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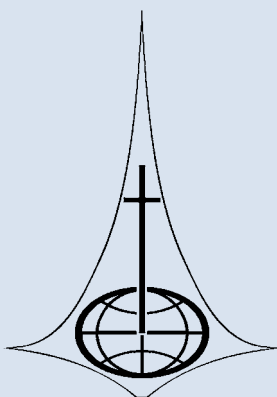
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FEATURE: The Strength to Survive – Kazakh Lutheran Congregations



In July, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko visited Lutheran congregations in northern Kazakhstan. "You have demonstrated to the world that the Church of Jesus Christ can withstand all adversity," said the LWF leader during meetings with congregation members © LWF/Anli Serfontein

LWF General Secretary Noko Touched by Lutherans' Experiences in Kazakhstan

ASTANA, Kazakhstan/GENEVA (LWI) – In the last 70 years, the Lutheran church in Kazakhstan has been through devastating times, yet it survived. As recently as 20 years ago, it was a strong community, united in a heartbreaking history of forced removal; today it comprises small, depleted congregations.

Two traumatic events mark the church's history.

Engraved in the memories of many and still held alive by the survivors' oral history, is the 1941 forced deportation of half-a-million ethnic Germans from the then Volga Republic, most of who were Lutherans. They were originally German settlers invited to the area during the 18th

century Russian empire reign by Catherine the Great. Former Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin banished them to the Russian steppe in the middle of a Siberian winter—at below zero degrees, without any food or housing.

And then 50 years later, after rebuilding their lives and communities, independence in 1991 led to the mass emigration of many ethnic Germans to Germany, leaving another deep mark. Communities were eradicated, emptying the once overflowing churches within a few years. Eighteen years after the onset of the emigration wave to Germany,

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LWF World Service Director Underscores Crucial Role of Unified Church Humanitarian Body

The head of the Department for World Service (DWS) at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) says the establishment of a unified church-based emergency and development global network is an important step toward closer cooperation between churches and their related agencies.

"The ACT Alliance is a unique chance to enhance ecumenical cooperation, and thereby the efficiency and visibility of the churches' development and humanitarian work," said DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, commenting on the March 2010 launch of "ACT Alliance." ACT stands for Action by Churches Together.

The ACT Development General Assembly decided at its May 2009 meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to unify with the ACT International emergency network, whose governing board had approved the unification in April. The ACT Alliance hopes to bring together nearly 150 churches, agencies and other faith-based organizations from the North and South. It will have a combined income of more than USD 2 billion and a staff of 40,000 including volunteers.

Hitzler expressed satisfaction with the decision to unite the two networks, of which the LWF is a founding member. "We now have to make it [cooperation] real and use the ACT Alliance actively," said the DWS director, who represents the LWF on the ACT Development governing body.

The LWF and ACT International cooperate closely in several countries including Chad, Colombia and Myanmar. Through emergency appeals, ACT International coordinates humanitarian operations all over the world, and has been recently active also in Afghanistan, Gaza, India, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

ACT Development focuses on long-term development issues and coordinates work in areas such as aid effectiveness, impact assessment and malaria initiatives.

ACT International director, Mr John Nduna, says the new movement will be a professional and Christian alliance working on emergency and development. ACT saves thousands of lives every year, he added.

Read more about DWS work globally at: www.lutheranworld.org

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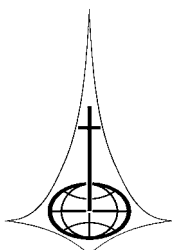
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LWF CONSULTATION: "CHURCH AND STATE IN SOCIETIES IN TRANSFORMATION"

26-29 June 2009 in Budapest, Hungary

European Christians Must Offer Alternative to Worship of Money

Lutheran Consultation Meets in Budapest 20 Years after the Fall of Communism

BUDAPEST, Hungary/GENEVA (LWI)

—Two decades after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, Christians are now challenged to offer new values in a society governed by the worship of money, Rev. Marianna Szabo-Matrai told around 30 representatives from member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) participating in a regional consultation on "Church and State in Societies in Transformation" in Budapest, Hungary.

Preaching at the opening worship of the 26-29 June LWF gathering at the Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University, Szabo-Matrai described how young Hungarians today believe they must "reach the top and become rich." They have learned that they need to be first—to see their peers as adversaries and triumph over them, she said.

