable foreign debt, and the 2005 launch of the Argentine-based LWF program on illegitimate debt, which articulates the pastoral and ethical concerns regarding foreign debt on behalf of the entire Lutheran communion.

He emphasized the need to focus also on the spiritual and material dimensions of debt relationships. He made reference to a new LWF publication on illegitimate debt, in which he argues against unjust, corrupt, oppressive debt arrangements as deeply corrosive not only of intergovernmental relationships but of each of the parties involved. (See www.lutheranupress.org/catalog/p-95.html for LWF Documentation



Dr Alejandro Olmos Gaona (left) from Argentina, advisor to the LWF program on illegitimate debt, speaks during a panel discussion on new approaches to resolving sovereign debt crises. © NCA



53: *Not Just Numbers – Examining the Legitimacy of Foreign Debts*)

The symposium organizers described the meeting as timely especially in view of the current global financial crisis. “It is an illustrative case in point especially when we have observed in the past weeks how efficient Western governments and financial institutions are able to act swiftly when they see it as necessary,” said NCA General Secretary Rev. Atle Sommerfeldt, referring to financial bailout negotiations in leading world economies.

He commended the Norwegian government for its leadership role on

the illegitimate debt issue, especially for being the first Western government to accept co-responsibility by cancelling in 2006 the debt owed by five countries in Africa and South America.

Sommerfeldt outlined NCA’s involvement in the debt issue since 1989 through debates and interactions with government and civil society, especially with the international non-governmental youth movement Changemaker, which revitalized the debt cancellation campaign beyond 2000.

He however noted that despite three decades of advocacy against foreign illegitimate debt, there was an ever-wid-

ening gap between developing countries and creditor nations, because of the lack of delivery on promises made. Citing the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he said it was scandalous that “the people of DRC today are forced to pay between USD 300 to 400 million annually on the financial costs of [former President] Mobutu’s debt. This is a population that is suffering one of the largest humanitarian crises in our world today.”

The success of the current symposium would be determined by “our ability to formulate positions which can change this scandal,” added Sommerfeldt.

Norway Affirms Support for Debt Cancellation Initiatives, Urges Developing Countries’ Involvement

The Norwegian government has affirmed its continued support for efforts that address the causes and consequences of debt and the burden it places on countries and development.

Delivering the keynote address at the International Symposium on Illegitimate Debt, the country’s Deputy Minister for Finance Mr Roger Schjerva underlined the government would continue to seek “to be a leading force for debt cancellation” through existing and new multilateral mechanisms. He urged further engagement by other creditor nations and by debtor governments in the illegitimate debt debate, saying “developing countries are in a unique position” to contribute to multilateral fora on the debt issue.

Key international stakeholders including governments, academicians, civil society and multilateral organizations are attending the three-day meeting convened jointly by the Lutheran World Federation, Church of Sweden and Norwegian Church Aid.

Schjerva outlined Norway’s support for debt cancellation initiatives such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), and its role in encouraging responsible and sustainable lending



Deputy Minister for Finance Roger Schjerva © NCA

through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as its significant contribution to the United Nation’s work to build debt management capacity in poor countries.

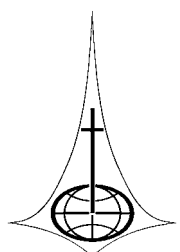
He said Norway considered its financial support for studies on the “odious debt” doctrine by the World Bank and UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as a first step toward translating these ideas into practical policies and building

international support. The country’s unilateral action in 2006 to cancel debts from five developing countries was an acknowledgement of its co-responsibility as creditor.

The deputy minister noted that while most global debts contracted by governments were uncomplicated, some were problematic, thus the need to study the past, present and future circumstances in considering debt and its legitimacy. Citing the case of South Africa’s apartheid regime, he questioned whether the country’s people today should pay for loans contracted by a small minority to finance oppression of the majority.



The coordinator of the LWF illegitimate debt program, Rev. Ángel F. Furlan (far right) from Argentina, moderated a panel session during which Dr Yuefen Li (left) director of UNCTAD’s Debt and Development Finance unit, and María Lúcia Fatorelli (middle), auditor of Brazil’s Ministry of Finance, discussed possibilities for further legal action on illegitimate debt. © NCA



Similar questions should be asked of loans during the Cold War period given by superpowers to support dictatorships and fight proxy wars, said Schjerva.

