

Lutheran World Information

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In this issue

LWF Council Meeting in Medan, Indonesia Opened With Traditional Worship 3

Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water 4

Interview with Chair of LWF National Committee in Indonesia 9

LWF chooses logo and theme for Twelfth LWF Assembly in 2017 in Namibia... 12



(From left) LWF General Secretary Martin Junge, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib Younan, LWF National Committee in Indonesia Chairperson Bishop Langsung Sitorus and other member church representatives with a Luther Garden partner tree planted at the Ecumenical Center of the Council of Protestant Indonesian Churches in North Sumatra on 15 June 2014. Photo: LWF/C. Kästner

“Let these trees grow as our communion is growing”

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Indonesian member churches of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have planted partner trees for the ones in the Wittenberg Luther Garden at the Ecumenical Centre of the Council of Protestant Indonesian Churches in North Sumatra on 15 June 2014. Representatives of the 13 Indonesian member churches planted saplings of mango, avocado, banana and durian trees. The first trees were planted by LWF President Bishop Munib A. Younan and LWF General Secretary Rev Martin Junge, as well as representatives for the 7 LWF regions.

At the beginning of the planting, Bishop Langsung M. Sitorus, chair of

the LWF National Committee in Indonesia, reminded the participants of God’s call to take care of creation. “We plant not only in Wittenberg but also in Indonesia,” Sitorus said. “With the planting of these trees we support the 500 year anniversary of the Lutheran reformation, but we also contribute to a better climate”. Deforestation is a major issue in Northern Sumatra, where tropical forests are threatened by illegal logging and commercial plantations for pulp and palm oil.

“We plant these trees as partnership trees for the Luther Garden in



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Continues on page 3

Contents

“Like a tree planted by streams of water” – LWF Council in Medan

- 1 “Let these trees grow as our communion is growing”
- 3 [LWF Council Meeting in Medan, Indonesia Opened With Traditional Worship](#)
- 4 Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water
- 5 [Deep Sense of Ownership a Sign of Growth in the LWF Communion](#)
- 7 LWF financial results 2013 with a surplus
- 8 [Keynote Panel Addresses Interfaith Relations in Indonesia](#)
- 9 Interview with Chair of LWF National Committee in Indonesia
- 10 [Mutual Accountability for the Gift of Communion in the LWF](#)
- 11 LWF Council Shares in Fasting for the Climate
- 12 [LWF chooses logo and theme for Twelfth LWF Assembly in 2017 in Namibia](#)
- 12 Across Generations without Fear or Different Status
- 14 [Ecumenical Guests Praise LWF Determination to Reach Out](#)
- 15 Standing Ovation for World Service Director Hitzler
- 16 [LWF Council 2014 Adopts Public Statements](#)
- 17 LWF Council Issues Public Statement on the Ukraine
- 17 [LWF Council Actions](#)
- 19 Of Gifts and Burdens

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“LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER”

LWF Council, 11–17 June 2014 in Medan

Continued from p. 1

Wittenberg,” President Younan said. “May they grow as our communion of churches is growing”. Three Indonesian member churches have already planted trees in Wittenberg, a fourth planting is scheduled to take place at the end of June.

“We plant trees because we have hope” General Secretary Martin Junge said upon planting a mango tree sap-

ling. “We know that they take a long time to grow, and we will not be the ones who eat the fruits. Others will enjoy them” he added. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, added Martin Luther’s quote that “if I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant a tree”.

OKR Norbert Denecke, chair of the LWF German National Committee, also placed a small tree inviting those

churches who had not yet done so to plant a tree in the Luther garden as well. “These trees are a symbol for the reformation which spread from Germany to the world, and has taken root worldwide” OKR Denecke said.

The tree planting took place in the framework of the LWF Council 2014, which met in Medan, Indonesia from 11-17 June 2014.

LWF Council Meeting in Medan, Indonesia Opened With Traditional Worship

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Deforestation and freedom of religion in the world were themes in the opening worship of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 2014 council meeting in Medan, Indonesia. The service took place in Jalan Sudirman church in Medan, belonging to the Christian Batak Protestant Church (HKBP), one of the 12 Indonesian LWF member churches.

Bishop Willem T.P. Simarmata of HKBP held the opening sermon about the council motto “Like a tree planted by streams of water” (Jeremiah 17, 7-8), linking the council theme to the destruction of forests in Indonesia by commercial plantations. “Can we still maintain to have this imagery of a tree planted by a river, of a tree planted by streams of water in our time?” he asked. “Is the imagery not threatened by a constant destruction of the jungle and forest in our world, which has caused the disappearance of streams of water from many lands?” Simarmata called on Christians to take action against environmental destruction and climate change. “The strengths of the members of the Lutheran World Federation are gifts from the Lord. Using them will not oppose the principle of trusting in the Lord.”

The service which was attended by about 700 guests, council members, LWF staff and local parishioners, gave a very lively impression of Indonesian worship life. Many visitors had come from neighboring towns to welcome the international guests. The majority of the 5.8 million Indonesian LWF members live on Sumatra, home to different groups of the Batak people who were Christianized through Dutch and German mission. Worship therefore is being held in different local dialects.

Some churches even have their own Bible translations. Among them, HKBP with 4.1 million Lutherans has the most members with congregations all over Indonesia and also abroad.

The opening service which was held mainly in English had many elements of these traditional roots, most visible in a traditional Batak dancing group which led the opening procession and performed a Tortor Batak, a contextual dance which in this case told about the confession and the forgiveness of sins.



*A Batak group performs a traditional dance showing the confession of sins.
Photo: LWF/M. Renaux*

Together with the contribution of three church choirs and a music group, they made the opening worship a very warm welcome to Indonesia.

After the service, LWF president bishop Munib A. Younan opened the council, affirming the LWF support to Indonesian member churches. “Keep the power of unity among you, keep the power of the holy spirit in you,” he said. For their mission “to carry the spirit of love in a multicultural society”, Younan strongly emphasized the right to practice “the freedom to build churches, the freedom to pray and worship”.

This freedom was also emphasized by the Mayor of Medan, Mr. Dzulmi Eldin. Mr. Eldin, who is a Moslem, joined the opening in the church after the service to greet the LWF council meeting. “Let me start with a thanksgiving to God Almighty for this gathering of the churches of the world in Medan” he said. “Each religion has the right to practice its rituals so once more welcome to the Lutheran churches”. Mr. Dzulmi explained about the different ethnicities and religions who “represented a vital aspect of our lives” and “have strengthened the city”. He expressed his hope “that the

churches grow even more and that pastors guide their flock according to their religious teaching”. According to Mr. Dzulmi, there are 635 Christian churches in Medan.

Greetings were also conveyed by Rev. Mori Sihombing, HKBP General Secretary and chairman of the local council preparations’ committee, and Bishop Dr. Langsung Sitorius, chairman of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia. The national committee has invited to and is hosting the LWF council meeting in Indonesia. It represents the 12 Indonesian member churches.

Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water

LWF President Addresses Council

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – The President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan has urged the church to continue working for justice that promotes abundant life for all.