If necessary, "[this] fight must be hard and harsh," said Szabo-Matrai, deputy bishop of the southern district of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary. Along with this goes



Rev. Marianna Szabó-Mátrai delivers the sermon during the 26 June opening worship service of the consultation on "Church and State in Societies in Transformation" on in Budapest, Hungary. © LWF/Zsuzsanna Bolla

"the idol of the post-socialist times, the honor of money."

"This is what we have taught them," she explained. "And in the meantime we did not pass on our own values—friendship, the need for fellowship, embracing each other and mercy."

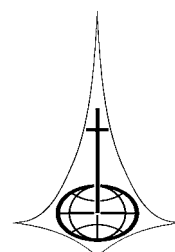
Eastern Europeans feel that they need to run faster and worry more than their northern or western counterparts, Szabo-Matrai remarked. They are often tired and depressed. It is hard to accept that "it is crazy to exploit ourselves excessively," added the Hungarian church leader.

In a greeting on behalf of the Hungarian host church, Prof. Tibor Fabiny described how the global economic crisis had hit the country hard. The downturn had led to the rise of an extremist political party in the recent European Parliament elections, he said.

"The experience of crisis, once again in modern history, has resulted in the sudden emergence and strengthening of populist and dangerous tendencies in the political discourse, the intensification of right-wing radicalism," explained Fabiny, a Lutheran and professor of English literature and hermeneutics at Budapest's Karoli



Around 30 persons from European and non-European LWF member churches participated in the LWF consultation in late June in Budapest, Hungary. © LWF/Zsuzsanna Bolla



Gaspar University of the Hungarian Reformed Church. “And this is not what we wanted 20 years ago.”

In 1984 Budapest hosted the Seventh LWF Assembly, the first time the organization’s assembly had taken place behind the Iron Curtain, Fabiny noted. “Then no one dared to dream that just in five short years the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe would collapse as a pack of cards,” he said. “Is this not a clear sign that not human be-

ings, but our creator, the Triune God is in charge of history?”

The Budapest consultation concluded a three-year study process examining the relationships between church and state in the Europe that has emerged since 1989. It followed workshops in Moravske Toplice, Slovenia; Svaty Jr, Slovak Republic; St Petersburg, Russia; and Leeds, United Kingdom. The study was organized by the LWF Department for

Mission and Development Europe area desk.

The LWF has 43 member churches in Europe, to which approximately 37 million Christians belong. The Central and Eastern European region comprises 15 member churches with 1.44 million members.

(Stephen Brown, managing editor of Ecumenical News International, reported on the LWF consultation for LWI, and wrote the articles in this section.)

Christians Urged to Look to Luther for Insight on Relations with Islam

Martin Luther, the 16th century Protestant Reformer, can help Christians today to accommodate Islam in western societies, a German constitutional expert told participants in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation in Budapest at the end of June.



*Prof. Gerhard Robbers
© LWF/E.-S. Vogel-Mfato*

Dr Gerhard Robbers, professor of public and constitutional law at the University of Trier, Germany, recalled how Luther, introducing a German translation of the Qur’an, said, “Read the Qur’an to understand Islam better, to understand Muslims better, and in the end, read the Qur’an to understand yourself better.”

For Robbers, this statement was a true, and early, “act of enlightenment” and a good example of trying “to understand the other,” something much needed in today’s Europe marked by increasing religious pluralism.

Robbers said a major challenge in the transition in which Europe now finds itself is “attributing an adequate legal status to Islam and Muslims.” In his paper titled “New Forms of Pluralism as Challenging and Trans-

formative Factors,” he emphasized that Europeans need to remember how much Islam and Christendom have in common.

“Many in Europe have forgotten what their culture owes to Muslim thought,” he observed, pointing to the influence on medieval Europe of Islamic ideas in philosophy, medicine, mathematics, economics and diplomacy.

“Many key features of the laws of international diplomacy have ori-

gins [in] Muslim legal culture,” said Robbers. “And certainly religious tolerance, at least the tolerance for those religions which have the Book in common, comes from Muslim thinking.”

He suggested seeking parallels between Lutheran and Islamic thought in areas such as the role of Scripture—Luther’s concept of *sola scriptura*—the place given to the realm of God and the understanding that clergy are not required as mediators between believers and God.

“In Lutheranism, there is no necessity to have clerics, no necessity to have hierarchical clergy,” noted Robbers. “It is very similar in Islam.”



