

Lutheran World Information

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The Lutheran World Federation Develops New Visual Identity

New Logo Is a Dynamic Expression of the Lutheran Communion

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has begun rolling out its new visual identity including a new logo. It will be officially launched together with a redesigned LWF web site on 12 June during the LWF Council meeting.

The new logo represents a reinterpretation of Martin Luther's seal, also known as the Luther rose, and includes five elements—a cross, ring/circle, Luther rose, dove and a hand.

The LWF Council took the decision to develop a new visual identity at its meeting in June 2012. Committee work and a creative development process began soon after, leading to a first presentation

of a new visual identity to the Meeting of Officers in November 2012, and a subsequent approval by the governing body in January 2013.

The visual identity draws inspiration from the long-standing history of the LWF. It reconnects in a new way with the roots and identity of the Lutheran tradition, showing the close links between the foundational vocation of LWF's work and the communion's shared purpose for the future.

It also reflects the LWF vision, as stated in the LWF Strategy, underlining

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LWF Offers Condolences and Prayers for Oklahoma Tornado Victims

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expressed heartfelt condolences and prayers to the people of Oklahoma, following the tragic loss of life in the wake of devastating tornados across central United States.

“We pray particularly for those families, relatives, and friends who are in pain because of the loss of loved ones,” LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge wrote in a 22 May letter to Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

A tornado was part of a storm, 18-19 May that swept across Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. According to news

reports, 24 people have been confirmed dead following the tornado that demolished an elementary school and destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses.

Junge offered prayers for churches in the USA including the ELCA Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, as they provide “words of comfort, peace, hope, and spiritual guidance for people who have such a difficult path ahead.”

He added, “May wisdom, courage and compassion continue to guide your pastoral and relief work among people in grief and loss.”

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

Head of Communications

Heidi P. Martinussen
hpm@lutheranworld.org

Editor

Pauline Mumia
pmu@lutheranworld.org

Layout

Stéphane Gallay
sga@lutheranworld.org

Circulation/subscription

Colette Muanda
cmu@lutheranworld.org

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the main expressions of Lutheran identity—evangelical, sacramental, diaconal, confessional and ecumenical.

In the new visual identity, LWF's commitment to holistic mission (proclamation, service [diakonia] and advocacy) is symbolized by the various graphic elements. The cross is a symbol of faith, and the Luther rose represents the Lutheran identity. The circle stands for the communion of churches, of people and the world; while the hand illustrates

diakonia and service to humanity. The dove expresses reconciliation, with the leaf in its beak symbolizing creation.

The LWF logo currently being phased out was designed in 1970. The new logo builds on the Luther rose, which many LWF member churches use as their emblem. The Luther rose was also the base for earlier LWF logos dating as far back as 1949.

"We are excited to use this new logo, which builds on our history and our roots as a Lutheran communion, and at the same time portray the dynamism

of our mission as a worldwide communion of churches that is called to proclaim the gospel, serve the neighbor, and advocate for a just, peaceful and reconciled world," says LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

For more information, please contact Heidi.Martinussen@lutheranworld.org. For a more detailed theological explanation of the logo elements please go to www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Theological-dimensions-of-the-new-visual-identity-final-EN.pdf.

Growing Awareness of Women's Role in Churches

Women Leaders in LWF Churches in Asia Set Course for Inclusive Participation

BANGKOK, Thailand/GENEVA (LWI) – One of the oldest and well known groups of the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) in Medan is a women's church choir which "is never absent at church on Sunday, no matter what," Tetty Aritonang told a recent regional women's meeting of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Bangkok, Thailand. She underlined the group's contribution to church life, but decried the general lack of understanding about inclusive participation of many women, men and youth actively serving the church today.

The GKPI women's desk coordinator was among the participants in the LWF

Women in Church and Society (WICAS) regional meeting held prior to the Asia Church Leadership Conference (ACLIC), hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand, 10-15 April.

At the WICAS meeting, regional coordinators discussed the main priorities for women's work in their respective churches, outlined plans for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, and gave further input to the draft LWF gender policy, which will be presented to the June 2013 LWF Council meeting. Reports from the three sub-regions under which the LWF member churches in Asia coordinate their work, illustrated

that there is growing awareness around women's roles in church and in society, and space is opening up for dialogue on gender issues.

Presenting the Asian women's report to the ACLIC on 15 April, Ranjitha Borgoary (India) and Kiyoe Narita (Japan) urged that women's work in the region be understood as core church work, rather than something complementary or parallel to it.

They affirmed that churches should motivate and open spaces for women to study theology in order to build the capacity to have more women in decision making and in ordained ministry.

On advocacy issues, they emphasized that issues relating to the realities of migration need to be addressed especially how this phenomenon affects women. It is also important to remain focused on the issue of cultural practices that promote discrimination against women in church and society, they noted.

The WICAS network is planning to hold a conference for women and men in 2014 to explore together how the LWF gender justice policy can be placed in the context of Asia, and what further actions ought to be undertaken around leadership, advocacy and women's theology.

Mary Hrangliani from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Myanmar said



WICAS regional coordinators Kiyoe Narita (Japan), Nora Samosir (Singapore) and Ranjitha Borgoary (India), at the regional meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. © LWF/E. Neuenfeldt

the WICAS meeting had showed how important it was for women to have access to theological education in order to become leaders. “But it is also important that the church provides space for women who receive theological training so that they can serve in their vocation,” she said.

Dora Hemalatha, a delegate from India, called for churches to empower women in order to end institutional,

cultural and interpersonal violence and atrocities committed against women. “I would like to make a call to all, saying, ‘Enough of cultural discrimination which allows rapes. Women are mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. They must be treated as independent and dignified human beings,’” she concluded.

Aritonang expressed optimism about working for changes in GKPI,

saying the WICAS meeting had provided much-needed support in planning programs that would help promote relations that empower both women and men for equal participation and leadership in the church.

(WICAS regional coordinators Ranjitha Borgoary (India) and Kiyoe Narita (Japan) contributed to this LWI article.)

Re-forming Theology amid Rapid Changes

Asia Church Leadership Conference

BANGKOK, Thailand/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran churches in Asia have embarked on a reformation of their theological understanding and reflection on holistic mission and Lutheran identity in the context of the region’s rapid secularization.

Sixty-five leaders from Asia’s Lutheran churches and mission partners met in Bangkok, Thailand, 12-16 April, for the Asian Church Leadership Conference (ACLC), organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development (DMD) under the theme “Strengthening the Asian Communion in Changing Times.” The ACLC is convened every two years with the aim to discuss strategies and programs of the regional Lutheran communion, which includes 52 LWF member churches.