In his address to the LWF’s annual Council meeting at Medan, Indonesia, 12-17 June, Younan noted that tangible faith is rooted in the sacraments of baptism and communion and in the church’s response to the concrete needs of the poor and vulnerable.

Drawing on the Council’s theme “Like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3), the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), said the world is thirsting for justice.

“Our world is dying for fresh streams of water that will transform inequality to equality, injustice to justice, ego-centric economies to economies of equal opportunity. The church will be prophetic only when it is the voice of the poor, the ones suffering injustice, the occupied, oppressed, persecuted, and displaced,” Younan added.

The LWF president reminded the Council that its theme from the first Psalm not only points to the need for theological renewal but also demands



LWF President Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan presents his address to Council 2014 meeting in Medan, Indonesia, 12-17 June. Photo: LWF/S. Lawrence

that the church consider questions of justice, particularly as water is becoming a symbol of injustice and inequality.

“Many of us have had the experience of streams of water that have been diverted by more powerful people so that trees downstream do not receive the same benefit. Many of us live in communities where the flowing water is polluted with chemicals, algae, or nuclear waste,” Younan said.

At the approach of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017, which will focus on the proclamation that

“we are liberated by God’s grace”, Younan said freedom in Christ binds Lutherans to their neighbors in service.

The LWF’s work for economic justice should not be separated from the growing calls for environmental justice and he linked care for creation to the first articles of the Nicene and Apostolic creeds.

“This is God’s creation and human beings are to care for it; we are to tend God’s beautiful garden. There are times, however, when we can distract ourselves with theological language; it

is time that the church speaks plainly about the looming crisis of climate change," the bishop emphasized.

Churches must raise their collective voice of concern regarding climate change because it is the marginalized peoples of the world who will face the greatest risks as the growing environmental crisis increases the risk of violent conflicts, poverty and economic shocks.

"If we are to be like trees planted by streams of living water, we must do our best to preserve the climate in which those waters flow," Bishop Younan urged. "Our calling is to be deeply rooted so we can follow God's law, the law to serve the poor and to shelter the vulnerable."

While highlighting the growing complications in relations between Christian and Muslim communities, particularly in Muslim majority societies, the LWF president refused to attribute these to theological disagreements between the two faith groups.

He said the tensions must be seen in the context of growing international

and economic power struggles and he urged LWF member churches to name and then address these struggles in their own contexts.

Younan said that the vast majority of Muslims are not Islamists and that Muslims and Christians do live together peacefully. Christians who live side-by-side with Muslims need to share stories of these good relationships. Christians are called to witness among Muslims but not proselytize.

"Our witness, faithful to Christ, is one of hospitality and openness, not exclusion and controversy. Our presence in itself is a witness to the Gospel of Christ's love."

Bishop Younan said the shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan in 2012 and the kidnapping of more than 200 girls in Nigeria by the extremist Boko Haram has rekindled LWF's commitment to education as an evangelical call.

"It is vital that this communion recognize and promote the transformative power of education in each of their societies. This one priority of educa-

tion encompasses climate challenge and life within and between Muslim and Christian societies.

"Extremists do not want education. They want you to believe blindly and not engage critically. The more you are educated—the more you read—you find that you are small and there is a power in the world far greater than you alone."

Bishop Younan acknowledged the difficulties the past months have brought to Asia, site of the Council meeting, with the missing Malaysian plane, the Korean ferry disaster, the Nepal avalanche and the landslide in Afghanistan.

He added: "Here, one can find rich and affluent countries immediately next to countries that cannot adequately address needs of their own people. One finds many countries exploited by multinationals and transnational corporations."

However, the LWF president emphasized: "We do not prosper until all of us prosper: men and women, north and south, east and west, old and young, rich and poor."

Deep Sense of Ownership a Sign of Growth in the LWF Communion

Report of General Secretary Junge to the Council

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – In his report to this year's Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge highlighted perspectives that indicate growth in the LWF and areas of work that require further attention as the communion prepares for both the Twelfth Assembly and the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017.

Junge expressed gratitude to the LWF National Committee in Indonesia and the 12 LWF member churches for their generous hospitality in hosting the Council, and providing an opportunity to experience the context in which they live.

The LWF communion is growing, and its 142 member churches repre-

sented 72.2 million members in 2013, up from 70.5 million in 2011, Junge said. However growth should not be seen only in numbers, but also in the difference churches make in their respective contexts as they participate in God's mission of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.

Relationships, Responsibility and Closer Cooperation

Referring to the overwhelming assistance to people suffering from the impact of devastating drought in Angola and Namibia in 2012/2013, the general secretary said this had shown "the responsiveness of a communion

that is bound into relationships that are nurtured by word and sacrament."

For some churches, growth can also be expressed in making difficult choices in a context of fragmentation, as is the case for the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ukraine (GELCU) and its congregations in Crimea, a region that recently voted to become part of Russia. That the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) has left it to GELCU's Crimea congregations to decide their possible future affiliation "is a powerful message that regardless the consequent political connotations that such choices may carry, the congregations



LWF General Secretary Martin Junge presents his report to Council 2014 meeting in Medan, Indonesia, 12-17 June. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

will still be seen as being part of the same communion,” Junge noted.

In the LWF North American region, the two churches there are exploring closer cooperation with churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a perspective of considering structural changes in the future. In Africa, celebrations in 2015 to mark the 60th anniversary of the first regional gathering of the Lutheran communion will focus on how theological education connects the regional and global dimensions of the Reformation.

Through the Department for World Service (DWS), the Lutheran communion was supporting almost 2 million internally displaced persons and refugees by early 2014, compared to 1.5 million in 2013. While the growth sadly reveals that those fleeing conflict, violence, oppression and hunger are increasing by thousands every day, the way the LWF responds “fills my heart with humble gratitude, as it becomes the telling story of a communion that wants to stand together without turning its back on the poor and the suffering at any point,” Junge said.

Strategic Priorities

On the work carried out by Communion Office (CO) in the past year, the general secretary elaborated the ongoing commitment to align program-

matic work to the strategic priorities of the LWF Strategy 2012-2017. He said concern about decreasing funding towards some of the departments’ work has been addressed with the goal to reversing such trends, but overall, there has been “continued growth in programs and LWF operations.”

In its committee sessions, the Council will discuss proposals for a refocused Department for Mission and Development (DMD), with a goal to sustaining DMD’s support and accompaniment to member churches in a context of declining financial resources. Junge expressed gratitude for ongoing support from the LWF member churches, related organizations and partners that has strengthened the financial capacity for programmatic work including in the new the Department for Theology and Public Witness.

On the “Emmaus Conversation” about the issues of family, marriage and sexuality, the general secretary noted that the accompaniment approaches recommended by the LWF Council in the recent and previous meetings had provided space for learning. He underlined the need for a sustained, structured and intentional process convened and led by the LWF, “in order to keep prayerful discernment and dialogue going on”.