While debt legitimacy should be questioned, it was also important to consider a country's ability to repay including the amounts of resources that debt servicing would divert from development and poverty reduction. The emergence of developing countries as bilateral creditors also needs to be considered in the future

processes of encouraging responsible lending practices.

The Norwegian minister said the notion of illegitimate debt raised dilemmas about criteria for deciding the legitimacy of projects and regimes; ensuring debt cancellation did not dry out credit markets for developing countries; and how further gains could be made without threatening the progress of existing initiatives. The notion also called for further discussion about legitimate and efficient conditionalities and

where the limited resources should best be spent.

Schjerva commended the convening of a variety of key international stakeholders as an important step in moving forward the debt discussion. He expressed his hope for a world where state debt could be handled through transparent and fair multilateral mechanisms, "where debtors and creditors take joint responsibility for debts incurred ... [and] where responsible lending and risk sharing practices are the order of the day."

Lutheran Leader Hanson Insists Church Voice Must Be Heard in Complex Situations

Faith-based organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and their leaders must not relent on their unequivocal responsibility to agitate for multilateral solutions that ensure fair and just lending and borrowing practices globally. LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson made these remarks in the context of the international consultation on illegitimate debt.

"We must recognize the complexity of issues without allowing their complexity to immobilize us. We must not lose our voice," said Hanson, relating the current global financial crisis to the LWF co-organized International Symposium on Illegitimate Debt.

Hanson is presiding bishop of the 4.7-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Speaking to *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, Hanson underlined the mandate of the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly, urging the LWF to prioritize illegitimate debt cancellation through actions that move beyond the economic viewpoint, and integrate instead a broader approach based on moral, ethical and legal obligations. "We [church leaders] must always ask the questions: 'At whose expense are profits being made? 'What will be the long-term impact for people who live in poverty?' And, we must hold governments accountable," he said.

Seeking alliances with other stakeholders remains an important LWF strategy, as the global Lutheran communion on its own would not have the expertise to move to public discourse crucial issues such as the debt crisis. "This symposium is our ability to convince others—lawyers, economists and policy makers—that solutions to the illegitimate debt crisis will depend on our capacity to push together for concrete steps," said Hanson.

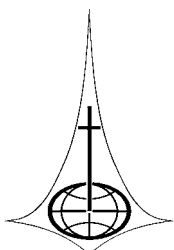
Exemplary Initiatives

He noted the model to have one LWF region take up leadership of an issue, as is the case with the Latin American region on the debt program, helps the other LWF regions to contextualize the implications for their own contexts.

Hanson moderated a panel dialogue, 22 October, during which the Norwegian Minister for Environment and Development Mr Erik Solheim and Ecuador's Attorney General Mr Washington Pesantez Muñoz presented their respective governments' initiatives on sovereign debt, hailed at the symposium as successful role models, which should also be built into the framework of global policies through organizations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and international financial institutions including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.



Speakers at the symposium's "special dialogue" moderated by the LWF President included, from left to right: Ecuador's Attorney General Washington Pesantez Muñoz; Henrik Harboe, Deputy Director General, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Bishop Mark S. Hanson; and Norwegian Minister for Environment and Development Erik Solheim. © NCA



Solheim elaborated Norway's decision in 2006 to cancel unilaterally the outstanding debt of NOK 520 million (USD 72 million) owed by Ecuador, Egypt, Jamaica, Peru and Sierra Leone as a result of the 1976–1980 Norwegian Ship Export campaign involving 156 vessels and equipment. Pesantez explained further the process of the national Commission for the Complete Auditing of Public Debt (Comision para la Auditoria Integral del Credito Publico – CAIC), set up in 2007 to look into the legality and legitimacy of the

country's external debt between 1976 and 2006.