Participants in the LWF consultation in the Hungarian capital follow discussions on the development of church-state relations in Europe since 1989. © LWF/Zsuzsanna Bolla

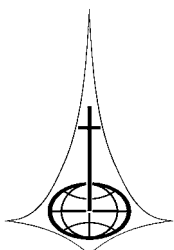
Lutheran Churches Face Ongoing Struggle to Adapt to Post-Communist Realities

The fall of communism two decades ago gave Lutheran churches in Central and Eastern Europe—most of them smaller churches—both new freedoms and many difficult tasks, Rev. Dr Eva-

Sibylle Vogel-Mfato told participants at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation in Budapest.

These churches have moved from “being a church under oppression to

a church which the state expects to take an active part in society,” remarked Vogel-Mfato, LWF Europe area secretary at the Department for Mission and Development. Lutheran





German theologian Rev. Dr. Annette Leis-Peters, is a researcher on the influence of religion on society at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. © LWF/Zsuzsanna Bolla

churches have had to negotiate with the state for legal recognition and over church property confiscated during the communist era, she noted.

Emigration is also a problem for some, noted Rev. Dr. Annette Leis-Peters. “The end of the Iron Curtain meant it was much easier to migrate,” said Leis-Peters, a German researcher at Uppsala University, Sweden, studying the impact of religion on society. Members of some minority Lutheran churches left in significant numbers for western countries.

Return of Confiscated Property in Hungary

In Hungary, the government is to return by 2011 most churches and church buildings confiscated after 1948 by the communist regime, Rev. Dr. Gabor Orosz told the consultation. Compensation would be provided for the remainder, reported Orosz, an assistant professor at the Evangelical Lutheran Theology University in Budapest. Lutherans could assign one percent of their taxes to the church, and 20 Lutheran schools, with thousands of pupils, would be entitled to the same subsidies as state schools.

The return of confiscated property can present its own problems. “We have been given back old dilapidated churches but not the supporting properties,” noted Archbishop Dr. Edmund

Ratz of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States.

Diaconal Work in the Czech Republic

The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren plays a significant role in providing social services through its Diakonie organization, which runs 33 centers and eight special schools. Diakonie’s ministries include hospices, residential centers for the elderly and day-care centers for children with learning difficulties, who otherwise would be placed in institutions.

“We had to develop facilities that were completely missing in our societ-

ies,” said Ms. Eva Grollova, Diakonie’s deputy director. “After the fall of communism, without partners in sister churches abroad, we wouldn’t have been able to start our activities.”

Emphasis on Protestantism in Slovenia

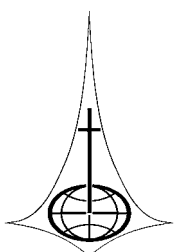
In Slovenia, Protestants comprise less than one percent of the country’s population. A marginal community like the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia with its 20,000 members, “cannot compete with the still big and influential Roman Catholic Church with its many institutions,” said Rev. Simon Sever, a Lutheran pastor in Bodonci. But it does want to emphasize its “Protestantism” through preaching and diaconal work, as well as by being “productively critical” in promoting a more human society.

Struggle for Recognition in Croatia

In Croatia, where the collapse of the former Yugoslavia led to war, the minority Protestant churches still struggle to contribute to the public arena, said Enoch Seba, a Baptist from the Matthias Flacius Illyricus faculty of theology in Zagreb. They lack human resources and in the post-war period have been preoccupied with the legal regulation of their status.



Archbishop Dr. Edmund H. Ratz (left) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States exchanging views with Dr. Pekka Leino (right), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. © ENI/Stephen Brown





For Rev. Dr. Marianne Subklew of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the future of the church in eastern Germany depends on whether congregations are able to develop structures and patterns to attract new members. © ENI/Stephen Brown

Attracting Members in Former East Germany

In the former German Democratic Republic, Protestant churches, which historically gathered a majority of the population, became a marginalized minority, reported Rev. Dr. Marianne Subklew.

After German reunification in 1990, the churches in the East took over the church-state model of the

West, where the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches accounted for a majority of the population. They adopted the western church tax system and took on religious education in schools as well as vast areas of diaconal and social work, often in competition with other welfare organizations.

“While some people had hoped that, after the political changes, people would again flock to join

the churches, this hope was disappointed,” said Subklew, herself from eastern Germany but now working in Hamburg for the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The future of the church in eastern Germany depends on whether congregations are able to develop structures and patterns to attract new members. “People have left the church in droves, but can be won only as individuals,” Subklew said.