The region’s interfaith context continues to challenge the churches and they must not be ignored, the church leaders said, noting that discipleship remains an important part of the life of the church but must be clearly defined in the Asian context.

Bishop Nelson Lakra of the Gosner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam, in India, remarked that the Asian Lutheran communion now has a clear direction for its theological formation as well as its reflection on holistic mission and Asian Lutheran identity that will strengthen it amid changing times.

“There is strong leadership provided by the LWF Asia desk and the Asian



Participants at the Asian Church Leadership Conference in Bangkok, Thailand © Bernard Riff

leadership has shown strong unity and cooperation for this common course. The Asian communion remains committed to its churches and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in season and out of season,” Lakra said.

Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice at the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness, said that rapid social changes are affecting the church’s self-understanding and capability as well as its perceived legitimacy in society, and it must adapt its theological communication.

“Only a comprehensive theological response can reposition the church to speak with relevance and authority in these changing times,” Mtata said.

The Same Gospel in Different Contexts

In his opening address, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge highlighted the apostolic tradition of churches extending the arm of fellowship to one another.

“The main reason for the apostles to reach out and connect with each other was to share in the spreading of the gospel. Very early, churches understood the need to relate to each other as a way to avoid self-centeredness and uncritical alignment to prevailing cultures,” Junge said. “As they visited each other, churches began to realize how the same gospel would be received and witnessed differently in different contexts.”



Representatives of LWF member churches in Asia follow discussions during one of the plenary sessions.
© Bernard Riff

Referring to Acts 15, Junge shared how the early church saw it as its responsibility to address such differences of culturally framed reception by emphasizing the basics of the gospel and an attitude of hospitality to one another. “Your meeting as the Asian communion of churches is an expression of that apostolic wisdom that there is no church which is too small to give, and no church is too big to receive,” he concluded.

A Discipleship of Equals

LWF Vice-President for Asia Ms Eun-Hae Kwon conveyed to the ACLC par-

ticipants greetings from LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan. In his message, the LWF president emphasized “a discipleship of equals” which is grounded on equality before God and the equal calling by God to serve the world. “Because we are called, we are free to engage with others and share the good news in communion as Lutherans,” he said.

Younan said “discipleship is a concept that we need to reclaim as we seek to accompany one another, as we participate in God’s redeeming and reconciling mission in a broken and globalized world.”

Emphasis on Networking and Commitment

Participants from Myanmar underscored the importance for churches in the region to display a strong commitment to each other. They noted that the renewal of the Asian Lutheran communion through theological reflection offers hope for the church in the context of secularization.

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, Myanmar Lutheran Church and The Mara Evangelical Church, as well as the formation of a network of west Asia churches, will help strengthen the Asian Lutheran communion, said Satu Ve-U, general secretary of the Mara church.

“The emphasis on networking affirms our love and commitment to each other for mutual accompaniment towards growth and in facing the challenges of secularization in changing times,” he said.

Kisku Logen from the Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church noted that the renewal process, with its focus on theological formation and reflection and emphasis on holistic mission and Asian Lutheran identity “provides a clear strategy and hope for the Asian communion against secularization.”

A Just and Sustainable Future without Illegitimate Foreign Debt

LWF Partners in Central America Say Public Debt Leads to Structural Violence

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras/GENEVA (LWI)

– The Social Forum on the External Debt of Honduras (FOSDEH) and other non-governmental organizations in the Central American country say Honduras is on the brink of ruin. It cannot pay government employees, contractors or suppliers. Construction unions owed more than USD 100 million by the State are demanding payment. Teachers can go up to six

months without salaries. Road construction has stopped and the government health provider is threatening to dismiss employees.

Concerned about the situation in Honduras, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) program in Central America and its partner FOSDEH jointly hosted a forum in mid-April on “Public Debt and Structural Violence.”

The gathering held in the capital Tegucigalpa, focused on indebtedness among Latin America countries and discussed foreign debts that have been incurred without the consent of the population but with the creditors’ full awareness. This is relevant in Honduras whose government debt according to the Central Bank of Honduras is 47 per cent of the GDP. But according to Raf Flores, FOSDEH

deputy coordinator, the actual figure had reached almost 71 per cent of the GDP. FOSDEH argues that the Honduran government does not take all its debts into account.

Participants in the “Public Debt and Structural Violence” forum included representatives of the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH) and the regional LWF Illegitimate Debt Program. Rev. Ángel Furlan, coordinator of the illegitimate debt program for LWF member churches in Latin America, referred to the debt system as modern slavery. The Honduran debt has made the country extremely vulnerable and caused a completely unsustainable situation affecting mainly the poor and causing social violence, he emphasized.

“It is not a mere crisis. It is a system failure. We need to talk about debt as a system that leads to modern slavery. The debt itself is a system of modern slavery,” said Furlan, former president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina.

Poverty Has Increased

Furlan’s message is clear. The current economic development model is based on growth and it has used debt as one of the most effective mechanisms for its own survival.

But creditors have applied conditions to their loans, forcing developing countries like Honduras to undergo structural reforms. According to Furlan, most of the costs incurred in debt servicing have been put mainly on the average citizen, therefore deepening poverty and exclusion.

Apart from lower salaries in Honduras, subsidies on fertilizers, fuel and transport have been eliminated and tariffs for service delivery including water, energy and communications have been raised. Cuts in public expenditure and reduction of direct taxes on labor, business and heritage tax directly affects the poor, Furlan noted.

Such a situation leads to violence because of social exclusion. Lives are



*Ms Eva Ekelund (left) LWF regional representative in Central America and Rev. Ángel Furlan (right) addressed the forum on “Public Debt and Structural Violence,” held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.
© LWF/DWS Central America/M. Salinas*

no longer valued. The value of life is traded like goods. Access to education, work, food and a future are taken away, he continued.

“The social violence corresponds to structural violence. Even the Maras criminal gangs, manage to create social acceptance and exclusiveness within the group. But that is an acceptance built on violence,” Furlan said.

Foreign Interests Manage National Well-Being

According to Eva Ekelund, LWF regional representative in Central America, debt puts a heavy weight on countries facing deep socio-economic challenges and hinders the full development and exercise of human rights. Loans and foreign investment that come with conditions have resulted in the weakening of state power.

“Human rights have no conditionality. They are unconditional and can neither be sold nor changed. But the right to development, to employment and to equality between men and women require a state [that is] able to intervene and to guarantee these rights. It requires control of public finances to ensure socio-economic fulfillment,” said Ekelund.

According to FOSDEH, Honduras is now seeking to privately place over

USD 750 million in bonds. To do so the government has hired banking firms to set up meetings with potential investors.

