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– A Communion of Churches**

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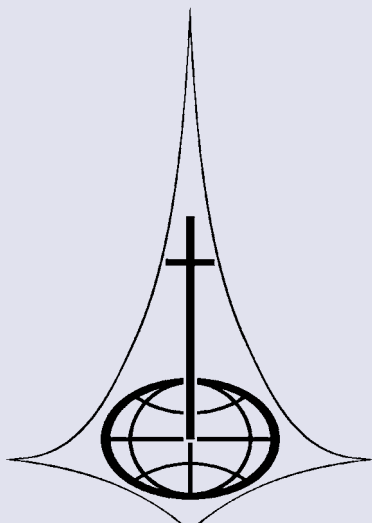
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Costa Rica: Moving Toward Autonomy



*The hands of 84 year-old María Montezuma, a member of the Gnobe community, portray the daily struggle for survival among Costa Rica's Indigenous population.
© ILCO communication office*

For 54-year-old Luisa Bejarano and her mother, María Montezuma, 84, a typical working day starts before sunrise and ends when residents of the southern region of Conte Burica go to bed. "As self-employed women, we have to work up to 17 hours non stop. We milk the cows, feed our pigs, chop firewood, and make handicrafts, which we sell to earn a living," says Bejarano, clad in her *da gudu ga* [long colorful dress].

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Zambian John Nduna to Head ACT International Coordinating Office

Zambian relief and development worker **John Nduna**, takes up his new appointment as director of the Geneva-based Coordination Office of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International on 1 April 2006.

ACT, the global alliance of churches and related agencies working to save lives and support communities in humanitarian emergencies worldwide, is based with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC).

Nduna, 51, is currently director of the Nairobi, Kenya-based Church Ecumenical Action in Sudan (CEAS). His humanitarian field experience includes service to refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) field offices in Africa.

Nduna graduated from the University of Zambia in 1979 with a bachelor's degree majoring in economics, leading to a banking career, 1980–1982. He worked as a training and projects' manager with the Zambia Small

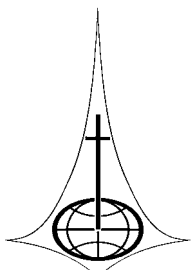


*ACT director, Mr John Nduna.
© WCC/Peter Williams*

Industries Development Organization, 1983–1987. He was program coordinator with the UNHCR/Zambia refugee program, 1987–1989. From 1990 until 1993, he worked as project coordinator responsible for a settlement camp of Mozambican refugees under the LWF/DWS Zambia program, the Zambia Christian Refugee Service. In 1994 he moved to the LWF/DWS program in Mozambique as a repatriation and settlement officer. From 1995 until 1999, Nduna was emergency project coordinator for the Burundi refugee program of the LWF/DWS program in Tanzania, the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service.

He joined the ACT Geneva staff in 1999, where he was appeals officer for Europe, Central Asia and Africa, until mid-2004. He is the fourth person to lead the organization since it was established in 1995.

Nduna is married to Sydia, and they have three children. (267 words)



Palestinian Lutheran Bishop Says Election Process Demonstrated Desire for Change

Call for Continued Support from World Leaders

JERUSALEM/GENEVA, 31 January 2006 (LWI) – Palestinian Lutheran Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan described the recent Palestinian election process as a clear demonstration of the people’s desire for a new and more effective government.

While stating that Palestinians were “still somewhat in shock” at the extent of the Hamas’ election victory, the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) urged Palestinians, especially Christians, not to panic and arrive at hasty conclusions but to persevere and remain steadfast. “Now more than ever we need to continue to be an active, integral part of the people and to continue as Christian witnesses for justice, instruments of peace and ministers of reconciliation,” he said in a statement following the January 27 victory of the Islamic party Hamas in the democratically-conducted elections.

The Lutheran leader pledged the ELCJHL’s commitment to equality and freedom for all in seeking a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He urged faith and political leaders to continue their support toward the church’s work through schools and organizations in order to strengthen Christian witness in the region.

Referring to his conversations with many who voted for Hamas, Younan said they did not support

a radical Islamic agenda or violence, but they instead wanted change and reform “in a system that has been broken for a long time.”

The Lutheran bishop pointed out that time was needed for self-evaluation about the Hamas’ victory over the ruling Fatah party, and listed “an accumulation of many things” that could have led to this achievement. He cited among other issues, division, corruption and lack of accountability within Fatah; and lack of substantial political support by the government of the United States of America and Israel for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his non-violent mandate. Younan also mentioned Hamas’ social assistance toward needy Palestinian families faced with economic hardships, and a poorly managed administration as factors in the election outcome.

He challenged both Palestinians and Israelis to work together “to find new language and proposals to build common ground on our shared interests for justice and reconciliation and an end to occupation and violence.”

Younan is vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Asia region. The 3,000-member ELCJHL joined the LWF in 1974.

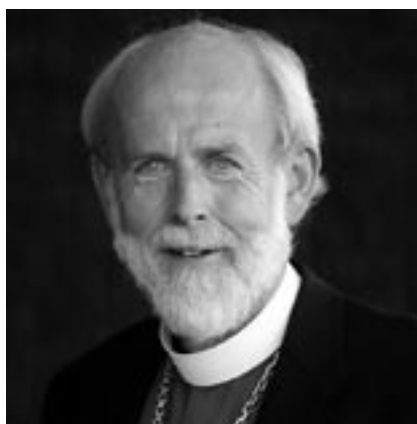
(391 words)

LWF Welcomes WCC Invitation to Plan Common Assembly

Celebration of Search for Unity and Common Witness of Christian Churches

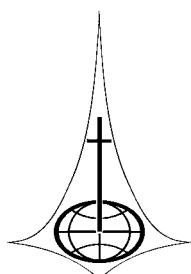
PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil/GENEVA, 23 February 2006 (LWI) – The top leadership of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has welcomed a renewed invitation by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to consider planning a common Assembly together, within the next decade.

The issue of coordinated assemblies under the WCC has been on the agenda of LWF governing bodies for several years. LWF President, Bishop Mark S. Hanson and LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko affirm the federation’s role as an ecumenical instrument in the search for Christian unity.



LWF President, Bishop Mark S. Hanson.
© LWF/D. Zimmermann

WCC General Secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia renewed the proposal that the next WCC assembly should provide a common platform for the wider ecumenical movement at the WCC 9th Assembly, taking place 14–23 February, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. “If we are ready to take such a significant, concrete step we could envisage together, instead of the many different global assemblies and general conferences organized by the various world communions and other bodies, just one celebration of the search for unity and common witness of Christian churches,” he said. Kobia proposed that the WCC 9th Assembly give the mandate to accelerate the dialogue with the LWF and World Al-



liance of Reformed Churches to explore possibilities of holding the next assemblies as a combined event. “And we should also invite any other world Christian body to join us in this dialogue,” he added.

