

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation
[Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe]

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko is the first African General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). He was born on 29 October 1943 in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, where he received his primary and high school education. He is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, has several years of experience as a university lecturer in theology, and has served in the LWF since 1982.

Dr Noko studied theology at the University of South Africa, in Pretoria, and at the University of Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal. He completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1971, majoring in systematic theology, church history and biblical studies. After being ordained in 1972, he studied for a Master's degree in Canada at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He completed the degree in 1974 with a thesis on the "Communion of Saints from the African Perspective."

From 1974 to 1977, Dr Noko studied at McGill University in Quebec and earned a Ph.D. with his doctoral thesis on "The Concept of God in Black Theology: An Appreciation of God as Liberator and Reconciler."

During his studies in Canada, Dr Noko worked as a parish pastor and university lecturer. In late 1977, he accepted a lectureship at the University of Botswana where, two years later, he was appointed as head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. He also served for three years as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.

In May 1982, Dr Noko was called from the University of Botswana to join the LWF Department of World Service where he worked for refugee services related to churches, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other organizations. As chairperson of one of its subcommittees, he participated in several OAU Ministerial Council meetings.

On 1 October 1987, Dr Noko became Director of the LWF Department of Church Cooperation. In this position, he was responsible for programs in the areas of theological education, mission, youth, and the various regional desks. Following a major restructuring of the LWF in 1990, he continued as Director of the new Department for Mission and Development.

Following election by the LWF Council in June 1994, Dr Noko assumed the position of LWF General Secretary on 1 November 1994. The Council re-elected him, at its meeting in September 2004, for another seven-year term.

As LWF General Secretary, Dr Noko is the Chief Executive Officer of the entire organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with a staff of 70 persons from 20 different nations. There are also some 40 international staff members and consultants, who work alongside some 5,200 local staff in DWS country and regional programs, as well as associate programs.

In addition to administrative responsibilities, Dr Noko is the chief ecumenical officer of the LWF; headed the LWF process leading to the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Roman Catholic Church; relates to Christian world communions and communities of other religious traditions; and, is responsible for international affairs in contact with governments and political leaders. In recent years, he has had audiences with numerous heads of state and government.

Dr Noko is a recipient of the 1994 Luther Award, of five honorary doctorates from the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Canada, the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA, Concordia College, North Dakota, USA, California Lutheran University, USA, and Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai, India. On 7 October 2000, he was made an honorary citizen of Slavkov (Austerlitz) in the Czech Republic.

Ishmael Noko and his wife Gladys have one daughter, two sons, and two grandsons.