Common Issues Across Europe

The consultation was the final meeting in a European study on “Church and State in Societies of Transformation.” The study began in 2006 as an opportunity for LWF member churches in Central and Eastern Europe to explore together their relationship with the state after communism. It was later expanded to include churches elsewhere on the continent, Vogel-Mfato explained, “as we discerned more and more how many issues we have in common all over Europe.”

European Lutheran Churches Seek New Forums for Dialogue

Lutheran churches in a Europe divided for decades by the Iron Curtain have got to know each other since 1989 “in ways previously unforeseen.” However, they need “new ways and spaces” to discuss the critical questions they face, concluded the participants in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Budapest consultation.

“While churches may not always be able to arrive at clear answers, the very process of struggling together with the questions can be a helpful contribution in society,” the LWF member church representatives agreed in a final message from the meeting.



LWF/DMD secretary for Europe Rev. Dr. Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato (left) conversing with Provost Linards Rozentals, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. © LWF/Zsuzsanna Bolla

Regional Commonalities

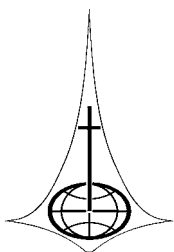
The participants noted that, “in spite of significant differences which still exist between East and West,” Lutheran churches across the old divide

share many things, “both positive and negative.”

All churches in Europe, they stated, “struggle to bear witness to the faith they confess in new politi-

cal and economic contexts, and amid increasingly diverse populations.”

Meanwhile, they noted, there are new patterns of state “neutrality” toward churches. Some states not



only provide financial support, but also expect churches to do more in their societies.

Opportunities for Witness

Participants underlined that church numbers may have declined, but interest in spirituality and values in European societies has increased, bringing new areas for outreach.

and “through new opportunities for diaconal work and participation” in the wider society.

“As Lutherans we especially discern God’s presence through a theology of the cross,” the message emphasizes. God is glimpsed through weakness and vulnerability. “Here we need to learn from and reach out to immigrants from other parts of Europe and beyond, to hear their

in Budapest, which “served as a reminder of the political, economic and religious situation existing in Central and Eastern Europe at that time.”

The consultation also coincided with commemorations in the country marking the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border. In June 1989, the foreign ministers of the two nations symbolically cut through the wire fence dividing their countries.

A few months later, Hungary allowed East Germans seeking to reach the West to cross the border. This meant “people were free to escape from oppressive, totalitarian regimes,” participants remarked.

New Threats

“Prior to 1989 churches in Central and Eastern Europe had often provided the space in which discussion could take place in tyrannical regimes,” they noted. Since then, spiritual values have been under threat from different “tyrannies,” such as consumerism and neoliberal globalization. The participants warned that the churches themselves have been in danger of diluting or abandoning the substance of the message they are called to proclaim and live out.

The consultation was the culmination of a study by the Europe desk of the LWF Department for Mission and Development. Related workshops had taken place in Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Russia and the United Kingdom.

(By Stephen Brown)



The approximately 30 participants in the LWF consultation in late June in Budapest, Hungary sought to strengthen ties among Lutheran churches in Europe. © ENI/Stephen Brown

“God has upheld the churches in many of our countries through painful times of oppression, persecution and declining numbers and influence,” they said. God continues to be active throughout Europe, in “communities of faith” that are “doing new things, through new people who are bringing new signs of life,”

voices, perspectives and the yearnings they bring.”

Symbolic Meeting

The gathering at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological University in Budapest took place 25 years after the 1984 LWF Seventh Assembly

Karl-Hinrich Manzke Elected Bishop in Schaumburg-Lippe

The superintendent of Aurich **Dr Karl-Hinrich Manzke** has been named bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe, Germany. The 51 year-old was elected on 23 June in Bückeburg, in the third ballot by 20 votes out of 30. Manzke will be installed on 17 October, replacing the retiring head of the church Bishop Jürgen Johannesdotter.

Located on the border between Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia, the Schaumburg-Lippe church has 60,800 members in 22 congregations. It is the second smallest Protestant church in Germany, and the smallest in terms of area.

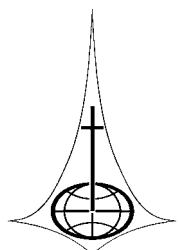


*Bishop-elect
Dr Karl-Hinrich Manzke
© epd-bild/Detlef Heese*

The bishop-elect has led the Lutheran district of Aurich in East Frisia since 1998. He studied theology and philosophy in Germany and in the United Kingdom. He served as a pastor in Soltau for seven years, and was dean of studies for three years at the preaching seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover in Imbshausen near Northeim.

