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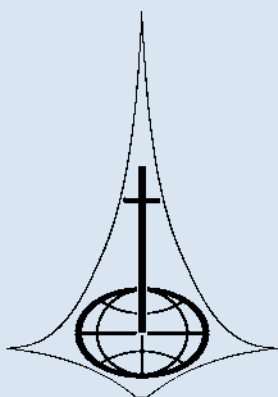
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Picking Up the Pieces

Kenya's Lutheran Bishops Say Injustices Must Be Addressed



The burned Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya Springs of Life Lutheran Church in Kibera on the outskirts of the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. © LWF/F. Nzwilli

NAIROBI, Kenya/GENEVA (LWI) – At the height of the violence that gripped parts of Kenya after the December 2007 elections, Christine Musyoki, a mother of six was displaced from her home and livelihood in Kibera, a sub-urban of the capital Nairobi. For several days, the small-scale vegetable trader joined thousands of other internally displaced Kenyans seeking refuge at the city’s Jamhuri Park, where humanitarian agencies provided emergency assistance through the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS).

Musyoki who has since returned to Kibera recalls: “They [angry mobs] stormed into our house and demanded that we leave immediately. I pleaded, but they threatened to kill me with my children, saying I had not voted for them. I left with nothing. They looted everything from my house.”

She ponders the connection between a voter’s right and the suffering she has been subjected to. “My children have little to eat now, and I am forced to move from place to place including churches, looking for food. I cannot leave Kibera. This is where I have lived all my life.”

A short distance from Musyoki’s house, Teresia Anyango, self-employed until the recent crisis, earned a living from selling beads at her make-shift stall. Today, she struggles to cope with the impact of what she describes as criminal acts perpetrated by unruly young men under the guise of political and ethnic affiliations. “Everything has turned upside down for me now,” says

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LWF Bangladesh Program Assists Churches in Weather Crisis

As part of its emergency response to the impact of a cold wave sweeping across Bangladesh in January/February, Bangladeshi non-governmental organization (NGO) Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) presented eight bales of quilts (35 quilts per bale) to representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in the country.

RDRS is the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) associate program in Bangladesh. The LWF has two member churches there—the Bangladesh Lutheran Church (BLC) and Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (BNELC).

A mild cold wave swept across the country posing great danger to many vulnerable people in the north western region. The LWF associate program noted that “the poor, who cannot afford to buy warm clothes, are suffering and falling sick.” About 22 deaths among the elderly, women and children had been reported by the first week of February 2008.

Presenting the quilts mid-January to Rev. Arabindo Sarker and Rev. Naresh Hansda of BLC and BNELC respectively, RDRS directors Dr Nural Alam and Mr Tapan Karmaker also offered to provide financial support to the churches' sanitation projects and staff training on health and microfinance.

Besides church-related bodies, RDRS also donated warm clothing and blankets to vulnerable people in six north west-



Dr Nural Alam (left) of RDRS and Bangladesh Lutheran Church pastor Rev. Arabindo Sarker (right) at the mid-January meeting. © RDRS

ern districts including Rangpur, where its program work is concentrated. *(By RDRS communications office)*

More information about Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service is available on the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org

To donate toward the LWF Department for World Service work please see <http://donations.lutheranworld.org>

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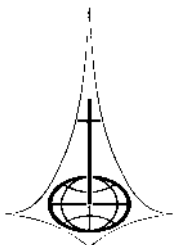
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LWF, LCMS Directors Affirm Shared Lutheran Identity, Urge Further Mutual Dialogue

Emphasis on Joint Intervention in Overcoming Church Tensions

GENEVA (LWI) – Representatives of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) meeting at the LWF secretariat in Geneva, 21–24 January have affirmed the need to establish direct communication between both organizations in order to mutually benefit from their common heritage in the Reformation.

“From our meetings and conversations, we have been able to verify that mutual suspicions exist between our respective church bodies and their members, yet we have a lot in common because of our common Lutheran heritage,” remarked Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD).

In an interview with *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* Nordstokke and LCMS Associate Executive Director for International Mission Rev. David C. Birner, emphasized the need for further dialogue and sharing of relevant materials and resources “in order to jointly discern opportunities for potential cooperation at regional and local level.”