Responding to comments from the floor, Solheim emphasized any loan acquisition process as fundamentally a two-way process entailing responsibility on the part of the lender and borrower. He challenged civil society in other countries to put pressure on their governments to ensure broader action on foreign debt cancellation. While it might be difficult to give a clear definition of illegitimate debt, it was obvious urgent action was needed especially in cases whereby the debtor could not honor obligations as a

result of financial or political crises with serious consequences for the country's people, he said.

Pesantez explained that although CAIC's report had not been officially released, he expected its findings on irregular re-negotiation of credits and government failure to protect the rights of its citizens, would encourage other countries to carry out similar audits. "We are not questioning our obligation to repay debt, we are seeking solidarity" in determining the legitimacy, transparency and efficiency of indebtedness, he emphasized.

Symposium Calls for Further Political and Legal Action on Illegitimate External Debt

Despite different opinions and approaches with regard to a precise definition of "illegitimate sovereign debt", representative of governments, multilateral organizations, churches and civil society movements concluded an international symposium on illegitimate debt with a joint agreement to push for further political and legal action on sovereign debt crises and their impact at national and global levels.

One of the most outstanding achievements of this gathering "was our ability to use the communicative space it provided as an opportunity to accept the other as a legitimate counterpart," said Rev. Atle Sommerfeldt, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) General Secretary, concerning the outcome document of the International Symposium on Illegitimate Debt.

This symposium was not about political positions, ideologies or agendas, remarked Sommerfeldt, referring to the variety of expertise in attendance—more than 60 representatives of governments, church bodies, international and regional financial institutions, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations. "Its outcome reflects our concern for those who suffer the real impacts of sovereign debt ... [and] are deprived of their basic rights as global citizens," he said.

The final document summarizes the experiences that were shared at the forum, listing 14 generally agreed



Liberia's Deputy Minister for Finance Hon. Tarnue Marwolo (right) speaks at a panel discussion during the symposium. On the left is Prof. John Williamson, Peterson Institute, USA. © NCA

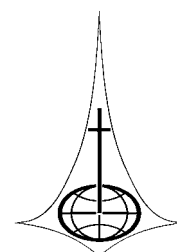
viewpoints with regard to deepening the concept of illegitimate debt and to establishing a foundation for a new international legal framework for debt management and resolution. The "legitimacy" questions are generally related to the ways in which loans are contracted, the conditions attached to such loans and their use.

The participants agreed that ongoing discussion regarding the precise legal status and content of the concept of illegitimate debt should not impede further political or legal action on the issue. They noted it is nevertheless important to continue with the concept development, as

relevant criteria could be drawn from academic legal writings and state practice, among other sources.

"Political and legal approaches to the challenges of illegitimate debt are not mutually exclusive, but complementary approaches. Legal actions have to be accompanied by a political strategy, and political initiatives will invariably require legal support and follow-up," they stated.

A proposal calling for consideration of a referral to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the legal aspects of external debt reflects the participants' emphasis on the importance of further





The symposium participants represented government units, multilateral organizations, churches and civil society movements from across the world. © NCA

official debt audits, such as the one conducted by Ecuador, and the need to follow up concretely on the eventual prosecution of legal violation cases.

Describing Norway's unilateral and unconditional cancellation of debt claims against five developing countries as "a very positive step forward" and an important example to other lenders, the participants underscored the Norwegian practice that creditor

co-responsibility was not counted as official development assistance.

The public's responsibility is clearly spelt out in an affirmation of civil society's indispensable role in mobilizing political will, and in proposing and supporting legal interventions with regard to illegitimate debt and creditor co-responsibility.

The participants identified possible follow-up actions through the

UN financing for development Doha Review Conference and the Paris Club (representing 19 of the world's richest countries) discussions. The suggestions also include national legislation, citizens' audits, transparency and accountability in budget processes and coherence of government policy, among others.

Sovereign lending and borrowing is not just a matter of finance and economics, but of politics, law, justice and ethics. Further efforts were therefore urged in promoting reflection on the relationship between foreign debt and human rights, for which guidelines could be developed in cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on foreign debt and human rights.

