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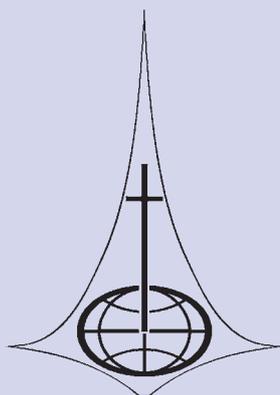
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Indian Lutheran Church Ordains First Women Pastors



Front row: the four newly ordained women pastors (left to right) Rev. Vijaya Victor, Rev. Nelavala Gnana Prasuna, Rev. Smitha Das, Rev. Kasimala Sireesha; back row, (left to right) Rev. Augustine Jeyakumar, UELCI executive secretary, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, LWF deputy general secretary, SALC Bishop Chandra Sekhar and ELM's Rev. Helmut Grimsman. © UELCI/Timothy Melvin

A Step Toward Inclusion, Reconciliation and Equal Opportunity

TIRUPATI, India/GENEVA (LWI) – The South Andhra Lutheran Church (SALC) in India ordained its first women pastors on 12 January, marking a new era for ordained ministry in the church whose history dates back to 1865.

"Finally the dream has come true," said SALC Bishop Chandra Sekhar at the ordination service of the four women and two male pastors at St Peter's Lutheran Church in Tirupati. He noted that historical, cultural and traditional roots of SALC had prevented theologically trained women from "even dreaming of ordination."

Rev. Vijaya Victor, the first to be ordained, said many women who witnessed the historic ceremony saw it as the beginning of women's leadership in the church. Many more have expressed an interest in studying

theology, noted Victor, who will serve as director of the SALC women's desk.

A "celebration of liberation, inclusion, reconciliation and equal opportunity," was how Rev. Nelavala Gnana Prasuna described her ordination. It was a precious covenant "between me and God's community to work for God in partnership with ordained men."

She expressed the conviction that the church would grow as a result of women's ordination, and reminded women in ministry of their responsibility "not to divide but to unite, not to exclude but to include, and not to rule but to nurture."

Newly ordained pastor Rev. Kasimala Sireesha will minister in a parish and head

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New Zealand Lutherans Ask for Prayer Following Quake

Lutheran Church of New Zealand (LCNZ) President Robert Erickson requested prayer and support following the severe earthquake that hit Christchurch on 22 February.

The 6.3 magnitude tremor wrecked a trail of destruction in the city, killing more than 160 people and damaging an estimated 100,000 homes.

Rev. David Lipsys, pastor of St Paul's Lutheran Church in Christchurch, reported that there were no known casualties among the congregation, though he emphasized the difficulty in reaching members. "Loss of power and telephones, combined with transport restrictions, is making contact with our church members and friends very difficult," he said. Lipsys motorcycled to areas that were still not accessible by car to find out how parishioners were faring.

New Zealand's second major earthquake in five months had compromised the structural integrity of the church worship center, he noted, and seriously damaged the house in which he and his wife live. "We hope to be able to remain in our home, but I am afraid that we may have to tear it down," he commented.

In the first days after the earthquake, many people were spending the nights in tents, without water or food, Lipsys said. Many were afraid because of the risk of aftershocks.

Erickson said 27 February was declared a "Sunday of prayer for the people of Christchurch and surrounding areas."

The LCNZ is a district of the Lutheran Church of Australia. *(Linda Macqueen, editor of LCA's The Lutheran magazine, provided information for this story, with additional information from LWI.)*

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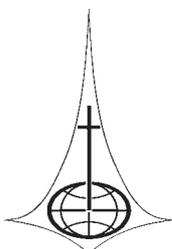
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Lutheran Congregations Rally Help for Australia's Flood Victims

Three-Quarters of Queensland Declared a Disaster Area

BRISBANE, Australia/GENEVA (LWI) – Across flood-devastated Queensland, Lutheran congregations and schools rallied to help desperate people in their communities to recover from the immediate impact of disaster.

After a day of mucking in as a volunteer, Rev. Stephen Nuske of St Andrew's Church in the state's capital Brisbane reflected: "My initial reactions to the devastation of the floods were numbness, shock, isolation and anxiety and loss of hope." In his city congregation, 12 homes were flooded, four badly; some members are suffering hardship, but he says they remain optimistic. "We are caring for one another. This has strengthened us as a congregation," said Nuske, one of many members of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) providing support.

homes submerged, belongings washed away, and livelihoods destroyed in the aftermath of heavy rainfall, comparable only to the 1974 flooding whose damage at the time was estimated at AUD 200 million.

Three-quarters of Queensland was declared a disaster area while parts of northern New South Wales and Victoria were also threatened by high waters.

As the LCA's executive officer Trevor Ruthenberg, himself a volunteer, put it, "The emphasis is very much on local community support—rolling up your sleeves and cleaning up the next door neighbor's house."

He added: "I acknowledge the great work that occurs for God within this church. I know that many good things happen in his name but I firmly believe it could be so much

Business people donated their time and skills to the recovery effort and people of all ages and walks of life raised funds to help victims.

In Brisbane, the Good News congregation at Middle Park acted as an evacuation center, providing food, accommodation and counseling for the homeless. The church at Everton Park offered beds and meals to victims.

St Peter's College at Indooroopilly was operating as an emergency shelter, making available up to 100 boarding house beds. Chaplain Peter Bowmer said, "It is envisaged that some of the start-of-year college camps will be replaced with community service projects."

Work Has Only Just Begun

The water came to within a street of the Bundaberg church in Queensland, said Rev. Chris Gallasch. "It's heartbreaking to drive around Bundaberg and see people's ruined furniture dumped along the roads. But at the same time it's so encouraging and uplifting to see the way people are pitching in and caring for each other."

Pastor Athol Pukallus agreed that the work had only just begun, "especially the counselling side of things." He and Good News community chaplain Sean Conry were asked to go to people in their ruined homes and sit with them as the reality of what had happened became a burden too heavy to bear.

