



Youth who made the Lutheran communion

Testimonies and stories
from 1947 to 2017



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

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*Let no one despise you for your youth,
but set the believers an example in speech,
in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

1 Timothy 4:12, NRSV

Be it resolved, that we call upon our Lutheran Churches everywhere to give continued and increasing attention to their youth programmes, that we call upon our Youth Organizations as serving arms of the Church in soul – winning and soul-keeping to hold high the torch of faith, and that we encourage our youth to reach out the hand of Christian fellowship especially to our Lutheran youth throughout the world, that unitedly they may express effectively their common faith and devote themselves to common tasks.

Proceedings of The Lutheran World Federation Assembly: Lund, Sweden 1947.

*Young people have a place and a voice in all aspects of church and communion life,
including decision making and leadership.*

LWF Strategy 2012-2017

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Foreword



The Lutheran communion of churches is not merely a collection of old stones from church buildings, but is a living organism. The picture beautifully illustrates how young Lutherans form the Luther rose, a symbol of being together with so many different stories to tell. The church is people.

After seventy years of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we see that the communion of churches is full of stories and testimonies of those who were affected by the LWF at an early age and who in turn had an impact on the communion and on their churches as young persons.

Through their testimonies and stories, gathered here, we can witness how young people have been an integral part of the life and work of the communion since the very beginning.

They have engaged with the LWF as delegates to Assemblies and as young members of Council, worked in the Communion Office in Geneva and New York or in the country programs as interns, were scholarship holders, and worked as youth secretaries or young communicators.

They spoke up on the challenges of their generation and of all generations, such as oppressive political systems, gender injustice, civil war, humanitarian crises, apartheid, HIV and AIDS, and climate change.

Through the global platforms of the Lutheran communion, they were able to understand those issues through the lens of Lutheran theology and to engage with others, becoming brothers and sisters in faith and sometimes friends for a lifetime.

LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan opens this collection with his story of his time as a young LWF Assembly delegate in 1984, and Eun-hae Kwon, the first young LWF vice-president, closes with her experience of serving the Asia region for the last seven years.

“A people without memory is a people without a future (Un pueblo sin memoria es un pueblo sin futuro)” as the LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge reminds us often.

Thanks to the LWF Archivist Ms Béatrice Bengtsson we were able to retrieve many important stories and get into contact with the authors, their relatives or colleagues. These stories are exemplary for the LWF regions and Assembly decades- but many voices are yet to be heard. Maybe your story becomes part of the second edition?

We hope you are inspired by the discoveries made through these stories and further encouraged to always invite and encourage young people be fully part of the worldwide Lutheran communion.

Caroline Bader
LWF Youth Secretary



The young Luther

1517



A bronze sculpture of Luther as a young leader is on display at the LWF headquarters in Geneva. It was carved by German artist Knud Knudsen (1916-1998), a Berlin sculptor and painter. Until 1939 he created expressionistic portraits and sculptures. Next to the sculpture, a visitor to the LWF Communion Office can find his comments on the work: *From time to time all religions, especially in their churches, need people who can renew them. I have always regarded the Augustinian monk monk Dr Martin Luther as a symbol of reform, not of protest. Instead of the usual symbolic sculpture of a corpulent, smug Christian supporting the alliance between the Church and the territorial princes, 'a throne and altar Christian' with upturned eyes, I wanted to portray a Roman Catholic monk: slim, energetic, striding ahead, going in among the masses to look for the*

language used by ordinary folk. That kind of élan, I reflected, could sweep even doubters along with it and give clear meaning to a church's missions.

Young Luther was freed by God's love to change the world and inspired many, many generations up to the 21st century and beyond!

On the occasion of the Luther 500 Years, in 1983, Bishop Josiah Kibira, then LWF president, reported to the LWF Executive Committee: It was impossible here to summarize and evaluate all that has been achieved on so many different levels as we have celebrated and penetrated deeper into the significance of this great man Martin Luther. For sure he has also been criticized, but he has not left anybody indifferent. He was a spiritual genius who indeed changed both world history and our own personal lives. Martin Luther is "500 years young" and it is our task to carry the message of Jesus' free mercy as Martin Luther has clarified it to this generation.

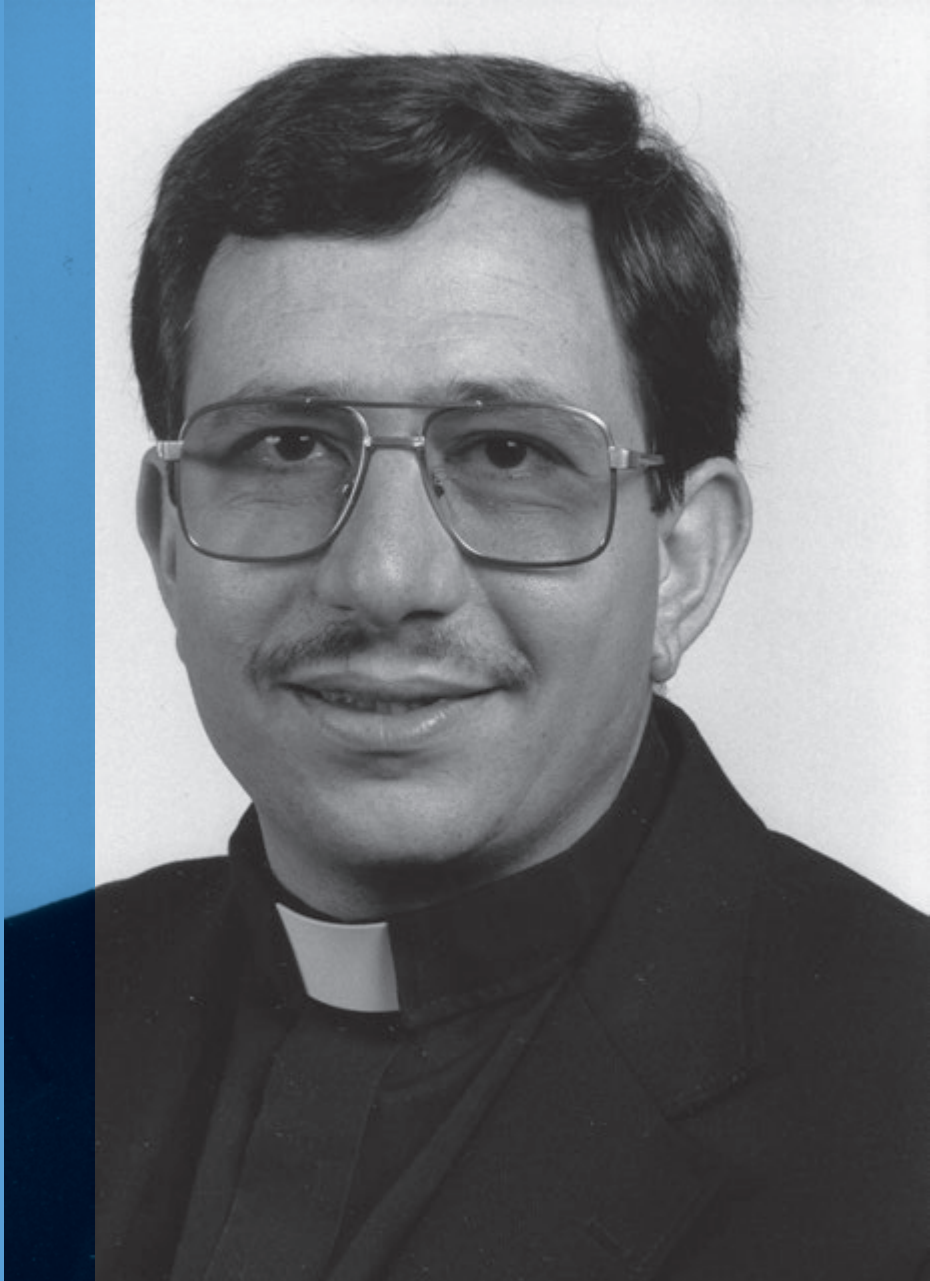
President Kibira added that he had meditated on the stormy life of this rebel Martin Luther, who asked basic questions about God with great intensity: *I have asked myself if we present-day Lutherans have not tamed him too much and cut off his wings. How is it possible that this challenger, prophet and revolutionary who dared to stand up so boldly against both the secular and religious authorities of his time and cried from the bottom of his heart till he was absolutely sure of his salvation, how is it possible that many churches which are proudly carrying his name have become only mirrors of society', looked upon as lukewarm, middle of the way Christians, even conservative, afraid of taking a courageous and challenging stand in both spiritual and political questions? Is this an exaggeration? I certainly feel that the stirring life story of Martin Luther could inspire a new generation of Lutherans to wake up to a much deeper involvement both in the existential question of what personal salvation really means and in the socio-political questions of peace and justice which are the burning issues of this generation.*



1

Munib Younan

1976



“With Christ as our liberator, we always have hope. In him we can trust. Through him we are called to reform our broken world.”

Name	Munib Younan
Year of birth	1950
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
Position in the church	Bishop
First engagement with LWF	1976 with the LWF Asia desk at the age of 26 years
Functions in the LWF	1984 Steward to the LWF Seventh Assembly 1990 Advisor to the LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil 1997 delegate to the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong 1997-2003 LWF council member 2003 delegate to the LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada 2003-2010 LWF Vice-president for Asia 2010-2017 LWF Council member and President of LWF

I myself am a young reformer and continue to support young reformers. You may be surprised that I call myself a “young reformer” at my age, but of course as long as you are moulded in grace and in justification by faith you are always young in the Spirit!

I felt the call to become a pastor and preacher of the gospel already when I was a young boy, age 11. I was very young, but of course I believe that when God calls, God also equips and qualifies. When I was 18 years-old, I applied to study theology in Germany, hoping to receive a scholarship from the LWF. Unfortunately, the process did not go quickly, so for one year I studied Hebrew in the morning, and worked as doorkeeper and receptionist at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem in the afternoon, while I waited to prepare myself for ministry.

An interesting thing happened while I was waiting: on 20 April 1969 (I remember the date very well), two Finnish pastors came to Propst Koehler of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer and asked if he knew of a young Palestinian who would like to study diakonia in Finland. Propst Koehler, who was the spiritual leader of our church at that time, called my mother Alice, who presented the idea to me. I immediately said, “No!” I wanted to study in Germany, and I wanted to study theology, not diakonia. But my mother prevailed. She told me, “Munib, you’re going to Finland. The Finns are good people, and if you succeed in your studies in diakonia, perhaps you can then continue in theology. Let’s not block this opportunity.” So, I prayed about it. I listened to my mother, and to the convincing voice of my father, Andrea – and accepted the offer. I was given only six weeks to prepare travel documents and obtain a visa, which was not easy. By 6 June 1969, I was in Finland! I studied the Finnish language for three months, and then I joined the Seurakunta Opisto in Jäärvenpää to study diakonia—in Finnish! After two years, I applied to continue studies in theology at Helsinki University, and was accepted. My dream of becoming a pastor and preacher was coming true. On 30 May 2016 I celebrated 40 years of ordination, thanks be to God.

My interest in the LWF began in the year of my ordination in 1976. Several LWF leaders encouraged me in my early pastoral work, including Rev. Dr Kalle Hellberg, LWF director of church cooperation, and Dr Kunchala Rajaratnam, LWF Asia desk secretary. They especially encouraged me in my work with the youth of the church. One highlight of this was in 1981 when I was invited to be on the youth committee for planning the 1984 Youth Assembly in Budapest.

Young people from all over the world—the United States, Hungary, Hong Kong, Japan, Scandinavia and Africa—formed the preparatory committee to plan the event. We met several times, in different locations. Of course, we had no experience at all in planning such a huge event, and there were challenges. What we noticed was that when we spoke on theology, we all agreed. But when we wanted to contextualize the pre-Assembly activities, we could not agree on anything! Our cultural and contextual perspectives were very different. Our readings of the Bible were different. We had to work through these differences, knowing that we possessed one faith, one Christ, one Eucharist, and one justification by faith.

Prior to the Pre-Assembly of the youth, I was assigned to visit the German Democratic Republic to meet with local people and understand their struggle for freedom. I was received by Rev. Harald Bretschneider, the youth pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony. He was a very strong and powerful voice, and the leader of the semi-legal peace movement in the church. He picked me up at “Checkpoint Charlie” in East Berlin and together we drove to Dresden in his Trabant car. With my bad German and Pastor Bretschneider’s bad English,

we managed to understand each other on the drive! When we arrived in Dresden, we both had the very special smell of the East German gas emissions on our clothes. I stayed at his home, and he did not spare a moment to show me every kind of oppression that the people, including the youth, were experiencing in his country. In the evening Rev. Bretschneider invited me to a restaurant in the center of the town. We had to queue for over an hour to get a table in the restaurant. While we were waiting, some youth were shouting in the streets. The police were staring down every young person, including me. Rev. Bretschneider was teaching me how to behave in the presence of such intimidation, for he was well known by the Stasi, East Germany's secret police force.

I could feel the deep fervour in his heart for freedom and justice for his people. He really loved his people, especially the youth. He was truly a young reformer in his community. This experience in Dresden really prepared me for the youth Pre-Assembly gathering in Budapest. I was asking myself, "Which is easier: living under the occupation of my country, or living under the iron fist of communism?" We had a very remarkable Seventh LWF Assembly, under the powerful theme: "Christ - Hope for the World". Many people who are leaders in the LWF today were present there in Budapest, including Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, later a general secretary of the LWF. We were really hearing the voice of liberation as we met behind the iron curtain. Pastor Bretschneider of Dresden spoke of the end of injustice and communism. Rev. Allan Boesak of South Africa spoke of freedom and hope, which at that time seemed very far off indeed for his country. One South African youth presented a drama about his treatment under the apartheid regime, which left none of us without tears. At the same time, a Swedish rock band called Fjedur was leading us in singing an African song which proclaimed: "Freedom is coming—oh yes I know!"

I remember feeling very caught up in the moment, and filled with hope that changes were really coming soon. However, I was also aware that just outside the Assembly hall, the people of Hungary were still living under communism. I knew that Allan Boesak and the other South Africans were returning to an apartheid state. I also would return to a country struggling for freedom. However, the yearning for liberation and justice was given a stubborn push in Budapest. We knew we were called not to give up. With Christ as our liberator, we always have hope. In him we can trust. Through him we are called to reform our broken world.

I still clearly remember the last evening of the Assembly, which was celebrated with much food and many drinks, as is the custom in LWF circles. As we gathered in a small room to bid farewell to each other, there was a young woman from Romania there who was bitterly weeping. As a pastor, I came to her and asked, "Why are you crying, woman?" She told me:

“I have experienced liberation and freedom in this Assembly. And tomorrow it ends when I go home. Again I will be locked in a prison. I don’t know if I will see any of you anymore, or if I will ever travel out of Romania again.” Of course, this touched me, and I remember it to this day. I saw with my own eyes the serious effect of oppression on a human being. What words could comfort and console her in such a moment? I did not know.