The general secretary also expressed his appreciation for the reception of the gender justice policy, which

the Council adopted in 2013 reporting on the fact that more churches have begun to implement the policy in their respective contexts.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Expressions

The general secretary’s highlights on LWF’s engagements with other Christian World Communions explained some of the tangible expressions of the ecumenical dialogue with Catholics in the life and witness of churches at the grassroots, and for people suffering in conflict situations across the world.

With regard to the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017, Junge noted that approaches coherent with the principle of an anniversary in a spirit of ecumenical accountability are being developed with the Catholics, Anglicans, Orthodox, Mennonites and with the World Communion of Reformed Churches as well as the World Council of Churches.

He expressed hope that the communion’s solid theological reflection and engagement with other religions will continue to be an added value for practical interfaith cooperation in LWF’s humanitarian work, supporting churches’ advocacy for peaceful neighborly relations, and helping to transform the negative public perception of religion through religious extremism. The June 2013 United Nations-led “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders”—document jointly signed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and faith organizations, is one such initiative that has enabled the LWF to start interfaith humanitarian cooperation projects.

Diaconal Vocation

The general secretary’s report also stressed the issue of shrinking space for international humanitarian action in conflict areas such as the Central African Republic, and South Sudan where some 7 million people are at the risk of famine. He urged additional

support as the LWF prepares to scale up its response. “Who is going to take away the soot and hurt in the heart of the South, in the heart of a child who has seen his or her house burned down?” The Junge asked.

Looking Forward

At this year’s meeting, the Council will dedicate a “lunch-fasting” on 13 June to the “Fast for the Climate” initiative,

spearheaded by LWF’s delegation at the 2013 United Nations climate conference, and continuing on the first day of each month until the December 2015 meeting in Paris. Junge thanked the youth for their leading role in the dynamic process that is being taken up by individuals, churches and gaining regional commitments.

This year’s agenda includes a decision on the theme and the dates of the Twelfth Assembly. Expressing

gratitude to the Council for its continued support to the CO, the general secretary emphasized the need to work closely together to make the next meeting of the highest decision-making body of the LWF a “memorable and energizing event for the entire communion.” He urged collaboration in working towards a “joyful, transformative, forward-looking and outward-looking Assembly.”

LWF financial results 2013 with a surplus

Chairperson of finance committee presents report

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have increased their commitment to the communion in the fiscal year 2013, Christina Jackson-Skelton, Chairperson of the LWF Finance Committee reported to the LWF Council meeting 2014 in Medan, Indonesia. LWF financial results for 2013 were better than expected. The chairperson commended the Communion Office for cost-effective and balanced budgeting in 2013.

LWF income in 2013 was EUR 105.6 million, an increase of 5 percent over the previous fiscal year. Instead of the expected deficit the budget ended with a net surplus. The increase and surplus are mainly due to the work of the Department for World Service. World Service Programs in the previous year have provided assistance in various humanitarian emergencies in Chad, Namibia, Angola and Ethiopia which resulted in higher income from partners and UN-Organizations. Additionally, the LWF-run Augusta-Victoria-Hospital (AVH) on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem increased programming and revenue for patient care. Jackson-Skelton added however that a large sum is still tied up in receivables and not available in cash.

Jackson-Skelton thanked member churches for the increased commitment in paying LWF membership fees. “Your commitment for advocating for the payment of the membership fees is a reflection of your commitment to the communion and your passion for the ministry that we share and undertake together”.

More than 80 percent of LWF member churches have paid their membership fees in 2013 in comparison to 2012, where only 49 percent of member churches had paid their fees.

LWF membership fees are set based on a formula that indicates the relative wealth of the member church country compared with other member church countries. The basic fee is USD 100. Membership fees – altogether about 2.5 million EUR in 2013 – make up about 2.4 percent of total LWF income. They are, however, an expression of solidarity and ownership in the LWF communion. They also create “unrestricted operating income that can be used where it is most needed in the work of LWF” as Jackson-Skelton pointed out.



Christina Jackson-Skelton, chairperson of the LWF finance committee, presenting her report at the LWF Council meeting 2014. Foto: LWF/S. Lawrence

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Keynote Panel Addresses Interfaith Relations in Indonesia

“Crucial Role” of Religious Groups in Society

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Addressing the root causes of inequality and caring for those who suffer most are the areas where religions can strongly contribute to society. This was the conclusion of the keynote panel on interfaith relations which was held on the first day of the 2014 meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Medan, Indonesia. Indonesia, which is a religiously diverse country, is known for having a unique tradition of interfaith relations. The keynote panel gathered two theological scholars from renowned religious institutes in Sumatra as well as an Indonesian human rights activist.

“I am witness to the crucial role of religious communities and institutions in building a nation where peace, justice and human rights are upheld” Ms. Kamala Chandrakirana, an Indonesian advocate of human rights, said. Having specialized in women’s rights, she related her experience about the close ties between rights for women and rights for ethnic and religious minorities in Indonesia.

“The religious communities I work with are not only spaces for open debate

about matters of worship, they are also sites of power struggles among elements with differing views and interests, whose opportunities are shaped by larger processes in state and society”, she said. This places high responsibility on religious communities in shaping society: “We found that women who experience violence often seek justice not through state authorities, but religious leaders.” She called upon religious communities to assume responsibility for securing the coherence and integrity of a national legal system and law enforcement through accountable state institutions and to eliminate violence.

Joint activities in protecting the environment, disaster response and disaster preparedness were the areas Prof. Dr. Katimin, who teaches Islamic theology in the State Islamic Institute of North Sumatra in Medan, named as possible areas of Muslim-Christian cooperation in attending to the most vulnerable. He especially mentioned the response to the 2004 tsunami which heavily affected North Sumatra and brought Christians and Muslims together in humanitarian response.

“When one hand helps another, then interfaith encounter happens. People in the affected communities did not ask about religious teachings but worked together on addressing the needs,” Rev. Bonar H. Lumbantobing, pastor of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) who is a lecturer at the Theological Seminary of the HKBP also recalled the disaster response in 2004. He cited many cases in Indonesian history, when religious communities “rose up to defend life” thereby creating situations of interfaith encounter.

Lumbantobing said that religious groups met when they “jointly entered the community development program. When people were against the destruction of the environment, the adherents of any faith met again. When the workers were demanding their rights, religious encounter ensued. As God is masked in selfless service, coming together in interfaith action for the poor and vulnerable is a way of serving God”, Lumbantobing explained.

“We believe that religious communities are part of society, and together with other agents such as non-governmental organizations can work for just and peaceful communities” Rev. Dr. Simone Sinn, Study Secretary for Interfaith Relations in the LWF explained. “The two theological institutes are the places where the future generation of religious leaders in Indonesia is formed. It is they who will shape the future role of religious communities in the Indonesian society.”

“Religious belief and interpretation, like culture, can also be a source of new understanding”, human rights activist Chandrakirana said. “The vibrancy of new thinking within religious communities – rooted in and responsive to the realities of today’s life – is a prerequisite for the continued relevance of religion to our future”.