Manzke is married and has two children.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1947.



Groundbreaking Ordinations in Mexico Affirm Commitment to Women in Ministry

An Important Sign from the Latin American and Caribbean Region

MEXICO CITY, Mexico/GENEVA (LWI) – The Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM) affirmed commitment to women in ministry with its first-ever ordination of female pastors.

“This important sign from the Latin American and Caribbean region should encourage the communion to continue reflecting on women’s ordination,” remarked Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, secretary for the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development. Fifteen out of the 16 LWF member churches in the Latin American and Caribbean region ordain women.

The three women ordained on 25 April will serve congregations in the capital, Mexico City. Rev. María Elena

Ortega Mora will continue to work at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, while Rev. Sofía Deyanira Tenorio May will remain at the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. Rev. Angela del Consuelo Trejo Haager, will work alongside her husband, Rev. Dr Moisés Pérez Espino, at Christ Lutheran Church.

Commenting on the Mexican church’s historic step, ILM president Rev. Daniel Trejo Coria, underscored that Jesus commands Christians to preach the gospel to all nations. “If this is the basis of the Sacrament of Baptism, we can conclude that preaching and proclamation can be done by all people,” he told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*.

“A basic tenet of the Lutheran church is the priesthood of all believ-

ers,” said Trejo Coria. “If we place that theological statement in its New Testament context, we can conclude that the ministry of the Word and sacrament is not forbidden to women.”

Trejo Coria presided at the ordination, in which pastors from Lutheran, Anglican, and Baptist churches, a woman rabbi from the Jewish Messianic Community of Mexico, and international guests also participated.

The three recently ordained ILM pastors studied at Augsburg Lutheran Seminary, which reopened in 1998 after an 18-year hiatus. The seminary is part of the Theological Community of Mexico, a consortium of Protestant seminaries on the southern side of the capital city.

“The ordained ministry of women has been celebrated in the communion as expression and gift of women’s leadership and is a commitment member churches are encouraged to address,” Neuenfeldt told *LWI*. “The public witness of ordained women has also strengthened women in other areas of leadership, in both church and society.”

The WICAS secretary added, “Fully integrating ordained women into the life of the church on the basis of a theological understanding of ministry implies sharing power and service and establishing structures that are accessible and hospitable to all God’s people.”

Read more about the LWF and women’s ordination at:

www.lutheranworld.org

30 July 2009



In late April, Rev. Daniel Trejo Coria, President of the Mexican Lutheran Church ordained Rev. María Elena Ortega Mora, Rev. Sofía Deyanira Tenorio May and Rev. Angela del Consuelo Trejo Haager. © LWF/David Brondos

India: New Church Leader Seeks Active Role for Congregations

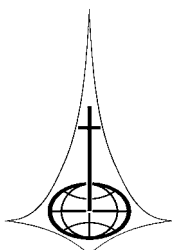
The new leader of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) hopes to see the Indian church become more vibrant in its mission.

In office since 1 June 2009, AELC president **Rev. Dr Suneel Bhanu Busi**, says it is time to reinvigorate local congregations in their commitment to the gospel.

Delegates attending the AELC’s 44th biennial convention elected the 57 year-old theologian to lead the church from 2009 to 2013. “Justice and Righteousness” was the theme of the 27 to 28 May gathering in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, India.

The church representatives expressed hope in the new AELC president, citing his extensive teaching experience in seminaries, deep pastoral commitment to Dalit liberation, wide ecumenical exposure, and passion for the church’s mission and ministry. He succeeds Rev. Dr V. Earnest Christopher.

Bhanu Busi had served as head of the Departments for Dalit Theology and Religions at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai. The 800,000-member AELC is among the ten Lutheran churches in India that belong to the Lutheran World Federation. (*Asia Lutheran News*)



USD 87.6 Million for LWF Projects and Programs in 2008

LWF Annual Report 2008 Published

GENEVA (LWI) – Total income for the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2008 amounted to USD 102.9 million compared to USD 100.2 million the previous year. According to the recently published *LWF Annual Report 2008* the LWF member churches and their related agencies provided financial assistance amounting to USD 68.8 million toward the organization’s administrative



© LWF

support and programs. The remainder included income from United Nations’ agencies, different governments, local income in the field programs and interest earned on short-term deposits.