Role of Christian World Communions in Ecumenical Movement

LWF President Hanson said, “One of the tensions in the global ecumenical movement today concerns the role of the Christian world communions and confessional bodies, and [whether] they are finally contributing toward the greater unity of the church or taking energy away from the ecumenical movement.”

“For me, as a Lutheran and as president of the LWF, I believe that being Lutheran is to be ecumenical. I can’t read the Augsburg Confession without thinking that this was a proposal for the unity of the church, at least the Western church at that time,” said Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Asked what would change were the LWF and WCC to hold coordinated assemblies, he stressed the need to continuously rethink “the function of these assemblies, in our life together, and in our witnessing in the world.” He wondered whether the focus on ecumenism or Lutheran identity through the current assembly rhythm of six to seven years was the most effective way to tend to “our relationship together” or to “our witness in our work for deeper unity in the body of Christ.”



At the WCC 9th Assembly: Rev. Chandran Paul Martin (right), LWF Council member and executive secretary, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India; and Dr George Mathew Nalunnakkal (left), Syrian Orthodox Church, join a peace march as part of the WCC “Decade to Overcome Violence.” © WCC/Igor Sperotto

Hanson said planning such assemblies would call for “careful talks” and openness to addressing “complicated questions” in order to ensure the contribution of the different Christian traditions represented in the Christian world communions (CWCs) and the WCC. “In no way do we want this to diminish the fullness of participation by all the members. ... I think right away one of the concerns would be ‘What is the response of the Orthodox community?’”



WCC General Secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. © WCC/Paulino Menezes

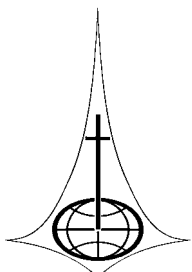
Building Theological and Ecclesial Bridges

LWF General Secretary Noko said “holding assemblies within the space of WCC assemblies would neither lead to the dissolution of the LWF nor the CWC assemblies, but would strengthen the ecumenical commitment of the participating communions and build theological and ecclesial bridges nurtured by the Holy Spirit.”

“The LWF Council, in September 2005, decided to seriously explore possible coordination of the meetings of governing bodies of the WCC and CWCs, as well as the achievement of broader ecumenical assemblies, based on the WCC Assemblies where CWCs have their specific space,” Noko said. The Council also especially emphasized the need for a more specifically recognized role of CWCs in the ecumenical movement and in relating to the structures of the WCC. (640 words)

**Acting on recommendations of the Policy Reference Committee, the WCC 9th Assembly agreed to:*

- a) **affirm the important specific role and place of the Christian World Communions in the ecumenical movement and as partners of the WCC, and particularly acknowledges the importance of the role of Christian World Communions in both multi-lateral and bilateral dialogues and reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement;**
- b) **direct that the WCC jointly consult with the Christian World Communions to explore the significance and implications of overlap of membership, coordination of programs, and other common efforts between the WCC and the Christian World Communions;**
- c) **direct that the WCC initiate, within the next year and in consultation with the Christian World Communions, a joint consultative commission to discuss and recommend ways to further strengthen the participation of Christian World Communions in the WCC;**



d) direct that the WCC explore the feasibility of a structure for WCC assemblies that would provide expanded space for Christian World Communions and confessional families to meet, for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agendas. Early in the term of this next central committee, a decision would be expected as to whether the next WCC Assembly should be so structured;

e) direct that United and Uniting churches be included in this process.

More information at www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/assembly-documents/plenary-presentations/committee-reports/policy-reference-committee.html

Brazilian Lutheran Church President Is Moderator of WCC Central Committee

LWF General Secretary Congratulates Altmann

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil/GENEVA, 25 February 2006 (LWI) – The president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), Rev. Dr Walter Altmann, is the new moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee.



IECLB President, Rev. Dr Walter Altmann, WCC Central Committee moderator. © WCC/Peter Williams

WCC Central Committee members elected Altmann on 23 February. He succeeds His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, appointed moderator at the 1991 WCC 7th Assembly in Canberra, Australia.

In a congratulatory letter to Altmann, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said the IECLB president was “one of the most qualified persons to be elected to this position.” He particularly mentioned Altmann’s theological qualifications, his many years as a church leader, as president of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and his knowledge of churches worldwide as admirable credentials.

The 150-member Central Committee serves as the WCC’s main decision-making body between assemblies held every seven years.

Altmann, 62, has been IECLB president since December 2002. He was elected to the LWF Council at the July 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. As chairperson of the Program Committee for Mission and Development, he is also a member of the LWF Executive Committee.

Noko noted that the recent WCC Assembly, held 14–23 February in Porto Alegre, had demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the future of the ecumenical movement in the 21st century would depend on radical modalities of imagination and cooperation.

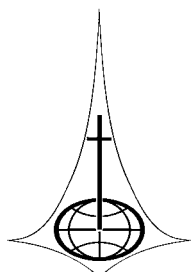
He said he was convinced this would be possible under Altmann’s leadership of the Central Committee. The general secretary emphasized the LWF’s understanding of ecumenical commitment as “an obligation and not an option,” and affirmed the anticipated cooperation with the WCC in the search for Christian unity.

Altmann studied theology in Sao Leopoldo, Buenos Aires (Argentina), and Hamburg (Germany). In 1972, he earned a doctorate in Hamburg on Karl Rahner’s understanding of tradition. He was a parish pastor in Ijui, southern Brazil, 1972–1974. From 1974, he taught systematic theology at the Theological College in São Leopoldo. His theological work focused on Martin Luther, Latin American liberation theology, and ecumenism. From 1981 until 1987, he headed the Theological College in Sao Leopoldo, and was director of the Ecumenical Institute for Post-graduate Studies, 1989–1994. Altmann served as IECLB vice-president 1998–2002, and CLAI president, 1995–2001. He is married and has four daughters.

The 712,000-member IECLB is the largest Lutheran church in Latin America. It joined the LWF in 1952.