Human rights advocate Kamala Chandrakirana speaking on rights for women, ethnic and religious minorities at the Council 2014 interfaith keynote panel. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

Interview with Chair of LWF National Committee in Indonesia

“The Council Meeting Has Empowered Us”

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Indonesia have been living in a multi-religious society for decades. At its meeting, the LWF Council issued a statement, joining and supporting Indonesian member churches in their continuing dialogue with different religious groups. In an interview with Lutheran World Information (LWI), Bishop Langsung M. Sitorus, chair of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia and Bishop of The Indonesian Christian Church (Huria Kristen Indonesia, HKI) speaks about the challenges Indonesian churches are facing today and the power of being part of the Lutheran communion.



Bishop Langsung M. Sitorus, chair of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia and Bishop of The Indonesian Christian Church. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

What are your impressions of the 2014 meeting of the LWF Council in your country?

We prayed that the meeting could take place, and when it happened it was a blessing. We thank everybody who helped with prayers and donations. I think every church member contributed a small part to finance this meeting. We learned and feel strongly that all the Lutherans worldwide unite in communion, in belief and in the responsibility for a good neighborhood between followers of different religions. This meeting has empowered Lutherans in Indonesia.

What does it mean to be Lutheran in Indonesia?

We received the word of Christ, we received salvation and now have to share His word by doing diakonia – serve our neighbors. Through this meeting we learned that it is better to do diakonia together than alone. We are powerful when united.

How do you experience being part of the Lutheran communion?

We feel that we are part of a very great family which is very strong in faith and strong in caring for the world and for humankind. We feel that the churches in Indonesia are not alone: We have many brothers and sisters.

What challenges do Lutherans in Indonesia face today?

Our greatest challenge are the radical groups. They are in fact very small, but they work hard to close churches. They do not represent the majority of Indonesians. That's why we still have hope to build tolerance in society. We live in a country where the majority are Muslims. They have a missionary religion, and we are also a church in mission. We try to do this in peace and without confronting each other. I see ourselves like people in a market. People will come where they find the better goods. So our task is to improve ourselves.

Our second challenge is poverty. We are training people to improve their economic situation without destroying the environment. Many of our members are small farmers. Sometimes they cut the trees and destroy the tropical forest to gain farmland and make more money. We must

help the farmers to stop this and give them alternatives to preserve nature. We see it as our task to support organic farming. Our churches also give microcredits to help poor people. But the poverty also unites us. I hope that a time will come to unite our 13 Indonesian member churches into one, or maybe three – according to the languages we would then have an Indonesian, a Batak and a Nias church. But I think it is time to unite.

We also see how charismatic movements are drawing on our members. We stand strong with Lutheran teachings. Over the past years we have reformed and transformed church life and worship life. Therefore today more people seek to be Lutheran. They understand that it is good to be in God's grace.

Where do you see the treasures of your church?

Our churches can share Lutheran teachings about democracy and about the two kingdoms Martin Luther describes. We can envision a society where all religions sit side by side. We can share our teachings about peace and tolerance.

Mutual Accountability for the Gift of Communion in the LWF

Council Receives Study Outline on Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – A working group on the self-understanding of belonging to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has encouraged LWF member churches to see communion as a gift “we have already received,” and as a task that calls the respective members to discern together their mutual accountability towards each other.

In its preliminary report to the LWF Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the newly appointed working group on the Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion shared reflections from its first meeting in March. The report maps out a study process that will discuss the understanding of church fellowship within the LWF; the shared gift of participating in the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and the task of accountability for churches that are both autonomous and in communion with each other.

The seven-person group comprises theologians representing the LWF members and accompanying staff persons. Its final draft report will be discussed at the June 2015 Council meeting, and subsequently shared with the member churches. LWF constitutional provisions and relevant theological documents will inform the drafting process, which will include individual and virtual meetings, as well as input from the various leadership gatherings in the LWF regions during 2014 and 2015.

At its June 2013 meeting, the Council asked the General Secretary “to engage member churches in further theological reflections on how to respect the autonomy of LWF member churches’ decisions and express and deal with the resulting differences, while at the same time upholding their commitment to live and work together as a communion of churches.”

The working group’s preliminary report noted that while previous stud-



Dr Minna Hietamaki presents the First Report of the Working Group on the Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion to Council 2014. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

ies have explored the Christological, ecclesiological and spiritual dimensions of the LWF as a communion, the process of expressing the communion fully in the life and internal relationships between the member churches remains an on-going task.

Reconciled Diversity and Accountability

Referring to LWF General Secretary Martin Junge’s address at the group’s inaugural meeting, the report noted that the concept of reconciled diversity is an additional building block to which the Lutheran communion can particularly relate and offer as a possible process of expressing disagreement.

Churches of the LWF communion do not see themselves as an association of like-minded individuals “but as a deep fellowship of a variety of churches of the Lutheran confessional tradition seeking common witness to the world,” the group reported. It added that this “diversity is not on the way towards uniformity but rests in the reality of recognition and rec-

onciliation of differences that bring both joy and challenge to the communion.”

The task of being in communion does not contrast autonomy against accountability, but instead calls on churches to exercise their freedom to serve while being accountable to the gospel and to the individual church membership context.

Each church is therefore “differently accountable” to contextual and catholic realities which are in a dynamic relationship. As accountability is also about how the church seeks to be apostolic—accountable to the gospel, Scriptures, history and tradition—the working group suggested a new way of discussing the distinction between autonomy and accountability by speaking about “accountability to context/accountability to catholicity.”

The study process will also name challenges in the communion. The working group noted that diversity as both an individual church and communion-wide characteristic poses questions on how to create common orientation for churches that have different decision-making mechanisms.

The preliminary report noted that diversified accountability creates challenges when member churches identify differences as intolerable. The question then remains, “When does it become impossible for churches within the communion to recognize each other as churches of Christ and what are the consequences?”

Lessons Learned

Still, lessons can be learned from concrete examples with the communion and other Christian World Commu-

nions, the group reported. “We want to offer examples of deepened, lived communion where the local and global exist in fruitful relationship.”

The section on forms of fellowship will explore the variety of mechanisms that are available for learning to be a communion together. This will include issues relating to the use and abuse of power in the different contexts, while taking into account gender, economic realities and decision-making, among other dynamics.

Joint accountability was highlighted as an important part of the discern-

ment process for a communion that is on a shared journey in different contexts. The group members said they would “emphasize listening to the quieted voices, those who have stayed in the margins or have been silenced.”

The study document will offer suggestions on how to nourish trust, encourage but also admonish each other, with the aim “to confirm our commitment to each other and to the gift of communion we have already received,” the working group concluded.

LWF Council Shares in Fasting for the Climate

Solidarity With Those Affected By Extreme Weather

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Council members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expressed solidarity with the people most affected by climate change and severe weather events by joining in the Fast for the Climate campaign and calling upon the Lutheran Communion to join the campaign. More than 100 people, LWF Council members, observers and staff, fasted lunch on Friday, 13. June 2014. With this symbolic action, LWF underlines the urgency of a concrete international agreement for climate justice.