Mutual Transparency

“The visit to the LWF helped us to affirm the common strands of our identity in the Reformation, and that this identity needs to be constantly reaffirmed in so many different ways including open dialogue between us and our partner churches,” said Birner. “Our discussions were marked by mutual transparency, open communication, a spirit of collaboration and open information exchange,” he noted.

The conversations at the LWF included meetings between the LWF/DMD area secretaries for Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean and the LCMS regional counterparts. Through its



The LCMS-LWF staff meetings in Geneva involved, front row, from left to right: Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, LWF/DMD director; Rev David Birner, LCMS associate executive director for International Mission; LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, and the organizations' area secretaries. © LWF/D.-M Grötzsch

regional and international desks, DMD assists, coordinates and accompanies the 140 LWF member churches, their related agencies and other bodies to develop and maintain holistic ministries that affirm the church’s participation in God’s mission to all creation.

The St Louis (Missouri, USA)-based LCMS is the second largest Lutheran church body in North America with some 2.5 million members. It has altar and pulpit fellowship with 29 other confessional Lutheran churches on every continent except Antarctica, including 12 LWF member churches in Africa, Asia and Europe.

Potential Collaboration

The Geneva discussions highlighted common areas of work and potential collaboration including conflict resolution in the churches. Nordstokke pointed out the genesis of the current meeting was a November 2007 joint intervention in a process to resolve a 20-year old split in the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP),

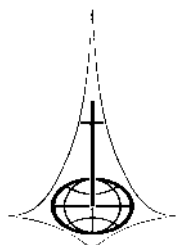
an LWF member church since 1973. “The present process of reconciliation [in the church] has been strongly strengthened by the LWF-LCMS cooperation,” he noted.

There are also potential areas of collaboration and common initiatives in lay training, scholarships for both men and women, the churches’ response to the HIV epidemic, violence against women, and churches’ relations to Islam, among others. “The meeting has encouraged us to see Lutherans together becoming part of the solution to global issues,” noted Birner.

Nordstokke and Birner confirmed their group discussions on issues that have resulted in strained relations between some of the LCMS and LWF churches, especially the ordination of women. They noted that while both organizations affirm inclusiveness in church life, they have different approaches and positions on the role of women in the church.

Discussions were also held with LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko.

24 January 2008



LWF Calls for Constructive Dialogue to End Kenya's Post-Election Crisis

No Political Justification for Loss of Life, Noko Says

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) appealed to Kenya's political leadership to urgently work toward a peaceful resolution of the post-election crisis there that has resulted in widespread loss of life and destruction of property.

In a statement issued on 3 January, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko urged the leaders of Kenya's major political parties—the Party of National Unity and the Orange Democratic Movement—to “urgently pursue constructive dialogue to end the impasse.”

By early January, over 300 people in different parts of the country had reportedly died from violence following the disputed 27 December presidential election. The number of internally displaced persons was

estimated at 70,000 to 100,000. (*See also pg. 17*) “There can be no political justification for the loss of life, senseless destruction of homes and property, and insecurity that have resulted from this violence,” Noko said.

The general secretary pointed out that in its recent history Kenya had undergone a democratic political transition process that offered concrete expression of the long-proclaimed “African renaissance.” The light of “this beacon of hope is being extinguished by the post-election violence targeting certain ethnic communities,” he cautioned.

Noko expressed the LWF's strong support for ecumenical efforts to promote national unity amid the current crisis. He equally welcomed initiatives by the international community

to broker a peaceful political resolution, and urged Kenya's political leaders to accept such intervention.

“It is my earnest prayer that the people of Kenya will be preserved from violence, and that the world will respond with compassion and generosity to the humanitarian needs of those affected by the unrest,” Noko added.

The LWF has two member churches in Kenya—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church—as well as extensive development cooperation and community empowerment programs, including through the LWF Department for World Service program in the country.

The full text of the LWF general secretary's statement follows:

Statement on the Crisis in Kenya

By Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation

Along with all members of the international ecumenical and interfaith community, the Lutheran World Federation appeals for an end to violence and calls for a peaceful resolution of the post-election crisis in Kenya. There can be no political justification for the loss of life, senseless destruction of homes and property, and insecurity that have resulted from this violence.

The democratic political transition that Kenya has undergone during its recent history offered a concrete expression of the long-proclaimed Africa renaissance. Today, tragically, the light of this beacon of hope is being extinguished by the post-election violence targeting certain ethnic communities.