We were really filled with idealism there in Budapest—an idealism which grew from the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the end of the Assembly, we prepared a drama which issued a challenge to church leaders and to each other. We asked, “After we leave Budapest, what will YOU do for justice?” As young reformers we felt inspired, and believed that the time for justice had come to the church and to the world. In hindsight, the idealistic demands we proposed to the heads of churches was just that – idealistic! In fact, many of those demands would be a challenge for me as LWF president today!

Of course, justice and peace have not yet come to many parts of the world, including my country. For many, the dreams of Budapest are still dreams. But just five years after that Assembly, Hungary was liberated from communism. Miraculously, other nations followed the same path. South Africans no longer live under apartheid, and the wall that divided Berlin is now just a memory. Although freedom has not yet come to all people, our faith teaches us that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2: 14) As we sang together with the Swedish band in Budapest: “Freedom is coming—oh yes, I know!”

It is very remarkable for me to see how many participants of that Budapest Assembly have become leaders in the church and in the world today. I never dreamt that 26 years after Budapest I would be elected as president of the LWF, and that the leaders who voted for me would be the same young reformers from that Assembly! I give thanks to God for that special opportunity to gather with youth from around the world, an experience which truly changed the course of my ministry and my life.

This is the reason why today, as LWF president, I encourage churches and the LWF to invest in and trust the young leaders in their midst. I urge church leaders and elders to understand that they possess their own wisdom and visions, which we need to hear. These are the ones who will lead our churches, who will lead the LWF, and who will lead countries in the future. These are the Young Reformers who will lead our world from injustice to justice, from extremism to moderation, from conflict to communion, and who will proclaim the gospel of love to the generations to come.

Even though I have been a pastor for 40 years, I will always call myself a Young Reformer! Together with reformers of every age and from every country, I stand firm in faith, and ever grateful for the freedom of this church which continues to be *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*.



Hemalatha John 1947



“Mission never ends. It is nurtured and grows.”

Name	Hemalatha John
Year of birth	1919 / died: 2010
Church	The Federation of the Lutheran Churches in India
First engagement with LWF	Visitor to the LWF First Assembly in Lund 1947 at the age of 28 years

Ms Hemelatha John was sent as a visitor to the First LWF Assembly in Lund from 30 June to 6 July 1947.

After completing her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Biology and Zoology respectively in Madras, she returned to her birthplace and became a lecturer at Andhra Christian College, where her father V. Ch. John had previously served as the first native principal. The Lutheran church offered her a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D. She declined, however, because there were very few Christian men at that time with a Ph.D. In June 1947, she left Bombay by boat together with other Indian delegates and arrived in Sweden in July 1947. The Lund young people’s meeting took place on Sunday 6 July 1947, led by Pastor Ingemar Lindstam of Sweden. Ms John then continued her travels by boat from Sweden to Norway to attend the World Student Christian Federation meetings and then to the USA to address Saint Paul Lutheran seminary.

Her daughter remembers: Hema opted for museum training in Buffalo, New York, (1947-48) after being sent as a Lutheran delegate from India to Europe and the United States. This included the World Student Christian Federation conference in Oslo, Norway, in 1947. I remember seeing a photograph of her that was published in the Oslo newspaper at the time, when the delegates were entering the stadium at which King Haakon was present. She told us that she and others were presented with roses.

How was it to travel months to international Christian gatherings?
How did it feel to be a female youth visitor from India to the LWF First Assembly in Lund?

Did the presence of a young Indian woman in 1947 pave the way for the election of an Indian woman as LWF Vice-President, a couple of decades later?

We do not have much information about John in the records of the LWF Assembly but one picture bears witness to her very attentive presence in the first row of Section Two of the Lund Assembly, which had the theme: "Performing Her Mission in a Devastated World." In 1957, at the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis, John was followed by another Indian woman, this time not as a visitor but as a delegate: Ms Teli Rajeswari was appointed by the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church. At that time there were seven member churches in India and (appointed as delegates.

John later on founded the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Machilipatnam, India, and in Koforidua, Ghana, leading charity and diaconal activities. With her husband and four children she lived and worked as a lecturer in the USA, Ghana and Nigeria.

Her daughter Jemima Seetha Rajaratnam writes in 2017: *We have a rich heritage, in the Lutheran World Federation and in the ecumenical movement. Many of the grandchildren of V. Ch. John are involved in mission of one sort or another, in various parts of the world. Mission never ends. It is nurtured and grows. We are fortunate to have had the guidance of those who have gone before us, and we are inspired to continue in their footsteps, so the present and future generations will have the opportunity to come to the knowledge and love of Christ.*

Birgitta Voltenauer

3

1952



“For a life spent at the service of the Lutheran communion, I am grateful to God.”

Name	Birgitta Voltenauer
Year of birth	1945
Church	Church of Sweden
Position in the church	Lay person
Functions in the LWF	1980-2004 Assistant to the LWF Youth Desk

I was only seven years-old when my life of service to the LWF began. At that time my father – the late bishop Åke Kastlund from the Church of Sweden - was sent by the LWF to Latin America to establish congregations in all the countries there except Brazil. The whole family, my parents, sister and brother, started the journey in the harbour of Göteborg, where we boarded a freighter bound for Buenaventura on the Colombian coast of the Pacific Ocean. It was in 1952 and that meant three months of travel on board a cargo ship with stops in many harbours to deliver goods. We boarded in Sweden and arrived in Colombia after many hardships for a Swedish family from Dalarna, composed of three children aged five, six and seven and their parents.

Upon our arrival in Buenaventura, Colombia, we travelled by bus to the capital, Bogota, where we lived for about three years. The Latin American work of the LWF originated with the LWF's Second Assembly in 1952 in Hannover and can be better understood against the background of World War II and its immediate aftermath. Because of the kaleidoscope of European immigrants and refugees who reached the coasts of Latin America, one of the first duties for the LWF and its member churches in America, Germany and Scandinavia was to provide pastors and parish centers. With the arrival of my father, a special effort was made to reach Scandinavians in Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, although it was impossible to promise that services would be held frequently until more pastors could be found for this type of work.

My father was very often absent from the family home in Colombia and my mother was left with three small children in a foreign Spanish-speaking country and with the havoc of

that time. Many of the parish activities took place in our family house prior to the building of a church hall, so I spent a lot of time with both the Swedish and the German-speaking parish members.

From Colombia, we moved to Mexico.

Preliminary visits had been made to Central America and plans had been laid to provide an itinerant ministry there as well as to the Scandinavians in Mexico. However, the sudden death of the German pastor in Mexico caused Pastor Kastlund who had just been transferred there to concentrate on the German and Scandinavian communities in Mexico City. Visits to Central America were interrupted and nothing more could be done.

LWF Assembly Report 1952-1957

In January 1957, Pastor Hilding Olsson of Sweden replaced my father in Mexico. After our return to Sweden my father rented a small office in Stockholm where he started "Lutherhjälpen," a Swedish development agency. At the beginning there was no money to engage any staff so my mother worked with him and from the time when I was 12 or 13 years-old I also helped out in the office during school holidays.

My first job after commercial school was a six-month temporary post with Lutherhjälpen while waiting for my Swiss work permit. On 31 December 1965, I travelled by train from Sweden to Geneva, where I started working in the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) in January 1966.

I worked in the Department for Mission and Development's (DMD) Youth Desk until my retirement. I had worked alongside five LWF Youth secretaries:

- Alf Idland, Norway – 1980-1984;
- Julios Filo, Slovakia – 1985-1990;
- Siv Limstrand, Norway – 1991-1994;
- Ondrej Prostrednik, Slovakia – 1995-1999;
- Tita Valeriano, Philippines – 2000-2004.

For a life spent at the service of the Lutheran communion, I am grateful to God.

Gudina Tumsa 1955

4



“This is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock alone at this moment of trial?”

Name	Rev. Gudina Tumsa
Year of birth	1929 - died: 1979
Church	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)
Position in the church	1966-1979 General Secretary of EECMY
First engagement with LWF	1955, youth delegate at the All-African Lutheran Youth Conference, Marangu, Tanganika, at the age of 26 years
Functions in the LWF	1970 Delegate to the LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian

Gudina Tumsa was very passionate and ready to stand up for the truth. He went through hardship to live and work for his church, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), which he served as general secretary during the “Ethiopian red terror” in the 1970s. He was arrested for the first time on 11 October 1978 while working in the central office of the church. He was taken to the police station and then to prison in Addis Ababa. After being held for more than three weeks, he was released on 7 November 1978. No official reason for his arrest was given, but the government suspected him of creating political opposition.

On 1 June 1979, Tumsa was arrested a second time and held until 23 June by the People’s Militia in Addis Ababa. Harsh interrogation followed with his captors attempting to label Tumsa as a counter-revolutionary and as a political agent. His daughter Leensaa was arrested as well and kept in a neighboring house. According to her, “They threatened to torture both of us, as well as my mother. They were shocked when my father answered them that such a torture could make no difference. He could only tell the truth.”

While under arrest, Tumsa was interrogated and tortured. The militia said they would bring his wife and daughter and kill them in front of him. “We have all your manuscripts,” they said. But he answered: “I have nothing to hide.”

The circumstances leading to his release were dramatic and his reaction revealed the great witness of this man of God. A good friend of his, Christian Krause, the Oberkirchenrat or member of the High Consistory, who later became the LWF president, played a crucial role in his release. When he learned about the arrest, he immediately understood the danger it posed to Tumsa's life. While talking to Bishop Josiah Kibira, the then LWF president from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, at the Kirchentag in Nuremberg in 1979, they together decided to go to Dar es Salaam to advocate on Tumsa's behalf with the President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere.

Krause would later report about this meeting: *Nyerere turned to me and asked, "What do you want?" I told him the whole story. I asked if there was any chance of having Rev. Gudina Tumsa released. Nyerere answered: "In two days I will go on a state visit to Sudan. Instead of refuelling in Nairobi, I will have the plane refuelled in Addis Ababa. If I pass through the capital city, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will greet me. Then I will whisper to him..." Bishop Kibira asked President Nyerere, "If he is free again, would you allow him to be taken to Tanzania?" Nyerere answered, "Yes, we are ready." And then he arranged the details, just as he had said.*

Krause then recalled: *In a matter of hours, Rev. Gudina was released. He told us in Addis Ababa the horrible story of how the militia had pressured him, led him to the wall to have him shot, and led him back. He was not afraid to be killed, but the torture was cruel. Then I said, "Gudina, your life is at stake. Our time is short..." and told him about the plan to send him to Tanzania. His reaction was more than unusual and had never happened before in our friendship... he yelled at me: "This is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock alone at this moment of trial? I have again and again pleaded with my pastors to remain with their church". He then quoted 2 Corinthians 5: 15, which had become his motto in prison: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." Then he turned to me and said: "I will never ever escape. If anything happens to me (pointing to his wife) this is your wife and those are your children." His wife's face showed no emotion.*

When Tumsa finally said farewell to his friend Krause, it was clear to both of them that they would never meet again.

"If they arrest me again, I know this is the end," he had said shortly before they arrested him for the third time. On the evening of 28 July 1979, Tumsa preached during a church meeting on Luke 14: 25. Armed plainclothes officers stopped him and his wife on their

way home and separated them by pushing them into two cars. The kidnappers did not identify themselves, nor did they explain the reasons for the abduction. Tumsa's wife was taken to the outskirts of Addis Ababa, where she was subsequently released. He disappeared and his body was never found. The government did not admit to killing him.

In the weeks before his death, Tumsa worked intensely on his last publication, "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society." The persecutions of many Ethiopian Christians continued after his death.

Maria von Reichwitz

5

1957 



“Maria fled as a refugee from Saxony, Germany, halfway across the world to Santiago.”

Name	Maria von Reichwitz
Year of birth	1934
Church	Lutheran Church in Chile
First engagement with LWF	Delegate to LWF Third Assembly in Minneapolis, 1957 at the age of 23 years

The youngest delegate at the LWF Third Assembly in Minneapolis was Maria von Reichwitz.

The LWF news report from 1957 states: *Maria von Reichwitz comes as a 23 year-old delegate from Chile. When she was 12 years-old, Maria fled as a refugee from Saxony, Germany, halfway across the world to Santiago, where she has learned Spanish and English and now works as a secretary. She is an interested member of the youth work of her church. She is also very much interested in the missionary work in East Asia because her aunt, Ursula von Reichwitz, is a missionary, formerly in China, now in Japan.*



6

Stephen Larson

1970



“We made embarrassing mistakes. We made hopeful contributions.”

Name	Stephen Larson
Year of birth	1949
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Position in the church	Pastor
First engagement with LWF	Steward at the LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian, 1970 at the age of 21 years
Functions in the LWF	Chair of the International Worship Planning Committee to the LWF Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, 2017

Lutheran campus ministry in North America brought many people together over the years and kept many students in the church – including me.

The year 1968 was a turbulent one in the USA: Rev. Dr Martin Luther King and Robert. Kennedy were assassinated; the Vietnam War raged; student protested at home and abroad. The Lutheran Student Movement-USA met in Chicago that summer amidst hippies, tear gas and police riots. There the students learned of a global gathering of Lutherans to be held in Brazil and the invitation to study the crisis of world hunger and student protests in their local contexts.

Students at Pacific Lutheran University in Washington State, where I was a student, accepted the invitation and formed a study group. That led to an invitation a year later for me to serve as a Lutheran Church in America student advisor to the LWF Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1970 and participate in the Pre-Assembly World Encounter of Lutheran Youth in Latin America (WELY). The task of the WELY was to meet as an international student group and explore the issues of world hunger and student protest in our own contexts as well as in Latin America and to report to the Assembly in Brazil. Although the Assembly was later changed on very short notice from Brazil to Evian, France, the WELY went ahead in Latin America. It was a life-changing summer for me.

In that summer of 1970, the WELY met in Mexico City for a few days of orientation and encounter with the church in Central and South America. It was there that I first met Rebecca, who seemed to know much more about the context than me (The Canadian students had been sent for the previous two summers to Cuernavaca to study Spanish in preparation for the WELY). I was assigned to a small group to travel to Colombia and Bolivia for an encounter with the church and students there. Rebecca was assigned to a small group to journey to Guatemala and Venezuela (where in Caracas she was hosted by Pastor George and Emese Posfay, who 18 years later became mentors and dear friends of ours in Geneva, where George was serving with the LWF Latin America desk).

My experience with the church and people in Colombia and Bolivia opened my eyes, ears, heart and life to the pastoral and prophetic dimensions of mission and ministry lived out in a context of sorrow and hope, death and resurrection. From that exposure to a faith context and levels of poverty utterly foreign to me, my small group and I were transported from Latin America to the shores of Lac Lemman in France. There, in Thonon, the WELY students shared and debriefed around their experiences and were introduced to the topics and agenda of the Assembly, which was soon to meet down the lakeshore in Evian. During those days, Rebecca and I got better acquainted, shared some walks and talks together and with another. Two students from North America rented a car for a quick weekend trip into the Swiss Alps. But on another weekend, Rebecca and I – good Lutheran PKs (“preacher’s kids”) took a bus into Geneva to attend Sunday worship at the Lutheran Church of Geneva, sat in the balcony and even signed the guest book (18 years later, as pastor of that congregation, I found the guest book we had signed).