EKD Council Chairperson, Bishop Dr Wolfgang Huber addressed the WCC Assembly. © WCC/Paulino Menezes



Indonesian Lutheran Elected WCC President for Asia

On 22 February, the WCC Assembly delegates appointed eight presidents for each of the world regions and for the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. Rev. Dr Soritua Nababan, Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), Indonesia, was elected president for the Asia region. From 1987 until 1998, Nababan was bishop of the 3 million-member HKBP, the largest Lutheran church in Asia, and an LWF member church since 1952. From 1970 until 1977, and 1984–1990, he served as LWF vice-president, and was a member



*Ms Inger Aasa-Marklund, Church of Sweden.
© Haakan Sjunnesson*

of the LWF Executive Committee, 1990–1997.

Other representatives of Lutheran churches appointed to the WCC Central Committee include Bishop Dr Rolf Koppe, Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) Bishop for Foreign Relations; and Inger Aasa-Marklund from the Church of Sweden.

There are a total of 20 representatives from LWF member churches in the new WCC Central Committee. They are drawn from two churches each in Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America; and 12 churches in Europe. (575 words)

Foreign Debt Payment Condones Impunity, Says Argentine Lutheran Pastor

It's the "Fundamental Tool of a Model of Domination"

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina/GENEVA, 8 March 2006 (LWI) – Argentine Lutheran pastor Ángel F. Furlan has criticized his country's recent repayment of its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He insists the action has contributed to deepening the impunity enjoyed by its creditor, and to worsening the social and economic well being of Argentineans.

Furlan, and a group of citizens led by Nobel Peace laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, had lodged a judicial appeal with the country's Federal Court of Administrative Affairs in December 2005, demanding suspension of the then proposed payment to the IMF. They repeated their appeal in a telegram dated 2 January 2006 to Argentina's President Néstor Kirchner, which said that repaying the money would affect the "economy of the country in a way that is irreparable."

On 3 January, within a debt-restructuring program, Argentina repaid USD 9.5 billion—its outstanding loans to the IMF over a period of more than 20 years. The amount was reportedly paid from foreign reserves of the Central Bank, said to have recently risen after increased exports had boosted economic growth. In recent years, the policies of the IMF and other international financial institutions in regard to the foreign debt, which was directly or indirectly contracted by the 1976-1983 rule of military dictatorship, have been strongly criticized by successive democratically elected Argentine governments.

Furlan, a former president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina, is responsible for a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) advocacy program on illegitimate foreign debt, started in the Latin American region in 2004. The

Esquivel-led group, comprising representatives of trade unions, religious and civil society groups and human rights organizations, is linked to Jubilee South, the network of social movements that advocates the immorality and illegitimacy of external debts owed by developing countries. Similar concerns had been raised in the case of Brazil, which recently also repaid its IMF debt.

The group argued that the Argentine government's decision to repay what was owed to the IMF had been taken in a "unilateral and non-consultative manner." Its members cited disregard for a federal court ruling that substantiated the fraudulent nature of the debt, referring the matter to the National Congress for constitutional redress.

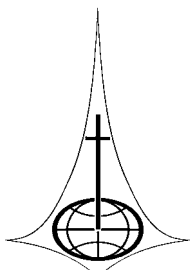
They expressed doubt that "our countries will gain greater freedom in the design of their economic policies, especially when those same governments continue to accumulate new debts," for which the IMF's approval is sought.

Speaking during the January 2006 Latin America World Social Forum session in Caracas, Venezuela, Furlan described external debt as the "fundamental tool of a model of domination," that continued to take more human lives than the aberrant crimes of the military dictatorship.

An estimated 40 percent of Argentina's 39 million people live below the poverty line. (472 words)

Related news in LWI No. 11/2003 p. 6 & LWI 07/2004 p. 12.

(The Peru-based Latin American and Caribbean News Agency (ALC) contributed to this article.)



Kristi Bangert Is Executive Director, ELCA Communication Services

Ms Kristi S. Bangert is the new executive director for the Communication Services unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Bangert, 59, began her four-year term on 1 February. She joined the ELCA Communication Services' unit in 1997, and was director for marketing, public relations and planning. She had served as the unit's interim executive director since November 2005. In her new role, she succeeds Rev. Eric C.



Ms Kristi S. Bangert, executive director, ELCA Communication Services. © ELCA

Shafer, who concluded his service with the churchwide organization last November, and has accepted a call to serve as senior pastor, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

Born in Minneapolis, Bangert earned a bachelor's degree from Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota in 1967. She was director of development and public relations, Lutheran Deaconess Association, Valparaiso, Indiana, 1994–1997. From 1988 until 1994, she was associate vice-president, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) Foundation.

Bangert is an active member of the American Marketing Association and was a longtime member of the Association of Lutheran Development Executives (ALDE). She served on the ALDE board of directors and was president of the ALDE's Chicago chapter, 1990–1992. Bangert and her husband, Rev. Mark P. Bangert, have five grown children. *(202 words)*

Historic Agreement Between Middle East Lutheran and Reformed Churches

The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land** (ELCJHL) and **Reformed** (Presbyterian and congregational) churches in the Middle East, signed an agreement of full communion, 26 January 2006. ELCJHL Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan was among the seven church representatives who signed "The Amman Declaration – A Historical Agreement Between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the Middle East" in the Jordanian capital. It was initiated by the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches.

Younan, who was instrumental in getting the churches to unite and agree, stressed the agreement's significance, saying "the Christian church has a crucial role to play in the Middle East." Other churches represented include the Synod of the Nile, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt; Synod of the Evangelical Church in Iran; National Evangelical Church

in Kuwait; National Evangelical Union of Lebanon; National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon; and the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East.

An ELCJHL news release noted, "The churches have mutually recognized one another's ministries and agreed upon a declaration of faith including beliefs in the Trinitarian God, justification by faith, the sacraments and the preaching of the gospel. They have agreed to mutual participation in one another's worship, concelebration of the Sacraments, common prophetic witness for justice and peace and other joint activities that will promote ecumenical and interfaith witness and service to God's people in our lands."

The 3,000-member ELCJHL joined the LWF in 1974.

(250 words)

Lutheran Information Network Sub-regional Coordinator Pierre Djaboule Dies

Mr Pierre Djaboule, a planning committee member and facilitator of the Africa Lutheran Communication and Information Network (ALCINET) died on 29 January following a short illness.

As an ALCINET representative for the Lutheran Communion in Western Africa (LUCWA), Djaboule, 60, was one of the key persons working toward the re-establishment of a viable information network for Lutheran churches in Africa. He had served with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC) for 37 years, and was the communication department coordinator, at the time of his death.