The expectation was that when power was restored, people could move back into their homes, and there would be need to provide furniture and other goods. "We need to pray that the generous spirit of the people of Brisbane, Queensland and Australia will continue well into the future because this will be

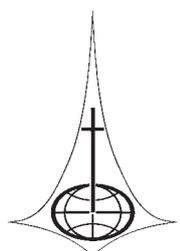


The car park of the LCA Queensland District Office was inundated. © Noel Noack

A week of devastating January floods in Queensland left 30 people dead, 12 missing and 30,000 homes and businesses affected. Cost of the cleanup was estimated at USD 5 billion, making it the country's costliest natural disaster. Crops were destroyed,

better. We could do so much more with what we have to offer."

Still, across Queensland, Lutheran communities worked hard to clean out houses and ensure that flood victims had food, accommodation and basic household goods.



a long, hard road back to normality for thousands of people.”

Messages of solidarity were sent to the LCA from Lutheran churches and partners across the world. The Luther-

an World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge expressed “deep condolences and solidarity with the families of those who died and all who were suffering as a result of these

floodwaters,” and offered prayers for individuals and LCA pastors and other staff are providing care and support in this midst of the crisis.

“We also express solidarity and pray for the Australian authorities, agencies and volunteers some who even risk their lives to assist the communities. May God bless the work of their hands!” added Junge.

The 70,000-member LCA has been an LWF associate member church since 1952. Its overseas aid and resettlement agency Australian Lutheran World Service supports the LWF Department for World Service in implementing programs in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central America and the Caribbean.

(Linda Macqueen, editor of LCA's The Lutheran magazine, provided information for this story, with additional information from LWI.)

21 January 2011



Pastor Athol Pukallus and Jill Shepherdson of Good News Lutheran Church with a “basket of hope” containing food and household goods assembled by Middle Park and Rochedale congregations for flood victims. © LCA/Susan Seng

Lutheran Volunteers Assist Most Vulnerable in Brazil Disaster

Coordinated Needs Assessment Critical for Effective Response

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran congregations in Brazil worked in solidarity with disaster relief organizations to assist the millions of people affected by the country’s worst climatic catastrophe in decades.

“It is all very, very sad, but after so much death we have to start thinking and working for life,” said Rev. Guilherme Lieven, synodical pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

Lieven illustrated the level of solidarity by recounting the story of the president of a local Lutheran congregation who was sheltering 18 people in a space normally shared between her and her mother.

Another volunteer, Rev. Adelcio Kronbauer, distributed food to the worst hit areas in an army truck. “When the truck arrives in certain locations, the atmosphere is tense, everyone is quiet. You never know how many people might be starving there...

maybe hundreds... and we might not have enough food to offer.”

Heavy rain in the southeast caused floods and mudslides in many cities in January, especially in the state of Rio de Janeiro in the Serrana region. Millions of people are affected. More than 750 people died, mainly from Rio de Janeiro, Teresopolis, Petropolis, Sumidouro and Nova Friburgo, the towns hardest hit by the disaster.

Authorities feared the death toll could climb as rescue workers retrieved more victims buried under collapsed homes and buildings.

IECLB congregations established two solidarity committees in different cities and worked with other organization and the government to assist the affected population.

“First we want to identify people’s needs, work on a diagnosis of the situation, and then we will work on an action plan. This way we want to assist the most urgent requests of those unas-

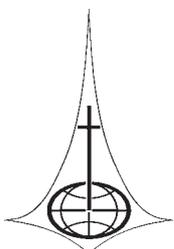
sisted and avoid the waste of resources and replication of help,” said Lieven.

“At the same time, we also need to think both on mid and long-term levels, when the media’s attention on this region will be gone,” he noted.

They already found that while enough clothing had been donated, there was a shortage of diapers and clean underwear. They were asking for financial donations so that those in charge could buy basic goods according to local need.

“We want to work in an organized way, so we can know what needs to be done,” said Kronbauer. “As soon as we have a clear picture about the major needs we will share it with our partners.”

ACT Alliance, the Geneva-based global church emergency and development body of which The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a member, issued an international alert on the situation in flood-stricken regions.





In the Floresta neighborhood of Nova Friburgo, Nilcimar Fleiman digs the earth with her hands, looking for missing personal items, like clothes and photos. © ACT/FLD/Gustavo Bonato

Its members in Brazil, including the IECLB's Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia (FLD), Koinonia, Ecumenical Coordinator Services, Diaconia and Christian Aid, collaborated to bring

relief where it was needed most. Community-based churches in the cities already deployed emergency response teams and were walking alongside devastated communities.

LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge was in dialogue with the IECLB leadership and expressed the LWF's solidarity and prayers with the Brazilian people, churches and authorities during this difficult period. "We see diaconal expression linking up in a wonderful way as individuals shelter neighbors; congregations mobilize and distribute resources and connect to government and other networks," he said.

"It is a special joy for me to see how the global and local response connects to our international collaboration under ACT Alliance," Junge added.

The 717,000-member IECLB joined the LWF in 1952. FLD, its diaconal arm, works among marginalized communities to promote gender equality, combat racism and overcome violence.

(By Susanne Buchweitz and Marcelo Schneider)

21 January 2011

New "LWF together" Initiative with Youth for Environmental Justice

Young Lutherans Use Internet for Biblical Reflection and Action

GENEVA (LWI) – Young Lutherans around the world will tackle environmental justice and experience the communion of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) through "LWF together – the earth needs you," beginning May 2011.

Launched by LWF Youth at the Department for Mission and Development (DMD), "LWF together" combines a new method of global learning with renewed efforts for environmental justice.

Coordinated by the LWF youth desk, local Lutheran youth groups around the world will team up with two other youth groups in different continents using the Internet to read relevant Bible passages together and develop an understanding of God's creation and humanity's responsibility toward it.

The young adults will analyze the environmental challenges that they

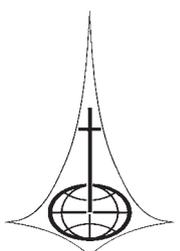
face in their own contexts—places as diverse as Sweden, Brazil, Tanzania, Indonesia and the United States.