This system produces international indebtedness of the country, allowing the management and planning of the national economy to be subjected to international agreements of a market dominated by external and private interests.

Economic Transformation Needed

LWF Central America proposes a number of steps toward a just and sustainable future. “Firstly there is a need to build a financial architecture, which aims to change the rationalities of production, distribution and growth patterns that are not based on debt and financial capital efficiency,” said Ekelund.

Furlan emphasized the need for “a true green economy”—an economy that is not based on speculation but instead prioritizes food security, health, renewable energy, inclusion, gender and ethnic justice, human rights and the rights of mother earth.

(By LWI correspondent Thomas Ekelund)

Preaching the Gospel in the Midst of Diversity

LAC Leaders Address Lutheran Identity and Communication as a Key Tool for Mission

MANAGUA, Nicaragua/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) addressed the challenge of preaching the gospel in diverse and disenfranchised cultures, calling for new theological language, holistic mission efforts and support for youth in their churches.

The LAC Leadership Conference (COL) was held in Managua, Nicaragua, 15-19 April, hosted by The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE) under the theme “Lutheran Churches, Churches of the Word.”

It was organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development (DMD) LAC desk in collaboration with the Nicaraguan church. Some 50 LAC leaders attended the annual event, which serves as a platform for decision making, reporting, collaborating and networking.

Leaders recognized both the challenges and opportunities represented in trends such as growing secularism and indifference to faith and religion and the need to revise the theological language used to proclaim the word of God in the different cultural reali-

ties in predominately Roman Catholic countries.

Many of the LAC leaders expressed concern about how to preach the word of God in the context of poverty, increasing violence and climate change.

Rev. Gustavo Gómez, president of The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (IELU), spoke about the challenges of being an inclusive church in a multi-faceted society, where the notion of diversity is changing.

It is a struggle to find the Lutheran identity in an evolving world, he added. “When we think of the Lutheran identity, we think of large churches with wooden pews and a pipe organ, filled with light skinned people speaking German or English.

“If we have that as our perspective, we will never be 100 percent Lutheran. The Lutheran community is transforming into something new, something with new faces and expressions,” Gómez emphasized.

Rev. Emilio Aslla, president of The Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELB), spoke of the diverse nature of his church. “We say ‘diverse’ because

our church is multi-cultural, multi-lingual. We speak Spanish, Aymara, Quechua, Guaraní, amongst other languages and every community has their own history and customs.”

Aslla recounted that when Christian missionaries originally came to Bolivia, the indigenous people were told to leave their cultures behind. “It has been a painful process but we are now looking to embrace our diversities. The challenge is: how do we continue to be Lutheran without forgetting our history?”

The Bolivian church leader reflected on the lack of theological resources available to help reach the indigenous in the region. “There are many people in Bolivia that cannot be reached without the right tools,” he added. “It is a fundamental issue that we need to continue discussing.”

The Future Is Young

Throughout the conference the “Creatitude” program developed by the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), to engage youth participation in creative ways, was used by delegates to take part in panel discussions and presentations.

Addressing the meaning of being a young church where 42 percent of the Lutheran population is under the age of 25, Bishop Eduardo Martínez of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) said that “it is a reason to celebrate.

“We feel our church has a promising future. It fills us with hope that our church will be maintained in the following years with new leaders and Lutheran people working in the church and society,” Bishop Martinez added.

However the IELCO is challenged to find ways to move young people to embrace their faith. “We want to assist



Bishop Eduardo Martínez of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia speaks at the LAC Leadership Conference in Managua, Nicaragua, 15–19 April. © LWF/Chelsea Macek



Gustavo Driau, regional coordinator of the LWF/LAC Sustainability Program, in a group discussion with youth participants at the regional church leadership conference in Nicaragua. © LWF/Chelsea Macek

the youth to grow in their spirituality as human beings. We have to orient our ministries to work with them in a way that they feel they belong.”

Lutheran Formation and Education Is Central

Theological education and formation was also a central theme of the conference. Churches analyzed their struggles to

better respond with pastoral skills to challenging and changing societies.

They affirmed that theological education and formation should consider the social contexts and vulnerable populations. Bishop Melvin Jiménez of The Lutheran Church in Costa Rica (ILCO) stated that, “Pastors should be equipped to preach and offer pastoral support while also engaging in the initiative of human rights and advocacy.”

An emphasis on theological practices needs to be put in the theological education system to support diakonia and participation at all levels of church and society, the LAC leaders noted. Member churches agreed to enhance local efforts on theological education using online training, by bridging the generational gap by having younger leaders as mentors to help the older generation gain new technology skills.

“The contribution towards 2014 from the leadership conference has brought a rich reflection about the Lutheran heritage that is being contextualized and invites to reform our theological education and formation processes,” stated Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for LAC.

Leaders determined the focus for the leadership conference in 2014 would be on practical theology, hermeneutics from the LAC perspective, on-line education, the role of theology in the ecumenical and inter-religious world, and theological education and formation considering the world economy.

All themes will be reflected upon using a gender perspective.

We Need to Act on Poverty, African Lutheran Diaconal Workers Say

LWF Task Force on Poverty Map Out Action Plan

NAIROBI, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI) – A consultation of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Nairobi, Kenya, heard how churches’ support and collective action by community-based organizations are helping small-scale farmers in many parts of Africa fight poverty and create opportunities for economic empowerment.

One of the initiatives cited at the 22-25 April consultation on “Confronting Poverty and Economic Injustices in Africa” was the work of the National Smallholders’ Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), which in 2009 received the Yara Green Revolution

Award for its outstanding efforts to increase food production among farmers, majority who are women.

“Our small-scale farmers lack farm inputs and NASFAM has been helping them get the inputs, including seeds and fertilizers, and providing technical support throughout the process. After that the association helps in marketing the produce,” Mr Steven Kaseko from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM) said at the consultation organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) to review the work of the LWF Task Force on Poverty.

The group which comprises ten diaconal workers from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe explored further how LWF member churches in Africa can jointly formulate tangible and workable measures to address poverty and food insecurity on the continent.

Like in Malawi, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG) extends financial support to church members who are in need, which includes setting up food points known as chop bars. “There is a woman we [ELCG] gave USD 100 to set up a chop

bar. She has built a house out of that money and educated her children,” Bishop Dr Paul Kofi Fynn told the consultation. Such efforts are improving living conditions, keeping children in school and empowering women, he emphasized.

Participants emphasized the need to share and learn from the numerous simple yet practical efforts by civil society and African churches aimed at uplifting marginalized people from poverty. Other church-supported income-generating initiatives discussed included the Basic Income Grant project in Namibia, and the distribution of heifers among small-scale women farmers in Tanzania.

other mineral. But their worry is that decisions [will be made] that are not in the interest of the poor,” she added.