Djaboule was a headmaster and teacher in church primary schools for ten years, before joining the EELC Christian



Mr Pierre Djaboule. © LWF/H. Putsman

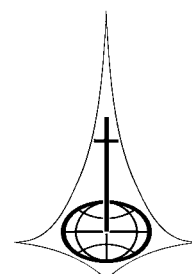
Multimedia Center in 1978, where he headed the Fulani language section of Sawtu Linjiila [Radio Voice of the Gospel] for about 16 years.

At a funeral service in Ngaoundéré, northern Cameroon, the president of EELC, Rev. Dr Thomas Nyiwe, described Djaboule as a courageous and dedicated servant of the church, who had made a lasting contribution to communication and education in the church, country and the LUCWA region.

Pierre Djaboule is survived by his wife Patouma Marie, their seven children and one grandchild.

The 195,000-member EELC joined the LWF in 1971.

(200 words)



LWF Welcomes Democratic Palestinian Election Process, Urges Commitment to Peace Efforts with Israel

General Secretary Noko: Violent Means Incompatible with Democratic Leadership

GENEVA, 31 January 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has welcomed the democratic Palestinian election process, and urged the victorious party Hamas to honor its responsibility for sound leadership toward all Palestinian people and commit itself to peace efforts with Israel.

“For the sake of the Palestinian people and the future State of Palestine, Hamas must transform itself in its policies and approaches concerning the State of Israel, and commit itself to dialogue and negotiations,” LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said in a statement issued on 31 January.

Noko expressed the LWF’s conviction that Hamas’ new responsibility to form the next Palestinian government had the potential to be a catalyst for the group’s transformation. “Having secured this political victory, Hamas now has an obligation to provide sound, democratic and honest leadership for all Palestinians, regardless of religious or political allegiance. They must work for the unity of the Palestinian people, and for freedom of religion, in order to foster a genuinely civil society,” he said.

In the 27 January results of the first Palestinian parliamentary elections in ten years, the Islamic group Hamas won 76 out of 132 seats, leaving the ruling party Fatah with 43.

The LWF general secretary commended the Palestinian elections for having provided a model of popular democratic expression in a region in which democracy “is still the exception rather than the rule.” He also cited the strong role played by Hamas in providing social welfare for the Palestinian people and in addressing corruption.

Stressing the incompatibility of violent means with democratic leadership, Noko reminded both Hamas and the Israeli government of their responsibility to pursue the “Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East,” of which the objective is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, with two states and three religions co-existing peacefully.

Noko recognized the enormous risks and opportunities in the current transition period for both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and expressed the hope that no opportunity for dialogue would be excluded by either party to the peace process.

He underlined the commitment of the LWF and its member church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land—to political and inter-religious dialogue for peace and stability in the region, and to humanitarian assistance to promote human dignity. (401 words)

The full text of the LWF statement on the results of the Palestinian elections follows:

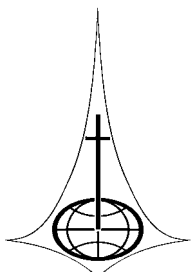
Statement of the LWF General Secretary on the Results of Palestinian Elections

The Lutheran World Federation is present in the Holy Land through its member church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land—and through its field program which operates, among other activities, the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives. The LWF has long accompanied the search for peace in the Holy Land, promoting dialogue—both political and inter-religious—as the only instrument for achieving a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis, while providing health care and other humanitarian support to impoverished communities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Lutheran World Federation has therefore followed recent political developments in the region with a direct and immediate concern.

Democratic processes inevitably produce results with which some will disagree. But democracy remains the least unjust political system so far devised. So it is

with the result of the Palestinian elections that one can legitimately welcome this successful election process, despite widespread concerns about its result. The Palestinian elections have provided a model of popular democratic expression in a region in which democracy is still the exception rather than the rule. The Lutheran World Federation celebrates this fact. The strong role played by Hamas in providing social welfare and in addressing corruption helped it to secure the support of a majority of the Palestinian people, who have been forced to try to eke out a living in ever more precarious social and economic circumstances and who had become disillusioned and frustrated by rampant corruption.

Having secured this political victory, Hamas now has an obligation to provide sound, democratic and honest leadership for all Palestinians, regardless of religious or political allegiance. They must work for



the unity of the Palestinian people, and for freedom of religion, in order to foster a genuinely civil society.

And in this day and age we must insist that violent means are not compatible with democratic leadership and ethical legitimacy in the community of States, not only for Palestine but for all other States and peoples. For the sake of the Palestinian people and the future State of Palestine, Hamas must transform itself in its policies and approaches concerning the State of Israel, and commit itself to dialogue and negotiations. Both Hamas and the Government of Israel have a responsibility to pursue the Roadmap towards the objective of two States living side by side in peace. Both must recognize the Holy Land as a land holy to three religions, not only one.

The Lutheran World Federation believes that the responsibility with which Hamas has now been entrusted has the potential to be a catalyst for its transformation. However, at a moment in which political leadership in Israel is also in transition, the risks and the opportunities are both enormous. We pray that no opportunity for dialogue will be excluded by either party, and that wisdom and restraint will prevail so as to avoid the terrible risks of the moment.

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation
Geneva, 31 January 2006

Anglicans and Lutherans in Africa Encouraged to Seek Practical Steps Toward Church Unity

Third Anglican – Lutheran International Commission Meets in Tanzania

MOSHI, Tanzania/GENEVA, 4 February 2006 (LWI) – The Third Anglican – Lutheran International Commission (ALIC-3) has expressed its support for feasible affirmation of visible unity between Anglicans and Lutherans throughout Africa. It encourages churches there to consider practical steps toward realizing such unity at regional level.

During the first meeting of the current phase of the commission held 13–19 January 2006 in Moshi, Tanzania, members heard from the All Africa Anglican – Lutheran Commission (AAALC) about the nature of cooperation between Anglicans and Lutherans in Africa, and encouraged the “AAALC to move forward to its next meeting at the earliest opportunity.”

“Whilst both communions [at international level] have expressed full visible unity as an ultimate goal in the ecumenical quest, the time would nevertheless seem ripe for Anglicans and Lutherans throughout Africa to discern a realizable first step in that direction,” a communiqué from the recent meeting states.

At the meeting hosted by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), the commission identified the key issues that it would focus on in order to advance Anglican – Lutheran relations globally. Questions discussed included the place of the historic episcopate within the apostolicity of the church, life and work in the service of the gospel, and theological education and formation.

The meeting affirmed the commission would pay special attention to the regional and contextual aspects of relations between Anglicans and Lutherans, and possibilities for encouraging regional relationships and agreements.