The Lutheran World Federation appeals to the leaders of the two major political parties—the Party of National Unity and the Orange Democratic Movement—to urgently pursue constructive dialogue to end the impasse.

I wish to express the Lutheran World Federation's strong support for the efforts of the ecumenical movement—under the leadership of the All Africa Conference of Churches—to promote peace, ethnic and inter-religious harmony, democratic accountability and transparency, and national unity in the midst of this crisis. I call on all churches and people of good will around the world to lend their strength to these efforts. I welcome

initiatives by the international community to broker a peaceful political resolution to the current impasse, and urge all political leaders in Kenya to accept the assistance of the international community in this regard.

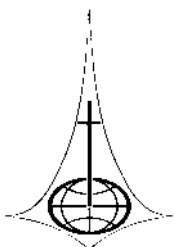
The Lutheran World Federation, which has two member churches in Kenya as well as extensive development cooperation and community empowerment programs, is deeply and directly touched by this situation. It is my earnest prayer that the people of Kenya will be preserved from violence, and that the world will respond with compassion and generosity to the humanitarian needs of those affected by the unrest.

3 January 2008

Ecumenical Women Launch Advocacy Web Site at UN Commission Session

Ecumenical Women, a coalition of churches and ecumenical organizations in dialogue with the United Nations in New York, has launched a Web site for the 25 February – 7 March 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the New York UN headquarters.

At www.ecumenicalwomen.org the coalition, of which the Lutheran World Federation is a member, offers perspectives on the biblical mandate of liberation and justice for women. It features a blog with academic articles and theological resources from around the world. (*Lutheran Office for World Community*)



LWF Mourns Death of Greek Orthodox Archbishop Christodoulos

Noko Recalls Church Leader's Vigor and Courage

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has extended deep condolences to all members of the Church of Greece following the death of His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece.

In a 29 January statement, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko recalled the LWF's "warm memories" of Christodoulos' pioneering spirit as the first Archbishop of Athens and All Greece to visit the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, where the LWF is located, in 2006.

Noko cited their meeting's focus on the churches' role in building "vital bridges within the human community" and providing spiritual strength to urgent processes of reconciliation and conflict resolution. He noted the archbishop would be honored also for receiving Pope John Paul II in Athens in 2001 and for his 2006 visit to Pope Benedict XVI.

"The leadership of His Beatitude was marked by his deep love of his



During the 28 May - 1 June 2006 visit of Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece to the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, the Orthodox Church leader expressed his appreciation for ecumenical cooperation, and urged increased bilateral contacts and cooperation on "burning issues of mutual concern" including climate change. (Photo) LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (left) receives Archbishop Christodoulos and members of his delegation. © LWF/D.-M Grätzsch

country and his church," noted Noko. He paid tribute to the archbishop's vigor and courage in witnessing to the importance of Christian faith in civil society.

Archbishop Christodoulos died on 28 January, aged 69, after a long illness.

The full text of the LWF statement follows:

Statement from LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, on the Death of His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece

On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, I extend deep condolences to all members of the Church of Greece on the loss of His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos. All of us who care for closer relations among Christians join you in mourning his death, even as we give thanks for the accomplishments of his life.

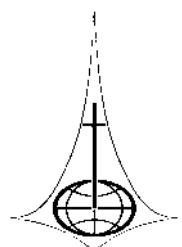
His Beatitude's time as Archbishop was marked by many initiatives in ecumenical relations. At the Lutheran World Federation, we have our own warm memories of His Beatitude's pioneering spirit: he was the first Archbishop of Athens and All Greece to make a visit to us at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. On that festive occasion, His Beatitude joined us in a common meal as we

said that one of the important ways in which we can participate in and seek to alleviate the suffering of the world is through "increased mutual religious understanding which builds vital bridges within the human community and provides urgently needed spiritual strength to processes of reconciliation and resolution of conflicts." His Beatitude will be honored also for his widely-remembered welcome of Pope John Paul II to Athens and his visit to Pope Benedict XVI in Rome. Christians of every tradition are enriched by these mutual initiatives for closer relationships and dialogue. Today as we honor the legacy of Archbishop Christodoulos we give thanks afresh for this memory and this new beginning.