Organizers hope the program will be an important learning experience for all young people involved. The youth

groups are going to implement actions in their own contexts to address local and global environmental challenges and injustices. While the individual activities may be small, they will have the potential to be a powerful sign of



Pedro Munaretto, a steward from Argentina's United Evangelical Lutheran Church, speaks during the youth presentation at the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly. © LWF/Erick Coll



the Lutheran communion's commitment to environmental justice.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time something like this has been attempted," said Rev. Roger Schmidt, secretary for LWF Youth. "There were several projects of groups in different countries reading the Bible together and sharing their insights. However, 'LWF together' combines reading of the Bible [and] advocacy efforts, alongside joint analysis and action," he noted.

"We also hope that through this dynamic program the Lutheran communion can be experienced by many young people around the world," he added.

"LWF together" will conclude in October 2011 around Reformation

Day. The youth groups will present the work as well as their new connections with young Lutherans around the world to their local congregations.

The program was developed in gatherings of young people around the LWF Eleventh Assembly held in July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany. In their Pre-Assembly Youth Conference, more than 100 young representatives from LWF member churches agreed to prioritize issues of sustainability as well as the visibility of the LWF in their joint work. The idea was further developed in an online consultation and at a meeting of youth workers.

"The program clearly affirms principles at the core of what it is to be in communion: talking with each

other and praying together, understanding and sharing, reading the Word of God together and engaging in joint action for the healing of God's creation," said Rev. Dr. Musa P. Filibus, DMD director. "LWF together' uniquely combines all these traits that make communion a reality. I look forward to learning from young people in our churches and gaining from their inspiration for our common witness in the world," Filibus added.

More information about "LWF together" is available on the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/themes/lwf-together

25 January 2011

LWF Center in Wittenberg Goes Online with Content on Luther's Theology

Junge: Space for Cross-Cultural Discussions and Shared Learning

HANOVER, Germany/GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Center in Wittenberg has a new web site: www.lwb-zentrum-wittenberg.de giving more detailed information about its broad spectrum of activities.

An initiative of the LWF German National Committee (GNC) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD),

the center seeks to promote greater fellowship among churches and enable Christians worldwide to encounter the theology of Martin Luther at the birthplace of the Reformation. "The new web site is intended to raise the profile of the center and establish it as a communication platform in the run-up to the Reformation anniversary in

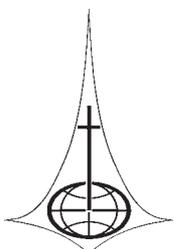
2017," said Rev. Hans W. Kasch, the center's director.

This self-understanding is also reflected in the materials on the site. The center organizes seminars with a deliberately international focus. Participants are invited to engage intensively with the most varied aspects of Lutheran theology, under the guidance of visiting academics. Fourteen pastors from all five continents attended the last course in November 2010 on "Justification with Luther and Melancthon." The center also offers young people from the global ecumenical movement the opportunity of an internship and gives assistance for theological study periods in Wittenberg.

A further emphasis is the Luther Garden project: to plant 500 trees in a designated park in the city of Wittenberg by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Churches from all over the world and from all denominations are invited to sponsor one of the 500 trees and also plant a tree in their home church. This project is a joint collaboration between the LWF, GNC and the city of Wittenberg.



Participants of the Second International Seminar are happy to encounter Luther during Reformation festivities in Wittenberg. © LWF-Center/ Wittenberg



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge affirmed the importance of the Wittenberg Center as place that provides space for cross-cultural discussions and shared learning. “People coming from all regions of the LWF can connect to the fundamental theological insights of Lutheran theology and interpret this according to the diverse contexts and challenges in their respective churches,” he told *Lutheran World Information*.

On the Luther Garden, Junge said it was encouraging to see the enthusiasm with which LWF member churches and other Christian churches are receiving this creative initiative. The tree planting was inaugurated in November 2009 with the planting of 25 trees by representatives of the LWF and other Christian World Communions and from churches in Germany and other parts of Europe.

“The garden carries a strong symbolic message: each tree planted reaffirms our understanding of the global nature of the LWF communion, its ecumenical commitment and its understanding of being church in need of ongoing reformation,” Junge added.

(A contribution from VELKD and LWI)

3 February 2011

LWF President Younan Urges Diligence in Promoting Religious Co-Existence

Interview with Bishop Younan on First “World Interfaith Week of Harmony”

JERUSALEM/GENEVA (LWI) – Classroom and playing field activities at Talitha Kumi Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Jala, West Bank, are an opportunity for Christian and Muslim students to grow and learn together. This is one of the four schools run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Holy Land (ELCJHL). The 2,027 students enrolled in the ELCJHL schools in 2011 comprise around 52 percent Christians and 48 percent Muslims.

On the occasion of the first “World Interfaith Harmony Week” (1-7 February 2011) designated by the United Nations General Assembly last October, Rev. Elizabeth McHan spoke with ELCJHL Bishop Dr. Munib Younan, also president of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) about the significance of this week for the Holy Land faith communities and for the global Lutheran communion.

The proposal for the World Interfaith Harmony Week came out of Jordan. What is the significance of Jordan as the country of this initiative’s birth?

It is very fitting that the proposal for the World Interfaith Harmony Week came out of Jordan, as Jordan is a country in which Muslims and Christians have been living in harmony for 1,400 years. I welcome the initiative of King Abdullah, and hope that this paradigm of Christian-Muslim coexistence should continue



A boy sits, surrounded by his classmates in Talitha Kumi Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Jala. © ELCJHL/Elizabeth McHan

to be developed not only in Jordan and in the Middle East, but also throughout the world.

It is my wish that we Arab-Christians may be of help to those countries in which Islamophobia is growing by sharing how we here in Jordan and the Holy Land live with other religions, working to overcome not only Islamophobia, but also anti-Semitism and anti-Christian sentiments and actions.

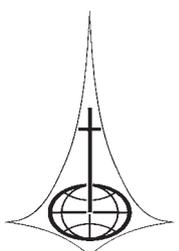
How does Lutheran theology speak to religious teachings about tolerance, respect for others and peace across the globe?