What does one say about the WELY in the Assembly? My immediate analysis I wrote in an article for Lutheran Forum that autumn. Looking back over four decades, I see us as young, idealistic, passionate, frustrated, naïve, trying to find our voice in the Assembly and then wondering what to say. We made embarrassing mistakes. We made hopeful contributions. For all of us in the WELY, it was life-changing in many ways. The experience was a major influence on my decision to go to seminary. Some of the North American WELY students met again in New York City later that summer to report to a national Lutheran youth gathering at Madison Square Garden. Rebecca and I were two of the participants who met there to plan and make the presentation as well as to share meals and times together.

For one of our North American colleagues, WELY became life-ending. We’ll never know why. Was it the immersion into Latin American poverty, juxtaposed with Lake Geneva splendour, then a side trip on his own to Northern Ireland to enter that intra-Christian conflict of the 1970s and then back home on his own to university classes? For whatever reason, his suicide in the

fall of 1970 prompted Lutheran Campus Ministry in Canada and the USA to gather its WELY students for a winter meeting in Minnesota to talk about our experiences. Out of town students were housed with host families. I invited Rebecca to stay with my family.

In that 1970-1971 post-WELY academic year, Rebecca and I stayed in contact through letters, phone calls and visits. In the 1971-1972 school year we both entered seminary: Rebecca at Waterloo, Ontario, and me in Chicago. That's only a short 760 kilometers apart. We made trips back and forth. We wrote letters. We built up large phone bills – all in the last century before email and Skype. In the 1972-1973 school year we were engaged and married in June 1973 in Canada.

Only during the WELY did we learn that both our fathers were Lutheran campus pastors who had met years earlier at a campus ministry conference in Canada. Rebecca's ancestors were Lutheran German immigrants to the USA, while mine were Swedish Lutheran immigrants to the USA. Our mothers were both born in South Dakota. Our fathers were both born in Iowa. Rebecca's parents met in Iowa and emigrated to Canada, where she was born in Saskatchewan while her father was serving a congregation with a mission outreach to a university campus. My parents met in Minnesota and moved to Texas, where I was born while my father was serving a congregation with a mission outreach to a university campus. Forty years after WELY we are both pastors who have continued to explore the issues first raised at the WELY and the Evian Assembly as we served in Canada, USA and Switzerland.

From 1977-1988, I was a Lutheran campus pastor at the University of Alberta and Rebecca served Hosanna Lutheran Church. During that time, she earned a PhD in development education and I a Doctorate of Ministry - a post-seminary graduate degree - in worship and social justice. From 1988 to 2003 I served as pastor of the Lutheran Church of Geneva, while in those same years Rebecca worked with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in development education and then in the LWF's World Service. From 2002 to 2011, she was director of Church in Society at the ELCA in Chicago while I served a suburban congregation. From 2011 to 2014, Rebecca was deputy general secretary of the ACT Alliance in Geneva, and during those years I was a short-term consultant with the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW), and interim pastor at the Lutheran Church of Geneva. Now in 2016, I'm serving as interim pastor at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Hamburg, Ontario, and chairing the LWF's International Worship Planning Committee for the Twelfth Assembly 2017 in Namibia.

We have two daughters, Katherine and Sarah, and three grandchildren, two with Sarah in Africa and one with Katherine in Canada. Guess what? After university, Sarah worked with LWF World Service in Uganda for a few years. From generation to generation, eh?

Christian Kempf

1970



7



“So what about the young people?”

Name	Christian Kempf
Year of birth	1947
Church	Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine
Position in the church	Pastor and Journalist
First engagement with LWF	Delegate to the LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian, 1970, at the age of 23 years
Functions in the LWF	1970-1977 Member of the Executive Committee

The LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian, which took place in May 1970, elected the first youth delegate to its Executive Committee (now called the LWF Council). At that time, Christian Kempf was only 23 years old.

Upon his election, he addressed the delegates of the Assembly, saying that “he did not yet know what the election meant to him personally but he felt that it did imply a lot for youth and the churches.” He expressed his need to keep in contact with those participants of the Assembly from all over the world who had placed their hopes in his election.

In another LWF publication some years later, the very same pastor Christian Kempf wondered: *So what about the young people? Are we still amazed that they are abandoning our parishes? In 1970, one of the hopes of the LWF Assembly lay in my own election as a young man to the Executive Committee. But this hope, like the others, has proven to be somewhat deceptive... I had very little chance to get through those ‘unacceptable measures’ put forward by the young delegates at Evian, for example, that the LWF would act courageously and radically to promote justice in the world, that it would take up an avant-garde position on theological questions, etc...*

Zephania Kameeta[∞] 1971



“Human rights are almost a luxury to us. We are struggling for human lives.”

Name	Zephania Kameeta
Year of birth	1945
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN)
Position in the church	Bishop Emeritus
First engagement with LWF	1984 Advisor at the LWF Seventh Assembly in Budapest at the age of 39 years
Functions in the LWF	2003-2010 LWF Council member and Vice-President for the Africa region 2010-2015 LWF Council member

In South Africa and Namibia, the black population suffered from a system of racial separation and discrimination, known as apartheid. When young theology students in Namibia rediscovered the scriptures, they started challenging the religious arguments for apartheid.

On 21 June 1971, the young theology student Zephania Kameeta, a fourth-year seminarian, sat quietly in his chair, glancing at the clock. It was nearly 11 a.m. He raised his hand and asked the lecturer if the class could be excused to listen to the radio. Permission granted, the class hurried towards the radio. A judge from Pakistan overturned a 1950 International Court of Justice ruling that South Africa’s mandate in Namibia (once South-West Africa) was legal. Now, the court ruled, South Africa was illegally occupying the territory. Excited, the seminarians returned to their class after the broadcast.

Kameeta remembered: *“This broadcast raised our hopes so much. Afterwards, our Finnish professor for New Testament was lecturing on Romans 13: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but God: the powers that be are ordained of God...” Probably it was not by chance, but the Lord himself had asked the professor on this day to discuss that particular passage. All authority has been given by God. And you know, in*

South Africa and Namibia this text is the basis of racial separateness. And this text is the one that is being used in South Africa to justify apartheid. Those who were fighting against it must be communists or Marxists. That was the conviction.

For the first time, we looked at the text in the context of the Southern African situation. Given what we heard a few minutes before we asked our professor about his thoughts on the role of the church in this situation. This text suggested that authorities are entitled to punish those who are doing wrong and reward those who are doing good. But our experience in Namibia up to that day was that the authority punished those who were doing good and praised those who were doing wrong.

And we asked: what's the responsibility of the church in this situation? Has the church anything to say? Should the church only be concerned about what is to come? Or should the church be the "first taste of the kingdom of God"? Should the church keep quiet while witnessing the suffering of the people and the injustices?

The professor heard us asking hundreds of questions, paused, and then said, "I believe the church has something to say, but at this moment, I don't know precisely what."

The excited students said they'd give the lecturer a chance to think about it. But if the church didn't have anything to say, then, they agreed among themselves to boycott classes. Kameeta later said that it was at that moment when the theology students saw clearly that there was no point in being trained "to serve an organization that will be silent in the face of the suffering of their people."

The students stayed out of class for a whole day. It was the first time a boycott had been organized in the seminary. The next day one of the lecturers met with the students and said, "I'd like to ask you a question in return: Who then is the church? Is it the lecturers? And if it is not us – if we are not doing anything – then why are you not acting? Why are you not doing anything?" These provocative questions startled the students. They then decided to draft an open letter to South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster.

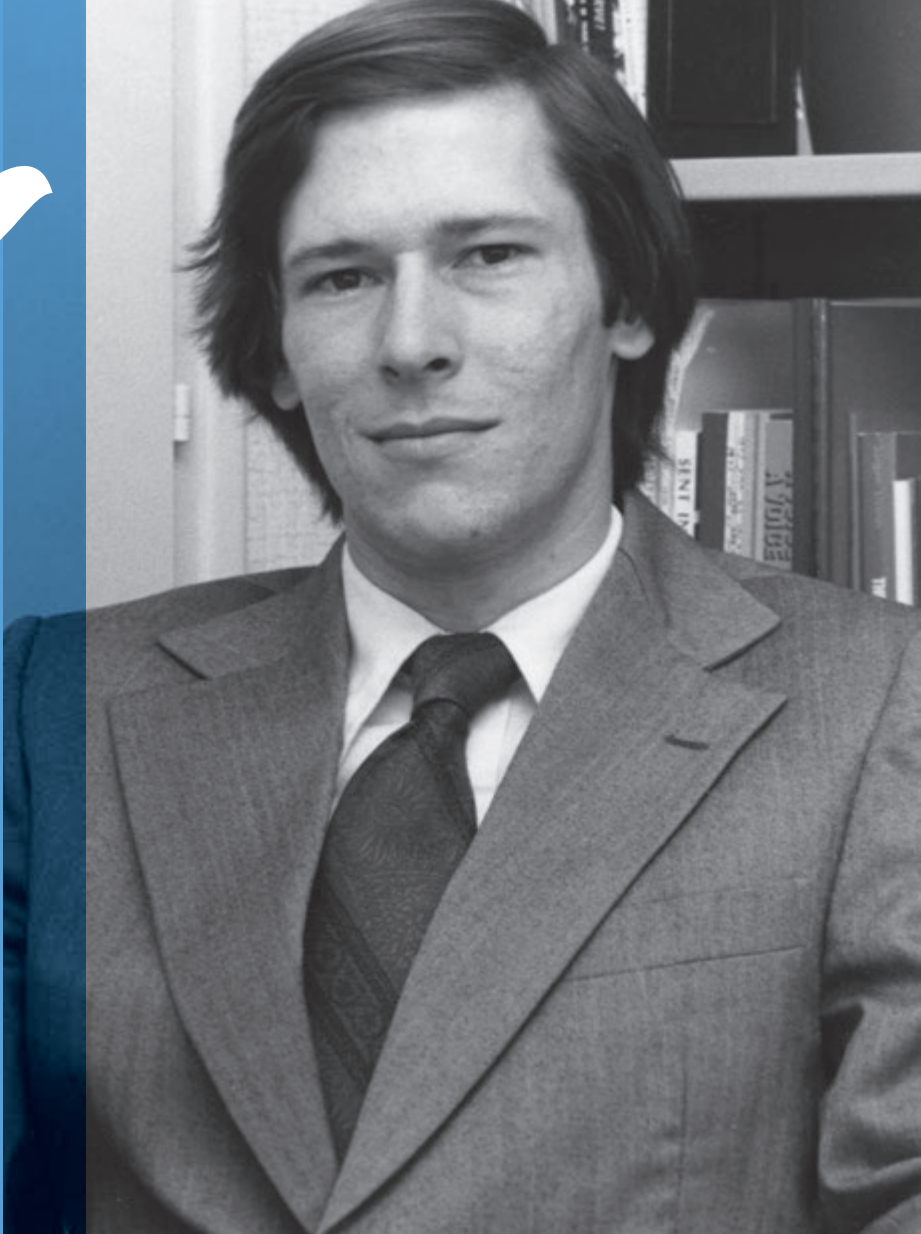
A few days later, the church boards of the two large Lutheran churches in Namibia met. They read the students' letter and decided to accept it. On 30 June 1971, the leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia/ Southwestern Africa released the open letter. In deferential but firm language, the letter said that the South African government "failed to take cognizance of human rights

as declared by the United Nations.” The letter demonstrated a growing consciousness and consensus among the country’s overwhelming black majority.

The writer Heinz Hunke in his book *“Namibia: The Strength of the Powerless”* later stated: *No other single document has ever had such an immediate and lasting influence in Namibia as this letter. The black population recognized that their feelings were being expressed by their church leaders...from now on the neat network of lies and propaganda would be destroyed again and again by the unintimidated denunciations of church leaders who belonged to the oppressed majority.*

Ralston Deffenbaugh⁹

1975



“Namibia won a place in my heart and I became committed to the LWF.”

Name	Ralston Deffenbaugh
Year of birth	1952
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Position in the church	Layperson
First engagement with LWF	1975 Trial observer in Namibia at the age of 23
Functions in the LWF	1981-1985 Assistant to the general secretary for legal and international affairs, Geneva 1985-1990 Director, Lutheran Office for World Community (LWF representative at UN, New York) 1989-1990 Legal Advisor for Lutheran bishops during transition to independence, Namibia 2010-2017 Assistant general secretary for international affairs and human rights

I completed my B.A. in Economics in three years instead of the normal four, so I felt I had a year coming to me. I decided to take a year off from the Harvard Law School and volunteered with the LWF. In September 1975 the LWF sent me to Namibia to observe political trials and to assist in the Lutheran and other churches' legal defence efforts.

At that time, Namibia was under South African occupation. South Africa had applied the full range of its oppressive racially discriminatory system of apartheid, including the use of detention without trial, torture, and extra-judicial executions. Namibia's churches were the only institutions with black leaders who could still operate inside the country and brought together people of different ethnic groups and regions. Yet even the churches were being hammered. In August 1975, Filemon Elifas was murdered outside a bar in northern Namibia. He was a tribal chief who collaborated with the South Africans. His killers were never found. In the wake of the murder, the South Africans arrested and detained more than 30 leaders and supporters of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), Namibia's liberation movement.

Among those detained were at least eight Lutheran pastors, including Zephania Kameeta, then the principal of the Paulinum Lutheran Seminary at Otjimbingwe, and Sebulon Ekandjo, editor of Omukwetu, the newspaper of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church.

The LWF protested the arrests and helped organize a legal defence. Many of the detainees were released. Eventually the South Africans charged three men and three women under the Terrorism Act. The three men were accused of helping the unknown killers of Chief Elifas; the three women, young nurses at the Engela Lutheran Hospital, were charged with having given small sums of money and sanitary napkins to Namibians who had fled over the border to Angola.

The trial went on for three months, from February to May 1976, in the seaside resort town of Swakopmund. It became clear that this was a political trial, not focused so much on the accused as on trying to discredit SWAPO. But what also came out in the trial was the widespread use of torture against both accused and witnesses. In the end, two of the men, Aaron Mushimba and Hendrik Shikongo, were sentenced to death. Two of the women, Rauna Nambinga and Anna Nghihondjwa, were sentenced to prison. In the weeks after the trial, it was revealed that the security police had had spies in the defence law firm. The attorney-client privilege had been violated. On appeal, the convictions were overturned.

For me, this was an incredibly formative experience. I was witness to grave violations of human rights. I saw how adversity bred character for some, but also how some others were broken. I saw how vitally important the role of the church was. Namibia won a place in my heart and I became committed to the LWF.

