

LUTHERAN COMMUNION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), the legal successor of the Federation of Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA), celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2006 in the midst of many challenges faced by the sub-region.

HIGHLIGHTS

South Africa has one of the most liberal and progressive constitutions in the world, as well as a strong and growing economy unparalleled in Africa, south of the Sahara. Yet, the black majority of its population is still very poor and is therefore very vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. South Africa has the highest number of people infected and affected by the virus. The Lutheran family in South Africa has not yet recovered from the divisions and the effects of the apartheid system. It is still divided along racial and ethnic lines. The voice of the church still needs to be heard today on critical issues affecting the country such as HIV and AIDS, crime, poverty, gender equity, and human sexuality.

Zimbabwe is facing a socio-economic and political crisis and serious challenges relating to governance, economy, health, education, brain drain, shortages of food, corruption, high unemployment rate, curtailing of freedom of expression, association and access to information, HIV and AIDS, and a very high inflation rate. Swaziland, to a lesser degree, faces similar challenges. Issues of justice, peace and reconciliation are in the forefront. The church, as an integral part of society, is caught up in this and needs to be empowered to respond appropriately.

Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Lesotho may be politically stable, but the resources in some of these countries are not adequate to enable their people to live fulfilling lives. The Lutheran churches in some of these countries are still very young and require a great deal of accompaniment. Some of them have the potential for mission and evangelism, (Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, and Zambia for example) but these young Lutheran churches are marred by lack of effective Christian education and stewardship programs, conflicts within the churches, unavailability of qualified and committed leadership, poor resource management, lack of effective mission strategies and other issues. Leadership development, capacity building in all areas, and accompaniment by other churches in the sub-region are critical for these churches.

In response to the above challenges, LUCSA engaged in a number of initiatives in 2006 which were aimed at building the capacity of the member churches in order to respond purposefully and effectively. Leadership development is one of the major challenges faced by the region. In this regard, we designed a one-week course for 12 newly elected church leaders and their spouses. We are grateful for the encouragement from the LWF/DMD who sponsored one of the newly elected leaders from LUCCWA. The course was largely funded by ELCA Global Mission and VELKD. Facilitators included the

LWF General Secretary, the Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, Bishop Manas Buthelezi, Bishop and Mrs Molefe, and Dr Lemma Degefa from the LWF/WS Department. The objective was to empower the new church leaders with basic leadership skills in order to help them understand their ecumenical, local, national and international roles as well as their responsibilities and relationships to the people they lead. A great deal of time was spent on the spirituality of a church leader, the challenges they face, and conflict management. The course was very positively received by the participants. They recommended that a follow-up course occur in 2007.

2006 saw the beginning of another new initiative on diaconia involving LUCSA and churches and diaconic training institutions in the Nordic countries. The program was launched with a consultation on the theme: "The Diaconal Identity of the Church in a Changing Society". It was held in conjunction with the LUCSA Executive Meeting in June 2006. A follow-up meeting of the Steering Committee in October 2006 formalized the recommendations into an action plan which, due to funding constraints on the part of LUCSA and the partners, will be implemented in 2008. 2007 will be devoted to fund-raising and setting up necessary structures for the implementation of the program. A full-time project coordinator will be appointed in 2007.

HIV and AIDS continue to be a major priority in LUCSA's activities. All LUCSA member churches are running HIV and AIDS programs. Almost all of them have clear policies in place and have appointed program coordinators/resource persons either full or part-time. Regrettably, many of them are still unable to afford full-time coordinators. This is very essential due to the serious challenge the epidemic continues to pose in the sub-region. LUCSA has continued to focus on programs to build the capacity of the member churches for HIV and AIDS ministries through workshops and follow-up events for pastors, women church leaders, peer educators, community capacity enhancement, and by creating a pool of HIV and AIDS resource persons in member churches. The reports received from HIV and AIDS coordinators in member churches confirm that our church leaders have broken the silence and are speaking openly, even on sexual matters. The "training of the trainer" courses included couple communication, monitoring and evaluation, peer youth counselors, and community capacity enhancement. As a sign of greater commitment to the AIDS ministry on the part of our member churches, LUCSA was represented at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto by seven people from our member churches and the LUCSA office. This provided the opportunity for us to not only share but to learn.

Through our Justice and Reconciliation Fund we continued to fund several encounters between different groups in member churches, (ELCSA and ELKSA NT & ALCSA Cape Church Bishops Conferences, ELCSA & ELCB) with discussions towards reconciliation and possible unity. The Unity Commission which was established by the Executive Committee held its first meeting in Namibia. The Unity Commission was set up to facilitate dialogue between Lutheran churches in countries where there is an expressed need for the merger of different Lutheran churches existing side by side in the same country and who have expressed a wish to unite, or where there is conflict between the churches. Through the Justice and Reconciliation Fund we have been able to support

projects focusing on pre-school education for children from disadvantaged communities and for member church initiatives on HIV and AIDS. LUCSA was instrumental in the establishment of the Ecumenical Peace Initiative of Zimbabwe (EPIZ) project which involves the three major Christian bodies: the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference, and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. EPIZ invited all sectors of the Zimbabwe population into a national dialogue reflecting on the past, present, and future of the nation through the publication of *The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision Document* in October 2006.

One of our major activities was to walk with the young churches in the sub-region in support of their mission. The churches in Mozambique, Zambia, and Lesotho are facing leadership challenges. LUCSA is an active member on their joint mission boards. Partners depend on LUCSA for accompaniment with these churches and for spiritual advice. The director, the president of LUCSA and some of the bishops made several pastoral visits to these churches this year.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a region, we are facing many challenges which impact our member churches' ability to support themselves and to honor their international and regional commitments. As a result of the AIDS epidemic, poverty is on the increase. This means that some are not able to support the organization's administrative structures. By God's grace, the year ended without any major disruption to the work. In May 2006, we lost Mrs. Selena Prinsloo-Abdul due to her untimely death. She was in charge of the Bursary program and administered the Justice and Reconciliation Fund.

Our thanks to the LWF and other partners, the LUCSA officers and member churches for their untiring support. Above all, we thank God for the strength and wisdom we have received to carry out God's mission in our sub-region.



Bishop Dr. Ambrose Moyo
LUCSA Executive Director