The interfaith campaign “Fasting for the Climate” was initiated by the LWF delegation at the UN Climate Conference

(COP19) meeting in Warsaw, Poland in 2013. At that conference, delegate Yep Sano, whose family in the Phillipines had been severely by typhoon Haiyan, started fasting to urge for climate action. The interfaith campaign has been taken up worldwide, with people fasting on the first day of the month. “There are thousands supporting that action worldwide, and our numbers are growing,” LWF vice-president Bishop Dr. h.c. Frank-Otfried July said. “We will fast every month – until the start of the UN climate conference in Lima in December 2014.

“We call to voluntarily fast for the climate for those who are able to. It is

a call to join in solidarity with all those with deep hunger for both: food and change, both rooted in climate justice today” LWF vice-president for Africa, presiding Bishop Alex G. Malasusa said, adding that for many people, fasting is not a choice because they are “imposed to starvation every day”.

“We understand it as a moral responsibility to build awareness for climate justice,” Council member Warime Gutu from Papua New Guinea said. He indirectly referred to the call by UN Executive Secretary Christina Figueres who recently urged religious institutions worldwide to “find their voice and set their moral compass on one of the great humanitarian issues of our time”.

LWF has been advocating for climate justice on a global level since the LWF Assembly 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany. Bishop Tamas Fabiny, LWF vice-president for Central Eastern Europe, called upon governments and leaders to act for climate justice. “Being citizens of this world we need to speak about about their climate change politics”. LWF would not stop advocating for climate justice. LWF president Bishop Munib A. Younan closed the fasting action with a prayer, recalling the spiritual dimension of fasting.



Youth were among those at Council 2014 who showed solidarity with people affected by climate change by joining the #fastfortheclimate. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

LWF chooses logo and theme for Twelfth LWF Assembly in 2017 in Namibia

500 years more of witness and service by the Lutheran Communion

MEDAN, Indonesia/Geneva (LWI) – “Liberated by God’s grace” will be the theme of the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF has opted for a joint theme and logo for its activities marking the 2017 anniversary of the Reformation and the Assembly in 2017 in Namibia. They were both adopted at the LWF Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia and include elements from previous assemblies and the Namibian flag. In addition, three sub-themes were defined: *Salvation – not for sale, Human beings – not for sale* and *Creation – not for sale*.

The Assembly is the highest body of the Communion and generally meets every six years. The Eleventh Assembly took place in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010. The date chosen for the Twelfth Assembly is 10 to 16 May 2017. With these decisions, the Council approved the proposals of the Assembly Planning Committee (APC), whose report was presented by Rev. Dr. Gloria Rojas Vargas from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile.

Besides the constitutional duties of the Assembly, such as electing the LWF president, there will be three main issues in Namibia. The Assembly will



Rev. Dr. Gloria Rojas Vargas presenting the Assembly Planning Committee report. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

itself be part of LWF activities around the Reformation anniversary in 2017 and particularly highlight the ecumenical and global aspects of the Reformation. It is intended to empower the Lutheran Communion in its witness and service of ongoing Reformation for the next 500 years. Further, it is to offer a framework for learning more about questions of healing and reconciliation in southern Africa.

When conferring on the APC report, the Council discussed and reaffirmed

the LWF’s decisions on the equal participation of men, women and youth. It states that all LWF events should implement a quota of at least 40 percent men and 40 percent women. In addition, 20 percent of participants should be young adults under the age of 30. In all, the Assembly will have about 370 delegates from all LWF member churches, along with several hundred advisors, ecumenical guests, visitors and staff.

Across Generations without Fear or Different Status Council Looks at Youth Participation in the LWF Communion

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – When The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017, youth will play a confident role in the “communion of generations,” says LWF Youth Secretary Ms Caroline Richter.

“I imagine they will discuss and engage without fear or different status or expertise, but with confidence, in mutual respect and trustful relationships with each other,” she notes.

During the 11-17 June LWF Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the participants were introduced to Youth Participation as a cross-cutting LWF priority.

The Council session “A Picture on Youth Participation in the LWF communion,” led by the young Council members and advisers, focused around 1 Corinthians 12, highlighting how all Christians are part of the body of Christ and that they are all essential if the body is to function properly.

The youth presented an 84-page publication “*Here I am, for you called me*” – *Youth Participation and Leadership in the LWF Member Churches*.” The document summarizes a survey done among the LWF member churches on sharing and learning among the different generations and the facilitation of meaningful youth participation represented in the Lutheran communion. In addition, the toolkit “*Intergenerational Sharing*” was launched and presented during that session.



Mami Brunah Aro Sandaniaina of the Malagasy Lutheran Church asks the Council how their churches engage young people who have taken part in LWF youth programs. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

Meaningful Participation

Young Council member Ms Danielle Dokman from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname, who is also chairperson of the Subcommittee for Mission and Development, said the LWF has taught her how to serve her neighbor and use her skills to be a leader in the church both regionally and globally.

Interviewed by a young Council member during that session, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge said that he has great memories of his time as a youth steward at the LWF Assembly in 1990.

Junge expressed particular appreciation for young leaders' participation in the LWF processes: Global Young Reformers Network; and the climate justice advocacy work focused on the Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the campaign "Fast for the Climate".

Junge expressed his hope that the LWF will continue to "nurture youth in specific processes, and provide space for them to be in contact with the LWF, learning together and giving back to their churches."

Rev. Dr Rafael Malpica-Padilla from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said he would like the Lutheran churches to abandon the traditional notion of youth being consumers of the experiences that the church provides for them, and instead provide opportunities for youth to participate in program development.

Council member Bishop emeritus Dr Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, who himself previously served as a young Council member, advocated that churches should engage young people when they return from international engagements so as to avoid the "wasting of youth experiences." He said that he would utilize youth within church structures so they can share their experiences, including what they have learned and what has empowered them.

Ms Magnea Sverrisdottir from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, expressed appreciation for the toolkit for intergenerational sharing in the LWF communion that has been produced by the youth secretary as a companion publication to "Here I am."

She said it will help small churches get new ideas on how to integrate different generations in church life.

"The youth are part of the church, and in my church it is important to be reminded that we are a big part of the communion. The concept of being together is relevant and a bigger thing. I express my gratitude for this well rooted document," Sverrisdottir said.

Call for Optimism in Working for Youth Participation

Council members were urged to commit to using the intergenerational toolkit in at least one strategic session in their churches before the next Council meeting in 2015. They were also asked to give youth the space to report on their activities and make an impact on their churches.

The Youth Secretary expressed her optimism that the LWF will maintain youth participation as a cross-cutting priority. She believes that as the LWF approaches the 2017 celebrations, there will be many more young professionals taking part in church activities who will be taken seriously.

"I imagine that one day we will not even notice having a youth quota as it will be so natural for young people to be included in all decision-making processes," Richter added.

"Here I am; for you called me." – Youth Participation and Leadership in the LWF Member Churches: <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-here-i-am-you-called-me>

Intergenerational Sharing in the LWF Communion – Toolkit: <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-intergenerational-sharing-lwf-communion-toolkit>

More LWI News at
www.lutheranworld.org

Ecumenical Guests Praise LWF Determination to Reach Out

Council Hears Ecumenical Partners

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Ecumenical guests to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council meeting at Medan, Indonesia, 12-17 June, thanked LWF for its determination to share the gift of friendship and work alongside sister churches to sustain suffering communities and the earth.