In Moshi, commission members worshipped at the Lutheran cathedral where they were received by its

dean Rev. Dr Fredrick Shoo, assistant to Bishop Martin Shao, ELCT Northern Diocese. They also visited the Anglican cathedral in Arusha where Bishop Simon E. Makundi of the Mount Kilimanjaro Diocese, Anglican Church of Tanzania, welcomed them.

ALIC-3 was established by the Anglican Consultative Council and the LWF to continue the dialogue between Anglicans and Lutherans on the worldwide level which has been in progress since 1970. The commission intends to build upon previous work recorded in various reports that focus on the mission of the church and the role of the ordained ministry. Anglicans and Lutherans have entered into various binding forms of regional church fellowship in Europe and North America.

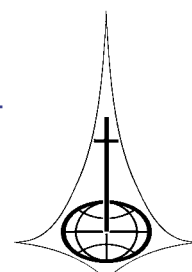
The Anglican Communion represents 76 million Anglicans worldwide, comprising 38 autonomous churches or “provinces” in 164 countries. The LWF currently has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, with a total membership of 66.2 million.

The current phase of ALIC is co-chaired by Anglican Bishop Fred Hiltz of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and Rev. Dr Thomas Nyiwe, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. Its 2007 meeting will be held in Niagara Falls, Canada.

(475 words)

Further information about the international bilateral dialogue between Anglicans and Lutherans is available at www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OEA/Bilateral_Relations/OEA-Anglican-Lutheran.html

The full text of the communiqué from the ALIC-3 meeting is available on the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1820.EN.html



LWF Denounces Publication of Controversial Cartoons, Urges Increased Pursuit of Justice with Other Faiths

Freedom of Expression Must Be Exercised Responsibly

GENEVA, 10 February 2006 (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has called for increased commitment to the pursuit of justice and reconciliation with people of other faiths, following controversy and protests in several parts of the world surrounding the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. The cartoons were first published in a Danish newspaper last September, and have since been reprinted in several European newspapers.

While denouncing both the publication of the cartoons and the ensuing violent reactions, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said the crisis around this issue should not be falsely presented as a conflict between secular rights and religious values.

In a statement released 10 February, Noko affirmed that the caricatures at the heart of this controversy were “genuinely and deeply offensive to Muslim sentiments and religious values,” and that Muslims around the world were “entitled to protest loudly and vigorously” at the provocation and insult to their religion.

He however noted that while freedom of expression was a universal legal right, it must be exercised wisely and responsibly according to ethical principles.

Statement of the Lutheran World Federation on the Publication of Caricatures of Prophet Mohammed

The crisis that has emerged surrounding the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed—and —the spreading and sometimes violent reaction to them—represents a failure to exercise responsibility. However, it has been falsely and sometimes mischievously presented as a conflict between secular rights and religious values, or worse still, as a “clash of civilizations.”

No one can doubt that the caricatures at the heart of this controversy are genuinely and deeply offensive to Muslim sentiments and religious values. Their repeated publication leads to the perception that they are published not innocently but with the intention to provoke. It must be clearly affirmed that freedom of expression is a legal right of universal application. But all legal rights must be exercised not only within the limits of the law, but also wisely and responsibly according to ethical principles. The freedom of expression was not exercised wisely and responsibly in this case, but recklessly and dangerously.

Muslims around the world are understandably outraged by this provocation and insult to their religion. Muslims offended by these caricatures are perfectly entitled to protest loudly and vigorously. It is very regrettable that the Danish authorities did not respond in a timely and appropriate manner to

The wholesale violence in which some of the protesters had engaged could not be condoned, either politically or religiously, Noko said.

Such violence, he argued, did not implicate all Muslims anymore than the actions of an “insensitive few” in Denmark implicated the entire Danish nation.

The LWF general secretary joined Palestinian Lutheran Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan in condemning the “defamation of all religious symbols, prophets and holy writings because it only provokes offense and builds walls of hatred.”

In a statement on the cartoon crisis, 9 February, Younan, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) also denounced all violent acts that threatened others as “intolerable and unacceptable.”

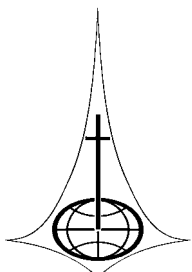
Noko, referring to the ELCJHL statement, urged other people to emulate Palestinian Christians and Muslims, who “have learned to live as neighbors, displaying respect for each others’ beliefs and traditions—not due to legal obligation, but out of respect and care for the neighbor.” (366 words)

The full text of the LWF statement follows:

the complaints first conveyed by Danish Muslims. A response at that time may have done much to forestall the chain reaction of rage that we now see. Nonetheless, the wholesale violence in which some of the protesters have engaged cannot be condoned, either politically or religiously. But just as the actions of an insensitive or provocative few in Denmark do not implicate either the entire Danish nation or the West as a whole, neither does the violence of some of the protestors implicate all Muslims.

As Bishop Munib Younan, Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem, has declared, “We condemn the defamation of all religious symbols, prophets and holy writings because it only provokes offense and builds walls of hatred,” and “We also condemn all violent acts that threaten others...as intolerable and unacceptable.” He has written about the small significant ways in which Palestinian Christians and Muslims have learned to live as neighbors, displaying respect to each others’ beliefs and traditions—not due to legal obligation, but out of respect and care for the neighbor. It is an example many others could learn from.

At the LWF Tenth Assembly, we acknowledged that in our world today “religions too often are used by political forces to divide people and fuel conflict,” and



that therefore “it is crucial that we pursue justice and reconciliation with those of other faiths. Reconciliation is central in the gospel we proclaim: in Christ, God has reconciled the whole creation. In this sense, dialogue that furthers such reconciliation is one of the important ways of carrying out God’s mission.” Let us hold fast to this vision and understanding. Coexistence and dialogical cooperation in addressing the problems that confront us all, regardless of

faith affiliation, remains the only path towards peace in our fractured and troubled world. Faced with this current crisis, our commitment to that path should be redoubled, not reduced.

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation
Geneva, 10 February 2006

Can the Bible Be Equated with the Word of God?

Theologians in LWF Study Program Debate Contextual Realities of Biblical Authority

WARSAW, Poland/GENEVA, 17 February 2006 (LWI)

– Can the Bible be equated with the Word of God? A group of Lutheran theologians focused on this critical question at their second meeting within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) study program “The Authority of the Bible in the Life of the Church,” February 1–6, in Warsaw, Poland.