The leadership of His Beatitude was marked by his deep love of his country and his church. He brought vigor and courage to his witness to the importance of Christian faith in civil society, and even those who disagreed with some of his positions recognized his passion and commitment to the good of the Church. The depth of his faith has been seen especially in his final gift to us: in his last months, he showed publicly the face of faithful dying and so offered to all of us a witness to trust in the power of the Risen Lord.

To that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we now entrust our brother Christodoulos. May light perpetual shine upon him.

29 January 2008



Theologians Urge Realistic Response to People's Daily Questions

LWF Seminar for Global South Teaching Theologians

HONG KONG, China/GENEVA (LWI)

– Theological questions evoked by the challenge of religious resurgence in various world contexts were the focus of a recent Lutheran World Federation (LWF) seminar bringing together 22 teaching theologians mainly from Asia.

“What do we believe, teach and practice in the midst of religious resurgence today?” was the title of the 27 January – 2 February LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) seminar held at Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Tao Fung Shan Christian Center in Hong Kong, China. Questions that are not often explored in theological discourse, especially people’s daily issues of survival, were a major highlight.

“Globalization evokes questions of identity, especially when we in minority situations ask who we are,” remarked Dr Martin Sinaga, who teaches at Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia. Dr Chung Song Mee, dean and church history lecturer at Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, described the charismatic movement impact on churches in Sabah, Malaysia, and how theological education should respond.

In his keynote address, Brazilian Dr Vitor Westhelle, who teaches systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois, USA, pointed to the growing number of Lutherans in the South, and the challenges they face. Non-traditional neighbors and new emergent pieties “bring to the Lutheran agenda implications for theology and pastoral practice that we are only now starting to realize in its breadth and depth, and redrawing the face of Lutheranism,” he said.

Contextualization

The question for Westhelle was whether “the figure of Lutheranism



*Some of the participants at the LWF seminar for teaching theologians held in Hong Kong, China.
© LWF/S. Sinn*

[can] be transfigured, and catalyze new experiences,” as the recognized Lutheran doctrines have become too reified, and no longer connected with their contexts. The key, he added, “is a real gift if, and only if, it opens the lock that holds our lives captive.”

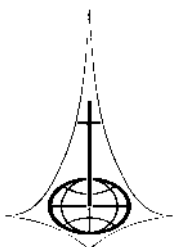
Rev. Yovan Benoit, teaching theology and ethics at the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad, India, remarked, “Our theology at times looks like a slogan: it needs to be more relational, dialogical and diaconal.” Dr Sarojini Nadar, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, reiterated the importance of “critical” contextualization of Christian theology, recognizing that some aspects of indigenous cultures and practices need to be critiqued because of their harmful effects, especially on women.

Lutheran Church of Australia pastor Rev. Basil Schild, working among Aboriginal people cited an Aboriginal pastor in central Australia, “It is so boring here, just waiting for Jesus to come: I want to die because it will be much better then.” Schild called for a theology of a survival to address such situations.

Discussions focused also on key questions on how material blessings can be understood in ways that are consistent with Lutheran theology; how relationships with those who have died could be understood; how more alive, creative and critical worship could be developed; and how Christian communities deal with religious and political threats to their existence.

Dr Samuël Ngun Ling, Myanmar Institute of Theology in Myanmar (Burma) asserted that daily threat is a reality for Christians there due to a repressive government, and also because being Burmese is equated with being Buddhist. His theological focus on interfaith dialogue in such a context was one of the papers discussed.

Other participants came from Hong Kong, Japan, Madagascar, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Sweden and Tanzania. DTS director Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist and Rev. Simone Sinn, theological associate in the department, said the seminar had helped the theologians “move beyond an inculturation phase of theological development, toward more inter-cul-



tural critique and transformation of theological understandings.”

Some of the presentations and group work from the DTS seminar will

be published in the third volume of the LWF *Theology in the Life of the Church* series. The next global South theological seminar will take place in July 2008

in South Africa. For more information, contact Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist at kbl@lutheranworld.org

27 February 2008

Thousands of Chadian Refugees in Cameroon Still Afraid to Return Home

LWF Assists People Sheltered in Churches, Hospitals

KOUKOU, Eastern Chad/GENEVA (LWI)

– A representative of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Chad said thousands who fled the capital N’djamena into neighboring Cameroon following the early February fighting between government troops and rebels are afraid to return home, citing fears over security, especially under the current state of emergency.