Reflecting on the theme of the Council gathering, “Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water” (Psalm 1: 3), Rev. Gani Wiyono of the Assemblies of God noted that the ecumenical tree between the LWF and Pentecostals is ready to bear fruit.

“Thank you ... for your determination to reach out to sisters and brothers of other Christian churches so that God may be praised and people may be blessed,” Wiyono said.

Monsignor Dr Matthias Tuerk of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity recounted the almost 50 years of “astounding progress” in ecumenical relations, emphasizing that ecumenism is more than an exchange of ideas, it is a sharing of gifts.

“The notion of an exchange of gifts is an exciting one for ecumenists, for it enables previously intractable issues to take on a new and positive aspect,” Tuerk said.

The Vatican official emphasized that ecumenical relations have moved from a place of ignorance and prejudice to a point where there is a sense of a Christian family, and pointed to Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations to illustrate his point.

“On themes such as justification, the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the nature of the Church and the sacraments, the ability to overcome historic and painful disagreements has been remarkable,” Tuerk said.

While there are differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, the



Bishop Ivan Abrahams, WMC general secretary (left), and Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, WCRC general secretary. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

Vatican official added that the goal of his church’s ecumenical activities is full and visible communion with other churches.

However, he cautioned: “Both of us, Catholics and Lutherans alike, are in need of constant renewal. The path to full communion is not a one-way movement. All parts must move. All parts are in need of repentance and renewal.”

For her part, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, the theme (“Like a Tree Planted by Streams of Water”) was an inspiring choice for a meeting held in Asia, where forests are being razed and rivers polluted in the name of profit.

“We are called by God the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer to revive the genuine images of the Tree and Streams of Water that nourish life,” Lebang said.

With Asia’s growing poverty, inadequate healthcare, human trafficking, environmental degradation, climate change and communal violence, the church is called to be like a tree planted by streams of water, she added.

“In the midst of mounting threats to life, peace and justice for all, we need to work closely together, more than ever before,” Lebang urged.

Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), highlighted the fact that millions of people who rely on parched lands for their sustenance are yearning for something different.

“We can dare to be different and be like the tree planted by streams of water – bringing life where death reigns, bringing justice, renewal and hope to replace the injustice, brokenness and despair,” Nyomi said.

The WCRC general secretary said he was thankful for the strong relationship between Lutherans and Reformed Protestants, who pray that the two groups continue to find new ways to strengthen the bond between them.

World Methodist Council General Secretary Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams, said the theme was timely and challenging, and one that Methodists embrace. “Like you, Methodists are passionately committed to eco-justice and the care of creation.”

In marking the 15th anniversary this year of the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodists, Abrahams said that he hopes the declaration will lead to con-

crete witnessing together and visible unity of the Church.

He urged the Council not just to talk about what the LWF has accomplished in the past but to tell the story of what God is doing in their

midst today. "The golden age of the Lutheran Church does not lie behind you, but ahead, as you tackle the challenges of the 21st century," Abrahams concluded.

Standing Ovation for World Service Director Hitzler

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches at the Council meeting in Indonesia have applauded the Department for World Service (DWS) director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler for his committed service, as he prepares to resign from leadership of LWF's humanitarian work in the coming months.

Hitzler who has served as DWS director since July 2006 has decided for personal reasons to resign from his current position this August.

The World Service Committee chairperson Rev. Dr A. G. Augustine Jeyakumar praised Hitzler's devotion to his task. "He would be the first to alert people any time there was a disaster in any part of the world. Such is his capacity," Jeyakumar, adding, it had been an honor to work with the DWS director.

One of Hitzler's programmatic responsibilities is the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH), which is part of the DWS Jerusalem and Middle East regional program. Expressing his deep gratitude for dedicated service in this and other areas, LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan told Hitzler, "You succeeded in making a balance between Jerusalem and the rest of the world—not everyone does that."

Hitzler thanked the LWF member churches, governing body and General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge for their support and prayers in the fulfillment of DWS' mandate. "I feel it is a privilege to serve our communion of churches in this capacity for eight years."

He added, "I feel truly enriched for having been entrusted with this position." He underlined the Council's outstanding commitment to LWF's diakonia and for showing the love of Christ to those in need.

"The real treasure is that of a communion of churches that spends most of its budget for the most needy in the world and not for its own sake," added Hitzler, an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany.

Hitzler will leave his current position on 31 August and will relocate to Germany with his family. He will continue serving the organization in the new position of Special Representative of the LWF General Secretary for the Trusteeship on the Mount of Olives, effective 1 September 2014.

Under Hitzler's leadership, DWS capacity has grown with respect to its operational budget, country presence and coordinated response to emergencies as well as scope of partnerships. From an annual expenditure of USD 70.8 million (EUR 53.6 million) in 2006, the department's expenditure had increased to EUR 92.9 million (USD 126 million in 2013), currently representing 87 percent of LWF's annual expenditure.

DWS' work includes relatively new areas such as Chad, Jordan, Laos and Myanmar. In 2013, DWS supported some 2 million refugees and internally displaced. It is the largest faith-based implementing partner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the fifth-largest global partner of the UN refugee agency. DWS collaborates increasingly with ACT Alliance and coordinates with several other humanitarian organizations at the global, national, and community levels.



LWF President Bishop Dr. Mounib Younan thanks outgoing DWS Director Eberhard Hitzler for his dedicated service. Photo: LWF/S. Lawrence

LWF Council 2014 Adopts Public Statements

Interreligious Dialogue, Peace and Justice

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – The LWF Council meeting in Medan, Indonesia from 11 – 17 June, 2014 adopted six public statements, reflecting issues discussed at Council and concerns of member churches brought to the Council.

Statement on Indonesia

Meeting in Medan, Indonesia, the Council was exposed to the situation of the Lutheran minority churches in a largely Muslim country. The Council statement on Indonesia gives thanks for the vibrant and faithful witness of sisters and brothers in Indonesia. It states that “the LWF Council joins and supports the Indonesian churches in their efforts to uphold freedom of religion, their interreligious solidarity in working against injustice and in responding to human need, and in their continuing engagement in dialogue with different religious groups to promote understanding and just and peaceful communities.”

Statement on Climate Justice

During the Council meeting participants took part in a “fast for the

climate action” to support the global interfaith campaign #fastfortheclimate. The campaign was spearheaded by the LWF delegation to COP 19 in Warsaw in November, 2013.

The statement on climate justice reiterates LWF’s commitment to climate justice as evidenced by previous Assembly and Council statements; and it calls on member churches to take action on organizational, congregational and personal level to become more eco-friendly. The statement also calls LWF member churches to engage in the #fastfortheclimate campaign.

Statement on Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa

LWF member churches in sub-Saharan Africa have, in the past months, offered more statements in which they have spoken out against the recent violence in some countries in the region, including the abduction of school girls and women in Nigeria.