The LWF church representatives also discussed the widespread practice by African governments to lease “so-called unproductive land” to multinational companies to cultivate food or cash crops for export under the guise of creating local employment opportunities and generating government revenue. This new development will further impoverish the communities and deprive them of land—their key source of livelihood, the task force members emphasized.

“The Lutheran churches in Africa need to act continuously through tactful and strategic advocacy for the poor who are losing their last asset, land, which all along has defined and dignified them,” said Mr Geoffery Kalugendo from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Bishop Fynn, who is the chairperson of the LWF Task Force on Poverty, urged African Lutheran churches to set up their own income-generating projects such as schools, conference centers, hotels and farms. “If churches’ anti-poverty efforts are to succeed, then the leaders need to believe they can fund the projects through their churches,” he added.



Ghanaian Bishop Dr Paul Kofi Fynn, moderates one of the sessions at the LWF consultation on “Confronting Poverty and Economic Injustices in Africa” held in Nairobi, Kenya. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwill

African Lutheran Communication Network

An LWF-led workshop for a core group of the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET) coincided with the LWF task force consultation. The eight-person ALCINET group agreed to focus on sharing information within the region about the good practices and challenges on fighting poverty and the impact of climate change on livelihoods in Africa.

Rev. Dr Elieshi Mungure, LWF area secretary for Africa said the consultation “has enabled the task force

Need for Strong Advocacy

They noted however that while several countries on the continent are recording fast growing economies, the wealth is not trickling down to the ordinary poor at the grassroots, and strong advocacy was needed to deal with this challenge.

In Liberia, civil society is demanding accountability for the gains made from the country’s vast natural resources, Bernice Womba from the Lutheran Church in Liberia said. After decades of mining diamonds, gold and iron ore, and exporting rubber and palm oil, ordinary people remain very poor and excluded. “The people now feel the discovery of oil deposits in 2012 will bring more money than any



Members of the LWF Task Force on Poverty and the ALCINET core group at the Nairobi meetings. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwill

to understand the new realities that hinder community empowerment and also learn that it is possible to tackle poverty and the underlying economic injustices.”

The action plan by the poverty task force includes measures to enhance local communities’ capacities to produce food, create better access to land use, promote advocacy for

environmental care and sustainability, and enhance gender and generational equality in sharing of resources and means of production, Mungure said.
(By LWF correspondent Fredrick Nzwill)

LWF Symposium on Work Underlines Role of Coordination for Effectiveness

Theology, Technology, and Power in Networking

GENEVA (LWI) – Humanitarian and development workers, theologians and scholars at a symposium on work organized by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) discussed how coordination and networking can support organizational effectiveness.

The symposium coordinated by the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) noted that while there is no single approach to achieving good results in an organization, establishing agreed standards to coordinate planning and activities gets more work done with relatively less costs, and creates room for learning from a variety of contributors.

“Lack of coordination would mean that actors have no arena to discuss or communicate the different objectives and alternatives. In the end the whole process takes more time than the different actors expect or are interested in investing,” Dr Julia Fleischer told participants attending the 1 May symposium at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva.

In her opening presentation, the assistant professor of political science at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, said academicians and practitioners are increasingly paying attention to coordination because of growing complexity in decision-making, globally. She elaborated the positive and negative perspectives of coordination, models of organizational structures and the perceptions of actors who are influenced by their own jurisdictions and worldviews.

For faith-based organizations with a variety of actors from different contexts and many objectives—diakonia,



Dr Julia Fleischer delivers the keynote address at the 2013 LWF symposium on work, held at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. © LWF/I. Benesch

humanitarian assistance, environment, gender, and justice issues—coordination can create unclear and controversial understandings about the benefits of different programs and ‘technologies’, Fleischer noted. By technologies, she referred to the methods used to reach the intended goals.

Fleischer concluded that in any institution or setting, coordination can be difficult but it is “highly indispensable,” as it is a prerequisite for coherent decision-making and consensus building between different interests.

Spirit of Life

Reformed Swiss theologian Rev. Dr Jean-Pierre Thévenaz, co-founder of the network, Church Action on Labour and Life (CALL), spoke about the deep connection between work and “the spirit of life”. Coordination of work, he told the

symposium, “must address how we experience life at different levels from birth, education, and even death; we need to think about it from the perspective of God who is working in us to achieve all.”

Responding to a question on whether contemporary theological education supports this task of coordination for “shared life” today, Thévenaz was emphatic that “our studies are constructed outside this shared life, and are constrained to pure church life which does not help the church to be present in the public debate. We need to have pastors who are able to speak in places where the church finds itself.”

New Media, Power and Performance

In his presentation on coordination in the global church and the digital revolution, Rev. Roger Schmidt discussed

possibilities for the global church to use some of the modern technology to connect local Christians with those in other parts of the world.

Schmidt, executive director of the Swiss-based association 'Digital Encounters', challenged church organizations to explore the use of smart digital tools to share their local learning with the broader community so that local Christians can also enjoy the reality of the global church.

There are various religious narratives that help faith-based organizations to see coordination in its positive and negative aspects, said Rev. Dr Simone Sinn, LWF study secretary for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations at DTPW. Her presentation on religious and theological resources for coordination highlighted the impact

of three dimensions of power: the desire to be all-powerful (hubris); power over the other (asymmetry); and power without the other (strife).

The meaning of coordination, Sinn emphasized, implies putting "power with the other at the center. It results in cooperation and in empowerment; it is not unlimited power but power in relation to the common task and in relation to who we are."

Ms Simangaliso Hove, secretary for Program and Project Coordination at the LWF Department for Mission and Development discussed why organizations need to measure and manage performance in coordinating systems. "It's important to look at work processes and see if they could be reorganized more efficiently, especially when funds are dwindling. Manage-

ment systems also make [staff] aware of their contributions' worth."

Humanitarian Relief

Through its Department for World Service, the LWF collaborates with United Nations (UN) agencies to provide humanitarian relief in different parts of the world.

Concrete examples by Mr Pascal Daudin from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Mr Brian Lander from the World Food Program (WFP) showed how realities on the ground must inform global coordination. The challenges that major UN and other humanitarian partners encounter in delivering timely and relevant assistance to people affected by crises were discussed.

Around 30 participants, mainly from organizations in the Ecumenical Center attended the LWF symposium, the third in a series on work and faith that DTPW began in 2011. Previous focus areas included "Trust in the workplace" and the "Dignity of work" – of which the latter is documented in the publication *Dignity of Work – Theological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2011).

"The inter-disciplinary nature of coordination calls for a critical analysis of our shared life at work. We can do more if we coordinate more," concluded Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, DTPW study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice, the symposiums' coordinator.