In a time of extremism, the core religious values of love of God and

love of neighbor should be promoted. I find that our Lutheran theology of creation and our theology of redemption both speak to this. We are created equally. And we are redeemed equally. Together, these theologies provide a strong basis from which to dialogue with our sisters and brothers in humanity from all religions, while we also have a strong basis from which to deal with any kind of exclusivity, extremism, or superiority complex.

How does the observance of this week relate to the ELCJHL context?

Our church has a prophetic role in the Middle East. Its prophetic role is to serve our Lord and our neighbor.



Our strength is not in our numbers, but in our witness for love, for justice, for hope, for forgiveness, and for reconciliation. This we do through our educational ministries and through interfaith dialogue with Muslims and with Jews, and through the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land, which is comprised of the two chief Rabbis, the Islamic court, the minister of religious affairs in Palestine, and the heads of churches. And for me, as long as the church is an integral part of the fabric of society, it carries in itself a living witness.

What is the significance for the LWF and its member churches?

The World Interfaith Harmony Week is significant for The Lutheran World Federation and all its member churches because there is no place in the world in which Lutheran churches live on their own. Lutheran churches, rather, live with other religions—sometimes in a minority position, sometimes in a majority position, but never alone.

As the ELCJHL observed this first week, I am convinced that it carries a strong message for our LWF member churches around the world to find the common values that promote justice, coexistence, peace, tolerance, and to work together for the eradication of poverty, the promotion of the

role of women, and reconciliation in our world. I call on all LWF member churches to observe this, the first week of February as the World Interfaith Harmony Week in the next years.

To the global human community this week?

My appeal is this: that religion be the source of harmony, justice, and reconciliation in this world. Find from the holy writings that which builds this world in the love of God and love of neighbor, not what divides it. Find from the holy writings the common values of our shared humanity. Thus, we will live in harmony.

4 February 2011

Honduras: Call for Lutheran Communion Solidarity as Violence Impedes Pastoral Care

Day of Fasting and Prayer on 13 February

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras/GENEVA (LWI) – The Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH) urged sister churches around the world to pray for an end to the wave of violence that continues to plague the Central American country.

The ICLH set aside Sunday, 13 February, as a day of prayer and fasting and its president, Rev. José Martín Girón urged the solidarity of churches in the global Lutheran communion for this initiative.

“Children don’t go outside to play, neighbors rarely visit each other and women spend their days trapped inside their humble homes,” the ICLH said in a recent letter addressed to various church organizations including The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The church said the violence was affecting its pastoral care with some congregations unable to offer services in affected regions. La Colonia La Unión community of San Pedro Sula is particularly affected. One congregation was unable to celebrate Christmas services because of killings that took place on the street where the church is located, forcing its members to close the church.

“We ask that you keep us in your prayers, trusting that they might help change this situation so that everyone can live together in peace,” the church said in the mid- January letter.

“These are areas where every day is one of death and survival. That reality is hitting various neighborhoods of San Pedro Sula really hard, where [organized] groups continue to control individual blocks or entire groups of streets. Everyone who lives there knows what is happening. They

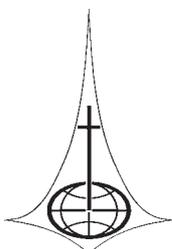
see it but don’t speak up out of fear for their lives,” the ICLH stated.

LWF member churches in the Latin American and Caribbean region and the ecumenical family have expressed solidarity with the ICLH by offering prayers and support and visiting with the church.

A group from the Salvadoran Lutheran Church went to Honduras “to listen and accompany our sister ICLH in their distress and grief,” Bishop Medardo E. Gómez Soto



In Langue, Valle department, the LWF/DWS Honduras program works with community members on food security projects including home gardens to enhance family nutrition and provide income with the sale of surplus.
© LWF/DWS Central America



reported in a 26 January letter. It was after this meeting with ICLH leaders Rev. Girón and Rev. Hernán López of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in La Colonia La Unión that the Honduran church urged support from the global Lutheran communion and from the ecumenical family. The meeting was hosted by the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) office in Honduras.

The ICLH has expressed gratitude to the Episcopal (Anglican) and Reformed churches in San Pedro de Sula for inviting the Honduran Lutheran church to use their premises for worship. “The ICLH is thankful for this offer,” said Girón.

The ICLH has 1,500 members in 10 congregations and five mission points. It works with marginalized groups in the country, utilizing a

community-based approach. The church’s work is focused on lay leadership development, children and youth ministry, preventative health care, HIV and AIDS awareness, micro-enterprise projects for women, environmental education and disaster prevention and response.

The Honduran church joined the LWF in 1994.

11 February 2011

LWF North America Leaders Affirm Commitment to Strengthen Lutheran Communion

Important Years Leading Up to Reformation Anniversary

CHICAGO, USA/GENEVA (LWI) – Leaders of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) North American region expressed “strong affirmation” to strengthen the Lutheran Communion during an 11-12 February meeting in Chicago.

Church in Canada (ELCIC), and the Toronto-based Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) Abroad.

The committee provided important responses to the ongoing LWF strategic planning process to deter-

tant to the ELCA presiding bishop for ecumenical and interreligious affairs.

At the meeting, committee members agreed that their purpose is to “strengthen the Lutheran communion by bearing witness to the fullness of Christ’s body for and with the world as a global community exercising visible solidarity among member churches. This solidarity is expressed in altar and pulpit fellowship among all member churches.”

Members agreed that they would propose to coordinate decisions and actions of the LWF to entities within each North America region church body and monitor reception of those actions.

They also agreed to commit to ongoing conversations to recognize “our mutual giftedness and mutual poverty, so that we receive the witness, gifts, prayers, and expertise from the (Lutheran) communion.”

The need was stressed to revitalize and strengthen relations in the region to participate more fully in the life of the communion; and to further the region’s identity as member churches of the LWF.