In 2008 the LWF Secretariat expenditure totaled USD 101.3 million, compared to USD 96.8 million in 2007. Out of this amount, USD 13.7 million was used for coordination, while USD 87.6 million was distributed to LWF projects and programs. In addition, the total expenditure includes a provision to cover actuarial pension liabilities of USD 549,000.

The Department for World Service spent USD 81.8 million for its work in

36 countries. Some USD 14.1 million went to activities of the Department for Mission and Development; Department for Theology and Studies, USD 1.2 million; and USD 4.2 million to the General Secretariat.

The LWF financial statement in the past year showed a USD 1.06 million surplus. By the end of 2008, the organization’s reserves amounted to USD 22.5 million.

The LWF Foundation – Endowment Fund had an amount of CHF 9.7 million by the end of the year. The Fund was registered in April 1999 to supplement financial support for the organization’s work. Its current target

is CHF 20 million by 2017, but the long-term goal is to reach CHF 50 million.

Produced in July 2009 with the theme “A Reconciling Communion,” the 2008 Annual Report highlights LWF’s work through its Geneva Secretariat units and field offices. The 36-page full color brochure includes focuses on food security, sustainability, healing and reconciliation, communion as a gift and task, and preparations for the 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly, with the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

A low PDF version of the Annual Report can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/LWF-Annual_Report_2008-low.pdf

To order copies please contact: The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches, Ms Colette Muanda, Fax: +41/22-791 66 30, E-mail: cmu@lutheranworld.org

29 July 2009

Asian Churches Grow Despite Adversities

Lutheran church representatives from across the globe attending the annual Mekong Mission Forum (MMF) and the three-yearly Partners’ Consultation heard how churches in South-East Asia are growing despite political and economic adversities.

The 50 delegates participating in the 12-14 May meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, listened to reports about some churches in the region that are able to work with government permission but with limited scope. They are sometimes allowed to have a dedicated building for worship, but are forbidden to publicly evangelize. Many others must work secretly, meeting in private homes and moving locations to avoid government scrutiny.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Asia desk at the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) facilitates the MMF and partner churches’ meetings, aimed at coordinating mission initiatives in the Mekong region—Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Partner church representatives at this year’s meetings came from Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Norway. The recent meetings focused on the theme, “Holistic Mission – God’s Work

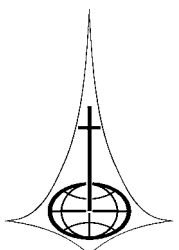
and Our Contribution.” Participants gave perspectives on the practicalities of carrying out mission in an environment that is mostly hostile to Christianity.

LWF/DMD area secretary for Asia, Rev. Dr Ginda Harahap explained the purpose of the consultation was to “empower Christians and local churches for mission” amid the dominant religious communities and cultural, social, political and economic forces.

“People have a real passion to share their Jesus with others,” remarked Ms Glenice Hartwich, representing the Lutheran Church of Australia. The political climate in some parts of this region is so difficult that we cannot give specifics about individuals and groups making significant progress in their communities, for fear of government retaliation toward them,” she added.

Current MMF projects include workshops for theological education, a library program to help distribute books throughout the region, a student and faculty-exchange program, and a project to develop a study guide to assist members who are unable to participate in formal theological education.

(The Lutheran – Australia)



FEATURE: The Strength to Survive – Kazakh Lutheran Congregations

Continued from p. 1

the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan (ELCRK) today has only about 50 congregations compared to 228 in 1993.

“It was a very bad time when a lot of people immigrated to Germany. I say thanks to God that our congregation survived,” recalls Rubin Sternberg, chairperson of the Lutheran synod in Kazakhstan.

Long Distances

The painful history of the Kazakh church left a profound impression on Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, general-secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), during several visits to ELCRK congregations in 2003 and 2006. In early July this year, Noko spent three days in Astana and Pavlodar listening to and meeting with dedicated pastors from the scattered congregations. “You may be a small church but I bring you greetings from 68 million Lutherans worldwide,” said Noko to his audience, including one pastor who had travelled 1,000 kilometers on the single journey from his parish in eastern Kazakhstan, for the meeting with the LWF leader in Astana.

Speaking to the pastors Noko said, “I think that Lutherans outside Kazakhstan need to hear from you.