The final "Outcome Document" of the International Symposium on Illegitimate Debt is available on the LWF Web site at:

[www.lutheranworld.org/
What_We_Do/DMD/
DMD-Documents/
Oslo_IllegitDebt_Oct08.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DMD/DMD-Documents/Oslo_IllegitDebt_Oct08.pdf)

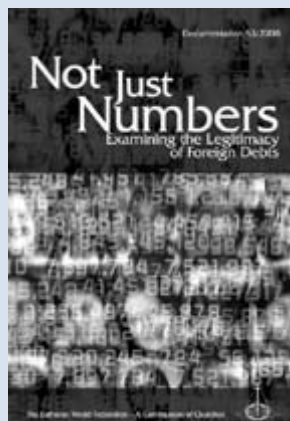
27 October 2008

New LWF Publication Explores the Spiritual and Moral Dimensions of Illegitimate Debt

An effective response to the continuing global debt crisis is not merely about examining the amounts a debtor country owes a lending state or institution, rather it is about recognizing the mutual moral responsibility in restoring people's justice, dignity, hope and life.

This dimension is the focus of a new publication of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) titled *Not Just Numbers – Examining the Legitimacy of Foreign Debts*, published in October. It provides insights from the LWF program on illegitimate debt, started in 2005 in Latin America, and invites reflection on new initiatives related to the question of illegitimate debt, including recent initiatives by the Governments of Ecuador and Norway.

Produced in the *LWF Documentation* series (No. 53), the publication offers contributions from authors from across the globe who, elaborate among other foci, why churches, governments and civil society must take concerted action against illegitimate foreign debt. It includes biblical approaches as well as a Lutheran theological dimension with regard to the debt crisis, giving examples justifying the call for the cancellation



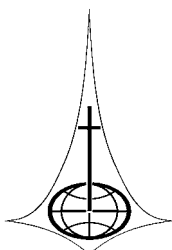
of sovereign debts that can be categorized as illegitimate.

In the foreword, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko points out that a debt relationship must be based upon transparency, voluntary action, trust and mutuality between lender and borrower. He argues against any unjust, corrupt or oppressive arrangement as it becomes "deeply corrosive, not only of the relationship but of each of the parties involved."

Not Just Numbers – Examining the Legitimacy of Foreign Debts is co-edited by Rev. Martin Junge, LWF Department for Mission and Development and Mr Peter Prove, International Affairs and

Human Rights, in collaboration with Mr Frederick Schlagenhaft, Office for Communication Services. The 112-page publication is also available in German under the title, "Nicht nur Zahlen Kritische Fragen zur Legitimität von Auslandsschulden."

Orders at USD 15 per copy can be placed with Lutheran University Press at, www.lutheranupress.org/catalog/-p-95.html. For further information please contact Ms Colette Muanda at: cmu@lutheranworld.org, Tel: +41/22-791 63 70, Fax: +41/22-791 66 30.



LWF Congratulates Former Finnish President Ahtisaari for Winning 2008 Nobel Peace Prize

Statement by LWF General Secretary Noko

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) congratulated former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari for winning the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.

In a statement issued on 10 October, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko paid tribute to the LWF’s “long and valued association” with Ahtisaari, whose career in the cause for peace and freedom in several parts of the world was marked by “skill and commitment.”

Announcing Ahtisaari as this year’s Nobel laureate, the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo recognized the contribution of the United Nations diplomat and mediator to important efforts to resolve conflicts on several continents over a period of more than three decades.

The LWF general secretary especially cited Ahtisaari’s role in



Former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, winner of the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. © LWF/Jim Elfstrom

Namibia’s independence, in Kosovo and the Indonesian province of Aceh, as among notable achievements of the 71-year-old laureate.

Noko also recalled Ahtisaari’s contribution as a keynote speaker of the March 2007 LWF Council meeting in Lund, Sweden, where the former Finnish president underlined six fundamental challenges for Europe—unity in diversity, democracy, economic success, the reduction of social and economic disparities, education, and interfaith understanding. “This paradigm carries even sharper challenges today than when Mr Ahtisaari presented it,” he noted.

Paying tribute to Ahtisaari’s presidency, 1994–2000, during which “he led the country into an active and constructive engagement in global affairs,” Noko thanked Finland for sharing the former president with the global community.