NARC members also reported on changes in staffing and funding at the national level, along with work to improve and build relationships. ELCIC National Bishop Rev. Susan C. Johnson, also LWF vice president for the region and a member of the LWF Executive Committee, reported that the ELCIC was undergoing a reorganization process at the national level, which would likely



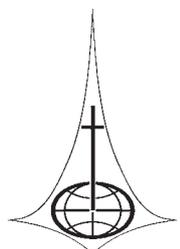
Left to right: Rev. Donald J. McCoid, assistant to the ELCA presiding bishop for ecumenical and inter-religious relations; Mikka McCracken, ELCA global mission; Ms. Christina Jackson-Skelton, ELCA and LWF treasurer; and ELCIC National Bishop Rev. Susan C. Johnson, also LWF vice president for the region. © ELCA/John Brooks

They agreed to proposals on how they will work together to fulfill regional needs; provided input into the LWF’s strategic planning process; and shared updates on their church bodies.

The meeting, convened by the LWF’s Department for Mission and Development (DMD), was held at the church-wide office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Member churches of the LWF North America Regional Committee (NARC) include the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Canada (ELCIC), and the Toronto-based Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) Abroad. The committee provided important responses to the ongoing LWF strategic planning process to determine priorities and direction for the LWF from 2012 through 2017. “The regional conference was held at a moment when the LWF [is] engaging in a process of discerning new ways to live out its vision of witnessing God in the world,” said DMD Director Rev. Dr. Musa P. Filibus. The LWF Council is expected to act on a proposed strategy in June.

“These are important years leading to the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation,” said committee chairperson Rev. Donald J. McCoid, assis-



be a topic of discussion at the church's national convention in July. A task force is preparing a draft of a social statement on human sexuality for presentation to the ELCIC Church Council and the national convention.

The ELCIC is working toward a new relationship with indigenous peoples and "on a call to spiritual renewal" among members, she said. "We hope to hold our church together as we commit to a deeper discipleship," Johnson said, adding that there was "a profound spirit of hope in the church."

The ELCA churchwide organization recently announced a significant reorganization of its structure and staff. "We're talking about how we do our planning in a more strategic way," said Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton, treasurer of the ELCA and of the LWF.

The 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, to be held in August in

Orlando, Florida, will consider recommendations from an ELCA task force that has studied possibilities for the church's future.

Rev. James F. Mauney, bishop of the ELCA Virginia Synod, Salem, said he and other synod bishops continue to work with congregations following the decisions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly on human sexuality.

Rev. Hannes Aasa, Consistory representative and Canadian dean of the EELC Abroad, reported about the November 2010 agreement between the Tallinn (Estonia)-based EELC and the EELC Abroad to establish closer ties, including a decision to have one archbishop instead of two. Archbishop Andres Põder heads the church in Estonia and Bishop Andres Taul leads the EELC Abroad.

In May, Lutherans in the United States and Canada, as well as Epis-

copalians and Anglicans in the two countries will celebrate full communion agreements, which have been in place for 10 years.

Filibus highlighted the regional conference's fruitful reflection on what it means to be a regional expression of the LWF, and welcomed participants' strong affirmation of the commitment to serve God together through service to the neighbor and work for justice and peace.

He encouraged the North American member churches to continue the reflection they started at the conference, on the need both to give to the communion and receive from it. "In this way, the whole church is nourished and the understanding of living in communion is made real," he noted.

(John Brooks, director of ELCA News Service wrote this article for LWI)

21 February 2011

Indian Lutheran Church Ordains First Women Pastors

Continued from p. 1

the women and youth empowerment project, while Rev. Smitha Das becomes director of the Sunday school ministry. The new SALC pastors included two men, Rev. T. Sundaram and Rev. K. Suwarna Raju.

Rev. Dr Augustine Jeyakumar, executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI), said he hoped the ordination would lead to broader reconciliation in the church. "With the recognition of women as equal partners in God's vineyard the church has affirmed that it is a family church," said Jeyakumar, a member of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council. He expressed his desire to see the three Lutheran churches in India that do not ordain women move ahead in their discussions on the issue. The UELCI brings together 12 churches, 11 of which belong to the LWF.

Preaching during the occasion, Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, LWF deputy general secretary, reminded

the new pastors that they had been called into a ministry with many challenges. He reassured them of God's presence and power to change and reform the church.

Martin brought greetings from Rev. Dr Musa P. Filibus, director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), who expressed hope that the historic step by SALC would be a source of "inspiration for the whole church and for other women in their leadership both in congregational life and society."

The DMD director noted that SALC's decision "to integrate women into the ordained ministry significantly affirms the commitment of the LWF and its member churches to be a sign of an inclusive communion in the world." It embraces the full participation of women in leadership, "enabling women to bring forth their gifts for the missional church and its public witness," he added.

"Women are put to shame all over the world," pointed out Rev. Helmut Grimmsmann representing the Evan-

gelical Lutheran Mission (ELM – former Missionsanstalt Hermannsburg), Germany. He noted that oppressive structures still existed, leading to women's subordination both in church and society. He urged the newly ordained women to become more active in the church and enrich its spiritual life.

SALC grew out of the work of the Missionsanstalt Hermannsburg, becoming independent in 1949. The 45,500-member church joined the LWF in 1952.

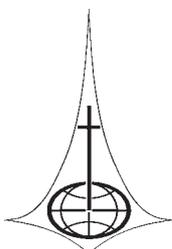
Women's ordination is one of the key issues for the LWF Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk. Around 80 percent of the 145 LWF member churches ordain women.

(By UELCI Communications Secretary Rev. Timothy Melvyn)

More information about WICAS is available on the LWF Web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/who-we-are/central-offices/dmd/women-in-church-and-society

20 January 2011



Amidst Upheaval in Middle East, LWF Calls for Just Peace in Holy Land

General Secretary: Fundamental Injustices Must Be Redressed

GENEVA (LWI) – The general secretary of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev Martin Junge, has urged the Lutheran communion to support those advocating for peace with justice in the Holy Land.

