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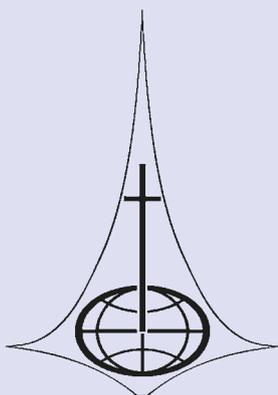
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New Year Message Urges Recognition of Human Vulnerability



Social worker Anita Várkonyi lends a listening ear to a man in Dombóvár, Hungary, where the Lutheran diaconal organization provides services such as warm meals in the winter months. © ELCH/Szilárd Szabó

LWF General Secretary Junge Calls for Action on Financial and Ecological Crises

GENEVA (LWI) – The current financial and ecological crises will not be overcome by continuing to please the markets, said The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in his 2012 New Year Message on 6 January.

Junge urged instead resolve to address justice issues within the human family in his reflections on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (12:9), also the Moravian tradition watchword for 2012: "My power is made perfect in weakness."

The LWF general secretary pointed out that human beings' pursuit of power and control over creation and the financial systems "is pushing humanity closer and closer to the abyss of ecological disaster."

Unlike Paul, who recognized his weakness and trusted God would transform this into power, human beings have dif-

ficulty understanding their vulnerability and dependence on God, their neighbor and creation.

Junge cited two examples of this lack of self-awareness—the international community's failure to tackle the ominous threat of climate change and the inability to effectively deal with a global financial crisis that highlights the futile attempts to live on non-existent resources. "We ought to recognize how carefully humankind has been woven into the fragile fabric of ecological systems and acknowledge our interdependence with the whole of God's creation," he stressed.

He said the biblical message that power is found in weakness is a dynamic reminder

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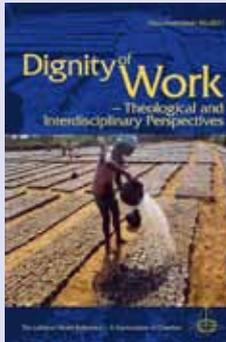
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New Book Examines Dignity of Work

Work can either affirm life or destroy it, argues a new LWF publication, *Dignity of Work-Theological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*.

Part of the LWF’s Documentation series, the publication grew out of a 2011 symposium on the theology of work organized by the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS).

“Work or labor constitutes a fundamental aspect of human existence regardless of whether or not one believes in God,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in the book’s preface. “Individuals of all cultures and traditions associate work not only with sustenance but also identity.”



In his introduction, the publication’s editor, Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, DTS study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice, noted that work is central to the shared life within and outside the communion of faith. “The fruits of our labor can be shared equally or become the basis for greed and marginalization.”

Dignity of Work (LWF Documentation 56) looks at Luther’s theology of work as a basis for a just economy, examines how work is understood in different contexts and illustrates how the world of work is skewed against women.

Dignity of Work is available from the LWF (EUR 12, USD 15 or CHF 15). Please contact info@lutheranworld.org

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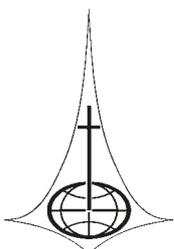
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"YOUTH FOR ECO-JUSTICE" TRAINING PROGRAM AT UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 28 November – 10 December, Durban, South Africa

Local Solutions to Global Environmental Problems

Christian Youth Are Exposed to UN Climate Change Negotiations in Durban

DURBAN, South Africa/GENEVA (LWI)

— Christian youth from 21 countries were in Durban, the site of international negotiations on climate change, to learn to care for the environment in a joint program of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

As global leaders started negotiations for an international climate change agreement, COP17, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the youth were involved in a two-week training and immersion program in South Africa called "Youth for Eco-Justice."

At the program's conclusion on 10 December, participants—including eight young Lutherans—would head home to initiate and implement environmental projects as volunteers in their own contexts.

LWF Youth Secretary Rev. Roger Schmidt said the program provided an important opportunity to expose youth to global climate change negotiations while they search for local solutions to the impact of the ecological crisis.

Participants have been studying the links between environmental issues and socio-economic structures, and were receiving training that prepared them to take part in the civil society activities related to the UN negotiations.

Both the LWF and the WCC "aim to engage young people in eco-justice and prepare them to become change makers in both church and society," Schmidt added.

Youth for Eco-Justice is also linked to the "LWF together—the Earth needs you" program, which has Lutheran youth around the world studying the Bible together to reflect on God's creation and environmental stewardship, and sharing their understandings across the Lutheran communion.



