

LWF AFRICA DESK

INTRODUCTION

The Africa Desk continues the task of accompanying member churches in their various ministries and strengthening the communion of churches through consultations and seminars/workshops, visits and mutual exchange. This report shares some major highlights in the region during the year.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

Mozambique – IELM Bilene, February 23- 25

The Joint Mission Board (JMB) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mozambique is comprised of representatives of the IELM, partners from Africa (Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa and LUCSA) and other regions (ELC Bavaria, ELCA, Danish Lutheran Mission and IECLB Brazil). The Africa Desk facilitates and participates in the meetings. Prior to the meeting, JMB members visited a number of congregations for mutual sharing and support. JMB members testified how they were warmly welcomed by the congregations and were grateful for the congregations' deep expression of their faith in Christ. The board discussed various issues related to the situation in the IELM, particularly the working conditions of the missionary pastor serving in Mozambique, future plans by the church for its leadership, and follow-up to the murder case of Sister Doraci Edinger. Plans for further accompaniment of the church were also discussed. Despite the difficulties there is an increasing understanding of the need for the church to assume responsibility for its own activities.

Consultation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon May 3-6

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC) convened a consultation with its partners in mission (ELCA, Norwegian Mission Society, Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland) and LWF staff to discuss the financial situation in the church and how the church could reorganize itself to ensure sustainability and accountability. The discussion was also aimed at identifying adequate resources for implementing the Strategic Plan (2006 – 2010).

A Technical Committee (TC) appointed by the church and accompanied by an external consultant assessed and analyzed the situation. It presented its report and recommendations in the Composite Action Plan. The greatest challenges are the huge deficit due to the large sum of money the church lost following the failure of its bank, the delay or inability of the government to remit subsidies towards teacher's salaries, the inability of the church to pay the social insurance of its pastors and staff and some debts. The recommendations require serious and painful steps to reform and transform the financial situation. Partners affirmed their commitment to accompany the church, but called on the leadership to assume responsibility in the implementation of the proposals.

Every morning the women's group "Femmes Pour Christ" marched in with encouraging songs, dances and food to share.

The area secretary visited a few Integrated Rural Development projects supported through the LWF. The cassava and water projects have tremendous life-changing impact on village farming communities. A well, constructed for a community that moved from extreme Northern Cameroon due to drought, was very impressive. Surely, it is life giving compared to the ponds from which the community drew water.

Visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Central African Rep (ELC-CAR) May 8-10

The visit to ELC-CAR was an opportunity to learn from the church but also for mutual sharing and strengthening of the communion. Despite the harsh political and economic realities in the country, the church stakes out its faith in Christ. The leaders enthusiastically shared their experiences and commitment to being signs of hope, especially in the rural communities. They affirmed that visits by any part of the communion encourage them in their work. In the words of the former President Rev. André Zoulè, such visits "... reinforce the visibility of the LWF and strengthen the church." I met with the Central Administration staff, the outgoing president and the newly elected president, Rev. André Golike, women leaders, youth leaders, and the HIV and AIDS coordinators to discuss various mission activities of the church. The church shared the remarkable success of its HIV and AIDS work. It cooperates with the Ministry of Health, the World Food Program and other Christian organizations. Communication is a major challenge as the facilities almost do not exist, and the church cannot download any email message with attachments.

The vision of the new president is to strengthen human resources, tackle unemployment and poverty among youth through self support empowerment programs, and emancipate young girls by encouraging them to pursue studies beyond secondary school levels. The empowerment of women, who are the majority members of the church, is crucial for the development of the church.

A number of LWF-supported rural development projects were visited. They significantly impact the life of the people. For example, the projects empower rural farmers to improve agricultural production, transform natural springs to drinking water and have their own first aid and elementary schools for children. The projects are about empowering people towards their basic needs and daily bread. It is life!

Nairobi + 4 HIV and AIDS Consultation June 5-9

The purpose of the consultation, attended by 76 participants mainly from Africa but also from other LWF regions, was to review the progress made in the last four years since the launching of the LWF's HIV and AIDS campaign *Compassion, Conversion, Care*. The churches in Africa have moved beyond breaking the silence to fully engaging the campaign. I refer to the reports of the HIV and AIDS consultant for Africa and the report of the global consultant on the campaign for additional information.