“Churches, houses and hospitals in Kousseri have been filled to capacity trying to cope with the influx,” said Mr Jaap Aantjes, regional supervisor for recently established LWF Department for World Service (DWS) programs in East Africa including the Chad operations. Aantjes who visited the Cameroonian northern border town of Kousseri 14–20 February, said large groups of refugees were still camping in open public places awaiting processing with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for accommodation in camps under construction.

The attack on the capital left an estimated 160 people dead, many wounded and thousands displaced. After the Chadian army repulsed

the rebels, the government declared mid-February a 15-day nation-wide state of emergency.

At the height of the turmoil an estimated 30,000 Chadians sought refuge in Kousseri’s churches, houses and hospitals according to the UNHCR and Cameroon Red Cross. With relative calm since restored, many have returned home, and the number of those sheltering in churches in northern Cameroon had reduced from over 6,500 to around 3,000 refugees at the time of the LWF/DWS visit.

The DWS Chad office is collaborating with Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon (EFLC – Église fraternelle luthérienne du Cameroun) to provide relief assistance to the refugees.

EFLC president Rev. Robert Goyek Daga says the LWF member church in conjunction with other churches moved in quickly to respond to the situation in northern Cameroon with their limited resources, but external support is still required.

The early February security situation had resulted in the scaling

back of DWS operations in eastern Chad and temporary reduction of staff persons, but normal work has resumed, including completion of a DWS mission to the south to assess the situation of refugees from the Central African Republic.

DWS assistance to over 45,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern Chad includes camp management, psychosocial assistance to IDPs, and support to host communities surrounding the Habile and Aradib camps in the border area with Sudan’s western region of Darfur.

LWF/DWS works in 36 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and Central America, through four regional and 15 country programs and emergency operations.

The LWF is a founding member of ACT International, the Geneva-based global alliance of churches and related agencies working to save lives and support communities in emergencies worldwide.

More on DWS Chad at:

www.lutheranworld.org

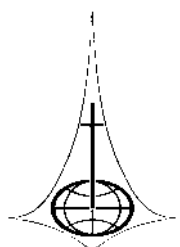
27 February 2008



Internally displaced women at an LWF meeting on psychosocial and community services in eastern Chad. © LWF/DWS Chad/ E. Tettee



LWF/ACT staff persons distribute mosquito nets at Habile during a vaccination campaign. © LWF/DWS Chad/ E. Tettee



FEATURE: Picking Up the Pieces

Continued from page 1

the mother of two, currently among local residents receiving assistance through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), which has a congregation in Kibera.

Burned Churches

The destruction is glaring in the expanse Kibera, regarded as the city's largest slum area, with an estimated one million people. The ELCK's Springs of Life Lutheran Church was among several churches torched in the area. It was reduced to a shell, as was its adjoining medical clinic, refurbished just three months ago to offer free medical service to community members, and a pre-unit school.

Members of the church who witnessed its burning say they pleaded with a mob of nearly 50 young men to spare the worship place, but the rowdy group remained firm—they did not want to see any church in the area. "We were nearly ten church members, but they overpowered us," recalls Caleb Oliech. "They looted whatever they considered valuable, before setting the building on fire."

Although relative normalcy has returned to Kibera and other parts the

country affected by the post-election violence, picking up the pieces from the impact of a month-long political crisis remains a major challenge. There is still tension and concern for security in some parts of the country. According to the KRCS, over 1,000 people have died and more than 300,000 have been displaced in the violence, which broke out after the 27 December presidential election. Incumbent President Mwai Kibaki (Party of National Unity – PNU) was declared the winner but opposition leader Raila Odinga (Orange Democratic Movement – ODM) says the poll was rigged. Many observers say the tallying of the votes was flawed.

In the unprecedented spate of reprisals in certain regions, community members perceived as supporters of rival ethnic and political camps were brutally killed mainly by gangs of young men wielding machetes and other objects. Homes and properties were looted and burned down, as were churches and schools. One of the most gruesome incidents was the early January burning to death of a group of nearly 50 people, mostly women and children from one ethnic community who had sought refuge in the Assemblies of God Church in Kiambaa village on the outskirts

of Eldoret town in the Rift Valley province. Some of the deaths are also attributed to police shootings, which police claim were targeted at protesting perpetrators of crimes.