The full text of the general secretary’s statement follows:

Statement from LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, on the announcement of Mr Martti Ahtisaari as the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize winner

The Lutheran World Federation warmly congratulates Mr Martti Ahtisaari on being awarded the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. Mr Ahtisaari’s long career in the cause of peace speaks for itself in justification for this honor. As President of Finland, as a United Nations diplomat and mediator, and as founder of the Crisis Management Initiative, Mr Ahtisaari’s skill and commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts has always been evident.

The Lutheran World Federation has enjoyed a long and valued association with Mr Ahtisaari, since at least his days as Finland’s Ambassador to Tanzania. The most recent landmark in this relationship was Mr Ahtisaari’s keynote address to the LWF Council meeting in Lund, Sweden, in March 2007, when he spoke on the theme of “The House of Europe”. In making that speech, Mr Ahtisaari drew on his long experience of the situation in Kosovo (in particular as United Nations Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo) in

order to address the unmet challenges of the European project. He identified six pillars for the ‘House of Europe’: unity in diversity, democracy, economic success, the reduction of social and economic disparities, education, and interfaith understanding. This paradigm carries even sharper challenges today than when Mr Ahtisaari presented it.

Prominent among his lifetime achievements, Martti Ahtisaari also played a key role in supporting the emergence of Namibia as a free and sovereign nation. He served as UN Commissioner for Namibia from 1977 to 1981 and subsequently from April 1989 as UN Special Representative heading the UN Transition Assistance Group. His contribution to Namibian independence was recognized in the award of honorary Namibian citizenship.

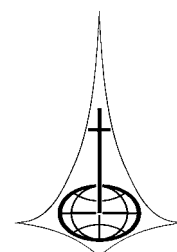
In the Indonesian province of Aceh, peace was achieved in 2005 thanks to the negotiation process that Mr Ahtisaari led, through the Crisis Management Initiative.

As President of Finland, Ahtisaari led Finland into an active and constructive engagement in global affairs.

Throughout his public service, Martti Ahtisaari has drawn deeply from the collective national experience of Finland. Finns have known what it is to be subjugated and exploited by other nations, and what it is to be involved in brutal internal and external conflicts. This national experience has ensured that all Finns prioritize peace and freedom as core values. Martti Ahtisaari has devoted his political life to working on behalf of the people of Finland to promote and share these values.

Therefore our congratulations go not only to Mr Ahtisaari personally, but to the Finnish nation. The Lutheran World Federation is grateful that this son of Finland has been shared with the global community, making him and his life’s work a gift to all of us.

Geneva, 10 October 2008



Global Lutheran Communion Congratulates New US President-Elect

LWF Leaders: Election Emblematic of Americans' Desire to Overcome Division

GENEVA (LWI) – Bishop Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, LWF general secretary, congratulated Senator Barack Obama on his election as the 44th President of the United States of America.

Speaking of an “historic moment” for the country, Hanson and Noko, in a letter to the President-elect, commended Obama’s passionate commitment to overcoming racial, political, social and economic divisions in the USA. Obama’s election is a sign that US Americans share this desire to overcome discrimination, they noted, an “affirmation—if not

yet the fulfillment—of the struggles and aspirations of generations of the excluded and the marginalized.”

Obama’s victory in the 4 November election—in which he won nearly 70 more electoral college votes than the 270 needed to secure the presidency—has significance not just for the USA but for the entire global human family, the LWF leaders stated. The time is ripe for the construction of a society in which “people are judged truly for who they are,” they claim, and the fruit of Obama’s efforts in America may bring hope to many throughout the world.

Hanson and Noko also emphasized commonalities in the challenges facing the new President-elect and those

encountered by the global Lutheran communion in promoting human dignity and justice around the world. They said they believed the ideals inspiring LWF’s service to the poor and oppressed are ideals and responsibilities shared with the senator.

Hanson and Noko expressed the hope that the future US president will be able to fulfill the heavy responsibilities he will be assuming, and assured the new leader that the LWF will accompany him with prayers for wisdom, courage and fortitude to meet the unprecedented constellation of challenges at hand.