I returned to the USA, got married, and completed my Juris Doctor degree. The LWF wanted me to come to work for them right out of law school but I said no, I needed to get my legal credentials in order. Four years later the LWF renewed the offer. I have been working with Lutheran organizations ever since, first for the independence of Namibia, then for refugees, and all along for human rights.

“I was witness to grave violations of human rights.

I saw how adversity bred character for some, but also how some others were broken.

I saw how vitally important the role of the church was.”

Ralston Deffenbaugh

Sven Gjessing Oppeggaard 1977



KIRKE-AKTUELT, utgitt av
Kirkens Informasjonstje-
neste,
Underhaugsveien
5, Oslo 3



Den norske delegasjon under generalforsamlingen, fra venstre Per Voksø, Sven Oppeggaard, Leif M. Michelsen, Astrid Grude Eikseth, Øyvind Dahl, Nils Bloch-Hoell, Elise Klouman Bekken og Andreas Aarflot.

Lite nytt fra Dar es Salaam

Det er ingen drey påstand at de fleste store nyhetene fra Det Lutherske Verdensforbunds 6. generalforsamling i Dar es Salaam i juni, hadde lite med selve generalforsamlingen å gjøre. Etter de tre siste stormende kirkemøtene: Kirkens Verdensråds møter i Uppsala i 1967 og i Nairobi i 1975 og LVF's forrige generalforsamling i Evian i 1970, ble Dar es Salaam-møtet en rolig, ja enkelte vil kanskje si nokså kjedelig, affære.

De over 100 journalistene som var til stede skrev hjem om at Europasekretær Paul Hansen hadde fått tillatelse til å sende 5000 bibler inn i Sovjet, med mulighet for flere sendinger senere. De rapporterte at katolikken nå nærmet seg lutheranerne med raske skritt, blant annet med arbeidet for å godkjenne Confessio Augustana som et «legitimt uttrykk for den kristne tros. Uventet harde uttalelser fra lederne av LVF's kvinneavdeling ble behørig registrert, og selvfølgelig satte det sitt preg på reportasjene at møtet fant sted i Afrika i en tid da apartheidsspørsmålet overskygger de fleste andre spørsmål.

Men selve møtet, ja, det ble ikke ofret så svært mange linjer. Noen vil se på det som en gledelig ting at kirkefolk fra hele verden kan møtes og diskutere viktige spørsmål uten at det gir grunnlag for store overskrifter om stridigheter og beske utfall til den ene eller andre siden.

— En kan ikke annet enn å undre seg over at dette møtet gikk så fint som det gjorde, sier en av de norske delegatene. Generalsekretær Sven Oppeggaard fra Ofoten, som var med i det andre av de tre norske delegasjoner, er innmeldt i, og har utarbeidet en viktig rapport til det internasjonale Råd i løpet av

fulgte LVF trofast opp sin formålsparagraf om å fremme luthersk interesse og deltakelse i økumeniske bevegelser. Det er grunn til å glede seg over at dette aspektet hører med som en selvfølge. Mye tyder på at de lutherske kirkene kommer til å ha en meget vesentlig plass i det mellomkirkelige arbeidet i årene som kommer, sier Oppeggaard. Han understreker også viktigheten av at LVF under møtet vedtok et økumenisk handlingsprogram, og i den sammenheng mener han at det ikke er minst viktig at det er klart understreket at de forskjellige konfesjonelle former for kristen tro har sin vedvarende verdi også i et mer utstrakt økumenisk samarbeid.

Og igjen ble vi stilt overfor de tydelige forskjeller i det man legger vekt på innenfor den lutherske kirkefamilie. Den afrikanske teologien med sterk vekt på frigjøring — personlig og politisk — satte et visst åndelig preg på møtet. En tenker med seg selv: Her er det mye materiale for teologisk arbeid. Kanskje det er en idé med en internasjonal teologisk konferanse i LVF's regi om tregimentslæren, sier Oppeggaard. Hovedforedragene fra de tre forskjellige seminarene sammen med de forskjellige vedtak som ble fattet og de norske delegasjonens rapporter med vurderinger, vil bli diskutert i det internasjonale Råd i løpet av

President
J. Kibira



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“The notion of ‘unity in reconciled diversity’ came to acquire a central place in the self-understanding of the LWF.”

Name	Sven Gjessing Oppegaard
Year of birth	1944
Church	Church of Norway
Position in the church	Pastor
First engagement with LWF	1977 Delegate to the LWF Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam at the age of 33 years
Functions in the LWF	1997 Worship Coordinator at the LWF Ninth Assembly 1997-2006 Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs

I shall never forget the experience of setting my feet on the red African soil for the first time. Its warm color signalled a genuine welcome to us. I was a young parish pastor then, based in northern Norway with its mountains, fjords and fisheries. We had landed at the airport of Dar-es-Salaam. The occasion was the LWF Sixth Assembly under the theme, “In Christ a New Community.”

The week prior to the Assembly proper was set aside for a visitation program. It took me and another young man, a French speaking delegate, to a small American mission station in Arusha. We were picked up by our host missionary, who drove us through safari landscapes to the mission station where we were received by his wife, the missionary partner. The ways in which the mission station was equipped fascinated me. And so did the villages with their cultivated patches, thatched roof houses, and the few pigs and goats. Aware, to some extent, of romanticizing, I felt I could live there and be part of such a village!

The Assembly venue was the University of Dar-es-Salaam. We were installed in the student dormitories, with their glassless windows that allowed air to circulate at all times and

in all weather. The Assembly hall was a worthy center piece of the university, with its fine architectural dome. Every day choral music was performed by choirs from all parts of the country. We were also received by President Nyerere in the presidential garden.

Among the topics of the Sixth Assembly the following three are especially significant:

How should the LWF respond, as a global family, to member churches that practice racial segregation at the communion table?

As a young delegate from the North I found it extremely educational to be in the midst of a qualified discussion of this core ecclesial topic on the African continent. After long deliberations the Assembly determined that this issue of racial segregation at communion “raised the status confessionis” of the relevant churches. By an action of the Executive Committee, the membership of the relevant southern African member churches was suspended. They were reinstated later, however, when their practices were changed.

How should the LWF formulate its ecumenical strategy?

The LWF Sixth Assembly took place at a time when major actors of the ecumenical movement, including the WCC, were involved in discussions of ecumenical models such as “organic union” and “conciliar fellowship.”

In the case of the LWF, significant groundwork had been done by a working group on the interrelations between the various bilateral dialogues. Its report, entitled “Ecumenical Relations of the Lutheran World Federation” (1977), was a significant resource for the Assembly, to which the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, had contributed substantially.

As a member of the Issue Group set to deal with this topic, I was well placed to propose that key parts of this valuable report be acted upon by the Assembly itself. Thus the notion of “unity in reconciled diversity” came to acquire a central place in the self-understanding of the LWF, stopping short of being formally adopted as the official ecumenical model of the federation.

Does the LWF Sixth Assembly reflect progress in Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations?

No striking ecumenical events during the Assembly indicated significant Roman Catholic-Lutheran ecumenical progress. The official guests from the Roman Catholic Church

were not invited to greet the Assembly in a plenary session. Only in one of the main seminars was it possible for us to get the acceptance of the Assembly for Professor Heinz Schütte to be invited to bring a greeting from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. On the other hand, the Assembly was able to take “cognizance of the fact that distinguished Roman Catholic theologians consider it possible for their church to recognize the *Confessio Augustana* as a particular expression of the common Christian faith.”

The Assembly was, of course, well aware of the international Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue commission that had begun its work in 1967 and had produced the significant report “The Gospel and the Church” (1971). This report foreshadowed the churches’ dialogues on most of the major themes to be taken up in the following years.

In addition, the Assembly was invited to assess the progress of possible Roman Catholic recognition of the Augsburg Confession. The Assembly stated its favorable position on this development, with “its possibilities, its problems and its wider ecumenical implications.” Furthermore, there is no doubt that the Catholic theologians who encouraged recognition of the *Confessio Augustana* contributed significantly, along with Lutheran colleagues, to opening up ecumenical processes that in the end made possible the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999).

For me, personally, the LWF Sixth Assembly became a significant introduction to African culture, church life and global ecumenism.

Eberhard Hitzler

1977

11



“I wanted to be part of a church radically standing on the side of the oppressed and the exploited.”

Name	Eberhard Hitzler
Year of birth	1953
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany
Position in the church	Missionary, Pastor
First engagement with LWF	Steward at the LWF Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam in 1977, at the age of 24 years
Functions in the LWF	2006-2015 Director of the Department for World Service

To be labelled as “young reformer” would have been an insult to me in 1977. At that time I studied at the Makumira Theological College in Tanzania and was invited by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) to serve as steward at the LWF Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam. As an exchange student in Tanzania I had become a strong follower and believer in Nyerere’s African socialism. I considered myself in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement, with the freedom fighters of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the SWAPO in Namibia. I did not believe that evil systems and ideologies like apartheid and neo-colonialism can be reformed. We instead discussed more radical solutions to the unjust state of the world and for the new African nations, which were rising from oppression and exploitation of colonialism only to find themselves in continuing dependency on the wealthy Western countries and as a battleground for the East-West Cold War. I wanted to be part of a church radically standing on the side of the oppressed and the exploited.

The LWF Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam made me proud to be a Lutheran: Church leaders from all over the world discussed apartheid and how to deal with Lutheran churches in South Africa and Namibia, which in their own church life had accepted the racist apartheid ideology. The Assembly declared the rejection of apartheid as “status confessionis” and expressed clearly that these churches needed to abolish racial segregation at the Lord’s Table.

Returning to Tanzania as a missionary a few years later was a sobering experience. The implementation of “African socialism” had led to an economic collapse of the country and violated human rights while only moderate social progress had been achieved. In a propaganda war of words between the press in Kenya and the press in Tanzania, the government-owned newspaper in Tanzania denounced Kenya’s capitalist system with the headline: “In Kenya man eats man”. The response came fast from the Kenyan press: “In Tanzania man eats nothing.” There was a grain of truth in both.

It took me a while to understand and accept that revolutions might often not lead to the desired results but can create even more suffering, injustice, oppression, and violence. Revolutions and armed struggles for liberation, which I had sympathized with, resulted more often than not in more misery and oppression in places such as Eritrea, Zimbabwe and South Sudan. It seems that human beings are not able to form perfect, peaceful and just societies, communities, or even churches. But the desire for peace with justice remains indelible and is strengthened by our faith and prayer that God’s kingdom will come.

It was a privilege to serve the LWF almost 30 years after the Dar es Salaam Assembly as director of the DWS. LWF World Service is one of the strongest expressions of the church’s diakonia. Since its beginning, it has provided millions of people with new hope and perspectives, has lifted people out of abject poverty and dire straits, and has supported refugees and displaced persons to maintain their dignity and human rights.

To “uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed” - the motto of World Service for the last decade – might not sound revolutionary and not resemble at all my radical ideas and attitudes in the 1970s. But to follow this biblical motto seems to me today the real revolution. The real revolution is not replacing a political or economic system or a ruler by another. The real revolution is a change of mind and attitude: put people and their rights at the center of all thinking and action, not systems or institutions.

To uphold the rights of refugees, displaced persons or persecuted minorities is revolutionary when the political and economic mainstream increasingly disregards human rights and the value of life and rather believes in shareholder values, the market and the survival of the fittest or strong dictatorial leaders.

I never was and still do not want to be a “reformer.” And by the way, neither did Martin Luther. He did not reform the church. He was a revolutionary and part of a revolutionary development in the 16th century that changed Europe radically. It was a revolution and not a

reform, as it challenged the political and ecclesiastical power and put the individual person in the center. This revolution is still on-going: “Liberated by God’s grace” is its motto.

To rename “Young Reformers” as “Young Revolutionaries” might be too daring and prone to misunderstanding. But I pray that a revolutionary spirit – the Holy Spirit – will always prevail in our churches so that we can be the salt of the earth (Mt. 5: 13).

12



Julius D. Paul

1980



“He soon found himself being gradually entrusted with responsibilities in the youth fellowship and the evangelistic work of the church.”

Name	Julius D. Paul
Year of birth	1945 - died: 1998
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia
Position in the church	1989-1998 Bishop
Functions in the LWF	1980 intern at the LWF Youth Desk at the age of 35 years 2003-2008 Executive committee of the LWF and the chair of LWF World Service

Julius D. Paul was a teenager with keen interest in the church and its related activities. He was an active member of the Lutheran Youth Fellowship, which provided the stepping stone for his leadership formation. He soon found himself being gradually entrusted with responsibilities in the youth fellowship and the evangelistic work of the church. He was active in the Scripture Union of Malaysia, a member of the Student Christian Movement, diocesan secretary of the church and also its youth secretary from 1962-1969. Upon completing his secular education in 1969, he began preparing himself for ministry at Trinity Theological College in Singapore from which he received the BD degree in 1973. He was ordained in 1975. In his capacity as a pastor, he was assigned to nurture the spiritual needs of church members in a number of rural and urban congregations. From 1975 to 1988, he served as pastor in charge of various congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM). During his tenure, he also chaired local church councils. These experiences provided him with greater insight and strengthened his leadership abilities and professional skills in the context of pastoral ministry.

His participation in ecumenical meetings and conferences both in Malaysia and overseas improved his composure and self-assurance. He served in such diverse capacities as coordinator of the Youth Desk of the LWF (1980), board member of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia (STM), member of the board of governors of the Negeri Agro Industrial Training Complex, and member of various committees set up by the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM). Paul was elected as bishop of the ELCM in 1988. By accepting the office, his commitments and responsibilities doubled as he now spearheaded church growth and leadership. To strengthen leadership, he sent pastors and church workers abroad for training and further education. He also invited foreign Lutheran churches to work with the ELCM in training and other areas of common interest. He pioneered and supported ministry in mission and diakonia, protected and defended church doctrines, and worked to guard and enrich worship as well. He was also a good administrator, maintaining positive relations with the clergy and other church workers and keeping the church functioning well.

At the international level, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the LWF and the chair of LWF World Service. And for all these years, Paul was kind, humble, understanding, trustworthy, cheerful and friendly to everyone. When clergy or lay church workers presented him with a problem, he would guide them to a solution. He had a pastoral heart for the pastors and church workers under his care. His openness and inspirational leadership motivated many others to join the ministry of the church. Paul had a good mind for theological engagement and excelled in public speaking. As observed by those who worked closely with him, he in his quiet ways contributed much to welfare, justice and peace in our society. His tragic death was a tremendous shock and loss to his family and to the church. He helmed the church for a total of 20 years until his demise in a tragic accident in Guatemala on 23 November 1998. Elected at the age of 44, he was the youngest person to serve as bishop in the ELCM.

“He pioneered and supported ministry in mission and diakonia; protected and defended church doctrines, and worked to guard and enrich worship as well.”