In a statement on the 18 February United States veto of a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Junge noted that

such settlements were a violation of international law and undermined the prospects for peace and the stability in the region.

“Fundamental injustices must be redressed, if peace is to be more than just a word,” he said. The LWF affirmed the responsibility of the international community to support Israelis and Palestinians in the search for a just peace in the Holy Land.

Junge urged Lutherans and all others to “encourage and pray for those who work for a peaceful resolution to the conflict,” particularly in this time of tumult and upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa.

The full text of the “Statement on Israeli Settlements and the US Veto” is available as a PDF document on the LWF Web site at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/call-for-just-peace-holy-land.html



The Islamic cemetery immediately behind Rachel's Tomb, with a section of the separation wall that cuts off the burial grounds from the holy site. © ELCJHL/Elizabeth McHan

Norwegian Minister Visits LWF

Focus on Sustainable Solar Project in Mauritania

GENEVA (LWI) – Rigmor Aasrud, Norwegian Minister for Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs, on a visit to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Secretariat on 25 February said she was impressed by the *diapaxis* approach taken by the Lutheran communion in its activities.

This approach combines theological and practical knowledge and methods, and ensures that church action is always linked to diaconal activities. It builds on long-standing interfaith relations that have been developed locally, striving to foster understanding and fellowship among different religions. The dimension of mutual accompaniment across contexts and cultures is also important.

Aasrud met with LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge to learn about the work of the LWF. Junge thanked the minister for her government's generous



Rigmor Aasrud, Norwegian Minister for Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs © Johnny Syversen

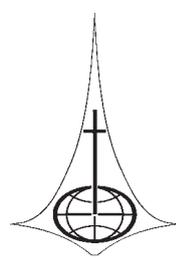
support for the LWF's work. He also emphasized the key role played by the Church of Norway in supporting the

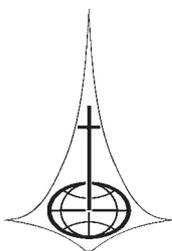
LWF and its projects and programs. The minister was accompanied by a six-member delegation, which included two representatives of the Church of Norway, an LWF member church.

Junge briefed the group on LWF projects and programs in Israel and Palestine and the long-term involvement of the LWF in Jerusalem through the Augusta Victoria Hospital.

The minister expressed her enthusiasm with regard to an LWF Department for World Service project involving women in Mauritania. The project is a South-South partnership with Indian women to develop and build solar panels to produce electricity for homes. The Minister stated that she was especially convinced by the sustainability of this project.

Other topics taken up during the discussions were the situation of ethnic





minorities, such as the Dalits in India, as well as the LWF's efforts in the area of illegitimate debt, an issue in which churches in Latin America have been particularly involved and about which there is considerable debate at present in Sudan and South Sudan. The South

Sudanese government is confronted with an outstanding external debt that had little to do with financing development projects.

Church of Norway has nearly 4 million members and has been part of the LWF since its creation in 1947.

Read more about the sustainable solar project in Mauritania: www.lwf-assembly.org/explore/diakonia-service/barefoot-engineers-bring-light-to-remote-villages/

25 February 2011

Lutheran Churches' Response Urged for Humanitarian Crisis in North Africa

LWF-Led Assessment in Tunisia to Elaborate Immediate Relief Needs

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge is calling Lutherans worldwide to prayer, support and advocacy concerning the humanitarian crisis developing from the swift political changes in North Africa.

In a 3 March letter to LWF member churches, Junge urged the churches' prayers for people in North Africa and the Middle East so "that violence and repression will stop," that people would "be treated with dignity and respect" and that leaders "will be chosen who are honest and accountable."

In December a popular uprising began in Tunisia, forcing the Tunisian president to flee the country in January. Similar protests in Egypt in January forced the country's president to step aside in February. Protests that began peacefully in Libya in February are resulting in a huge humanitarian crisis as the country's leader fights to keep his hold on power.

Junge deplored the loss of life and expressed hope that those fleeing would be able to return home safely and that the refugees will find refuge. He expressed particular concern for Libya where the country's leader, Muammar Gaddafi, "is trying to cling to power in the most cruel way, ordering his security forces to shoot and kill his own people. The death toll may already be in the thousands." Most of those fleeing the country are foreign workers, predominantly from Egypt but also from other countries including Bangladesh and Nepal.

The general secretary welcomed the United Nations' actions against Libya. The Security Council in February imposed sanctions against

Libya. On 1 March the General Assembly suspended Libya from the Human Rights Council.

"The international community is unanimously condemning the indiscriminate use of violence and the violations of human rights," Junge noted.



Bangladeshi evacuees scramble to receive food after crossing into Tunisia fleeing violence in Libya. © Reuters/Yannis Bebrakis

In view of the large-scale humanitarian crisis unfolding from Libya, Junge pointed out that an LWF-led humanitarian assessment team was expected in neighboring Tunisia. The LWF-ACT Alliance rapid assessment team will elaborate a preliminary appeal and coordinate the shipment and distribution of immediate relief goods as well as the establishment of water supply infrastructure in close coordination with UN organizations on-site.

The LWF is a founding member of ACT Alliance, a global network of church-related organizations collaborating in humanitarian assistance and development.

Junge asked the churches for continued financial support as the LWF responds to the humanitarian crisis.

He urged Lutherans in Europe to advocate with their governments to show compassion toward those fleeing North Africa. "While the

struggling countries bordering Libya are generously keeping their borders open, the European discussions seem to focus more on how to protect their borders" in a humanitarian situation that calls for a different approach, Junge added.

The general secretary expressed his hope that the political changes in North Africa would "pave the way for political governance that is accountable to the very people it represents."

He added, "People want to have their dignity respected. People want to be treated fairly and honestly – they reject injustice and corruption."

3 March 2011

FEATURE: Taking Peace to Southern Sudan Cattle Camps

LWF Intervention Reduces Community Conflict

PANYAGOR, Southern Sudan/GENEVA (LWI) – It has been six years now since Betty Adau Bul started going to cattle camps in Jonglei state, Southern Sudan. Her mission: seeking an end to the many inter-ethnic cattle raids that occur among the agro-pastoralists communities here.