Swiss theologian Rev. Dr Jean-Pierre Thévenaz delivers his presentation at the LWF symposium on work and coordination. © LWF/I. Benesch

German Protestant Kirchentag Focuses on a Just Economy

LWF Representatives Speak on Youth Participation and Sharing of Resources

HAMBURG, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – Questions of justice and a responsible economy were a central focus of the 34th German Protestant Kirchentag, which took place from 1 to 5 May 2013 in Hamburg.

The Kirchentag is a German Protestant lay movement and the theme for this gathering was "As much as you need" (Exodus 16:18). Almost 120,000 full-time participants attended worship services; exchanged

ideas about faith; and engaged in discussion about current political affairs with representatives from the church, civil society and political sphere. The guest speakers included German Federal President Joachim Gauck,

who is a former Lutheran pastor, and Chancellor Angela Merkel.

On the evening of 1 May, more than 350,000 people attended the Evening of Encounters hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, a member church of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The whole inner-city area was filled with stalls presenting the various regions of the North German church, which was only established at Pentecost 2012 as a merger of three churches. Between 2 and 4 May, around 2,500 thematic events took place, also involving many ecumenical guests from around the world, including representatives from the LWF Communion Office.

Speaking at the panel on “The good life—as much as you need. Between growth, progress and justice,” Caroline Richter, LWF Youth secretary, called for more youth participation in dealing with the pressing questions on the future of the world. She reported on the particular tasks and responsibilities borne by young adults in the LWF in relation to questions of sustainability. For example, the LWF delegation to the 2012 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Doha consisted exclusively of young adults under the age of 30.

As a further example of successful youth participation, Richter referred to the wide-ranging decisions made by



Ms Caroline Richter, LWF Youth secretary (right), addressing the panel on growth, progress and justice at the 34th German Protestant Kirchentag; on the left is Bremen senator Dr. Reinhard Loske. © LWF/GNC/F. Hübner

the LWF German National Committee (GNC), which go back to an initiative of the Youth Committee of the GNC/LWF. As a result of these decisions, the work of the GNC/LWF is to become more environmentally friendly.

In a Bible study on the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6: 1-15) Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, warned against an over-emphasis on economic thinking. The Bible passage showed that economic considerations are not able to satisfy the hunger of the people, but the source of life is already among them through Jesus.

What is already available can satisfy the hunger of people in just the same way as the five loaves and the two fishes fed the 5,000. She challenged the churches to make use of their own available resources in the same way and not to allow economic paradigms to hold too much power in the churches.

On 5 May, the huge festival of faith came to an end in the Hamburg City Park with a communion service, in which 130,000 people participated. The next Kirchentag will take place in Stuttgart from 3 to 7 June 2015.

Lutherans and Roman Catholics Jointly Tell the Reformation Story

Dialogue Commission to Publish “From Conflict to Communion”

GENEVA (LWI) – For the first time, Lutherans and Roman Catholics at the global level have worked together to tell the story of the Reformation as part of their commitment to deepen Christian unity.

The publication *From Conflict to Communion* will be published in May 2013 by the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. The commission is mandated by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Vatican’s Pon-

tifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) to facilitate the global ecumenical dialogue between the two Christian World Communions.

LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka said the publication *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Roman Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* contributes to strengthening the

commitment to work for the visible unity of the Church. It will be presented to the LWF Council at its meeting this June.

“After centuries of mistrust and prejudging between Lutherans and Catholics, we see this [publication] as a great opportunity to reflect together on the burdens of history, and to open more possibilities for witnessing together, not just as individual Christians but as Christian churches,” Hintikka said.

The publication takes into context the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in 2017. It builds on important ecumenical milestones especially the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ).

Hintikka emphasized that writing together *From Conflict to Communion* has been possible because of the process of deepened mutual understanding between Lutherans and Catholics that led to the JDDJ.

LWF and PCPCU representatives jointly signed the JDDJ on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, officially declaring that mutual condemnations at the time of the 16th century Reformation do not apply to their current teaching. Other ecumenical partners' follow up to the historic agreement include the Methodists' affirmation of the JDDJ in 2006, and the publication *The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification* (2011).

"Through *From Conflict to Communion* Catholics and Lutherans confess that they are responsible for the fracturing of the unity of the Church. At the same time the document sets the remembering of the Reformation anniversary as a possibility for new efforts both in healing of memories as well as in restoration of Christian unity," Hintikka said.

She emphasized that though a challenging task, one of the opportunities of the 500th anniversary will be to broaden the understanding of the ownership of the legacy of the Reformation beyond churches of the Reformation.

"The insights of the Reformation were so powerful that they not only significantly shifted the theological and spiritual understandings but also challenged the prevailing perceptions of structures of societies and the self-understanding of human beings," Hintikka said.

Within the LWF, the Reformation anniversary will also invite discussions

on Lutheran identity, spirituality and theology, she added.

Topics discussed in *From Conflict to Communion* include the Reformation commemoration in an ecumenical and global age; basic themes of Martin Luther's theology with a view to the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues; and emphasis on five ecumenical imperatives for the relationship between Catholics and Lutherans as they commemorate 2017 together.

The publication offers LWF member churches an opportunity to "learn not only about their own historical and theological roots but also about our relations with the Catholic church—why they have been on the one hand so challenging and on the other hand so important for us to reflect on," Hintikka concluded.

The full text of the publication *From Conflict to Communion* will be released on 17 June at a joint LWF-PCPCU press conference during the LWF Council meeting in Geneva.

“Stand Up and Walk”

LWF Launches Global Virtual Conference on Diakonia

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has broken new ground in its continuing efforts to strengthen social services efforts by Lutheran congregations around the world by holding a virtual conference on diakonia on 5 June.

Organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) the one-day Internet-based conference was framed around the theme “Stand Up and Walk,” based on the story about Jesus healing a paralytic (Mark 2:9-12).

Some 500 pastors, diaconal workers and lay leaders were expected to engage with one another via the Internet on new trends in how churches and their related organizations respond to human need. Registration was free and open to all those who were interested.

DMD director Rev. Dr Musa Panti Filibus said the conference aimed to

share experiences that would help support lay leaders, pastors and diaconal workers in strengthening the social service care and support that churches provide at community and other levels. The meeting also hoped to connect diaconal workers with colleagues undertaking similar work globally.

“We believe this innovative conference will be a major opportunity for the member churches to strengthen our joint service,” Filibus said.

He added, “Churches around the world do tremendous work in fighting poverty and standing with the marginalized. But how much better can we become in our joint diaconal ministry if we learn from each other?”