Klara Valejeva has never considered emigrating to Germany. Pavlodar, Kazakhstan is her home.
© LWF/Anli Serfontein



Because of the massive emigration to Germany, worship attendance has dwindled in the Astana Lutheran congregation, Kazakhstan. © LWF/Anli Serfontein

How you remained true to the Word. Many would not have coped, and yet you survived. You have demonstrated to the world that the Church belonging to Jesus Christ can carry on.”

The road from Astana to Pavlodar over the Kazakh steppe is long, straight and bumpy. Bishop Yuri Novgorodov’s driver often changes to the opposite side of the road to avoid deep potholes. “Kazakh Autobahn [highway],” the bishop smilingly tells his visitors. The monotonous grass landscape, where sheep graze in the distance with their shepherds on horseback, is interrupted by roadside graves—a stark reminder of the road’s danger.

It had taken 19 hours to cover the 900 kilometer return journey from Astana to Pavlodar, routine for the bishop and pastors in this huge country. Novgorodov has been bishop of the ELCRK since 2005.

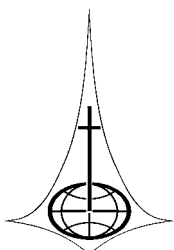
Ms Klara Valejeva, 75, is a congregation member of the small church in Pavlodar, in the northeast. She was a child when the Volga Germans were exiled without any advance warning. She recalls, they had no time to pack

their belongings, and her father died when they fled. She had to work from the age of seven, together with her four siblings. When asked why she did not go to school, she answers shyly, “We didn’t have the right clothes.” From the age of 12 she worked as a housekeeper, marrying at 19. Widowed today, she lives in Pavlodar with her daughter and visits the local church regularly—it is her social life and link with the past. She says she never had any desire to go to Germany, this is her home.

Emigration

Ms Alla Shirokhowa, 40, is fluent in German. She grew up in Novousenka, a German village in north Kazakhstan, where everything was in abundance. After Sunday service in Astana, Shirokhowa reminisces about the beauty of the town and the comfortable lifestyle they had. “We were rich,” she says. Today almost all of the Germans from that village live in Germany.

A qualified German and English teacher, she moved from Novousenka to Astana, where she taught German





Alla Shirokhowa fondly remembers the days when many parishioners still lived in the villages.

© LWF/Anli Serfontein

at the Lutheran Seminary before the institution's closure. Today her husband only manages to get small jobs, while she does translation work. With three children, including one at college, she worries constantly about money. Rents are extremely high in the new high-rise buildings springing up all over the new capital, Astana, and work is getting scarcer, if one does not speak Kazakh.

Shirokhowa's face brightens up when she talks about the time when worshippers overflowed into the courtyard for the Sunday service in the Astana congregation. Only a handful of people attend worship today.

In church, the older ethnic German women still dress in black skirts and white shirts, covering their heads in small triangular scarves. After the service they started to sing hymns in German. On this warm summer Sunday morning, their beautiful voices carry an air of melancholy, of yearning for days long past; pining for friends and family, now far away.

Because of the huge emigration wave, services today are held in Russian. By changing the language of worship, the church has evolved from a traditional German church, preserving German traditions and language to a multi-ethnic church. "From a mono-ethnic church, we developed into a multi-ethnic church. That is our only chance for the future. In this way we have a lot of chances especially in the cities, but our resources in manpower and finances are limited," said Novgorodov.

Under Stalin, Lutherans were not allowed to practice their faith openly, thus some Lutheran church buildings in Kazakhstan resemble houses. The country's population of around 16 million people comprises less than two percent Protestants, while Muslims count for more than half the population. In the post-Soviet Union period, an increasing number of people are turning to religion in this multi-ethnic country.

Shirokhowa's request to immigrate to Germany, where her mother and three siblings live, was turned down. In 2008, her daughter was denied a visa to visit relatives in Germany. She speaks of the family's difficult experience between the hope of emigrating and the darker moments of despair, before they were finally turned down. "It was six terrible years when we waited—a life out of a suitcase," she says, lamenting that her children do not know their family.

She says she is more and more worried about her future as a confessing Christian in Kazakhstan. "In recent times, one sometimes is really afraid, because it is a Muslim country. And, increasingly so."

Commitment

Some 450 kilometers away from the capital, Shirokhowa's half-brother Stanislaw Mikula, a Lutheran lay

preacher, like almost all the pastors left in this vast country, leads the second parish in Pavlodar. He started this congregation nine years ago, with a regular Sunday attendance of around 25 people. During the week he works as a tractor driver, setting aside Sundays for preaching in his small church. He has permission to immigrate to Germany, but intends to stay with his young family because he is deeply committed to his parish and sees it as his mission in life.