The seven theologians had identified crucial topics such as unity and diversity within the Bible, the biblical canon, and methods of interpreting the Bible, to form the basis for individual articles from a contextual perspective, at their first meeting in September 2004. They come from LWF member churches in Argentina, Germany, Hungary, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, South Africa and the United States of America.

Prof. Diane Jacobson, Old Testament lecturer, Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, USA, expressed appreciation for “tensions and contradictions in the Bible because they invite you to probe ever anew the depth and richness of the gospel.” Rev. Dr Elelwani Farisani, teaching Old Testament Studies at the University of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, said in his country one could not “read the Bible without taking into consideration the [extent] to which [it] has been misused for the interests of the powerful.”

Dr Marta Cserharti from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary cautioned, “It is the obligation of trained theologians to unmask interpretations of the Bible [that] support dangerous tendencies such as anti-Judaism.” Argentinean theologian, Rev. Dr Mercedes García Bachmann, dean and Old Testament Studies’ lecturer at the Buenos Aires-based ISEDET (ecumenical theological school) observed, especially from an outside perspective, that “the credibility and

authority of the Bible can be eclipsed by the way churches operate and Christians live out their faith.” Prof. Günter Thomas teaching Systematic Theology at the Ruhr University Bochum, Germany suggested, “It is vital to understand the Bible as a decisive knot that God has woven into the history of [God’s] communication with humankind rather than isolating it as ‘the’ Word of God which is above history.”

The group’s contributions will be compiled in *Witnessing to God’s Faithfulness: Issues in Biblical Authority*, a title in the LWF Studies series to be published later this year.

LWF Department for Theology and Studies Director and Study Secretary for the Church and Social Issues, Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, noted that the issue on the authority of the Bible had been prominent in debates and controversies within the LWF and beyond. She said she hoped the planned publication would be an important resource in assisting the LWF “member churches to listen to the gospel creatively and responsively in the midst of burning issues of faith and life.”

DTS Study Secretary for Theology and the Church, Rev. Dr Reinhard Böttcher, responsible for the program said, “Given the vast spiritual and theological diversity within the LWF, this resource will certainly not ‘cut the Gordian knot’ but is expected to contribute to a crucial debate within the whole ecumenical movement from a distinctly Lutheran perspective.”

He cited the significance of the study process in relation to a call by the LWF Council, at its September 2005 meeting, that Christian world communions convene a symposium on interpreting the Bible in light of fundamentalist tendencies.

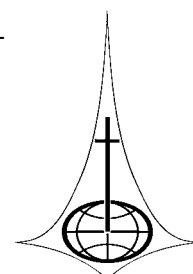
(547 words)

LWF 2006 Council Meeting Deferred to March 2007

LWF to Commemorate 60 Years

GENEVA, 22 February 2006 (LWI) – This year’s scheduled meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been deferred to March 2007. It will be held in Lund, Sweden, where the federation was founded in 1947.

The LWF Executive Committee, via mail vote, decided to reschedule the meeting to coincide with the LWF 60th anniversary, which will be celebrated next year. The committee’s decision was made possible



by the Council's amendment of the LWF Bylaws last year, providing for the spacing of its regular meetings to between 12–18 months. The Bylaws previously stipulated every 12 months.

In a letter dated 1 February, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, has informed Council members, advisers, and national committees, that the next meeting will be held between 19–28 March 2007, with precise dates to be agreed on by the Executive Committee at its March 2006 meeting.

In his report to the Council last year, the general secretary had requested that consideration be given

to combining the next meeting with the 60th anniversary celebration.

The Council governs the LWF between Assemblies, normally held every six years. The Executive Committee, which serves as the LWF Personnel Committee and Board of Trustees normally meets semi-annually.

The current Council, appointed at the July 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, comprises the president, treasurer and 48 persons elected by the Assembly. Other members include advisers, who are ordained and lay persons representing the different LWF regions. (256 words)

Theological Debate on Spirits, Ancestors and Healing

LWF Study Program on Spiritualism as a Global Challenge for Churches

BERLIN, Germany/GENEVA, 9 March 2006 (LWI) – An international consultation in Berlin, Germany, marked the final phase of a four-year study program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) on *Spiritualism as a Global Challenge for Churches*. The study process is aimed at helping Lutheran churches around the world understand indigenous spiritualities and spiritualistic movements in their respective contexts.



Eighteen experts from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin and North America participated in the international consultation marking the final phase of the four-year LWF study program on "Spiritualism as a Global Challenge for Churches." © LWF

"We realized that churches around the world are confronted with such questions. This is why the LWF Council unanimously approved the study program despite the sensitive and controversial nature of this subject," said DTS Study Secretary for the Church and People of Other Faiths, Rev. Dr Ingo Wulfhorst. "In spite of the diversity presented in the different continents and cultures, one can still compare the theological and missionary concerns linked to the respective situations," he noted. "Churches, could learn from experiences gained in the different parts of the world," he added.

"Exceptional Human Experience"

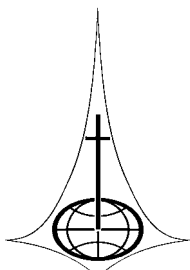
Prof. Johan L. F. Gerding, lecturing at the Institute of Parapsychology, Utrecht University, and the Faculty of Philosophy, Leiden University, both in the Netherlands, pointed out that many people had so-called exceptional human experience. "Although unusual and often frightening for the individual concerned, such happenings must be viewed as normal in view of the large number of cases reported," he explained. This fact alone could be of help to those concerned. Bereaved persons, who involuntarily have a sense of contact with the deceased should be able to talk about such events in their congregations, and receive

understanding instead of exclusion. He however warned, people should not seek contact with the deceased or spirits out of self-interest or intention.

Commemorating the Dead – Ancestral Worship?

During a discussion on ancestral worship, Prof. Paul Chung, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque,

Participants in the 12-18 January 2006 meeting discussed, among other issues, how churches should respond, for example, to congregation members who, in the face of difficult life situations, seek healing and consolation in traditional indigenous as well as spiritualistic rituals. A key question was whether Lutheran churches should allow the worship of ancestors. The group also analyzed the possible implications of such movements for Lutheran identity, dialogue and mission.



Iowa, USA, spoke about the situation in Asia, where many missionaries had asked their congregations to reject traditional ancestral worship, likening the practice to idolatry. He said Christians in the successive generations were considering how honorable commemoration of ancestors could include awareness about the Fourth Commandment.