Inspired by key themes in the LWF handbook on diakonia, *Diakonia in Context*, which was published in 2008, the virtual conference hoped

to enrich and strengthen theological understanding and practice of diakonia globally.

The conference topics included Faith in Action, Doing Diakonia in Context, Learning and Sharing in Diakonia, and Diakonia and Spirituality. Keynote speakers —including LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge; and Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, professor of diakonia at Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo and chairperson of the international development agency Norwegian Church Aid—offered perspectives on current diaconal practices and thinking.

Social services practitioners from different parts of the world took part in panel discussions focusing on local challenges. Several workshops offered hands-on opportunities to build the skills needed for diaconal work.

The conference languages were English, German, Spanish, French and Indonesian. It was accessible on computers with Internet connection, smart phones and other hand-held devices and the methodology used allowed

people with slow Internet connections to participate.

Participants could sign up for the conference as individuals, or join in groups of pastors, church councils or diaconal and other committees to dis-

cuss together issues that are relevant to their respective contexts.

(More information and registration: <http://lwfvirtualconference.org>)

Reclaiming the Power of Faith as a Driving Force for Justice

LWF President Younan Speaks at Danish Church Days

AALBORG, Denmark/GENEVA (LWI) – At the 2013 Danish Church Days, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), spoke of his hope for peaceful coexistence of religions and nations in Middle East.

the common, positive values of love, compassion, justice, and peace.”

He continued, “We must together uphold the sacred value of all persons regardless of color, race, creed or religion.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD) organizes the Danish Church Days every three years. It is the biggest interdenominational event in the country and is hosted on a rotational basis by the church’s 11 dioceses. Ms Hanne Broadbridge, chairperson of the ELCD Council on International Relations, said the Danish Church Days 2013 had been filled with deeply moving keynote speeches, church services, concerts, workshops and creative activities as well as “talks across the meal tables and coffees between people of all ages and confessions to spread the gospel of love, justice and peace for all.”



LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan delivers his keynote address at the 2013 Danish Church Days in Aalborg. © Christian Roar Pedersen

In his keynote address before an attentive audience on 9 May (Ascension Day) in the northern city of Aalborg, Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) said, “One of the great challenges of the 21st century will be to reclaim the power of faith as a driving force for justice, peace, and love. We must be convinced that no one religion has a monopoly on hate or extremism, and that all of us—Christians, Muslims, Jews—are equally responsible and equally called to work together to seek

The ELCJHL bishop said he regarded the role of Arab Christians in the Middle East as being more important today than ever before. He said he was worried that in recent years people are increasingly leaving the region for the West. “I believe that Arab and the Middle East Christians maintain a crucial balance in our society. They are the bridge builders, brokers of justice, defenders of human rights and gender equality, and most importantly, they are peacemakers,” Younan emphasized.

Education Is the Way Forward

In his address titled “Seeing God in the Other: A Theology of Hope,” Younan emphasized the importance of education as an instrument toward a more peaceful coexistence, and mentioned the Council for Religious Institutions in the Holy Land (CRIHL), as “a modern day miracle” that makes a difference.

Under the CRIHL, Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders work together to promote interreligious understanding and cooperation. In recent months the group has been analyzing how Palestinian and Israeli school textbooks depict “the other,” the result being two conflicting narratives which lack the values of coexistence.

Citing some examples, the ELCJHL bishop said the respective



"Gospel-kids" sang at the opening service of the Danish Church Days. © Christian Roar Pedersen

textbooks "treated access to the holy city of Jerusalem as a right exclusive to themselves. How can we hope for our children to live in peace if we do not plant seeds of hope in them when they are young? Our aim is to make the textbooks more inclusive, so that children will grow up with a knowledge and respect of their neighbor's faith and practice," said Younan amid applause from the hall.

Pray and Visit the Region

After the address the floor was opened to the audience, who seized the opportunity to put questions to the LWF president, including how the church in Denmark can best support Christians in the Arab world.

"You can help us by not being *for* Israel or *for* Palestine but by being *for* peace, justice and truth. You are not to help us *against* the others; help us only

to continue to be Christians in our own society. At the moment, with the Middle East boiling over and in crisis, it's important for us to experience the support of Western Christians," Younan said, and urged his audience to pray for Christians in the Middle East and to visit the region:

"Come and visit us in our churches. It's fantastic for Middle Eastern churches to experience Christians coming from Western countries and seeing the injustice. [You] can pray together with us and participate in the life and activities of our churches," Younan urged his audience.

On 12 May, Younan participated in the installation of Rev. Marianne Christiansen as bishop of Haderslev Diocese in the south. She succeeds LWF Council member Bishop Henrik Niels Arendt, who had served the diocese since 1999.

The Danish Lutheran church has nearly 4.5 million members, and is a founding member of the LWF.

(Written for LWI by Louise Haunstrup, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark).

LWF Expresses Joy for 'Witnessing Dimension' of United Protestant Church of France

Junge Welcomes the Sharing of Gifts with the Lutheran Communion

GENEVA (LWI)— The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed gratitude to the leadership of the United Protestant Church of France for emphasizing the witnessing dimension of the church in the unification process between the Lutheran and Reformed churches in France.

Junge participated in the 11 May inauguration of the United Protestant Church of France (EPUdF)—a union of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France and the Reformed Church of France—celebrated in Lyon. It was the culmination of a process that began in 2007. Both churches trace their his-



Rev. Laurent Schlumberger (right), president of the United Protestant Church of France, and Rev. Joël Dautheville (left), who until the merger with the Reformed, led the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France. © EPUdF-DC

tory to the 16th century Reformation movement.

In his letter to the newly elected EPUdF president Rev. Laurent Schlumberger, the LWF general secretary said “the joyful day marked in a powerful way the opening of a new chapter in the life of Protestantism in France, which sees a church that is ready to go out, following Christ’s path of incarnation, and thus reaching human beings in their specific life settings within the context of France.”

He continued, “Your process captured in a beautiful way that relationships of koinonia do not have their end in themselves, but have their horizon in the churches’ participation in God’s mission.”

Hundreds of people from France and international guests attended the inauguration ceremony, which included the installation of the 20-member EPUdF governing council headed by Schlumberger, former president of the Reformed Church of France. Lutheran pastor Jean-Frédéric Paztrynski and Ms Patricia Hildebrand will serve on the council as vice-presidents.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony, Schlumberger described the formation of the united church as a response to “immense changes” in the religious landscape of France and the result of the ecumenical movement’s visible unity between churches.

He mentioned the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement between Lutherans and Reformed churches in Europe, as an



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge joined local and global church leaders attending the inauguration of the United Protestant Church of France in Lyon. © EPUdF-DC

accord that had provided a model of unity that was no longer based on uniformity and suspicion but rather on “reconciled diversity.”