The full text of President Hanson and General Secretary Noko’s letter follows:

Senator Barack Obama
President-elect
United States of America
5 November 2008

Dear Senator Obama,

We write to congratulate you on your election as the 44th President of the United States of America. We do so on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation’s 140 member churches—in the United States of America and 78 other countries around the world—representing a global church family of over 68.3 million people.

In your campaign you have spoken passionately and with evident conviction of change, of hope, and of responsibility. You have invoked the vision of an America that transcends the divisions of race, political affiliation, and social and economic status. That is indeed a salutary vision.

Your election is itself emblematic of the desire of Americans to overcome discrimination based on color and origin. It is the affirmation—if not yet the fulfillment—of the struggles and aspirations of generations of the

excluded and marginalized. It is an historic moment for your country.

As President, confronting the unprecedented constellation of challenges that you must face, you will require much more than a human being’s normal measure of wisdom, courage and fortitude. We in the Lutheran World Federation accompany you with our prayers that you might be strengthened for the tasks you have set yourself in the promises you have made to the American people, and in the hopes you have inspired.

In the unfolding of your agenda for overcoming divisions in the United States of America, we believe that you will find a world that is ready—and waiting—for the USA to join in the common task of building a global human family in which people are judged truly for who they are. The fruit of your efforts in the USA will feed the hopes of many others around the world.

In your victory speech, you spoke of a new dawn for American leadership in the world, and affirmed that the USA’s strength for leadership

derives not from military might or economic influence, but from the power of ideals.

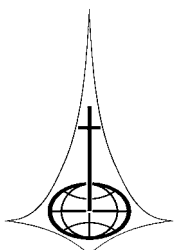
As a global communion of churches, we see our mission as the promotion of human dignity and inclusion, the restoration of hope, and the struggle for justice for all around the world. We confront the opposite of these qualities in far too many contexts—as experienced by our member churches and through our programs for humanitarian relief and development. We believe that the ideals and responsibilities that inspire our service to the poor and oppressed are ideals and responsibilities that we share with you.

We pray that what we do in the time we are given will fulfill the responsibilities we have accepted and advance the realization of our shared ideals, for the benefit of all people.

Yours respectfully,

Bishop Mark S. Hanson
LWF President

Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
LWF General Secretary



FEATURE: Nourishment for the Body and Soul

ELCA Congregation Volunteers Welcome Special Guests to Weekly Banquet

BISMARCK, North Dakota, USA/GENEVA (LWI) – At around 5 p.m. every Thursday, rain or shine, the guests start arriving outside Trinity Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Bismarck, North Dakota, USA, for a banquet. Volunteers—the true cornerstone of the Trinity community—begin to greet the guests, visiting with them outside the doors that open promptly at 5:30 p.m.

Regulars fill each other in on their weeks. Smiles are contagious. When the doors open, more volunteers will be waiting to escort guests to a table for a hot and delicious meal, free of charge.

Unlike most of the meals they've had this year, this one will be enjoyed on a beautiful table setting, complete with fresh flowers, colorful decorations, menus, and real china and silverware.

Hosted by Pastors Steve A. Sathre and Nathan C. Keith, and with dozens of volunteers organized each week by Banquet Coordinator Tudy Fennern, Trinity's banquet welcomes any and all homeless and hungry members of the community with open arms each and every week. Founded on the belief that "the needy should never be served poorly," the banquet's goal is simple: to nourish the body with food and the spirit with dignity and respect.

The tables, which seat eight, fill quickly with seven guests, escorted by yet another volunteer. The final seat remains open for one of the volunteers who has cooked and served the meal to join them in the family-style meal. The food is delicious—prepared with fine, fresh ingredients, and perfectly spiced with compassion. As freshly baked and donated bread is broken, stories are



A group of guests are among the 300 who enjoyed an early Christmas dinner on 18 December 2008 at The Banquet, the weekly feeding ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church, Bismarck, North Dakota. © Trinity Lutheran Church/Tudy Fennern

exchanged. Laughter is shared. And hope is restored.