Raimy Esperanza Ramirez Jimenez of the Presbyterian Church of Venezuela interacts with other Youth for Eco-Justice participants. © WCC/LWF/W. Noack

The youth gathered in South Africa visited the Clermont Youth Association, which was started by unemployed youth in the Durban township in 2009 and has focused on finding a more sustainable approach to the garbage problem experienced in Clermont.

Recycling Technology

The Clermont youth were trained in environmental management and recycling technology by Durban's Diakonia Council of Churches. They are now able to clear streams, maintain the natural environment, and provide research data to the municipality of Durban on water and waste disposal for its follow-up action.

"We pass on research data to the municipality on waste disposal management and seek partners to help secure the environment," said Justice Mahlaba, the Clermont youth team leader.

He said the youth also participated in municipal environmental

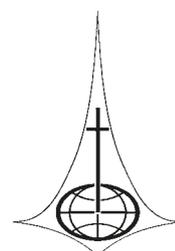
meetings called to address longstanding problems and used the knowledge they have acquired from such forums to educate fellow members and the wider community on waste recycling.

Clermont youth coordinator Solomon Dlamini said, "The group has developed a waste management culture and collects bottles, scrap metals, and plastic to sell to recycling plants."

Dlamini added that the group recently collected ZAR 1,400 (USD 175) from the sale of recycled materials. "The group intends to mobilize Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans to collect and sort papers from each church for recycling," added Dlamini.

Reaching Out

Support from the South African department of environment and the Diakonia Council of Churches has enabled the group to reach out to the Clermont community with education programs on water, sanitation and hygiene to assist them in their struggle to gain access to clean water.



The impact of climate change and lack of proper water and sanitation management were evident in every part of the African continent with millions unable to access water, said Maike Gorsboth, who coordinates the Ecumenical Water Network at

the WCC. She noted that “the water crisis is more than climate change and water scarcity.”

Gorsboth said: “The poor in the global South not only lack access to water, but also pay the highest prices for water often supplied by private vendors.”

She added that factors such as population growth, lifestyle changes and climate change contributed to the increased water scarcity. “In the past, the increased world population has doubled, but at the same time water demands have increased four times.”

Youth Gathered in Durban Offer Hope on Climate Change

With international negotiations on climate change nearing collapse in Durban, South Africa, 30 Christian youth from around the world offered hope by studying their Bibles and reflecting on justice issues involved in the care of creation.

“I had an opportunity to spend a couple of days with this amazing group and came away with a renewed sense of optimism and hope,” said Kristen Opalinski, communications officer for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA).

“These are the people who will one day become the leaders of our churches and ultimately our society as a whole. It is in this realization that I find inspiration and see God at work most,” added Opalinski.

The LUCSA official was monitoring the negotiations being held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP17, as part of the broad interfaith presence in Durban. Through rallies and worship services, the Youth for Eco-Justice program promoted justice, love and compassion.

“While the gridlock of the negotiations at the International Convention Centre continues to lead COP17 towards a dangerous collapse, it is the very important work of these 30 youth here that gives us the chance to see the sunshine through the clouds,” she added.

The workshops reflected on the challenges posed by climate change

from a theological perspective. Using the Bible as a guide to dialogue and debate, each session focused on a different subject related to God’s call for stewardship of creation.

Relationships

Participants looked at how the gospel relates to the way people treat each other as global neighbors, consumption and the disposal of products, water justice and food security.

“There are some things that we must do here on earth. We cannot wait for heaven as some would suggest,” said participant Mike Langa from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi. “We must start here by the act of sharing—sharing with others, with all those in need.”

Raimy Esperanza Ramirez from the Presbyterian Church of Venezuela noted that participants must ask themselves some tough questions: “What is the core of this injustice [the lack of clean drinking water]? If we work on the core, we will understand the root causes of this injustice.”

Rev. Roger Schmidt, LWF Youth Secretary, said Youth for Eco-Justice had brought young people together in Durban who would then have an impact when they return home. “Young people have been demanding in our assemblies that they have to take action and this is the response,” Schmidt noted.

The youth are capable of breaking the deadlock around climate change with new understandings of the connections between justice and the ecology, Schmidt concluded.



Youth for Eco-Justice raise their voices at the COP17 in Durban. © WCC/LWF/W. Noack

A Pledge for Active Involvement in Environmental Justice

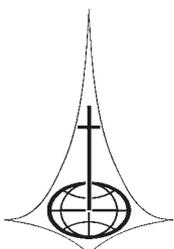
After two weeks of training in Durban, South Africa, on the theology and politics of ecological justice, participants in the LWF/WCC training program pledged to start

in their own contexts initiatives that promote the new understandings they have acquired.