Hope

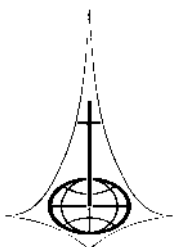
There are signs of hope in the ongoing PNU-ODM mediation process led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It incorporates a four-point approach for immediate action to end the violence; measures to address the humanitarian crisis; how to overcome the current political crisis; and long-term issues such as unemployment, poverty and land reforms.

Although Kenya had experienced proportions of inter-ethnic clashes in the past, church leaders, including leaders of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches there, say the tensions and violence had intensified with this election. They are calling on the PNU and ODM sides to resolve the election dispute without hurting the normal life of citizens, while favoring non-violent means as the way out. They are also keen to see key issues addressed such as a new constitution, land rights, the increasing gap between the rich and poor, and unemployment.



Above: Ms Christine Musyoki says she has lived in Kibera all her life.
© LWF/F. Nzwili

Left: Children displaced from Mathare where the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church provided relief assistance.
© CWS/KELC/ACT International/G. Arende





Above: ELCK Bishop Walter O. Obare
© LWF/H. Putsman

Left: ELCK pastor Rev. Dennis Mecker points at a cross that was burned inside the Kibera Lutheran church. © LWF/F. Nzwili



“The current crisis is about the flawed elections results, which triggered past issues like land distribution, corruption and others. The situation has created bitterness among different groups, which have in turn attacked those seen to support Kibaki,” says ELCK Bishop Walter Obare Omwanza.

Restoring Relations

Obare, whose church has congregations also in Nyanza and Western provinces says the tension that has build up at community level in the post-election period cannot be taken lightly, and a meeting of ELCK pastors in Nairobi this week is focusing on the issue. “In my church, there is a lot of tension right now,” he says. “Relations among members of certain ethnic communities belonging to ELCK congregations have been seriously affected. We have pastors who are afraid to go back to work in some of these areas, and we need to do a lot of reconciliation work. But I am also encouraged because we have been very open during our current meeting,” he notes.

Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) Bishop Zachariah W. Kahuthu says although tension has subsidized in areas served by

KELC mainly in the east and northern part of the city including Mathare, another big slum area, the impact of the violence is still being felt.

Resource Distribution

On the reasons for the violence, Kahuthu points out “tribes and political parties are only being used as an excuse. It is not about tribal hatred, but about who owns what. It is about resource distribution,” says the KELC bishop.

Both Lutheran bishops are optimistic about the Annan-led mediation process, but as Kahuthu points out, church leaders also “have to keep

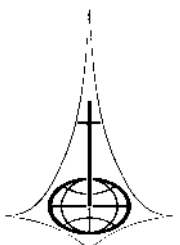
pressurizing politicians to give it all their commitment.”

The churches’ role in reconciliation at the grassroots is equally crucial to long-term peace building, says Obare citing the different parts of the country in which the ELCK works and the ethnic diversities there. “It is clear that our people have been involved in the violence. But we are asking them not to target their neighbors since they are not the cause of the problem. We are urging them to allow it to be solved at the top [political leadership].”

The ELCK’s immediate plans include redefinition of an ongoing peace initiative program to reflect the



Caleb Oliech stands inside the burned ELCK clinic in Kibera. © LWF/F. Nzwili



current political crisis. Its implementation will incorporate seminars at national, local church and grassroots levels, where members of the different ethnic groups will be invited.

*The churches' assistance is being coordinated through the Kenya Forum of Action by Churches Together

(ACT) International, which includes the LWF Department for World Service program in the country.

The LWF is a founding member of ACT International, the global alliance of churches and related agencies working to save lives and support communities in emergencies worldwide.

(By Nairobi-based LWI correspondent Fredrick Nzwili.)

See also www.act-intl.org/ for latest news and updates on the post-election violence in Kenya.

8 February 2008

FEATURE: From Humble Beginnings

Ethiopian Church Counts 4.9 Million Members, World's Second Largest Lutheran Church

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (LWI) – “God has blessed the Mekane Yesus Church with much growth over the past 50 years, but the work of this church in God’s mission is just beginning,” states Rev. Iteffa Gobena, President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). In the church’s name, “Mekane Yesus” means “the dwelling place of Jesus.”