“Our message to the young people is that raiding kills, so they must stop it,” says the mother of two. At 26, she is the youngest member of a local peace committee in Nyauk Piyam division where The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is working with community members to foster peace and reconciliation.

In the Dinka homeland, families keep large herds of cattle on the plains and grow grains such as millet around their permanent settlements. Recently, the raids have become very violent, prompting heightened intervention from the LWF through its Department for World Service (DWS) program in Sudan. The raids here involve the Dinka, Nuer and Murle, all pastoralist communities, who also abduct children under ten years in the attacks.

The cattle camps, comprising hundreds of animals, are organized all the time, but they move toward the Nile between the dry months when water is scarce. The head of the cattle



Betty Adau Bul, peacemaker from Panyagor, Jonglei, Southern Sudan © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili

camp identifies a location which must be secure with a water source nearby, usually a pond. The many herders in any given camp are able to offer security to their animals. The people sleep in the open or near a fire, entertaining themselves through wrestling and dancing competitions.

“The months of December and May are critical times, because this is when raids increase. When they occur, our development work comes to a standstill. Last year, for example, the raids destroyed all the fields we had planted and the income-generating activities

that had been put up,” says Mary Obara, DWS Sudan program coordinator.

Peace Committees

From its offices in Panyagor town, the Twiic county headquarters, DWS Sudan works with community members on water and sanitation, education, food security, and peace building. The interventions against the raids are part of the program on peace work.

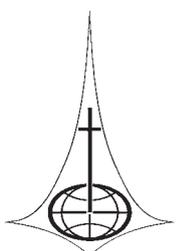
While the LWF has been sensitizing both men and women about the dangers of these raids there is a special focus and notable progress with the cattle camp boys. “Their work revolves around cattle, and the conflict heightens when they are taking animals to the River Nile,” says Obara.

The cattle raids became more fierce from the early 1990s at the height of the civil war between the government of Sudan and the former rebels, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) as communities easily acquired guns, still in the hands of locals.

In 2006, the LWF launched 11 “Piyam” peace committees, which according to community members are doing a lot to reduce conflicts in the county. The committees composed



A Dinka man watches his herd at a cattle camp in Panyagor, Jonglei state. © LWF/Fredrick Nzwili



of 11 members each, with a careful consideration for clan balance, were trained on peace issues.

Adau joined the Piyam soon after teenage. She too has been a victim of the raids, having lost eight cows in an attack two years ago during which one person was killed.

Bul Mayen Deng, the leader of the committee to which Adau belongs recalls only too well the 2008 attack—he lost 150 heads of cattle to the raiders. He still finds it difficult to forgive the men he says were from the neighboring community, because they also killed his brother. “Our experiences like this are not of one day. They are not pleasant either,” he adds.

The high dowry limits set by families have also been forcing the youngmen to stage the raids. In cases where they cannot manage to raise the number of cows demanded through raiding or any other means, some choose to elope with the girl, an action which often generates more conflict.

“Girls are precious. They are seen as sources of wealth. So when they elope the father may mobilize a whole village to go and rescue her and that becomes a community conflict,” remarks Obara.

Mary Abuk, LWF peace building officer in Panyagor spoke of decreasing cases of elopement and clashes at wells since the inauguration of the peace committees. “The committees have been reaching out to those who have eloped and urging them to go

back to their parents. Then parents decide whether to organize a wedding or not,” she explains. Dowry negotiations are usually left to the men. The normal rage for dowry is 30 cows, but in some cases it may reach 100.

Boreholes

The committees have also reduced inter-community conflicts at water points, grazing land and at fields where the residents cut grass for thatching houses (Tukul).

“We tell the people that peace is crucial: why it is important to keep it at water points or at the field. Tension over who will get water first at the well or grass in the field can easily become a community conflict,” Mayem explains.

The LWF has been drilling boreholes and training community members to maintain them in a bid to reduce tension at water points and curb part of the movement toward the Nile. “We trained a water user committee to manage the source. They fence the area, clean it and in the process resolve simple conflicts,” says John Mabior, acting program manager at the LWF Panyagor office.

Families contribute one Sudanese Pound per month to support the borehole maintenance.

Post-Referendum

On 30 January the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC)

announced in Juba the preliminary results of the 9-15 January referendum—more than 99 percent of Southern Sudanese had voted for separation from the north. In Jonglei much like in other states in the region, there is general calm. But residents are cautious the cattle raids may increase as water reduces and all communities move their animals towards the Nile River.

Expectations remain high, with southern Sudan residents and returning refugees hoping services such as clinic and schools will be available within a short period, and that the peace that has marked the voting period would prevail. “We must continue the peace building initiatives between the tribal communities,” says Mr Arie Den Toom, the LWF DWS representative in Sudan.

“Anything that happens and changes the political situation in the north, between now and July will have a tremendous impact on the process towards independence,” said Den Toom while explaining some crucial elements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that mandated the referendum are yet to be implemented before the south declares independence. These include the north-south border demarcation, resolving the disputed Abyei border region, citizenship and nationality, oil-sharing and currency, among others.

In Jonglei, the LWF plans to intensify peace conferences between the communities in addition to starting mobile schools at the cattle camps to guarantee education for children who accompany the family livestock.

“We have also been discussing the possibility of working with teachers, who are living in the camps. While mobile schools within the camp would be the best option, they are expensive,” adds Den Toom.

By LWI correspondent Fredrick Nzwili



Women returnees from Khartoum draw water from taps fed by a borehole in Bor, Panyagor, Southern Sudan.
© LWF/Fredrick Nzwili

Read more feature articles on DWS work in Sudan at www.lutheranworld.org

1 February 2011



FEATURE: New Roles for Women in Chile

One Year after Earthquake, Lutherans and ACT Alliance Continue Support to Poor Families

CONCEPCIÓN, Chile/GENEVA (LWI) – It is Friday evening. Maria Leyton is looking forward to an encounter to take place the next day. After the devastating earthquake of 27 February 2010, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) initiated regular discussions among those affected by the quake in the port sector of the city of Concepción.