They also trained in advocacy, campaign strategizing, communica-

tion and eco-justice project planning and implementation.

As they prepared to leave Durban, the youth outlined some of their future plans.





Stanislau Paulau from Belarus presents his eco-justice project.
© WCC/LWF/W. Noack

Eun-Hae Kwon, LWF vice-president for the Asian region, and a member of the LWF Meeting of Officers.

Hope for Dalits

Jeyathilaka Prathaban of the Church of South India said his church will continue to use eco-theology to give hope to the Dalit community in India.

“The caste system restrains Dalits from freely walking, fetching water or breeding livestock,” added Prathaban. He said he regrets the abuse the Dalits face in being denied the land they need to produce their own food.

Through Eco-Dalit Forum, a youth group he intends to form on returning home, “We will reclaim land from upper castes and claim rights for water.” They will also set up village resource centers to research improved agricultural practices and help save the environment from degradation.

Such initiatives at the grassroots level are key to transforming the ecological and wider injustice people face daily, stated Rev. Roger Schmidt, secretary for LWF Youth.

“The outcome of COP17 in Durban was disappointing and falls short of what the planet and humanity need,” he commented. “But the young people participating in Youth for Eco-Justice and their churches provide a glimpse of hope.”

With these projects, the churches contribute to building consensus globally on an ethical obligation to take concrete action on ecological challenges, he added.

(Written for LWI by George Arende)

Read more about Youth for Eco-Justice at <http://lwfyouth.org/eco-justice/> and LWF together at www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/lwf-together

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“I intend to use the 40-day Lent period to urge Lutherans in Sweden to minimize the use of vehicles and products that increase carbon emissions,” said Joakim Book Jonsson, 20.

He opted to use the Christian understanding of Lent, a period of self-denial and prayer, to call upon all Christians to do God’s will and make God’s reign first in their hearts by reducing carbon emissions.

“Fasting for carbon emission,” he noted, would be a better way for Christians to spend the Lent period. He will involve youth through social media and share stories on a blog.

Supporting Minorities

Viktor Liszka, 30, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, indicated that he will continue work promoting the artistic endeavors of youth from the Roma communities.

“Youth with artistic skills [paint] houses and promote the rich culture among [Roma people],” said Liszka. He explained the intention of Lutheran youth to promote the community’s touristic heritage and to improve their livelihood. The Roma in Hungary are the largest

ethnic minority group comprising nearly two percent of the country’s estimated population of 10 million.

The Hungarian Lutheran church shows support to the minority group in difficult times. “We share Christ’s love with the [Roma] and offer food and medicine in time of disasters,” said Liszka.

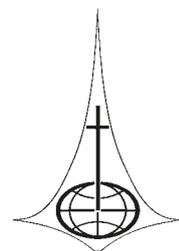
Preparing for Rio+20

On her return home, Raimy Esperanza Ramirez, 24, of the Presbyterian Church of Venezuela, plans to actively engage the youth in her home country to talk more about environmental concerns ahead of the Rio+20 meeting to be held in Brazil in June 2012.

Claire Barrett-Lennard, a Youth for Eco-Justice participant from the Anglican Church of Australia, intends to urge schools to work for water justice in the Philippines.

In 2008, the Lutheran Church in Korea adopted a strategic plan that seeks to enhance the involvement of women and youth at multiple levels of the church. “We seek to reconcile human beings and nature [with hope] to transform church and society,” said Youth for Eco-Justice participant

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“SEEKING CONVIVIALITY” – LWF WORKSHOP ON RE-FORMING COMMUNITY DIAKONIA IN EUROPE 7-10 December, Järvenpää, Finland

Workshop Launches Diaconal Reconfiguration Process in Europe

Community Diakonia as Response to Economic Insecurity

JÄRVENPÄÄ, Finland/GENEVA (LWI) – A group of Lutherans from different parts of Europe met near Helsinki for a three-day workshop on re-forming community diakonia in the region.

The 7 to 10 December workshop in Järvenpää, near the capital city, was also the launching of “Seeking Conviviality,” a three-year process that aims to develop holistic diaconal responses by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches to growing poverty and marginalization in Europe.

Rev. Dr Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, area secretary for Europe in the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), said the insecurity in which Europeans from both Western and Eastern Europe are living forms the backdrop for the workshop.

“This crisis calls for another vision of Europe: of growing into solidarity in a broader community that could enhance sustainability for all,” she remarked, referring to the need for the LWF communion to identify



A social worker in dialogue with a resident of the home for the elderly in Krabčice run by the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. © ECCB/Jan Silar

with the poor as a part of itself and address marginalization together.