The EECMY had 20,000 members when it was established as a national church in January 1959. At the end of 2007, its membership stood at 4,869,157, making it the world’s second largest Lutheran church after the Church of Sweden, with 6.9 million members.

The membership increase by nearly one million in the last five years is attributed mainly to growth in families, and sustained outreach efforts to new language groups, incorporating Bible translation and training of local evangelists as major strategies.

The EECMY has its origins in the mission work of Lutheran and Presbyterian churches from Europe and North America, working together with local evangelical pioneers.

In the 17th and 18th centuries various British, German and Swiss mission endeavors sought to stimulate evangelical revival within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOC)—which dates from the 4th century—through distribution and study of Holy Scripture. While the EOC uses the ancient Ge’ez language in its worship, the Protestant missionaries translated Scripture into local languages.

Early Protestant and Catholic mission efforts were not successful in



EECMY president Rev. Iteffa Gobena at a 2007 interfaith meeting in Tripoli, Libya. © LWF/F. Nzwili

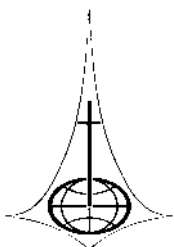
reaching the large Oromo population in western Ethiopia for many political and practical reasons. Nor was the region evangelized extensively by the EOC, which was concentrated in the northern and central parts of Ethiopia.

Organized Outreach

Early translations of Scripture into vernacular languages were largely done by local persons beginning from the 1830s. The Swedish Evangelical Mission (Church of Sweden) began organized efforts to reach the Oromo in 1866. From a base in Eritrea, Christian merchants from the Oromo area received Bible training and returned as missionaries to Wollaga in western Ethiopia. They were also entrusted with former slaves including EECMY pioneer Onesimos Nesib, who completed translation of the entire Bible into Oromo in 1897.

The Swedish mission was not aiming at starting a separate Lutheran church, rather a Bible-centered revival within the EOC. But Orthodox priests and other members who joined the Bible studies were harassed and often excommunicated, which gave rise to evangelical meetings, which after almost a century formed a basis for the EECMY.

In 1928, the German Hermannsburg Mission established a mission station at Aira in western Wollaga. During the missionaries’ absence throughout the 1935–1938 Italian occupation, the Oromo church grew under local leadership, evangelizing the whole area around Aira. After the Italian occupation, the use of the Oromo Bible in worship and teaching by Ethiopian and German missionaries greatly influenced the establishment of the evangelical church throughout the area.





Through ECCMY's cooperation with LWF/DWS Ethiopia, both partners of the Geneva-based ACT International, community members can participate in cash-for-work projects, like this one in southern Ethiopia, to ensure food security and sustainable development in drought-prone regions.

© Christian Aid/ACT International/C. Waterman

The Presbyterian Church (USA) had worked in Sudan for many years, and had medical and evangelistic contacts with Nilotic groups (especially Anuak and Nuer) who inhabited both sides of the Ethiopian border, especially during the 1919 flu epidemic. In the 1930s, Bethel (Presbyterian) congregations were organized in the western regions of Wollaga, and medical and outreach missions had close fellowship with the Oromo Lutheran believers. The Presbyterian believers organized the Bethel Church in 1947 which became part of the EECMY in 1973.

Mission initiatives from the Nordic countries expanded significantly from 1948 with the arrival of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, followed by the Danish Evangelical Mission and later by Finnish and Icelandic missionaries. The work in the south included hospitals, clinics, schools, Bible schools and a seminary.

The American Lutheran Mission came to Ethiopia in 1957, carrying out medical, educational and agricultural work, as well as outreach to the northern Afar peoples and neighboring lowlanders.

EECMY Founding

Joint meetings of Lutheran mission organizations in Ethiopia were held fre-

quently beginning in 1943. The establishment of a joint committee in 1951 led to common initiatives for pastors' training and organization of church work.

From 1954, the mission organizations worked with the local congregations to establish a united Lutheran church in Ethiopia. With encouragement from the then LWF Department of International Mission, the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Congregation was accepted as a member of the LWF at the Third Assembly in 1957.