After this three-day visit with the ELCRK, the LWF general secretary promises Novgorodov and his pastors that he will continue to speak up for the Kazakh church. "The reason I'm doing it is because I can't imagine how the Lutherans survived through this time. The faith you had and have in difficult circumstances, with little finances and resources, including the distances you have to travel. The Lutheran church in Kazakhstan is part of my soul," Noko pledged.

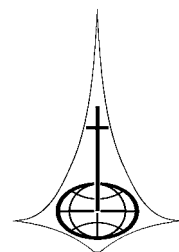
(By LWI correspondent Anli Serfontein)

30 July 2009

This article is in the continuing LWI features' series focusing on the topic "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly, which will be held from 20 to 27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.



Sunday worship in the Lutheran church of Astana. LWF-General Secretary Noko promised to continue speaking out for the church in Kazakhstan. © LWF/Anli Serfontein



Canada's Lutherans Resolve to Advocate for Peace in the Holy Land

Delegates attending the 2009 National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) passed a multi-point resolution to support peace in the Holy Land.

"This resolution seeks peace with justice for both Israelis and Palestinians and the continuation of the Christian witness in the Holy Land," said Tom Brook, National Church Council member, who introduced the resolution to the 25 to 28 June biennial convention, held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

The resolution, which inspired much discussion on the convention floor, recognized the ongoing divisions between Muslims, Jews and Christians in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. It lamented violence and oppression in that area, and directed the ELCIC to support a secure Israeli state and a viable state for Palestinians. The resolution also called for all ELCIC members to work for peace by praying, educating, and accompanying peace builders.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and ELCIC are partner churches, and both belong to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Public policy expert and LWF Council member Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer noted the resolution affirmed policies already

stated by the Canadian government, and was in line with similar statements made by the LWF and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The ELCIC resolution called for the Government of Canada to play a more active, constructive, and balanced role in creating conditions for peace in the Holy Land. Among other points, the resolution called for the government to support a shared Jerusalem, oppose Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, and support aid and policies that build the Palestinian economy.

ELCJHL Bishop Dr Mounib A. Younan, a special guest at the convention, spoke passionately about the church's role in promoting peace and justice in the region. He explained the work of organizations such as the LWF-run Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem.

Younan, LWF vice president for the Asian region, also addressed two forums where he shared challenges of living in Palestine. He said he spends half of his time organizing permits so that Palestinians can work in Israel, visit family members, and even attend funerals. He also stated his concern about the declining number of Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories.

(ELCIC Information)

Autumn Synod Will Elect New Bishop to Lead Polish Church

The Twelfth Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland decided in April that this year's autumn synod will elect a new bishop to lead the church. The synod said the current church leader Bishop Janusz Jagucki will retire in January 2010, following revelations about his cooperation with the secret service of the People's Republic of Poland during his ministry as a pastor in Giżycko.

In a letter to clergy, the church Synod Council said investigators working on a historical commission set up by the bishop in 2007 to examine infiltration of the church by security organizations from 22 July 1944 to 31 July 1990, had discovered files on Jagucki himself, which prompted him to resign from the commission.

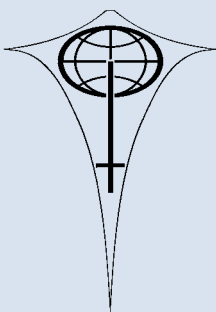
During the October 2008 synod session, Jagucki's deputy Bishop Mieczysław Cieślak announced that the governing body was continuing to study the files and clarify the facts of the case.

In March, a commission "concerned for and aware of [its] responsibility for the future and credibility of the church"

found, after intensive study of the files and interviews with Jagucki, that he was "guilty of cooperation with the security authorities to the detriment of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland."

Jagucki had given an hour-long response to the charges during the synod, the letter continued. "He also described in detail why it had been so difficult working in the northeastern Polish region of Mazury at the time. He emphasized that he did not confess to having had a deliberate, albeit unofficial cooperation arrangement with the security authorities. However, he did admit to having maintained contact with an officer whom he believed to be a policeman. Bishop Jagucki apologized for the situation into which our church had been plunged owing to the accusations leveled at it and the media hype around the whole business," said the Synod Council in its letter to the clergy.

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland has 75,000 members. It joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1947.



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