Dr Sylvester B. Kahakwa, systematic theology lecturer at the Makumira University College of Tumaini University, Tanzania, said worship of ancestors also plays a major role in Africa, and influences people's lives significantly. He stated his strong stance against labeling ancestors as agents of Satan. After all, the Old Testament commemorates the forefathers and describes God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the African theologian argued. "Jesus as the first and most powerful ancestor – could this be an interpretation of Christianity in African thinking?" he asked.

Emeritus professor Klaus Nürnberger from South Africa stressed, "What is important is that Jesus himself is present among the people." He said this would hardly succeed if Christ were to be placed at the far end of a list of ancestors. Ancestors should be honored, he agreed, but they should not determine the existence of the living. Christians did not need any medium to God, and the churches' obligation was to ensure that the real presence of Christ could be experienced through proclamation. The message to be conveyed ought to be that Christ genuinely accepts the concrete daily needs, and not only forgiveness of sins in the last judgement.



Plenary session to discuss the final study document titled "Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: Global Challenges to the Church": from left to right, Prof. Monica Melanchthon, India; Dr Jaap Breetvelt, Netherlands; and Rev. Dr Andreas Wöhle, Germany. © LWF

Final Study Document on Spiritualistic Movements

The results of four regional seminars were evaluated during the Berlin consultation, and a final study document titled *Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: Global Challenges to the Church* was elaborated. The publication to be produced in May this year will be a reference for Lutheran churches around the world in discussions on this subject, at theological seminars and congregations, and also as a guide and source of advice when dealing with such concerns. Each chapter contains proposals on how to deal appropriately with the challenges of spiritualism and worship of ancestors.

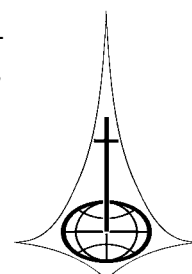
Regional study seminars were held in Latin America in 2002, Europe in 2003, and Africa and Asia in 2004. The participation of representatives of LWF member churches, theology professors, experts on spiritualism and representatives of traditional indigenous religions and spiritualistic movements facilitated the deliberations, exchange of experiences and discussion of possible action.

Three study documents were published as a result of the regional seminars—*Spiritualism: A Challenge to the Churches in Europe* (2004); *Ancestors, Spirits and Healing in Africa and Asia: A Challenge to the Church* (2005); and *Espiritualismo/Espritisimo: Desafios para Igreja na América Latina* (2004). They can be ordered at: The Lutheran World Federation, Department for Theology and Studies, 150 Route de Ferney, P. O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland; Tel. +41/22-791 6111, Fax: +41/22-791 6630, E-mail: Liesch@lutheranworld.org

(846 words)



In groups, participants evaluated the results of four regional seminars: from left to right, Prof. Willfred John, Malaysia; Prof. Isabel Apawo Phiri, South Africa; and Rev. Dr Ingo Wulffhorst, LWF study secretary for the Church and People of Other Faiths. © LWF



Tanzanian Mwombeki to Lead Germany-based International Missionary Body

Tanzanian theologian, **Rev. Dr Fidon R. Mwombeki** will be the next general secretary of the Wuppertal, Germany-based United Evangelical Mission (UEM). Appointed in September 2005, Mwombeki will assume the UEM's top position at the end of 2006, succeeding Rev. Reiner Groth. This is the first time that the organization will be led by a person from outside Germany.

Mwombeki, 45, is currently UEM Executive Secretary for Evangelism. Until the end of 2004, he was general secretary of the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Tanzania (ELCT). He studied theology and business management in the USA.

He served as parish minister in Tanzania and Sweden, and as executive secretary for mission and evangelism in the ELCT North-Western Diocese. He has been an active campaigner at global level for economic justice, and was a member of the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria from 2002 until 2004. The UEM is an international missionary communion comprising 34 member churches in Africa, Asia and Germany. (175 words)

Eric Hertel Is Bishop-Elect of Namibia's German Lutheran Church

On 28 May 2006, **Rev. Erich Hertel** will be installed as the new bishop of the German-speaking Evangelical Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC). He was elected during the church's synod last September.

Hertel takes over from Bishop Reinhard Keding, who returned to Germany last August after 12 years of service in Namibia. The GELC council vice-chairperson, Rev. Erich Rust will be in charge until the new bishop is installed.

Hertel was born in Hessen, Germany in 1949. He pursued theological studies at the Hermannsburg Mission Seminary, Germany. Following training as a vicar in Bogota, Co-



Rev. Angela Veii (right), coordinator of the LWF National Committee in Namibia, congratulates Rev. Erich Hertel (left) on his election as the new bishop of ELCIN-GELC. © ELCIN-GELC

lombia, he worked as a community pastor in Durban, South Africa, from 1986 to 1995. His responsibilities since 1995 include looking after and accompanying staff members sent to the Hermannsburg Mission partner churches in Southern Africa.

During the synod, members agreed to create a United Church Council of the Namibian Evangelical Lutheran Churches (UCC-NELC) comprising the three Lutheran churches in the country—GELC, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN); and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). (182 words)

Former Director of LWF Refugee Services Stewart Herman Dies

The Rev. Stewart W. Herman Jr., former director of refugee services with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) died on 16 February in Greenport, New York, following illness.

Herman, 96, a retired pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), joined the staff of the newly organized LWF in 1948 as director of its Service to Refugees, based at the Geneva headquarters. In 1952, he moved to New York as executive secretary of the Division of LWF Affairs in the National Lutheran Council, and as director of the LWF Committee on Latin America.

He was the first president of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) from 1964 until 1971.

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko paid tribute to Herman as "a very able director and chairperson of several Lutheran and ecumenical initiatives, through which Lutheran churches sought to respond to human need around the world." The general secretary recalled he had invited Herman to the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, China to join in the federation's 50th



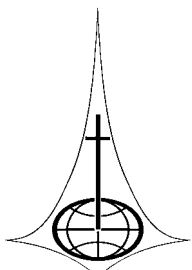
Former director, LWF Service to Refugees, Rev. Stewart W. Herman Jr. [The photo was taken during his tenure at the LSTC.] © LSTC/Fabian Bachrach

anniversary celebrations, but he could not attend due to poor health at the time.

"We are thankful to God for Dr Herman's exemplary life, lived among us as a translation of what he believed," Noko added.

Herman Jr. grew up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the son of Lutheran pastor, Stewart Herman. In 1930 he earned a bachelor's degree from Gettysburg College, and a bachelor of divinity degree from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg in 1934. He studied theology at the University of Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France, and pursued additional graduate studies in Göttingen and Berlin, Germany. He was pastor of the American Church in Berlin, 1936–1939. He subsequently worked with the World Council of Churches in the process of formation, 1945–1948, prior to joining the LWF. Upon retirement from the LSTC in 1971, he served as a trustee of the American Bible Society, and was active with the Union Chapel, an ecumenical summer ministry on Shelter Island, New York.