Alf Idland 1980

13



“His consistent support for those prophetic voices, and his demands for solidarity with them (...) would in turn be a source of hope for churches elsewhere”

Name	Alf Idland
Year of birth	1943 - d. 1995
Church	Church of Norway
Position in the church	Missionary
Functions in the LWF	1980-1984 LWF youth secretary

Rev. Alf Idland was the first full-time youth coordinator on the LWF staff, serving from 1980 to 1984. When he came to Geneva, he had already served as a missionary in Japan for over 10 years, doing work among students in Osaka in partnership with a local congregation and an LWF-sponsored student-center in Tezukayama church. Idland was sent by the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and worked in the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), an LWF member church since 1976.

Before he left for Japan, he married Yukiko Yamaoka, an NMS-sponsored student in Norway. After his service in the LWF, they returned to Japan, where he served in the Rokko church in the city of Kobe. This is one of the oldest local churches in the KELC, established when NMS, after the revolution, moved their missionaries from China to Japan. When the big Kansai earthquake hit Kobe in the early hours of 17 January 1995, Idland worked relentlessly, despite his own failing health, to help people suffering from the devastation. He died later that spring, on 28 May, at only 51 years of age.

Idland was an open minded and engaged missionary of his time, deeply rooted in the Lutheran theological tradition, which holds the theology of the cross and the reality of God's grace as its core values. He belonged to the ecumenically and dialogue-oriented missionary

tradition in the NMS, and was among the strong supporters of the KELC joining the LWF in the 1970s. He had an understanding for the cultural and social framework of the church both in Japan and worldwide. He was, therefore, strongly motivated for international service while based at the LWF headquarters in Geneva. He subsequently returned to Japan with an even stronger commitment to the global church and the responsibility of the church to be an active contributor in Japanese society.

Idland made friends easily and was interested in both the pleasant and less pleasant sides of life. The plight of those suffering under the apartheid regime in South Africa was of particular concern to him, as well as the situation of the younger generation of Christians in Eastern Europe.

One of the younger anti-apartheid church leaders he met in South Africa was Allan Boesak. He still remembers Idland and recently made the following statement, summing up Idland's important contribution while working for the LWF: *He [Alf Idland] cherished the work in Geneva because it put him in direct touch with the voices from the global South and the work of the churches there, done in extraordinarily difficult and challenging situations, from which he felt he, and the church in the North, could learn much. His consistent support for those prophetic voices, and his demands for solidarity with them, flowed from his deep respect for the courage and faithfulness he discovered there, and his hope that they would in turn be a source of hope for churches elsewhere. It was these qualities that gave us the encouragement to trust and work with him, and see him as a trusted friend.*

“Idland was an open minded and engaged missionary of his time, deeply rooted in the Lutheran theological tradition, which holds the theology of the cross and the reality of God’s grace as its core values.”

Tamás Fabiny 1981

14



“We are people of tomorrow, knowing that changes for tomorrow have to be made today.”

Name	Tamás Fabiny
Year of birth	1959
Church	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary
Position in the church	Regional Bishop
First engagement with LWF	1981 at the age of 22 years
Functions in the LWF	2010-2017 LWF Council member and Vice-President for Central Eastern Europe Region

In the summer of 1981, the LWF organised a youth meeting in Urach, near Stuttgart, Germany. As a student of theology from Budapest, I was glad to participate as I found it important to be able to meet young people from other churches and to learn from them. During the Cold War, it was not natural to be let out to a Western country by the Hungarian authorities. At the entrance of the beautiful building, I was greeted by a tall young man: Alf Idland, a pastor from the Church of Norway. I didn't know that he would soon be the first coordinator of the yet to be established LWF Youth Desk in Geneva. The 45 participants coming from six continents became part of a wonderful spiritual and intellectual journey.

I was quite astonished as the conversation touched topics which were not part of open discourse in my church: church and society, disarmament, the role of women and men in the church, relations to other confessions. In the swirl of the conversation, a strong desire to have a youth Pre-Assembly arose.

Even though political leaders opposed the idea, God had a plan. In the autumn of 1982, a 12-member preparation committee was established for the youth Pre-Assembly. In an article from that time, I introduced one of them as follows: “Munib [Younan] is a peculiar person. Once I heard someone calling him Israeli, which he took as a profound offense. He threw his passport to the table: ‘This is an Israeli document, indeed, but only by necessity, as we live under occupation’. I understood his indignation – he served as a Lutheran pastor in

a divided Jerusalem as a Palestinian, as a member of this unfortunate nation. For me, our late-night conversations was like a study trip to the Middle East”. I learned a lot during this preparation process, not the least about democratic decision making.

All this is mirrored in my article from February 1984: *In Budapest, July 12–20, 1984, we, young people from all over the world, will come together and have a celebration where we will worship, sing, listen, pray, act and witness to each other and gain strength to be sent out into the world. We will confess that IN CHRIST THE FUTURE IS NOW because we dare to trust that in Jesus Christ, God’s hope is for the world. (...) We dare to name what separates us from each other, knowing and respecting our parents, responsibility for the present world-order. We can’t avoid bringing our heritage with us and creating tensions among each other and in ourselves – even sometimes without knowing it.*

Although we live in diversity, we will spare no efforts to make fast, with bonds of peace, the unity which the Spirit gives (Ephesians 4: 3). As the present and existing body of Christ, we know that Christ has called us to a new life in peace, justice and freedom. All three are signs and fruits of the Kingdom of God. Often it is very difficult to experience the reality of peace, justice and freedom in our church and society, because we are still caught up in mistrust and ungodly social structures.

But in Christ, the future is now. The body of Christ is a reality. As parts of the body, we experience through worship and fellowship God’s presence among us. As youth, we can appreciate the need for reconciliation because we are people of yesterday with all the values and divisions we have inherited, people of today if we take responsibility in our world and people of tomorrow knowing that changes for tomorrow have to be made today. Because, we as youth, feel the tension in our own lives between tomorrow and today, we are especially aware of the challenge to make changes as it is expressed in the Bible (...).

Decades later, I see that most of the prominent persons in our church life today were involved in the learning process of the Assembly preparations.

In Hungary, the congregations and youth groups were eagerly awaiting Assembly. Then came the long-awaited moment of July 1984 when we opened the biggest Lutheran church of Budapest for the guests to come. And they came and came... Not only official delegates but also other interested people, from Hungary and abroad. The youth not only filled both galleries but they sat on the floor between the pews. As a liturgist, I served with a trembling voice but with great joy. The pastor of the congregation, Rev. Károly Hafenschner,

preached in three languages. We could hardly believe he mentioned 1984 and George Orwell, who was banned in Eastern countries.

After the service, we continued singing in the courtyard of the church with candles lit. It is typical of the era that when several young people wanted to go out to the open square in front of the church, someone (today we know that he worked for state security) tried to stop them in, saying there was no authorisation for this. The episode characterises all the complexity of that era.

And we had similar experiences in connection with the political content of the Pre-Assembly. Many of us were moved by the bravery of participants from South Africa who fought against apartheid during the Pre-Assembly and the Assembly itself. Among them, there was a calm but very brave young man: Zephania Kameeta. The fight against apartheid actually could have fitted into the Central Eastern European context of that time. The speech of Rev. Harald Bretschneider, a youth pastor from the German Democratic Republic (DDR) about peace caused more upheaval. It became apparent that he didn't think along the lines of oppressive ideologies but in the context of freedom and democracy. And those were topics not to be mentioned on this side of the Iron Curtain.

A small example of those times: Harald (our friendship continues to this day) informed me as an organiser that he returned to his hotel from a forum and he saw that the manuscript of his speech had disappeared from his room. When we returned there after an hour's time, it was there again. Apparently, the secret police had "borrowed" it to copy the apparently agitating text.

With this background, you may understand why we felt it is important to include these sentences in the recommendations of the Youth Pre-Assembly 1984:

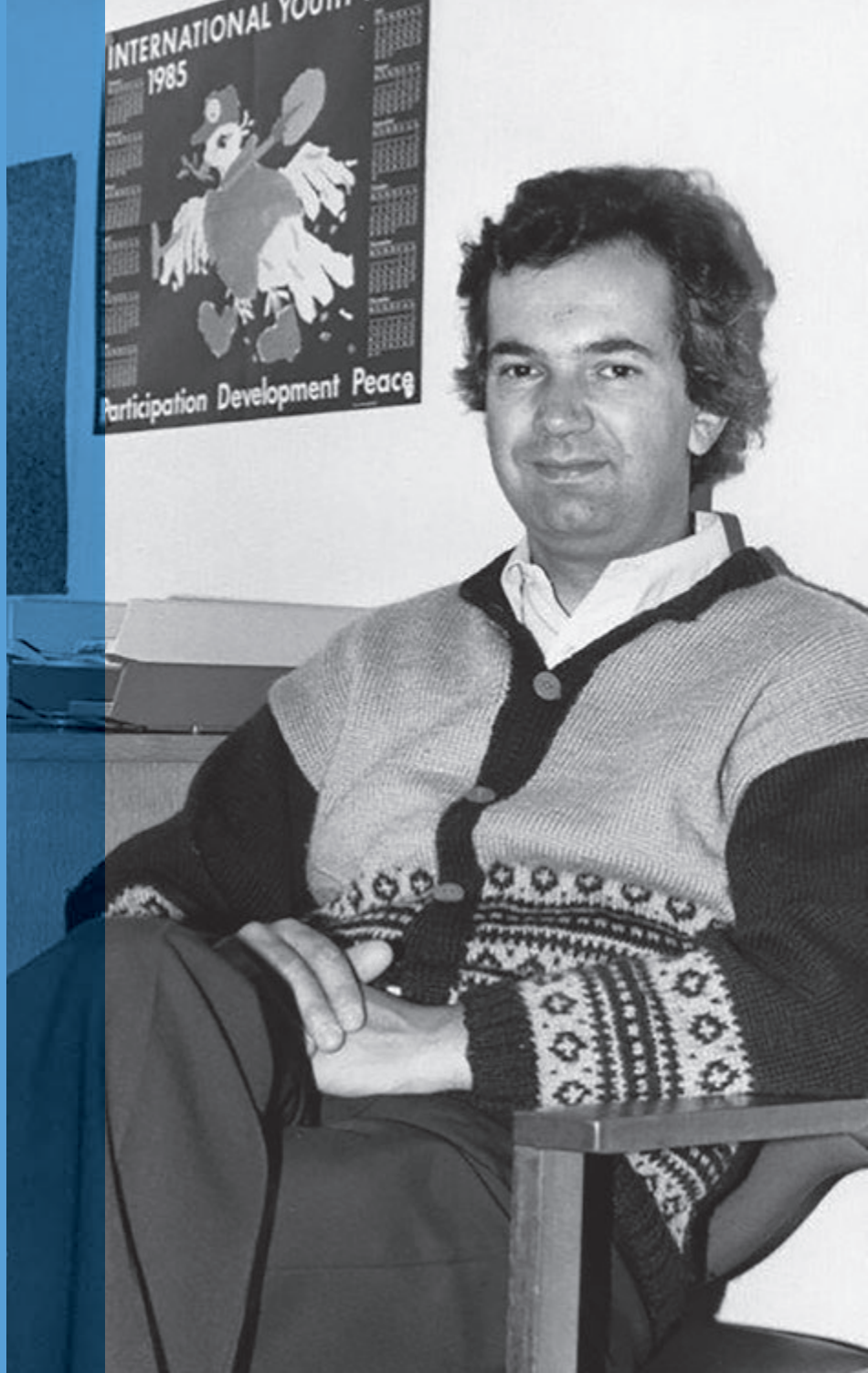
"We ask the General Assembly of the LWF [...] to hear us as we voice our deep concern about:

- the sufferings of the hungry;
- the silence of the hopeless;
- the anxieties of those who are constantly being watched;
- the cries of the beaten;
- the chains of the prisoners."

15



Julius Filo 1984



“Learn from youth in your church and you will stay young your whole life.”

Name	Julius Filo
Year of birth	1950
Church	Evangelical Church of the Confession in Slovakia
Position in the church	Bishop Emeritus; Professor of theology Assisting minister in a congregation
First engagement with LWF	1984 at the age of 33
Functions in the LWF	1985-1990 Coordinator of the International Program for Youth and Students (Department of Church Cooperation) 1990-1997 Advisor to the LWF Council 1997-2003 Member of the LWF Council and LWF vice-President for the region of Central and Eastern Europe

“Learn from youth and stay young!”

This rather bold expression is also my recommendation to everybody. I have found this to be true based in my general experience and also regarding my involvement in the LWF global youth program. I could put it in a few more words: learn from youth in your church and you will stay young your whole life.

A little background information: along with 10 students of theology from Bratislava, I attended in 1984 the LWF Pre-Assembly in Budapest. I spoke there about a task for the church: witnessing to Christ in the socialist context. Thereafter, I was employed as the second youth secretary of the LWF to serve the global program for youth and students. From 1985 to 1990, I along with my co-workers at the Youth Desk, especially Birgitta Voltenauer, organized regional youth conferences, youth visitation programs, global workshops, the Pre-Assembly youth gathering in Buenos Aires, and published youth newsletters, studies and reports. I have lectured at the national youth gatherings and met many enthusiastic young leaders of our Lutheran communion. This was my great privilege and I am thankful to God for it.

After returning home from Geneva in 1990, I continued my ministry in my home church and as a member of the Lutheran Theological Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. I have filled various positions, including dean of the faculty, general presiding bishop of the church (1994-2006), president of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia, and today, professor of practical theology. Our university has benefited from the support of the LWF. My international involvement in the LWF continued after 1990 until 2003 at various levels.

What did I learn from young people in the churches I have served during my LWF involvement and what has been the impact it has had during the following years of my ministry and my life? What was it that let me stay young despite the growing age? Here are some of the answers.

While respecting our Lutheran tradition, continue to look for new, better ways of witness.

Everywhere I have met young people, either in the wider world or in my home country, the same signs came up. Young people in the church test existing traditions and ask if there are better ways of doing things in the future. "*Semper reformanda*" in the Lutheran Church means that we have the courage to examine critically the formal parts of our tradition and look for new ways to be faithful to our Lord.

People will understand love of God, after we dare to serve them in their needs.

Our Lutheran sister churches in the world respond to social and humanitarian challenges in their context. Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ goes hand in hand with service to the needy and suffering, just as Jesus did while present among us. The response of the people in need is not surprising, as a result of our service they can see in Christianity a hope for the world and for their personal future. Many young people are involved in such a holistic ministry. Holistic mission is what the young faithful are advising the churches of our Lutheran communion to adopt.

Never lose joy, because it shows that your faith in Christ gives you stability and is full of hope.

The spirituality and worship of young people is full of expressions of joy. This has good theological and practical reasons behind it. Is it not great, to be involved in the transformation of the world? Is it not glorious to know that we are co-workers in creating a future world of peace, justice and love?