Schlumberger said the great challenge facing the church today was to be faithful to the gospel and to share it. For Protestants in France, this requires a shift “from being a closed group to meeting others, from being a church walled around to a church with open doors, from being a church made up of members to a church made up of witnesses.” The EPUdF, he added, “is not an end in itself, but exists to be renewed for mission and service.”

Junge encouraged the EPUdF to share the specific experience of its merger process with churches in the

Lutheran communion, and to be enriched by the gifts that other churches have developed as they witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “In the context of a communion of churches, the giving and the receiving doesn’t know of borderlines that would cluster churches according to their capacity to give or their need to receive,” he added.

There are an estimated 1.5 million Protestants in France, representing around three percent of the country’s population. The EPUdF has 400,000 members in ten regions, served by about 450 pastors. The Lutheran church was one of the founding member churches of the LWF in 1947, and was until the merger, led by Rev. Joël Dautheville as president.

Witnessing at the Intersection of Church and Society

LWF Lauds Norwegian Bishop Emeritus Stålsett for Niwano Peace Prize

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) lauded the “extraordinary ministry and witness” of Bishop Emeritus of Oslo Dr Gunnar Stålsett, as he received the Niwano Peace Prize in Tokyo on 16 May.

“Throughout your ministry, you have looked for opportunities to witness at

the intersection of church and society,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in a congratulatory letter to Stålsett, underlining his commitment to the pastoral and ecumenical ministry, leadership in the LWF and Church of Norway, and work in the public sphere.

“By bringing these two dimensions so meaningfully together you have given powerful witness to the centrality of ‘incarnation’ in Lutheran theology. In our theological tradition God’s call to mission is always understood as God’s call into the world,” Junge said.

“It is at the heart of issues of justice, peace and reconciliation in our struggling and wounded world that the newness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks and is received for the sake of transformation,” he added.

Stålsett, 78, was awarded the 30th Niwano Peace Prize in recognition of the Lutheran leader’s “extraordinary and persistent work for peace,” the Niwano Peace Prize Committee said. The committee noted that he “combines a deep spirituality and passion for social justice and for human rights with a determination to engage with leaders from politics, religion, civil society and business.”

The prize was established in honor of Nikkyo Niwano, the first president of the lay Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai, to recognize and encourage individuals and organizations that have contributed significantly to inter-religious cooperation and the cause

of world peace. It was first awarded in 1983 to Brazilian Roman Catholic Archbishop Hélder P. Câmara.

Junge said Stålsett, LWF general secretary from 1985 to 1994, gave critical leadership in the worldwide Lutheran communion in its support for the liberation struggles of Namibia and South Africa, and in starting the Guatemala peace process.

“I can testify that your legacy lives on. Here I think particularly of the commitment to ecumenical engagement and to interfaith relationships and understanding, of the principle that we Lutherans should look for opportunities to be engaged in efforts toward reconciliation,” Junge said.

Tolerance and Respect

In his acceptance message for the Niwano Peace Prize, Stålsett underlined

the award’s recognition “that peace is about the integrity of creation and the harmony of humanity,” about the environment and development, and human dignity and justice.

Referring to a pilgrimage to Hiroshima, and the memory of the atomic bombings on Japan in the Second World War, Stålsett said people of faith and all those “who revere the sanctity of life, should not rest until the world has agreed on a binding convention against the possession and use of nuclear weapons.”

On armed conflicts in many world regions today, Stålsett noted that extremism threatens peace and ethnic harmony, and religion was being abused to foment war instead of building peace. He underlined “tolerance and respect as one of the most urgent tests for religious leaders of today.”

Stålsett was Bishop of Oslo in the Church of Norway from 1998-2005, and had served in the 1970s as General Secretary of the church’s council on Ecumenical and International Relations. He has served on the executive committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and was moderator of the European Council of Religious Leaders.

He served in Norway’s parliament and government, and in various international commissions, including the Advisory Council for Arms Control and Disarmament. From 2006 to 2010 he was the special envoy to the peace and reconciliation process in East Timor (Timor Leste). He has served three times on the Norwegian Nobel Committee.



Bishop Emeritus Dr Gunnar Stålsett (right) receives the 30th Niwano Peace Prize from Rev. Nichiko Niwano, Honorary President of the Niwano Peace Foundation, in Tokyo, Japan. © Niwano Peace Foundation

Arab Christians Have Built Hope in Hopeless Situations

LWF President Younan Speaks at Conference on Christians in the Middle East

BEIRUT/Lebanon/GENEVA (LWI) – “We do not live in the mentality of the ghetto, nor in the mentality of a minority complex, nor do we live as *dhimmi* (dependent) people,” said Bishop Dr

Munib A. Younan. “We have always been, as Arab Christians, building our societies, loyal to our countries and nationalities, bringing hope in hopeless situations.”

Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), was speaking at a joint World Council of Churches (WCC) and Middle East Council of Churches

(MECC) conference on the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, on 22 May in Beirut, Lebanon.

Younan, who is President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), said that the process of reform continues to be at the heart of every Arab and Middle Eastern Christian. Their hopes, he said, will not end until they see the Middle East transformed through the values that Arab Christians cherish.

He particularly stressed a stronger engagement between Christians and Muslims. "Dialogue is important in some contexts, but we need full engagement. We need engagement with all monotheistic faiths, especially Muslims."

The ELCJHL bishop acknowledged the MECC's vital role in developing a constructive "intra-Christian" engagement, including involvement of the Evangelical family.

He noted that churches in the Arab world need further engagement with the global church, especially in the West. "Sometimes we express disappointment with churches and church-related organizations in the West. We

are tired of their speeches. We want action," he said.

In reference to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Younan mentioned ecumenical initiatives such as the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, which he said have helped to develop a common plan of action for how Christians can raise their voice against the occupation.

He concluded by saying that the current challenges in the Middle East are a "Kairos moment" for Christians. "It is a chance for us to remind the world that the conflicts in the Middle East are not religious. We know that extremism is not the monopoly of one religion alone and that more than just one people is capable of violence."

(Adapted from a WCC press release)



An LWF delegation visiting the West Bank in 2012, met with some of the students and staff of the Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, one of the institutions run by the ELCJHL. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund

Dhaka Disaster: Human Lives "Are Not for Sale"

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expressed its "deep pain" over the collapse of the Rana Plaza building outside Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 24 April, which claimed more than 1,000 lives, noting that human beings should not be sacrificed for profit.

"We realize that once more many lives were lost because of disregard for safety and security regulations," LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said in a 25 April letter to Bishop Arobindu Bormon of The Bangladesh Lutheran Church and Rev. Paulus Hasdak of The Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church.