The houses here are small and squat. They are inhabited by poor people. The tsunami unleashed by the earthquake devastated this quarter. ACT Alliance, the global church emergency relief organization, of which the IELCH and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) are members, provided those hardest-hit with new houses. The LWF Department for World Service (DWS) sent a staff member to Chile to help coordinate the cooperation with ACT Alliance; this person helped the church to set up an emergency relief program and strengthened the collaboration with ACT Alliance and other churches locally.

Encouraged by the Lutheran church, around 80 families from the heavily damaged neighborhood meet every Saturday morning under the theme “sharing the table.” They talk about their concerns and problems, and devise ways to provide mutual assistance. “Attendance is mainly by mothers with their children,” says Maria Isabel Castillo Moreno.

The social worker from the Lutheran church highlights the fact that the situation has given women a new role in this male-dominated society. Above all, solidarity within the congregation has been reinforced. For Maria Isabel Moreno, the development of a feeling of belonging together within the congregations only functions through women.

Hardest-Hit

Maria Leyton is one of the women participants in the regular gatherings.



Maria Leyton and her daughter Tiare Salazar Leyton in housing provided by ACT. Their home was destroyed by the earthquake that hit Chile in February 2010. © Rainer Lang

The 54-year-old single parent of three children says that without the help provided by the Lutheran church and ACT Alliance after the earthquake and the ensuing tsunami, she would not have pulled through. A year after the catastrophe, she is still overcome with emotion as she recounts how Lutheran volunteers were the first to help out.

“We were meter-deep in the mud and debris left by the tidal wave that swept over our district,” Leyton recalls. “Our house was completely destroyed,” says her 18-year-old daughter Tiare Salazar Leyton. “We were able to reach safety on a nearby hill,” she adds. She also talks about the fish offal from the neighboring fish factory and the stench it created.

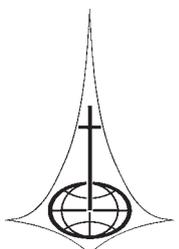
The elder Leyton is happy that as one of the hardest-hit persons, she was provided a temporary house by ACT. The houses are solid wooden structures and can be converted into permanent homes. A year after the earthquake, over 1,000 people in the area are still living in emergency shelters. Many others are still living in dilapidated houses that should in fact have been torn down a long time ago. There is neither running water nor electricity.

Weak Social Security

Vasquez Castillo, a social worker of the Lutheran church, considers the conditions in Santa Clara to be scandalous. “The earthquake revealed how weak social security in Chile is,” he says. He denounces the hidden consequences of the earthquake in the social sphere. For him, this “silent earthquake” is a long-term problem.

The 25-year-old social worker hopes that the earthquake will make people more aware of the country’s problems. In this regard, he mentions the protests of environmental protectionists that until now had not been heeded. Yet, the earthquake has proven true the criticism about the fish and paper factories that pollute the environment with hazardous substances such as lead and cadmium, which can lead to miscarriages in pregnant women and cause cancer. The tidal wave brought these hazardous substances from the port basin floor to the surface. For Castillo, the shameless exploitation of nature is the darker side of Chile’s economic success.

IELCH pastor Rev. Oscar Sanhueza also deplores that, following the earthquake, the government attempted to paint for the world the image of a



flourishing and economically successful country. He views with concern the high unemployment rate among the people in the congregations he serves. The 55-year-old, who during Chile's dictatorship was jailed and tortured for his convictions, makes a positive assessment after one year of the ACT Alliance-sponsored relief projects for over 100 families who received homes and psychological support.

Counting on Women

Sanhueza says he would like to tackle the unemployment problem head-on. For this, he is especially counting on women, who could start small businesses. The Lutheran church is ready to organize workshops where women could be trained, for example, as seamstresses. He is eager also to make the necessary machines available as part of the project. However, for these small Lutheran congregations, it is difficult to gather on their own the necessary starting capital of EUR 5,000.

In the meantime, the LWF through its Department for Mission and Development (DMD) continues to provide assistance for the reconstruction of IELCH congregations in El Sembrador,



A child outside the new houses in the Concepción neighborhood. © Rainer Lang

La Trinidad, and El Buen Samaritano, which were also seriously affected.

The LWF/DMD area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, underscores the significance of the support to the IELCH. "This has been developed through close and continuous communication with church leaders—motivating them during stressing times in the emergency; inviting and moving other churches in the communion to collaborate, to pray, to write and support our brothers and sisters in Chile."

The IELCH has 3,000 members. It joined the LWF in 1955.

(This feature article was written by Rainer Lang, with additional information from LWI.)

4 March 2011

***The article is in the continuing LWI features' series focusing on the topic "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly, held 20–27 July 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany.**

French Lutherans and Reformed Affirm Creation of United Protestant Church

An extraordinary joint session of the synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France (EELF) and the Reformed Church of France (ERF) mid-January in Paris, France, agreed on an institutional framework for submitting the future unified body's constitution and bylaws to the synod in one year's time.

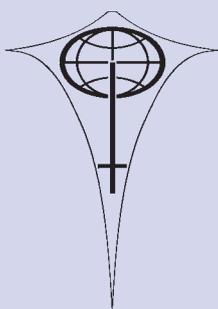
The joint synod, following up on earlier decisions, affirmed the new body would be called the United Protestant Church of France (Église protestante unie de France) with a sub-title indicating it is a "Lutheran and Reformed communion" (communion luthérienne et réformée). Other issues agreed on included having a unified roster of pastors, allowing each tradition to maintain its

specific differences, and changing the electoral mandate to four years instead of the current three and six respectively.

In the meantime, the EELF and ERF congregations and their governing bodies will be invited to examine the draft constitution and bylaws and provide feedback on them before their adoption in spring 2012. The constitutive synod of the United Protestant Church of France will be held in May 2013 in Lyon, France.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has three member churches in France including the 10,400-member EELF, which joined the LWF in 1947.

(Translated from Bulletin d'information protestant)



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