Learning from young people helped me to support the agenda of the young faithful in my home church. The church needs spiritual renewal in all its parts in order to be able to address the present challenges of the people. This continues to be my interest and duty. Development of diaconal ministry as an indispensable part of holistic mission is the most urgent task. It has its educational element and its practical form. We have started at our faculty a new study program preparing theologically trained workers for the social ministry of the church in society. Previously, the communist government had controlled all institutions of the church. After 1990, new centers of diaconal ministry in our church could be established. Recently, we started new diaconal projects in Austria. A nursing home for senior citizens and a day care center for handicapped children are the latest projects in which I have been involved. Though we are kept busy with these projects, I know that it is God's renewing Spirit which keeps everybody on this road of reforming ministry. Thanks be to God for that.

Mercedes García Bachmann 1985

16



“These blessings must be put to the service of the church at home first, then in the region and more globally, if possible.”

Name	Mercedes García Bachmann
Year of birth	1963
Church	United Evangelical Lutheran Church, Argentina and Uruguay
First engagement with the LWF	Member of the LWF Commission on Studies at the age of 22 years
Functions in LWF	Youth delegate to the LWF Eighth Assembly Curitiba, 1990 and the LWF Ninth Assembly Hong Kong, 1997 1990-1997 Young LWF Council member

From her time as member of the LWF Commission on Studies (1985-1990) to her current involvement in the hermeneutics study and the Windhoek Assembly Bible studies group, García-Bachmann has had a vast array of experiences in LWF activities and governing bodies.

She was nominated to be a youth delegate at the Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, where she preached at the closing service. She was elected one of seven youth delegates to the LWF Council, and finished this mandate by taking part in the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong (1997). She was part of the study group “The Authority of the Bible in the Life of the Churches” (2004-2006). While she was on sabbatical in Germany, García-Bachmann participated in the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart (2010) as a volunteer helping with translations. She was the second female to be ordained a pastor in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay and served in several different congregations before doing graduate studies. She taught Bible at the ecumenical theological school, Isedet, from 1999 to 2016. She has recently been appointed director of the *Instituto para la Pastoral Contextual*, the organization of her church responsible for lay leadership training.

García-Bachmann feels the privilege of having studied and of experienced so much of the life of the LWF, and she feels that these blessings must be put to the service of the church at home first, then in the region and more globally if possible. Currently, in the region she is the only Lutheran female professor with a doctoral degree in Old Testament teaching at a theological institution. She tries to bring feminist biblical input into the region’s Lutheran debates and struggles, and especially into the women’s network.

17



Martin Junge 1990



“Oppression is on the increase and especially hitting youth.”

Name	Martin Junge
Year of birth	1961
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile
Position in the church	Pastor, President of the church
First engagement with LWF	at the age of 26
Functions in the LWF	1990 Steward at the LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba 1990-1992 Focal point for a youth network in Latin America and the Caribbean 1997 Church delegate at the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong 2000-2010 Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean since 2010 LWF General Secretary

Rev. Dr Martin Junge, then a steward, recalls that from 19-27 January 1990, the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference met in Buenos Aires, Argentina. By then, Argentina had returned to democratic rule after dictatorship. But the wounds of dictatorship were still open and bleeding.

Thousands of people who had been detained during dictatorship by the military forces were still not accounted for. They were being referred to as *“detenidos desaparecidos”* – the disappeared detainees. Can human beings simply disappear? Or worse: can they be made to disappear?

Mothers and relatives of those who disappeared didn’t want to accept that notion. They formed a movement. Among their advocacy activities, they defiantly gathered once a week in front of the presidential palace on a square called “Plaza de Mayo”. They stood there with a simple but powerful message: “We want them back”.

At Plaza de Mayo, mothers came together every Thursday to bind over their heads white scarves with the names of their young disappeared ones and to march peacefully and silently, to protest against political oppression. Between 1976 and 1980 the military junta waged a crushing war against leftist opposition forces. The aim was to eliminate them completely, and it resulted in whole families disappearing – including babies and small children. The majority of those who suddenly disappeared were young people. As early as September 1983, the LWF youth newsletter was reporting on these events. “How is it possible to describe these feelings? To stand there, watching these hundreds of people carrying pictures of the ones who disappeared several years ago, and to sense the pain, the agony and the suffering that each picture represents?”

“During the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference,” explained Martin Junge, “we understood that there was no provision made for meeting these brave women and to express support for their cause. But there was great desire by the youth delegates to do so. We got organized and managed to get a delegation of the Pre-Assembly to the Plaza de Mayo to meet the women and talk to them. Together with Soren Krogh, a youth delegate from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, we presented our encouragement and our support.” The youth delegation headed by Junge said, “Human beings have a God-given value and a God-given dignity that nobody can strip from them.” Prophetically, the pre-Assembly Youth Conference theme was the verses from Jeremiah 1.7: “Do not say: I am too young – I send you.”

Junge remembers:

It has to be said that the political situation in Argentina, fortunately, has improved considerably thanks to a democratization process, but what should not be forgotten is that what was reality some years ago in Argentina is still the brutal reality of too many other countries: young people disappearing under repressive regimes. The procession of pain and agony at Plaza del Mayo symbolizes all those who have to live with the same pains, with the same agonies. It is a glimpse of what a terrible reality oppression is. But this is the reality for millions of people in our time. Oppression is on the increase and especially hitting youth.

“Is oppression a concern of the church?” challenged the 1983 LWF Youth Newsletter. “It is and has to be: the total oppression of sin and death, but also social and political oppression. The cross stands as a symbol of liberation also on a human level. It challenges us, the church, to go into the suffering with the symbol of liberation, the cross, so that forces of oppression may be shattered and crushed.”

The youth delegation headed by Junge said,
“Human beings have a God-given value and a God-given dignity that nobody can strip from them.”

Siv S. Limstrand

1991



18



“Was it the strength of the communion that carried them through?”

Nam	Siv S. Limstrand
Year of birth	1961
Church	Church of Norway
Position in the church	Pastor, church city mission in Trondheim
Functions in the LWF	1991-1994 executive secretary for youth in church and society

I had no idea that a job could make such a difference in a person's life. I knew that taking up the position of youth secretary in Geneva would be a challenge, being my first job as an ordained pastor. But it turned out to be a privilege. And then I'm not thinking of the mileage earned, I'm thinking of the people I met, all the stories shared, all the perspectives emerging, all the faith and hope expressed.

And there were often times where I had to ask myself: what would my answer to this situation be, in these small churches in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia or Africa? So many struggling for their existence amidst poverty and political turmoil. Or in the bigger churches in Europe, undergoing political changes as Europe changes in the early 1990s. Would I have endured, struggled, had faith, had the commitment to the extent that I so often encountered in people much younger than myself, facing a lack of democracy, struggling for human rights, and fighting AIDS? Or in colleagues who had served for decades under harsh conditions?

Was it the strength of the communion that carried them through? The feeling and acts of solidarity? The shared hopes of being part of one body? And struggling with it. Not as an idyllic vision, but working and working and working to make it come true. Deeply inspired by the gospel. By Jesus.

This is what it is like being church. This is what I learned. This is how my theology and pastoral identity were shaped.

And I will share with you how it still affects me, through a story from our own streets and church where I serve now.

It was Easter, Good Friday. We followed the cross through the long and desolate streets of the city. Good Friday – in Norwegian it is called the long Friday. As in never-ending. As a never-ending sigh. The story of Jesus' last hours and death were read. We sang hymns as we walked.

I saw the man broken by mental health struggles after years and years of waiting for asylum. He carried the cross at the front. Kept on carrying. Wouldn't let go. I saw the man who was recently taken to the hospital with cardiac problems, first evident when he thought the police would come to pick him up to return him to an insecure future in a country he left long ago. He walked on the outskirts of the crowd. And I could recognize the sense of betrayal and suffering in his body. This was *his* experience as well.

I saw the young man who lives in a parallel dimension. I saw the woman who I know is fighting against the power of drugs, every day. I saw the man who has come a long way to accept that he loves another man. And right beside me were two women who have left a lot behind, their whole lives actually, and now struggle to keep up the hope that life can be better, that life offers more than dehumanizing begging.

It was as if there was a procession of Good Friday experiences through the streets. Human beings who have experienced betrayal, humiliation, torture – they were in our midst. They turned us into we. We were following the same cross. We could feel the solidarity coming from it.

In the evening we were sitting in front of the altar, listening again to the long, long, hurtful story – in Norwegian and Romanian. And with the help from the organ, we could continue breathing. Not stopping, or giving it up. But following until the last breath on the cross. The exhalation.

In many ways it could have stopped there. And often it stops right there - in the experiences of Good Friday. The vulnerable, exposed life. Forever turning in misery. Exhalation. But this is not the last word to be said about a human being. Because it seems like the light of Easter is stronger in humanity than the Good Friday darkness. The light that comes out of the night, even at its darkest. The light that defrosts, warms, and makes resistance and hope and courage grow. And it is the never ending source of liberation.

“Would I have endured, struggled, had faith, had the commitment to the extent that I so often encountered in people much younger than myself, facing a lack of democracy, struggling for human rights, and fighting AIDS?”

Siv S. Limstrand

Julia N. K. Lilonga

1994



19



“As a teacher, I will pass this knowledge on to my students.”

Name	Julia N. K. Ilonga
Year of birth	1979
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
First engagement with LWF	1994, Youth intern at the LWF office in New York at the age of 25 years
Functions in the LWF	1997-2003 Council member, Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights

The period from September 1994 to August 1995 will be added to the more memorable years I have ever experienced. Indeed, it may be the most memorable period of them all.

I am Julia N. K. Ilonga from Namibia. Prior to the start of my internship on 1 September 1994, I had been teaching accounting for six years at Gabriel Taapopi Senior Secondary School in Oshakati. This was after I had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in education, having majored in accounting as a teaching subject at the National University of Lesotho. During Namibia’s first free and fair election in 1989, which was supervised by the United Nations under a team called the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG), I participated as an interpreter for UNTAG. I appreciated the way the UNTAG staff members performed their duties. We called them “peace-lovers.” I felt like joining the team though it was not possible.

When I learned about the LWF internship program at the Lutheran Office for World Community, the Lutheran office at the UN in New York, I did not hesitate. I applied and fortunately was accepted. The program was educational and I was expected to gain knowledge in the fields of human rights and women’s issues. During my stay I also learned about both the UN and its activities as well as those of non-governmental organizations.

While the UN was doing its part, I started to ask myself: what are we, as Christians, to do? This reminds me of Jesus Christ, who prayed for his adversaries to be forgiven for he thought they did not know what they were doing. Would it be a good example and is it not good for us to follow that example and use such a powerful weapon – prayer - to call the Almighty, to open the eyes of those responsible for genocide so that they realize that what they are doing is wrong and stop it?

As a woman, I need to say something on women's issues. Having come from an area under South Africa's apartheid regime, one would think that Namibia is the country in which black people, not to mention women, are left out of the decision-making processes. But when I heard various statements from the Third Committee delegates, it became clear that women throughout the world, not just in Namibia, are the poorest and most vulnerable members of global society. The vast majority are excluded from economic and political decision-making processes. Nations worldwide, however, want women to be partners in decision-making. We want women to have equal access to resources such as land and credit opportunities, and above all, equal access to education. Education is an agent of change. We believe in the statement that when one educates a woman, one educates the whole nation. This is because women, for the most part, are those who pass on knowledge to new generations. The UN is concerned with the advancement of women and will hold its Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The conference's interesting theme speaks for itself, "A platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace." Women throughout the world have high expectations that the Beijing Conference will come up with something that will lead to solutions to the problems they face.

As a teacher, I will pass this knowledge on to my students. Although I have learned more about the importance put on the education of women, I have not yet reached my goal. I am just at the foot of the ladder. With this experience I will try to pursue further studies.

“It became clear that women throughout the world, not just in Namibia, are the poorest and most vulnerable members of global society. The vast majority are excluded from economic and political decision-making processes.”

Julia N. K. Ilonga

Roberto Kirchheim

1994

20



“Both Brazil and Africa have undergone similar histories of colonial exploitation: gold, fruit and slaves, mysticism, music, richness and misery. We really have a lot of things in common.”

Name	Roberto Kirchheim
Year of birth	1970
Church	Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil
First engagement with LWF	1994 Internship with LWF Mozambique at the age of 24 years

Once upon a time, on a Sunday afternoon, after a long journey, I reached Ulongué, the capital of the province of Angonia, near the border of Mozambique with Malawi. Thousands of refugees were returning spontaneously from Malawi and Zambia to homes which were perhaps destroyed. As international aid entered the scene, the LWF was one of the first non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that began to work there through its emergency program. It included the rehabilitation of pre-existing infrastructures such as roads, schools, health centers and water wells.

The day after, early in the morning, I was introduced to the water technicians, Zambians and Mozambicans, who were waiting for me to join them in a pick-up truck. While I was jumping into the vehicle, I more or less realized what my routine would entail. The Zambian team spoke Tcheua and English; the Mozambican team spoke Tcheua and Portuguese and English. Fine! Besides food preferences (long live beans and maize flour!) we also had a language in common. In the following days we worked together in a refugee village finishing a ring well. It was my first experience with ring wells.

On that Sunday afternoon my story began. It was like playing a role in a drama or being an actor in a film. From the director behind the curtains, I heard the typical: "One, two, three, action!"

My name is Roberto Kirchheim, I am 25 years-old, a "Brasileiro" from top to bottom despite the German name and look. In 1993, I graduated as a geologist from the South Brazilian Public University. After graduation came the day when one says: "Mother, Father...I am going to look for a job!" But what can a geologist do after university? One could work for the De Beers Multinational Concern (Mineral Exploration Company) searching for diamonds in the Amazonas region. Thanks, but I have decided to try another way!

I was engaged as a youth intern in the DWS field program in Mozambique. I stayed there for almost 10 months and during that time had the opportunity to visit and work in all the different project areas of the DWS in Mozambique. My main task was to conduct on-site training courses with the different water teams, using new equipment on hand-drilled wells.

There is no routine in the day-to-day events of an intern. Every day brings new sunshine, new raindrops, unexpected problems and a lot of hope. Also surprises, such as in Tchidzalomondo, a forgotten place in the middle of the mountains and bush. The inhabitants, recently settled, were walking long distances to fill their buckets with dirty river water. There were some abandoned colonial wells that could be repaired. After having met with the people and considered the possibility of making repairs, the work began. Inside one well we found an old Chinese bicycle and in another one only rusty pieces of buckets but also the bones of a child, probably sabotage to infect the existing well.

Sometimes good equipment turned out to be inefficient under non-favorable geological circumstances, like near the Mdudu school in the Inhambane province. "Inhambane" means land of good people. The same land with sandy soil that offered the famous Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama security, nice exotic fruits and so on, represented for us a tremendous effort. The soil was too sandy and we could not drill any further without considerable amounts of water dripping into the borehole. It was really difficult and nobody could see any progress. I did not know what to do. I thought, "This is the end of my career as a geologist!" At that moment I heard one of those attending the course say: "It is not so bad that things keep going wrong. This is a course and we are leaning a lot. When you leave and we have to conduct the work ourselves, it will already be easier." I spontaneously embraced him.