Council members at the 2014 meeting expressed their shared pain with the LWF member churches in the region. In a statement on violence in sub-Saharan Africa, the Council

strongly condemned all violence and called upon all parties and the international community to take immediate action to release those held captive; to desist from using violence and to prevent barbaric actions such as abduction from taking place in the future.

Statement on Ukraine

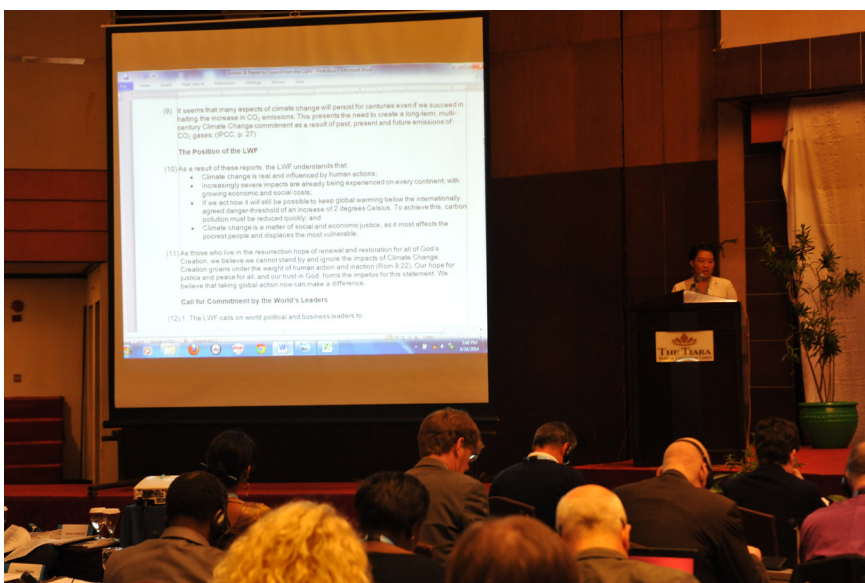
The LWF has a member church in Ukraine, which also has congregations on the Crimean peninsula that is affected by the recent instability in the region. The statement on the Ukraine called for prayers for the people in the Ukraine and in particular for the LWF member church in its ongoing witness and service.

Statement on the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites

The LWF Council 2014 endorsed the *Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites*, which is a document developed in consultation with religious leaders and experts from many of the world’s major faiths. The Council also encouraged member churches to support initiatives in their context and called upon the United Nations to adopt a UN resolution in the spirit of the Code.

Statement on Welcoming the Stranger

Following the Council adoption of the “Welcoming the Stranger,” code of conduct for faith leaders in 2013, the document has been widely distributed globally and regionally. The statement on welcoming the stranger encourages “our congregations and all people of faith to build their relationships with the “strangers” among them, and to be more open, to have more faith, and to trust God’s own support.”



Mikka McCracken presents the report of the Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice at Council 2014. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

LWF Council Issues Public Statement on the Ukraine

Praying Against Hate in a Divided Country

MEDAN, Indonesia/ GENEVA (LWI) – The Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on its 2014 meeting issued a public statement concerning the Ukraine, voicing deep concern over the conflict “which has intensified since December 2013 and has already resulted in 400 deaths”. While centered in the Ukraine, the conflict “has the potential of destabilizing all of Europe”.

The statement was initiated among others by Council adviser Anastasiya Piddubaska from Odessa, who in a short address told the Council about the situation in her country. “People are frightened and do not trust anyone anymore” she said. While her family luckily had not been affected by the fights, she very acutely feels the division in society. “We are divided in pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian, and both sides are very aggressive. We are afraid that we might be persecuted if we openly speak about what is happening.”

As the Council adviser tells in an interview, the atmosphere of hate and distrust is made worse by propaganda on state media as well as in internet forums, and by people agitating for money. Relationships fell apart under the pressure of insecurity and fear. People became displaced by the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. “Hundreds of people have died and thousands have fled from their homes,” she says, telling the story of a Crimean friend who



Anastasiya Piddubaska of Odessa, Ukraine, reports on the situation in her country during Council 2014. LWF/M. Renaux

now lives as a refugee in a Bible school in Odessa together with his family.

Solidarity Among Churches

“In spite of the political situation the relations between Lutheran churches in Ukraine and Russia have not been destroyed,” Piddubaska says. “In the end of June the congregations on the Crimea peninsula will vote and decide which church they want to belong to. And no-one will force them”.

Even though they do not agree in their political opinions, the pastor as well as the members of the congregation found a way to speak up against violence without hurting each other’s feelings.

In her own congregation in Odessa, a prayer for peace is part of every Sunday worship. “The parishioners started taking medical courses”, Ms. Piddubaska said. “They want to learn how to give first aid”. The congregation has also collected money for medicine. “We are a small church,” Piddubaska says, “but we do what we can”.

The LWF Council unanimously adopted the statement asking member churches to pray for “peace, stability and a common understanding”, and for all churches, especially the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Ukraine (GELCU) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia (ELKER), both LWF member churches which have been affected by the conflict.

LWF Council Actions

Changes in Departments, Welcome to New Member Churches

MEDAN, Indonesia/Geneva, 17 June 2014 (LWI) – The Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) concluded its meeting in Medan, Indonesia, with decisions on ecumenical dialogues, finance and

the work of the respective departments. It also received two new churches into LWF membership. The actions were based on discussions from the reports of the Council committees.

Ecumenical Relations

On recommendations of the Committee for Theology and Ecumenical Relations the Council received the report of the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission.

The document, titled “Communion: On Being the Church,” is ecclesiological in approach. It contains case studies on how Lutheran and Reformed churches exercise their mission jointly in different regions, and proposes practical steps for increased cooperation.

The Council took a further step regarding the dialogue with the Pentecostal churches. The dialogue process with the association of the Assemblies of God will have the theme “The spirit of the Lord is upon me.” The Council appointed members of the dialogue commission.



Council members vote on LWF decisions. Photo: LWF/M. Renaux

Changes in the Department for World Service

Changes have occurred in the Department for World Service (DWS), which coordinates LWF’s humanitarian response. The changes relate particularly to the Middle East, where humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees in Jordan, had until now been coordinated through the country program in Jerusalem. Jordan will be enlarged to become a separate country program. In taking this step, the LWF has responded to the long-drawn-out Syrian crisis.

Regarding the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem, the Council expressed appreciation to the Communion Office (CO), the AVH board and LWF Jerusalem staff as well as many member churches for the lobby actions carried out to address the hospital’s cash flow crisis stemming from unpaid receivables. At the same time, the Council stressed that the commitment and strong link between the AVH and the LWF and its member churches was not in question. It requested the general secretary to closely monitor the developments so as to ensure LWF’s ongoing solvency.

The Council also took note of an important staff change in the department. Rev. Eberhard Hitzler from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, announced his resignation as DWS director effective 31 August

and subsequent relocation to Germany for personal reasons. However, he will still be connected to LWF’s work: from 1 September 2014 he will serve as Special Representative of the LWF General Secretary for the Trusteeship on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Three New Directions in the Department for Mission and Development

The Council received the report of the Committee for Mission and Development and adopted changes for the Department for Mission and Development (DMD). In the future, the department will have three instead of six programmatic directions: Communion Building; Church Growth and Sustainability; and Capacity for Diakonia. Furthermore, the member church projects supported by DMD are to be associated more closely with these programmatic directions.