A constituting General Assembly, with 17 Ethiopian and eight mission-

ary delegates, formally established the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus as a national church on 21 January 1959. Mr Emmanuel G. Selassie was elected the first president of the new national church, which had 20,000 members. The EECMY as a national church was received into LWF membership in 1963, then with 42,884 members.

Mission and Relationships

In 1972, the EECMY published a letter "On the Interrelation Between the Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development," outlining its understanding and commitment regarding holistic ministry—"Serving the Whole Man [Person]." It also challenged donor limitations that sharply separated development from evangelism.

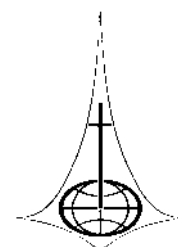
Upon EECMY's invitation, the LWF established in 1973 a World Service country program for relief and development work, which continues today as a joint LWF-EECMY program. The Committee of Mutual Christian Responsibility (CMCR) established in 1979 provides an annual forum for the Ethiopian church and its partners to address common concerns in mission at national and global level.

During the widespread religious persecution of the Derg Marxist



In drought-plagued northern highlands of Ethiopia where LWF/DWS Ethiopia is working with community members, a small-scale irrigation project has meant new life for residents.

© LWF/DWS Ethiopia/ACT International/P. Jeffrey



regime (1974–1991) in the country, many churches were closed down and pastors and other leaders were imprisoned. Then EECMY General Secretary Rev. Gudina Tumsa was assassinated in 1979. When many other churches were closed, the EECMY provided a place of fellowship for their members, thereby introducing charismatic worship, which continues to date in many of its congregations.

The EECMY is also a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, AllAfrica Conference of Churches, and a founding member of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia.

Since 1959 the EECMY has grown steadily in numbers and mission and partner relationships. Its over 4.8 million members today comprise many ethnic and language groups in 6,193 con-

gregations and 2,735 preaching places, served by 1,814 pastors, including nine women, and 2,750 evangelists.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus will celebrate its 50th anniversary in January 2009.

(By Rev. Arthur Leichnitz, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, currently serving as an advisor with the EECMY.)

15 February 2008

Australian Lutherans Support Government Apology to Aboriginal People

Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) president **Rev. Michael P. Semmler** has welcomed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's recent apology for historic policies that inflicted profound suffering on Australia's Aboriginal people. "As a church, we hope the Government apology will promote a process to improve the well-being of our Aboriginal sisters and brothers," Semmler said in a statement titled "Reconciliation and the Lutheran Church of Australia."

Addressing parliament on 13 February, Rudd (center-left Labor party) apologized for past policies of assimila-

tion under which Aboriginal children were taken from their families to be raised in white households ("the stolen generation").

Semmler's statement affirmed Christian understanding of reconciliation and the LCA's continued commitment to involving the Aboriginal people "equitably in planning to meet their distinctive needs, many of which are largely unmet."

The 75,000-member LCA has been an associate member church of the Lutheran World Federation since 1994.

LWF Publication Offers Theological Reflections on Interreligious Relations

Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths is the title of a new Lutheran World Federation (LWF) publication with the aim to deepen commitment to and theological discernment within interreligious relations.

Theologians from different parts of the world have contributed to the book produced by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) in the second book of its "Theology in the Life of the Church" series. The subjects covered delve into ecclesial, societal, pedagogical and biographical and gender dimensions of interreligious relations. The concept of a dialogue of hope is investigated and theological reflections on salvation and the Triune God in interreligious dialogue are explored in the book's final section.

In the introduction, the editor, Rev. Simone Sinn LWF/DTS theological associate, points out the importance of an

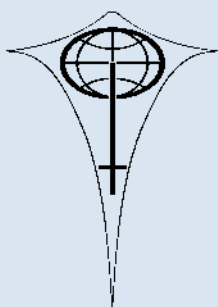


increased public awareness of interreligious relations but notes some caution is necessary with regard to the "accompanying haste and breathlessness." She adds that "building relationships among neighbors of different faiths is a long-term process that involves serious commitment and vision.

The first book in the LWF/DTS Theology in the Life of the Church series, Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections was published in late 2007 through Lutheran University Press.

To order copies of the new publication, please write to liesch@lutheranworld.org or The LWF Department for Theology and Studies, 150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Tel. +41/22-791 61 11, Fax +41/22-791

66 29. The price per copy is CHF 16, EUR 10 or USD 14 plus postage and packing.



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