We finally finished the well in Mdudu, 18 meters drilled by hand in the fine beach sand. There were also several places that are surrounded by land mines, such as around the Guara-Guara school, situated in the province of Manica. It was impossible to select a suitable place for the survey. In one of the few possible places for constructing a well, where we would probably not have any problem with land mines, we found brackish water!

In every story and film, whether it is black or white, there is an end. My internship ended in 1994 and since then I have been fighting for survival in Germany, where I am doing an advanced course in hydrology of the tropics. I miss Mozambique and all my friends on the LWF-DWS staff. I am glad that I had this opportunity and hope that the LWF will continue to enhance such activities, giving youth the chance of learning by doing.

Both Brazil and Africa have undergone similar histories of colonial exploitation: gold, fruit and slaves, mysticism, music, richness and misery. We really have a lot of things in common.

21

Emily Rapp 1997



“The diversity of the LWF makes it a powerful tool for reunification in our broken world.”

Name	Emily Rapp
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Position in the church	2001 ELCA Global Mission Board
First engagement with LWF	1997 LWF WICAS intern
Functions in the LWF	Youth delegate to the LWF Ninth Assembly, Hong Kong 1997

I am the youth intern placed at the desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) in the DMD in Geneva. Since I arrived, I have already learned so much and met so many kind and welcoming people. I am from Boston, Massachusetts, in the USA and I grew up in Wyoming, Nebraska, Illinois and Colorado. I graduated in 1996 from Saint Olaf College in Minnesota with a Bachelor’s Degree in Religion and Women’s Studies. During my third year of college, I studied Irish History and Theology at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Since graduation, I have worked as an English teacher at a girls’ high school in Seoul, South Korea, and as a financial consultant in Boston.

Throughout high school and college, I have been active in the church, first as the secretary of the US National Lutheran Youth Organization and now as a member of the Steering Committee of the Commission for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. My travels and work in the church have been incredible blessings by opening my eyes to the varied traditions and struggles of people from different parts of the world, as well as strengthening my faith and commitment to peace and justice. Next autumn I will enter Harvard Divinity School as a Masters of Divinity candidate in order to develop these interests further. I am excited to have the opportunity to learn more about the issues and concerns of this global community of Lutherans.

As a participant in the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Bangkok and a North American delegate to the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, I feel that many of these issues have already surfaced among the discussions, resolutions and committee meetings. In both

the youth and adult communities, I have been particularly impressed with the united Lutheran voice that continues to speak in a committed way about ending violence against women and children, combating poverty and the worldwide spread of HIV and AIDS, the ethical use of technology and media in the expanding information age, and sensitivity to issues of culture in worship, leadership development and participation.

Assigned to the WICAS desk, I help address some of these issues, remembering that perspective often shifts when seen through the lens of gender and that women's rights are human rights. Specifically, some of my tasks will include compiling and organizing information about women in the member churches for the WICAS data bank, recording the activities of the regional coordinators that provide an invaluable network for channelling women's concerns across the globe, and helping with Women magazine. The WICAS staff and their supporters have already made considerable strides toward the equal participation of both men and women in all decision-making and activity levels of both church and society. However, there is much work and research yet to be done, particularly in the areas of women's theological education and rights to ordination, access to appropriate health care, and freedom from sexual and domestic violence. I am especially concerned about the education of girls and leadership development of women. I am also interested in how to involve women in rural areas and those with disabilities in the life of the church as both groups often remain isolated for social, cultural and economic reasons.

The diversity of the LWF makes it a powerful tool for reunification in our broken world. The inclusion and empowerment of each person, regardless of gender, color, economic status, sexual orientation or ability, is central to the creation of a true global communion of Christian faith and service.

“Perspective often shifts when seen through the lens of gender and that women’s rights are human rights.”

Emily Rapp

Tolbert Thomas Jallah ²²

1997



“I want to be able to help my young fellow countrymen and women (...), to become good citizens in church and society.”

Name	Tolbert Thomas Jallah, Jr
Year of birth	1971
Church	Lutheran Church in Liberia
Position in the church	Pastor, secretary general of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA)
First engagement with LWF	LWF youth intern in 1997 at the age of 26

My name is Tolbert Thomas Jallah, Jr and I come from Liberia. I am the new LWF/DMD youth intern placed at the youth desk. I arrived in Geneva on 11 October 1998 and since then I have received warmest welcome from Ondrej Prostrednik, the administrative assistant, and Birgitta Voltenauer and the entire LWF family.

I am 27 years-old and the oldest of a family of five. I am now the head of the family because my father was brutally killed during the civil war in Liberia. I am a third-year student at the Gbarngba School of Theology and a junior student at the Liberia College of Technology in Monrovia. I am studying theology to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church in Liberia in the near future.

Before coming to Geneva, I worked as the financial secretary at the National Lutheran Youth Fellowship for four years. After that, I served as general secretary, starting in 1996, for the Youth Department of the Lutheran Church in Liberia, and as secretary for the Liberian Council of Churches Youth Desk, starting in February 1997. In these positions of trust, I helped with the organization and implementation of training programs for the young people of my country who had been affected by war. I also worked on self-sustainability during the electoral process.

For a very long time, I have wanted to work for an international organization in a foreign country that is concerned with the training of young people for future leadership in the church and in society. It is a big blessing, my dream has come true.

During my nine months, I will help the youth desk to conduct a study on models of spiritual renewal of youth work in the member churches of the LWF. I will also assist with the production of the Youth Magazine and the organization of youth meetings and international youth consultations.

Finally, while I am at the Youth Desk I expect to keep my ears open for new ideas, views, suggestions and corrections that will greatly improve my work and talents. At the end of the program I am expected to go home and help my church build a vibrant youth ministry, as well as help with the peace process in my beloved country. I want to be able to help my young fellow countrymen and women, who became primary or secondary victims of the seven years of civil war in Liberia, to become good citizens in church and society. I am hoping to liaise with the LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights and the Hague Appeal for Peace conference, organized by the International Peace Bureau, to prepare myself adequately for the mission of the church in Liberia in the area of peacebuilding. After seven years of civil war, there is a need for the church to help strengthen the human rights commission recently established by the Liberian government. I have so many expectations for these few months of my internship. I will make use of every minute I am available to learn as much as possible from the LWF and other organizations in Geneva. I look forward to meeting many other young people and to helping the LWF member churches to identify the need of training young people who are the future leaders of the church and society.

“At the end of the program I am expected to go home and help my church build a vibrant youth ministry, as well as help with the peace process in my beloved country.”

Tolbert Thomas Jallah, Jr

Christian Chavarría

Ayala 2001

23



“My cross is a symbol of hope, life and faith.”

Name	Christian Chavarría Ayala
Year of birth	1976
Church	Salvadoran Lutheran Church
Position in the church	Administrator, musician, lay pastor
First engagement with LWF	2001 ACT/LWF attending the victims of two earthquakes in El Salvador at the age of 24 years
Functions in the LWF	Artist

The civil war in El Salvador during the 1980s made me grow and mature much faster than other children my age. At the age of eight, I was a refugee in Honduras and during that time I started painting. I have never attended any art school. Since my childhood I have always had faith, not because my parents told me to be faithful, but because I myself experienced the presence of God in my life. I was Roman Catholic. When I heard about the beliefs of the Lutherans I liked them and decided to look into them. I became a member of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church when I was 12 and I feel proud of my church and all the good that it has done for El Salvador by saving the lives of thousands of people. My own life was saved by the Lutheran church when they offered me a scholarship to study. In my free time I painted crosses for the Lutheran church “La Resurreccion” in San Salvador. This is a gift I received from God. My art is simple and humble but I do it with dedication and love.

My first encounter with the LWF was in February 2001, when I was 24 years old. El Salvador was hit by two devastating earthquakes affecting the whole country. The LWF with ACT Alliance organized groups of young people to work in the field with the victims. We had to dig up the people who had died under their own houses and dirt, we took care of the wounded and we gave counselling to people who were in despair. We empowered and advocated communities to seek help with reconstruction and to gain better living conditions after the emergency.

About my art, I never imagined that God could give me this gift which took me to different places in the world, touched many hearts and gave happiness to people. This has happened with my cross. My cross is a symbol of hope, life and faith.

In 2012, the LWF President Younan visited our church in El Salvador; I made a cross as a gift for him. In 2013, the LWF asked me to make 10 special crosses to be given to different religious leaders in the world when the LWF visited them. In March 2013, I received the news that one of my crosses was to be given to Pope Francis in Rome. What did I do? I sat down and gave thanks to God, I could not believe it. If I would have known that one of the crosses was for the Pope, I would have made it better.

The news about my crosses being given as presents around the world from the LWF to different delegations, bishops, and archbishops, among others, was very gratifying. Signs of hope and faith were coming from a chaotic and suffering country such as El Salvador.

At the beginning of 2016, General Secretary Junge asked about the possibility of helping with a project. He did not tell me what it was about. I told him, yes, I could do something to help, I would be glad to. A few weeks later I was told about the idea of making a special cross for a very special moment. I was speechless. I always think my art is simple and wonder, what can I express with it? I knew how delicate this project was and I had to make it very carefully so that it would not hurt or offend anyone. This was something huge! I still could not believe it. Time passed and it was difficult to comprehend what was happening. Sometimes I thought they wouldn't take my crosses for such an event. Maybe I am only an option, I wondered... until it became reality.

On 31 October 31 2016 my cross was in front at the Common Prayer on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation. It was unbelievable. I was invited to the celebration and when I arrived in Lund, Sweden, I saw pictures of my cross on almost everything: the invitations, posters, TV screens, documents, guest badges, etc.

The most beautiful moment for me in this celebration was when Pope Francis and the LWF General Secretary Junge were at the end of the celebration in the stadium in Malmö. They gave the final blessing with the cross as a huge background. Thousands of people received the Roman Catholic-Lutheran and Salvadoran blessing. God is perfect in everything God does. God has guided me and saved me from many hard situations. My gift is an instrument in the service of God. My cross is a humble call to unity between the Christian communities in the world and the dream of a united communion.

“My cross is a humble call to unity between the Christian communities in the world and the dream of a united communion.”

Christian Chavarría Ayala



Meghan Johnston Aelabouni 2005



“We embodied the communion of churches in our time together.”

Name	Meghan Johnston Aelabouni
Year of birth	1979
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Position in the church	Pastor; PhD student in Religion and Theology
First engagement with LWF	LWF Young Communicators Training Program (2005-2007)
Functions in the LWF	Delegate to the LWF Eleventh Assembly Stuttgart 2010

In 2005, at the age of 26, I was living in Chicago and studying to become an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) when I was invited to join 25 other young Lutherans from 24 different countries in an LWF Young Communicators' Training Program. Over a week in Lyon, France, we were mentored by communication professionals from our member churches, learning aspects of print, radio, and web media and their role in making a “communicative communion.” Returning home, we spent the next two years working on individual projects in our member churches. In 2007 our group met in Lund, Sweden, to provide media support for the LWF Council meeting and 60th anniversary celebrations. In a final presentation to the LWF, our message was: “We are ready for the next step. Are you?”

Looking back 12 years later in 2017, I can say that we were ready! And yet, we could never have imagined how communication technologies would change. In 2005 my team spent several days creating an online homepage; now this task can be accomplished in minutes from a smartphone or tablet. The world of blogs and social media was just emerging then; now, it is an integral part of global communication.

The technical expertise we gained through our LWF program was significant, and many of us still do communications work in our churches. Perhaps even more significant, however, were the relationships we built with one another. We worked together, ate together, sang and danced and worshipped together. We learned from one another about life in our different cultures and contexts. We embodied the communion of churches in our time together.



And thanks to those same communication technologies, many of the original LWF programme participants have stayed connected to each other as we have grown older, pursued careers and adventures in new places, married, and had children. In the end, we learned that no matter how the means and methods of communication may change, the heart of communication is still the relationships we have as fellow members of the body of Christ.

As for me, I was ordained in the ELCA in 2007 and have served for 10 years as a pastor in two congregations. During these years, I spent a week at the LWF offices in Geneva, helping with an LWF communications audit, and I was also blessed to meet old friends and to gain new ones as a delegate to the LWF Eleventh Assembly 2010 in Stuttgart. The skills and insights I gained through the LWF training program have also helped me as a writer for the ELCA's *Living Lutheran* and *Gather* magazines, as a guest preacher and keynote presenter, and as a contributor to the *Huffington Post* in 2012.

In 2006 I married Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, a native of Israel/Palestine and a fellow ELCA pastor. We have welcomed three children, Ethan, Natalie, and Luke; and we have led Lutheran pilgrimages to the Holy Land, visiting Augusta Victoria hospital and the churches and schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

In September 2016, I began a new chapter in my own vocation as I entered a full-time PhD program in Religion at the Iliff School of Theology at the University of Denver (Colorado). I hope to study the ways that religion and theology intersect with the stories of our cultures, told and shared through film, literature, television and online and social media. As you can see, the lessons I learned through the LWF are still a major influence in my life. As I study and teach, I hope to remain connected to our global communion and our joyful work of proclaiming the gospel in word and in deed around the world.

“The technical expertise we gained through our LWF program was significant, and many of us still do communications work in our churches.”

Meghan Johnston Aelabouni

Jeff Buhse
2009

25



“Climate justice was an area of advocacy that was well championed by the youth of the communion.”

Name	Jeff Buhse
Year of birth	1985
Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Position in the church	National Church Council member (lay delegate)
First engagement with LWF	LWF youth workshop “Youth in decision making” in Switzerland, 2009 at the age of 24 years
Functions in the LWF	Youth Delegate at the Eleventh LWF Assembly Stuttgart 2010; LWF delegate to UN Conference on Climate Change (2012-2015), member of LWF Working Group on Climate Justice

For many years I have been active in my church community and in encouraging young people in in taking up their role in the everyday workings of the church in Canada. In 2009 I was asked to attend a workshop at the LWF headquarters in Geneva for youth decision making in the church. As a result of this experience, I was then approached by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to attend the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010 as an official youth delegate. It was this experience that truly began my work with the LWF.

The 2010 youth delegation at the Assembly acknowledged climate justice as a serious concern and decided that this would be a major area of advocacy for the Youth Desk in the coming years. I have been incredibly proud of the LWF for the support and responsibility it has provided to the Youth Desk over the years for this initiative and the fact that the LWF Council recognized climate justice as an area of emphasis for the LWF. It felt it was an area of advocacy that was well championed by the youth of the communion.

In 2012 I was approached to be a member of the LWF delegation to attend the 18th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP) in Doha, Qatar. I was pleased to find many familiar faces in this delegation and made a number of new lifelong friends. We had our work set out for us but we were able to lay the groundwork for the LWF Working Group on Climate Justice. Then in 2014 I had the privilege of attending the COP 20 meetings in Lima, Peru, and again in 2015 I attended the COP 21 in Paris, France. Throughout this process the LWF maintained an integral role, working in collaboration with the WCC, ACT Alliance, and many other faith-based organizations, ensuring that the governmental negotiators maintained a focus on the human element in their decision-making.