Since the last Council, an LWF task force on resource sharing in the communion’s churches analyzed project support to the member churches. In view of the volatile financing of projects under DMD’s oversight, it underlined the need for communion solidarity mechanisms that could include funding, sharing of human resources and other capacity building aspects. The Council endorsed this recommendation.

Membership Increase to 144

The Council also welcomed two new member churches into the LWF communion: the Communion of Protestant Christian Church (ONKP) from the host country, Indonesia, and the Guatemala Lutheran Church (ILUGUA). This addition brings the total number of LWF member churches to 144, coming from 79 countries. Furthermore, four new Council members were elected to replace church representatives who could not continue their remaining term for various reasons.

Finance

The Finance Committee presented the budget for 2015. The Council approved expenditure of around EUR 106.3 million for the four CO departments. The Council also adopted the budget for the 2017 Assembly in Namibia. It amounts to EUR 2.9 million, which will be raised on the same principle of fair contributions that applies to membership fees.

Furthermore, the Council adopted six public statements proposed by the Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice.

Of Gifts and Burdens

Church Ministry in Indonesia

MEDAN, Indonesia/Geneva, 17 June 2014 (LWI)

– What do Justin Bieber and the cross of Christ have in common? In Mamre orphanage in the town of Pematang Siantar, they are both very important to a group of six school girls who put both up on the wall, side by side. One of the girls is Yuspita, 13 years old and from the island of Nias. As we meet her she has already exchanged her blue school uniform for day clothes but proudly presents her books as she greets us in English. “Justin Bieber is my favorite singer” she explains.

We met Yuspita and her classmates on 11 June 2014 on a pre-council visit to Pematang Siantar, a town about three and a half hours away from Medan. The town, according to local pastors, has a predominantly Christian population. Four LWF member churches have their headquarters there. Visiting various diakonia projects provided an insight in how Indonesian member churches engage in society.

Mamre orphanage, run by the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) currently is home to 58 children aged 3- 19 years. They come from Northern Sumatra and Nias, and many of them lost their families in the 2004

tsunami. In Mamre they find a home while attending public schools up to secondary level. In some cases they also go on to university or theological college. The orphanage, a beautiful little village with houses, a vegetable garden and as we were told, until lately also a chicken pen, provides them with an education many of them would not have received under other circumstances. Among the donors of the orphanage are also former wards who went to university and by now make a good living. From what we saw, the children were happy and while we as visitors took their attention, often their own play seemed much more important.

But the mere existence of the orphanage is also a witness to the changing Indonesian society, as one of the staff told us. Many children come from traditional Batak families. The Batak place high importance on family. We experienced it first hand in most of the visits, when Bishops and church workers introduced themselves not only by name and position, but also told us whether they were married and how many children they had.

So until a few decades ago it went without question that these children would have been taken in by relatives.

However, one of the orphanage teachers told us that this became increasingly impossible in the past years. Poverty and modern society have weakened these family ties. Not all of the children are truly orphans, some also come from single mothers or poor families who can't support them. They are referred to the orphanage by pastors or relatives. As our steward on the trip told us: “Before, many children were considered many gifts. Now, many children are considered many burdens.”

German Heritage, Simalungun Bible

The host of the 2014 council meeting, the LWF National Committee of Indonesia, is representing 13 LWF member churches. Amounting to more than 5.8 million Lutherans, they portray the variety in Indonesian culture, with more than a hundred spoken languages and also a very diverse history in mission and evangelization.

Visiting the Simalungun Protestant Evangelical Church (GKPS) gave some insight into why there are so many different churches in Indonesia. The Simalungun, a group of the Batak people, broke away from the HKBP in 1963 because they wanted to worship in their own language. They take pride in that heritage, having their own Simalungun Bible translation and liturgy. An interesting concept in their ministry is the office of “Bibelfrau” (bible women), a word coming from the German missionaries who brought Christianity to the Simalungun Batak and an office closely related to what we would call a deaconess. They are supposed to support the minister, but also ordained into their service after a theological education similar to a bachelor's degree.

GKPS is also running one of the oldest LWF projects in the country.



Climbing Mango trees for some extra sweets is part of a childhood in the HKBP orphanage in Pematang Siantar. Photo: LWF/ C. Kästner

“Improvement of the economic and social living conditions of poor communities” (PELPEM) is administered by the LWF Department of Mission and Development (DMD) and went into a new project phase 2014-2016. Providing training on organic farming, raising awareness about human rights and advocacy and conserving land endangered by commercial exploitation are the many faces of this project. One very concrete step is ensuring there is enough drinking water for all – before, women had to walk three hours down and up a very steep road to provide for their families. PELPEM benefits 12,000 people directly. The project works with entire villages, regardless of the individual’s religion.

Ways out of Poverty

As Indonesian society is rapidly changing, it is the compassion and the witness of the churches’ engagement which is alleviating the impact of those changes for the most vulnerable. Lutherans have projects for senior citizens and people with special needs. In the Hephata Work Centre we saw youth in workshops of sewing and shoe-making, and sewing machines already in the girl’s rooms in then orphanages. According to the local

teachers, more than 80 percent of the youth manage to find jobs and make their own living.

The importance of these initiatives became clear as we were being navigated through the sometimes breathtaking traffic on Indonesian streets. Between swerving cars and intercepting bicycles we saw groups of school children walking home. This sight was contrasted in shops on the roadside, where children sometimes of similar age sat behind counters, helping their parents. Even though school attendance is mandatory and free of charge up to grade 9, many children start contributing to the family income quite early.

Schools run by religious communities have a reputation to offer high quality education, enabling their students to get better jobs in the future. We met with the staff of the HKBP technical school, whose students are building prototypes of car engines. The school is renowned not only in Sumatra, but having Javanese students as well.

Prayer on Air

Education is one key to being able to stand up for your rights. The other is having a voice. Quite literally, this is

what Radio Suara Diakonia, the “Diakonia Voice of HKBP” is doing. Turn on the frequency 103.4 FM and you will hear stories from diaconal workers, from those who are often silent in society, and you will hear politicians being questioned about their program. Radio host Hendrik Simanjuntak and his 5 colleagues have been on air for almost a year. “The people who listen to us are often poor and in desperation” he says. “How do we spread to good news to our listeners so they know that God is on their side? Living in country where the majority are Muslims, and people are poor, it’s sometimes hard to keep the faith. The radio strengthens them to still openly say: I’m a believer”.

The station is financed by advertising, the Indonesian churches and just received a grant from ELCA for a generator. It reaches people in Pemanang Siatar and the surrounding area. It receives 40-50 calls each day, with listeners asking for songs and prayers. The prayer requests are for wedding anniversaries and birthdays, for sick people or people in need. The prayer is then being said on-air – a very humble and yet very powerful way of telling people they are not alone.

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