Trinity banquet volunteers return, week after week. They come from churches and groups within the community, often hearing about it from a member of the Trinity congregation. They come from all walks of life. They get every bit as much—if not more—out of each Thursday's meal. Camaraderie. Conversation. The joy of knowing that they've not only helped nourish their neighbors' bodies with food—they've nourished their souls with dignity, respect, and love. Started in with 103 guests, the weekly Trinity banquet serves up to 400 people.

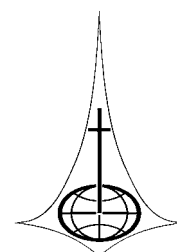
Breaking the Cycle of Hunger

The Trinity banquet is one of several ways in which the ELCA through its World Hunger Appeal, encourages its congregations to take up initiatives to help eradicate hunger

throughout the world. The solution to hunger goes way beyond getting a person to their next meal. Every day, in ELCA ministries and companion congregations spanning the globe, people help their brothers, sisters, and neighbors, providing the food, shelter, education and resources to help eradicate world hunger.

Last year alone, the ELCA collected more than USD 20 million through the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, a comprehensive and sustainable multi-strategy program designed to provide immediate relief, sustainable development, and to break the cycle of hunger through advocacy and education, responding to those in need at home and around the world.

According to ELCA's World Hunger program, some 35.5 million people (including 12.6 million children), representing 10.9 percent of the total population, experience hunger or the risk of hunger in the USA. These numbers include four percent of the country's households





Volunteers in the kitchen of Trinity Lutheran Church, Bismarck, N.D., prepare to serve a banquet for the waiting guests. From right to left: Norm Ostboe, Burt Riskedahl, Kathy Nordquist and Darlene Ostboe.
© Trinity Lutheran Church/Tudy Fennern

(11.1 million people, among who are 430,000 children), with some families skipping meals, eating too little, or going a whole day without food.

In 2007, an average of 26.5 million people participated in the Food

Stamp Program each month. In 2006, requests for emergency food assistance increased seven percent. Of those requesting emergency food assistance, 48 percent were members of families with children, and 37 per-

cent of adults requesting assistance were employed.

America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest network of food banks, reported that an estimated 24 to 27 million people turned to its agencies in 2006.

The international work of ELCA World Hunger is carried out with the Lutheran World Federation, of which the ELCA is a member, and with Lutheran World Relief, the ELCA and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod relief and development agency.

(This feature is provided courtesy of the ELCA Communication Services unit.)

***This feature article is the first in a series that will focus on the topic "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread", the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly, which will be held 20–27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany. The Assembly logo appears in the article's background on page 23.**

23 December 2008

Lutheran Church in Diaspora Merges with Mother Church in Lithuania

Following the merger of the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Diaspora with its mother church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania (ELCL), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) now has three member churches in North America—two in Canada and one in the USA.

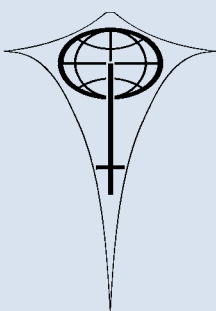
The formerly Oak Lawn, Illinois-based Lithuanian diaspora church was constituted in November 1946 in Lebenstedt, Germany, by Lithuanian refugees fleeing their homeland following the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States. Their goal was to maintain congregational life continuity in the Lithuanian church tradition. The 1,500-member church had been an LWF member church since 1947 until the 2008 merger with the ELCL, which joined the LWF in 1967.

The diaspora church approved the proposed merger in May 2007, which the ELCL synod endorsed with an overwhelming majority at its 19 July 2008 meeting in Taurage, also attended by delegates of the former USA-based church. Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis is the head of the ELCL.

The merger pushes the ELCL membership to a total of 21,500 members, and that of LWF member churches globally to around 68.3 million in 140 churches and 79 countries.

At the time of the June 2008 LWF Council meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, the LWF counted 141 member churches, following admission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville).

More LWI News at
www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html



Published and distributed by:
The Lutheran World Federation
150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel. +41/22-791 61 11
Fax +41/22-791 66 30
E-mail info@lutheranworld.org
www.lutheranworld.org