The LWF has afforded me the opportunity to see the communion in action in the world and see how we, as Lutherans, can make a difference beyond our own congregations and beyond our borders. As an LWF delegate, I have been a part of one of the largest gatherings of international leaders at COP 21 in Paris, France, and have seen what impact 72 million Lutherans can have. I have met lifelong friends from around the world and have learned so much from them. Having this connection to brothers and sisters across the communion has really helped me to realize that the decisions I make here, in Canada, have long-lasting effects on friends of mine in other parts of the world, like Brazil, Norway, and Papua New Guinea; we live in an increasingly globalized world and we need to work together to end the destruction of the creation that we have been provided.

The LWF has given me the skills and experience necessary to become a leader in my home church and my community in the area of climate justice advocacy and for this I am forever thankful. I have been able to transfer my skills and experience into every aspect of my life and I can see the effect the LWF has had on everyone I meet.



“The LWF has afforded me the opportunity to see the communion in action in the world and see how we, as Lutherans, can make a difference beyond our own congregations and beyond our borders.”

Jeff Buhse

Pranita Sunemia Biswasi 2013

26



“This communion has pushed my faith to be stronger by increasing my sense of ecumenism and the need for working together in hope.”

Name	Pranita Sunemia Biswasi
Year of birth	1990
Church	Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church, India
Position in the church	Youth coordinator
First engagement with LWF	LWF delegation to COP 19 in 2013 at the age of 23 years
Functions in the LWF	LWF working group on climate change, LWF delegation to COP 19, 20, 21

In the late 19th century my great grandfather converted to Christianity. This was only possible because of the vision of Pastor Christian Jensen from Breklum, Germany. He had sent two missionaries to preach the word of God to the most remote and under developed areas of Koraput district, which is in the state of Odisha in India. Since then my church has been called the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church and it later became a member of the LWF. In 1990 I was born and baptized and since my baptism I have been known as Pranita Biswasi. I was born in the small town of Jeypore. From my childhood to this youthful age my church has played an immense role in nurturing me and my capabilities.

Our present world is facing many global issues: dramatic changes of the climate, loss of biodiversity and habitat degradation, limited natural resources, increasing pollution and skyrocketing population. We live in a world where the finite resources available on our planet are doomed to conflict with the exponential growth of population. We humans dominate the land and its resources and we neglect the negative impacts we have on the earth. As humans, we also have a moral responsibility to help the world return to its more natural balanced state by reducing our negative impact on the world. For me, this realization increased my love for and interest in the environment and at the same time inspired me to pursue my Master's degree in Environmental Sciences. Until I took up this subject in university I had been unable

to explore it in depth. But as environmental sciences is an interdisciplinary subject, it widened my knowledge of many different aspects of environmental issues.

In the year 2013 the Youth Desk of my church nominated me and introduced me to the Youth Desk of the LWF as it was planning to send a young delegation to the COP. I don't have the words to express the happiness I felt when the LWF chose me to be one of the delegates to attend the COP19 in Poland. Later, I had the privilege of being a member of the LWF young delegation to COP20 and COP21 as well. I thank God for showering blessings on me through the youth desks of my church and the LWF.

The LWF changes lives through advocacy by putting young people at the heart of the discussions that will affect their own future. My experience on climate advocacy with the LWF equipped me with policy making, communication, advocacy and campaigning skills. It also gave me the essential tools to understand and influence key global challenges around sustainability and gave me the strength to motivate more young people at the local and global levels as a girl, a youth representative and as a youth coordinator of my church. Now, my work as a youth coordinator in the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church involves advocating with other youth on ecological and social justice issues.

I have experienced the serious effects of changing climate. Repeated cyclones, floods and droughts have caused major devastation in my province, leaving thousands of people to suffer without food and shelter. The harsh impacts of climate change are being felt especially by the poorest and most vulnerable, who have contributed the least to the causes of the problem. This is the injustice at the core of the problem. Those least responsible are worst affected. This is the reason why I still and will continue advocating for climate justice. Despite important steps in the global climate negotiations there remains a significant gap between where we are today and where we need to be by the end of this decisive decade if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.

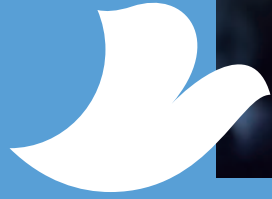
Yet another great opportunity I received from the LWF was to represent the whole Lutheran youth in the historic "Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation" on 31 October 2016. It was a thrilling experience for me. I never thought that I would meet Pope Francis in my lifetime and that the same audience would clap for me and the Pope while we stood on the same stage. While witnessing and speaking on behalf of LWF youth in front of around 10,000 people and millions watching the live stream, I could personally feel the abundant blessing of God upon me. This communion has pushed my faith to be stronger by increasing my sense of ecumenism and the need for working together in hope.

My experience with the LWF is always a joy. I owe a deep sense of gratitude to the LWF youth secretary for her confidence in me and for helping me to grow through encouragement and accompaniment.

While we commemorate the 500 years of Reformation, let us all reduce our consumption, re-use our resources and, most importantly, reform our mind sets and stand for justice in order to build sustainable churches and societies that guarantee a well-planned future for all.

Triin Salmu 2013

27



“The variety and diversity inside this one Lutheran confession was simply beautiful. We were all different and yet we had something connecting us all and making us one.”

Name	Triin Salmu
Year of birth	1988
Church	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
Position in the church	Director of an association in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
First engagement with LWF	Coordinator of LWF funded church project
Functions in the LWF	Member of the LWF Global Young Reformers' Network

It was four years ago when I consciously became aware of the LWF. I had heard the name before and I knew that the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church had an ongoing project with some sort of Lutheran organization. But I did not know anything about that organization. That changed very quickly.

In January 2013 I started my job as the director of an association in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church that was responsible for implementing the project. And at the same time the second phase of the project started. From that first day at work I was linked with the LWF even if I was not sure what that would mean. I had to learn quickly how to navigate the LWF systems and also how to run a non-profit organisation. Fortunately, I had wonderful people around me who helped me and gave me guidance.

The first real contact I had with the LWF was when a training course for project holders was arranged in Prague. There I met Ms Ilona Dorji, LWF Secretary for Project Coordination and Monitoring, for the first time. It was a good introduction to the project world of the LWF. I had to prepare for the next project application slated for the following year. I can

say that the journey had a fast but good start. In January 2014, LWF General Secretary Junge visited the Estonian church. We had a brief meeting during the pastors' conference.

Spring 2015 was a very interesting one for me. The DMD sub-committee was having its meeting to discuss the projects, and I was invited to Geneva to present our project's progress to the committee. That was somewhat scary because I've never been to Geneva or the LWF offices. There I met some of the Council members and got to know the process of project approval. It was very interesting to see how that process works, how the decisions are made and who actually makes them. I got to be a part of the meetings where they look over all the projects and discuss them and then decide if they are approved or not. I had a unique experience because I was in the room while they decided the approval of my project.

Up to this time, my connection with the LWF had been through the Estonian church project. But in 2015, I was asked to be part of the Global Young Reformers' Network. At first I did not know what to expect from it. We had our first meeting in Trondheim, Norway, where I got to meet the European Young Reformers. It was a good taste of what would happen in Wittenberg later that same year. Before that meeting I had known that there are Lutherans all over the world, but I had never really experienced this global communion. In Wittenberg I had the chance to experience it first-hand. That was an eye-opening two weeks in the heart of the Reformation's historic birthplace. The variety and diversity inside this one Lutheran confession was simply beautiful. We were all different and yet we had something connecting us all and making us one. We vary in size and membership, but as General Secretary Junge quoted from former LWF President Kebira: "There is no church so big, so old, [and] so well-resourced that it would not heavily depend on the love, care and solidarity of others. Conversely, there is no church so small, so young and with so scarce resources that it does not have gifts to share with others." We can all learn from one another.

These experiences can only enrich our own home churches. There we can share global church experiences with the local people. Bill Hybels has said: "The local church is the hope of the world." Let us, through this Lutheran communion, be that hope in the world.

“Before that meeting I had known that there are Lutherans all over the world, but I had never really experienced this global communion.”

Triin Salmu

Julia Braband

2013 

28



“For me the LWF is like a worldwide family with problems, differences and great moments. Coming together is always like coming home.”

Name	Julia Braband
Year of birth	1993
Church	Evangelical Church in Central Germany
Position in the church	Member of the synod, chair of the youth council
First engagement with LWF	Steering member of the LWF Global Young Reformers' Network at the age of 20
Functions in the LWF	Delegate to the LWF Twelfth Assembly 2017 Windhoek

When I was asked in 2013 to be part of a program within the LWF, I couldn't have imagined what would happen during the next few years - how many people I would meet and in which countries I would travel to. The first meeting of the steering committee of the young reformers was in Wittenberg. I couldn't be there because the youth council of my church was being held at the same time. The other members of the steering committee met us in Eisenach and we had some great sessions and a walk to the Wartburg Castle where Martin Luther translated the New Testament 1521. It was my first time meeting the other members of the steering committee. What a great experience! At that time I was not sure what we would do or plan during the future meetings and years. We had Skype meetings and long email conversations.

One year later, we met in Geneva. We planned our virtual conference and the first steps for the “Workshop Wittenberg.” We also went to Taizé for one weekend for ecumenical experiences. During the “Workshop Wittenberg,” we had some guests from Taizé. We got to know each other better and better.

Communicating in English got easier every time we met and we appreciated being a truly global team. On 31 October 2014 we held our Virtual Conference. We met the young

reformers from all member churches of the LWF for the first time, virtually. It was great to have this Virtual Conference to get the first ideas about important youth themes and different discussion styles.

A highlight was the “Workshop Wittenberg” in 2015. Wittenberg is part of my home church, the Evangelical Church in Central Germany. It was a great honor to host such an international conference with many interesting people from politics, church and youth groups from all over the world. We planned a lot and were excited to meet youth from all member churches of the LWF. We had a great and pleasant time, with intensive discussions and a wonderful Christian communion with prayers and worship, but there were also different problems that we had to solve.

We met as a steering committee again in Brazil in July 2016. It was our last meeting as a steering committee, and we reflected together on what we had experienced over the course of the last few years. After our meeting, we met the young reformers from Latin America and the Caribbean. They have built a strong network. It’s a benefit of our ‘Workshop Wittenberg’ and I am proud to have brought them together. With them and some young reformers from the other regions of the LWF, we were guests at the youth gathering of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. The youth were very happy to host international guests. We led one devotion and one workshop, where we presented our different cultures and some of the “Living Reformation Projects.”

Now, half a year later, it is 2017 and we are commemorating 500 years of Reformation. I’m a delegate for the LWF Assembly in Namibia and I have been nominated for a position on the LWF Council. For me, the LWF is like a worldwide family with problems, differences and great moments. Coming together is always like coming home. To know people all over the world is a great experience and a great gift. I’m so thankful to have been asked in 2013 to be part of the Young Reformers’ Network. I realize that it has changed the way I view my faith and the role of the churches in my context. It’s great to know so many people worldwide. I learned, and I will continue to learn during the next few years, a great deal about Lutheran churches worldwide, different cultures and lifestyles, the meaning of freedom and peace, different theological reflections, problems in a worldwide communion, as well as ecumenical efforts.

“I’m so thankful to have been asked in 2013 to be part of the Young Reformers’ Network. I realize that it has changed the way I view my faith and the role of the churches in my context.”

Julia Braband

Eun Hae Kwon 2010

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“Through my service in the communion, I’ve come to realize that God uses my weakness to reveal God’s surpassing greatness, steadfast love and exceeding grace.”

Name	Eun-hae Kwon
Year of birth	1987
Church	Lutheran Church in Korea
Position in the church	Youth representative, lay person
First engagement with LWF	2010 at the age of 23
Functions in the LWF	Delegate to the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart 2010 2010-2017 Vice-President for Asia region

My very first engagement with the LWF was the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010, where I participated as a youth delegate from the Lutheran Church in Korea, and also as a nominee for the new LWF Council representing youth in the Asia region. Back in my church, I was actively involved in organizing youth activities and serving as a Sunday school teacher and choir member in my congregation. Coming from a small church and meeting other Lutherans from all over the world - praying, worshiping, talking and reflecting together - was an overwhelming and enlightening experience. It was a moment of witnessing a communion which is unified in God’s grace and diversified in God’s creation. Right after the Assembly, the newly elected Council held its first meeting in Stuttgart.

Because the Asia region couldn’t come up with a nominee for Vice-President before the meeting, the region had to recommend a person from among the Council members in Asia to be the Vice-President, taking into consideration gender and generational balance. As a consequence of this exceptional situation, and in accordance with the LWF policy, as a young woman and a lay leader of the Lutheran Church in Korea, I received the support from

my fellow Council members in Asia to serve as Vice-President for the region. It was the first time in LWF history that a youth had become a Vice-President, which was indeed a surprising outcome for the region as well as for the whole LWF.

I am grateful to God for giving me the opportunity to serve the communion in my youth over the last seven years. It has been an enormously rewarding and great learning experience for me. God's call for me to serve the communion was indeed a privilege but there were moments when I was afraid. And so many times I asked from the bottom of my heart, "God, why do you use someone like me to serve the communion? You know I am not qualified and gifted enough for what you are calling me to do." When I raised doubts about carrying out what God called me to do, I was reminded in prayers that God will be with me. I prayed to God to give me the faith to trust in God's plan even if I didn't understand it at that time - the plan which is greater than all my struggles, all my doubts, all my weakness, and all my fears. Through my service in the communion, I've come to realize that God uses my weakness to reveal God's surpassing greatness, steadfast love and exceeding grace. God's call on me was not about me. It was about God. My response was to move forward in faith.

The LWF Youth Desk was established at the Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam in 1977. At that time the Assembly endorsed the establishment of the Youth Desk with a faith-based understanding that young people are an integral part of the body of Christ and of the Lutheran communion and are therefore committed to strengthening the youth participation in all aspect of church life and decision making. Forty years have passed since then. As the first youth Vice-President, I've have had opportunities to represent the LWF on many occasions at the regional and global levels over the past seven years. I hope and pray my service as a Vice-President can be shared as one of the many narratives of meaningful youth contributions in the LWF. Also, I hope it will be a stepping stone to improve youth participation and leadership in the life of our member churches.

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THE
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FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches



Youth who made the Lutheran communion

Testimonies and stories from 1947 to 2017

After 70 years of the LWF, we see that the communion of churches is full of the stories and testimonies of those who were impacted by the LWF at early age and who made an impact on the communion and their churches as young persons.

LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan opens this collection with his story as a young LWF Assembly delegate in 1984, and Eun-hae Kwon, the first young LWF Vice-President, closes with her experience of serving the Asia region for the last seven years.



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