"As people of faith we are reminded of the incommensurable value of each person. Every single life has its own dignity and beauty because of God, who is the Creator of all life on earth. Human lives are therefore 'not for sale' and their value should never be subordinated to the rules of profit and competition in the global market," Junge emphasized.

An estimated 3,000 garment workers, who were employed in factories that supply clothing shops in the West, were in the nine-story building as it collapsed. On 13 May, the authorities officially ended a 20-day rescue operation and declared that the death toll from the disaster was 1,127 people, while more than 2,400 had been rescued.

Bangladesh's garment industry is one of the country's biggest employers and earners of foreign exchange but it has been plagued by disasters.

In his letter, the general secretary offered the "heartfelt condolences" of the worldwide Lutheran communion to the people of Bangladesh, saying that the LWF joined the people and churches in the country in mourning and prayer, particularly for those who lost loved ones in the tragedy.

The LWF has two member churches in Bangladesh and is present through the humanitarian and development organization Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), which operates as an associate program of the LWF Department for World Service. Since 1972, RDRS has worked for poverty alleviation among landless and tenant farmers in the northwest of the country and is annually in contact with almost 1 million people.

Meanwhile, RDRS staff in mid-May contributed one day's salary each to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund that has been set up to assist victims of the tragedy.

Read full story at www.lutheranworld.org



LWF's work among communities in Pader district, northern Uganda, includes support to farmers to increase food productivity. © LWF/DWS Uganda

Easing the Pain of Shattered Dreams

LWF Uganda Supports Families Affected by “Nodding Syndrome”

KITGUM, Uganda/GENEVA (LWI) – He prepares himself every morning, walks up to the path leading to the compound's gate and stands there, watching other children from the village pass by on their way to school. On some days, 13-year old Bernard remains in that position for hours, yearning to take the path to school.

Bernard's younger brothers go to school. But his elder sister Janet dropped out to take care of her siblings after their father died, and the mother abandoned the home following cruel treatment from her in-laws. At 18, Janet grows some food crops, works on other people's farms for money and makes clay pots for sale to support her brothers.

Visiting another village in mid-March, staff from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Uganda program found 10-year-old Paul sitting in a tree shade, his little sister Sara asleep nearby on the bare ground. The orphaned siblings live with their elderly grandmother, who must find food for the family and occasionally visit relatives in the neighborhood looking for assistance. Her absence poses

a great risk for Paul who cannot be left alone. Keeping six-year-old Sara out of school ensures that someone looks out for her elder brother.

Paul is physically handicapped, falls ill quite often, and does not go to school. Bernard, on the other hand, while appearing to be undernourished, has no physical deformities and communicates well. Bernard insists he cannot go to school for fear of getting seizures which would make other children laugh at him and start discriminating against him.

The two boys suffer from the Nodding Syndrome (NS), an ailment which is characterized by seizures, including repeated nodding, hence the name. It is mainly found in northern Uganda, and affects children aged between five and 15 years. According to Uganda's Ministry of Health, the syndrome was first reported to authorities in 2009 but it had been endemic since 2005 in Kitgum, Pader and Lamwo districts. By 2012, around 3,000 cases had been reported including hundreds of deaths, but to date no cause has been discovered for the condition.

Because of the frequent seizures, some patients become completely paralyzed, deformed and unable to talk, while others remain in their normal body stature with the ability to talk. The condition can lead to mental impairment, with patients becoming so weak that they are unable to eat.

Stigma is rife toward NS patients and their families. Staff from the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) Uganda program use door-to-door visits to reach out to the most vulnerable households in Kitgum and Pader districts.

Minimizing Risks at Home, Improving Food Security

With no proper diagnosis so far, the Ugandan health ministry responds by treating the NS symptoms with anti-epileptic drugs, and working with its partners such as the LWF to provide psychosocial and livelihood support to the affected families.

As part of its humanitarian response and development work in the East

African country, LWF Uganda assists households to cope with the adverse effects of the nodding syndrome, says Mr Jesse Kamstra, LWF representative and head of program work there.

The cases that LWF staff encountered during the March and previous visits, show that many families do not know how to handle patients during seizures and accidents are frequent, with children injuring themselves at open fires and others falling into water, and in some cases drowning.

LWF's intervention includes providing households with skills training in constructing the "rocket lorena" improved cooking stove, which consists of a protected firewood chamber, one or two pot cavities (cooking plates) and a chimney. The stove greatly reduces the risk of exposure to an open fire place, minimizes smoke inhalation, and promotes efficient use of scarce fuel wood, Kamstra notes.

The inability associated with NS makes its patients vulnerable to other forms of discrimination and exploitation, including neglect at home and sexual abuse. In some households, patients are tethered to pillars to keep them in the house; others are denied food and proper shelter; and girls have been sexually assaulted leading to unwanted pregnancies and the risk of sexually transmitted infections. In addition, many children like John, Bernard and their care providers are denied the right to education.

LWF assists families with improved nutrition for the sick children and other vulnerable household members, and offers guidance on how to improve food security at family and community level.



Prolonged absence from school is common for children affected by the nodding syndrome. Christine (left) with her children Moses and Tedy, who are currently in lower primary school. © LWF Uganda/Alison Thurston.

Information sharing about NS has helped to increase awareness about the condition and improved care and support for the affected children, Kamstra notes.

Recovering from Impact of Civil War

The majority of children affected by the nodding syndrome were born and grew up in camps for internally displaced persons during the 1986-2006 civil war between rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government, in which tens of thousands of civilians died. For many residents of Acholi province who returned home after the 2006 and 2008 peace talks, "it is as if a second war has hit our land. Most of the children we bore from the camps, those who escaped being abducted by [LRA leader Joseph Kony] have been swept away from our hands by this mysterious illness," laments a mother who lost a child to the ailment.

With no specific treatment for NS, "it is important to understand the diffi-

cult conditions endured by the affected children and their families, many of who have barely recovered from the impact of two decades of civil war," says the LWF representative.

"Interventions such as the inexpensive 'loreana' cooking stoves, increasing access to safe drinking water and improved nutrition go a long way in providing some relief to the families, many of who are struggling to make a living," Kamstra added.

Assistance provided by LWF Uganda to NS-affected families in Kitgum and Pader districts in 2012 reached 2,005 children (1,132 male and 873 female) from 1,484 households. The LWF plans to increase support to more families.

The LWF has been implementing relief and development programs in Uganda since 1979. The program has expanded and adapted to meet the changing needs of communities across the East African country.

(By Betty Lamunu Ochana, monitoring and evaluation manager, LWF/DWS Uganda program)



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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