Herman is survived by his wife, Ethelyn, their four children and six grandchildren. (353 words)



FEATURE: Moving Toward Autonomy

Lutheran Church Backs Costarican Indigenous Population

SAN JOSÉ, Costa Rica/GENEVA, 8 March 2006 (LWI)—For 54-year-old Luisa Bejarano and her mother, María Montezuma, 84, a typical working day starts before sunrise and ends when residents of the southern region of Conte Burica go to bed. “As self-employed women, we have to work up to 17 hours non stop. We milk the cows, feed our pigs, chop firewood, and make handicrafts, which we sell to earn a living,” says Bejarano, clad in her *da gudu ga* [long colorful dress]. She is sitting on her bed in a Lutheran church shelter in the San Cayetano district of Costa Rica’s capital, San José.



Preserving and protecting the rights of the Indigenous population is important, especially for the future generations. María Bejarano and her son belong to the Bribri ethnic group in Talamanca on the Atlantic coast side in Costa Rica. © ILCO communication office

Like Bejarano and Montezuma, many women of the Indigenous Gnobe (also known as the Guaymies) population, which resides in the interior of the country, grow crops on their small plots of land. A 2000 national census put Costa Rica’s Indigenous population at over 70,000 people from various ethnic backgrounds, about two percent of the country’s four million people. Although the Indigenous population live in 24 officially reserved territories, they are for the most part disadvantaged and excluded in socio-

economic and cultural terms, making them one of the poorest communities in the country.

Landownership and occupation are just some of the problems they face. Despite a 1977 Indigenous land act that prohibits the sale and transfer of land in the territories reserved exclusively for the Indigenous population, not only have outsiders illegally acquired land there, but now they also occupy large tracts of it.

That is why the Lutheran Costarican Church (Iglesia Luterana Costarricense - ILCO) has been supporting the country’s Indigenous population for the past 15 years, working closely with them in the 24 reserved areas to safeguard their culture and ethnic identity, and advocate for their rights, particularly those related to landownership.

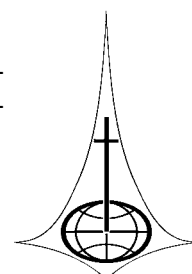
God Is Revealed Differently in Every Country and Culture

ILCO’s founder and president, Rev. Melvin Jiménez, points out, “The way God reveals [himself] is different in every country and culture.” ILCO’s involvement, among other, includes strengthening the Lutheran congregations, and providing support to Indigenous, urban and rural populations, including farmers. These communities, including Nicaraguan immigrants and people from the poorer regions, are becoming increasingly involved in the church’s congregational life. Founded in 1988, ILCO currently has 1,249 members. It has been a member church of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) since 2002.

Jiménez sees the most important tasks of the church as cooperation with the Indigenous communities and ensuring respect for their life and identity according to their traditions and faith perspective.

Within the context of interfaith dialogue and the endeavor to understand the Indigenous population’s culture, ILCO’s social work includes legal counseling for individuals and the community; defending and regaining landownership rights; and promoting programs for the prevention of natural catastrophes. The communities’ autonomy has been an important part of ILCO’s work, and aims to encourage them to speak out on pertinent issues, claim their rights, and take decisions.

The church’s work has been an attempt to seek alternative solutions to the Indigenous population’s problems. Examples include preventing non-indigenous people from illegally acquiring land in Indigenous territories; preventing environmental damage;





The hands of 84 year-old María Montezuma, a member of the Gnobe community, portray the daily struggle for survival among Costa Rica's Indigenous population. © ILCO communication office

improving access to income-generating opportunities; education and development planning; and creating institutions for the communities.

Rubén Chacón, a legal expert on Indigenous land-ownership rights in Costa Rica, and a sponsor of the ILCO assistance program explains, "In addition to providing legal counseling, this program offers guidance to the Indigenous population, enabling them to learn about their legal rights and obligations."

He credits the ILCO initiative, backed by the National Commission for Indigenous Affairs (CONAI), for the first-

ever report on the current status of the rights of Costa Rica's Indigenous population.

The report, which reflects the living conditions of the Indigenous population in Costa Rica, was submitted to the International Commission on Human Rights in Washington, USA, on 1 March 2005. It reveals how the general application of individual civil rights and liberties hinders the country's Indigenous population. Reference is made to the imposition of relatively unrealistic standards, through the education system and local authority governance. Other social action programs supported by the church include agriculture, public education, and credit schemes for small and large-scale businesses aimed at improving the livelihoods of the communities. (711 words)

(By Mariam Carpio Carpio, ILCO communication office.)

***This article is part of the ongoing LWF Features on Healing focusing on the LWF Tenth Assembly theme, "For the Healing of the World." The series highlights the relevance of the Assembly theme in the different contexts of the worldwide Lutheran communion by presenting projects and activities aimed at promoting reconciliation and healing. This theme continues to be an important aspect of LWF's work even after the 21–31 July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.**

Commission Proposes Ending Norway's State-Church System

A majority of members on a government-appointed multi-party commission with representatives of different denominations and religions has recommended abolishing the current state-church system in Norway.

The 20-member commission led by a former Christian Democrat government minister, Kåre Gjønnes, presented "The State and the Church of Norway" report to the minister for culture and church affairs, Trond Giske on 31 January 2006, after nearly three years of work.

The year 2013 is seen as the earliest date for a change in the [Lutheran] Church of Norway's relations to the state, as any major changes would require a revision of the country's constitution. Between 2,000 and 3,000 church and public bodies, institutions, organizations and parties

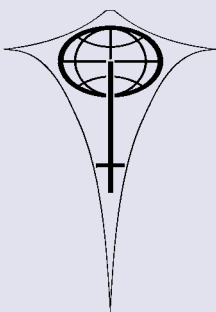
are expected to have stated their view on the matter by the end of this year. A government report to the "Storting" (parliament) is expected in late 2008.

Church of Norway, a state church since the 1537 Lutheran reformation in Denmark-Norway, has over 3.9 million members, representing 85 per cent of the country's population. It has been a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member church since 1947.

The other LWF member church in the Nordic country, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, with nearly 22,000 members, held LWF associate membership since 1997, and changed to full membership in 2005.

(218 words)

(Ecumenical News International)



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