**LUCSA-Nordics Consultation on Diakonia
Kempton Park, Johannesburg, June 19-23**

The Consultation on Diakonia was held with leaders and representatives of member churches of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), representatives from LWF member churches in the Nordic countries, and the Lutheran World Federation Secretariat staff, under the theme “The Diaconal Identity of the Church in a Changing Society.” They reflected on the self-understanding and identity of the church and its diaconal responsibility in a changing society, especially in the southern African context. They identified priorities relating to diaconal education and formation (Policy Formulation and Training for Diaconal Ministry). The outcome of the consultation was a concrete action plan for strengthening international and ecumenical diakonia and follow-up processes. The steering committee met in Uppsala, Sweden, on October 16, 2006 to follow up on the Johannesburg



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recommendations. The meeting, among other things, agreed to hold a workshop in 2007 to develop a common theological understanding on training for diakonia, especially in the southern Africa context. From the perspective of the LWF Africa desk, the process is a remarkable opportunity whose success should be shared with other sub regions and global communion.

**Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa
“That the poor may have hope and injustice shut its mouth (Job 5: 16)”
Arusha, Tanzania, September 4 -8**

The LWF Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa was planned and facilitated by the Africa Desk. It was preceded by the meeting of the team facilitating the set-up of the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET) and to finalize arrangements for setting up the ALCINET website. The team decided on the name, nature and content of the site, and also put an editorial team in place to coordinate its activities.

About eighty participants from member churches, northern partners, and staff gathered under the theme “That the poor may have hope, and injustice shut its mouth” (Job 5:16 paraphrased). The consultation provided opportunity for participants to reflect theologically on the church’s self-understanding, its identity and public responsibility in



Participants of the Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the church in Africa

the context of extreme impoverishment in a world that is endowed with enormous resources. Participants expressed deepest concern about the harsh economic situation in Africa. Sometimes characterized by anger, disappointment and lament, the consultation denounced all forces that perpetuate poverty and rob millions of people of their God-given right as “intolerable and sinful.”

Nonetheless, the consultation declared faith and hope in the crucified and risen Christ and insisted that “Africa has been blessed with abundant resources for life” and thus there is no justifiable reason for the increasing impoverishment that threatens the lives of the people. The recommendations in the Arusha Action Plan are forward-looking visions and commitment for continued reflection and the witness of the church. A task force will be set up by the Africa Lutheran Church Leadership in conjunction with the LWF Council meeting in Lund, 22-25 March 2007 to follow up on the program on poverty and the mission of the church.



Plenary Session / Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the church in Africa

Visit to the Lutheran Church in Rwanda September 10-13

The visit to the Lutheran Church in Rwanda was an opportunity for the Area Secretary to learn about the church and its mission and build relationships for mutual sharing and accompaniment. Rwanda has come a long way in its healing and reconstruction, especially related to the human relationships since the 1994 genocide. The impact of the war however, will go on for decades. Sadly, the local people expressed concern that the international community seems to have no interest in Rwanda because the country “has moved out of emergency.”

We discussed the main challenges of the church, especially the lack of a strong financial base. The church functions with little external support and risks losing its pastors and lay leaders who work almost voluntarily. Other challenges include capacity building to strengthen the leadership and governance at parish and community levels, stewardship and participation in the mission work. The vision of the church and its strategic plan (2005-2008) were also discussed. I visited and met with some local communities, LWF/DWS supported programs including AIDS-orphaned families and a camp for families returning from Tanzania who had fled from Rwanda during the 1961 crisis. The meeting with members of the Mumeya Parish/community in Kibungo area was a remarkable experience. Accompanied by the LCR, the community identified the need for a health clinic as urgent and embarked on community construction efforts. Within a few months, an estimated 200 tons of stones had been gathered for the project. The process enhances healing and rebuilding trust in the community.

LUCCWA Leadership Seminar and Assembly November 5 – 10

I participated in the Leadership seminar and General Assembly of the Lutheran Communion in Central and West Africa (LUCCWA) held in Lagos, Nigeria. The resource persons were from CORAT Africa and the LWF Department for Theology and Studies. Themes include the understanding of leadership and ministry from a Lutheran perspective, good governance including accountability, resource mobilization and management and conflict mediation. Other themes were leadership, authority and power and the participation of all believers. The experiences from the participants clearly showed the need for continued reflection on emerging leadership issues and challenges to equip church leaders for their ministry of oversight.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Social, political and economic challenges are still marks of the road ahead, negatively impacting the lives of the people and the mission of the church. Killer diseases (HIV and AIDS, malaria and cholera) are exacerbated by political instability and gross injustices in many regions. However, the churches are becoming stronger and members are increasingly aware of their public responsibilities. Our prayers are that we are empowered to wrestle not only for the bandage, but equally, and even more, against the root causes of our wounds and suffering. In our struggle for just societies, churches are

well-placed to lead in discussions on the other side of poverty, that is the whole question of making wealth and the question of “what is enough,” or “what is not enough” from a theological perspective. These are fundamental questions as churches continue their mission and public role in dealing with debilitating socio-political and economic issues.



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