The focus of the workshop, organized jointly with the International Academy for Diakonia and Social Action (Interdiac) in Český Těšín, Czech Republic, included ways of strengthening diaconal actors in their work, relationships and communities,

and explore the theological and spiritual resources from which they draw.

The participants from 14 countries in Central Eastern and Central Western Europe and the Nordic region will form a core group for the duration of the consultative program.

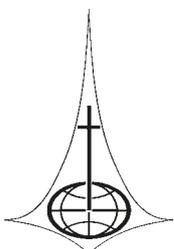
Communism Breakdown

Vogel-Mfato said the breakdown of communism resulted in great economic hardship for people in Central Eastern Europe, with the collapse of social security structures. Though the region had slowly recovered, the recent economic crisis has endangered the basic income of many.

“And the basic concerns raised over the past decade continue to concern us, and have spread to all regions of Europe. There is existential insecurity and fear during the ongoing economic crisis, with unemployment and rising numbers of families living at the edges of poverty,” she commented.



Participants at the first LWF workshop on “Seeking Conviviality” in Järvenpää, Finland. © LWF/Jubo Kuva



She cited her own country Germany, one of the economic powerhouses of Europe, with more than one million children at the edge of poverty, and also pointed to a grow-

ing phenomenon of burnout and minimum wage concerns.

“Seeking Conviviality,” slated to run until 2013, is intended to strengthen the churches’ commit-

ment to transform these daily realities of poverty and marginalization, and to contribute to dialogue within the LWF on diaconal practice, noted Vogel-Mfato.

Diakonia Can Light Up Communities in the Midst of Economic Insecurity

In Finland snow provides light in the dark days of the Christmas season.

Lutherans from Europe attending a three-day workshop on re-forming community diakonia in the region were reminded of this important aspect of snow for Finns.

Rev. Jouko Porkka, rector of the Diakonia University of Applied Sciences in Järvenpää, noted during

the workshop’s opening worship that diaconal service provides similar light to needy communities.

“We are people who dwell in a land of deep darkness. We wait for the light to shine on us,” said Porkka.

“We are all aware of this darkness. Because of this darkness, people in weak positions are suffering: children, the unemployed, old people, sick

people, those with disabilities, Roma people, people from sexual minorities.”

Porkka read out a joint message from Rev. Dr Kimmo Kääriäinen, executive director and Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen, secretary for theology of the Church Council Department for International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. They spoke of the help the center originally received from the worldwide Lutheran communion.

“The most concrete symbol of the connection this center and these buildings have with the global Lutheran world is the so-called ‘American hall’ beside the dining hall. The name comes from the fact that the Finnish Lutherans received a great deal of help from America and from other Lutheran churches after the Second World War,” he said.

“It helped us to locate ourselves more to be a part not only of the fellowship and global communion of the Lutheran churches but also a part of the wider ecumenical fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ.”



(Left to right) Dr Ulla Jokela and Rev. Jouko Porkka welcome workshop participants to the opening worship service. © LWF/Jubo Kuva

FEATURE: Influx to Serbian Province Increases Diakonia Work for Lutheran-led Ecumenical Program

People seeking a better life flock to the autonomous province of Vojvodina in the Republic of Serbia.

It is the most prosperous region of the country, but it has experienced economic woes since the end of the Yugoslav federation.

Vojvodina residents say it still has great potential although the civil war in the former Yugoslavia has undermined much of the social infrastructure.

“Basically since the civil war in Yugoslavia [in the early 1990s] and the bombing of Serbia in 1999, our

economic situation has been poor,” says Marija Parnicki, a psychologist who works for the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), in Novi Sad, Vojvodina’s capital.

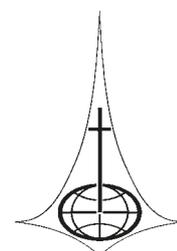
She works with Rev. Vladislav Iviciak, director of the EHO, who says that due to the area in the north of Serbia still being a pocket of relative prosperity it has become a magnet for migrants.

“The influx of Roma and other people increases our diaconal work,” says Iviciak who has a staff of 36 with hundreds of volunteers who support them.

With more than 25 ethnic groups and six official languages, Vojvodina is more diverse than the rest of Serbia.

The area has experienced diverse rule, having at one time or another been part of the Roman Byzantine, Austro-Hungarian or Ottoman empires, under the occupation of Nazi Germany and part of Yugoslavia as well as other countries earlier in its history.

Iviciak and Parnicki spoke to *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* during the December workshop in Finland on the theme “Seeking Con-





Rev. Vladislav Iviciak (left) and Ms Marija Parnicki, both from the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia © LWF/Jubo Kuva

viviality, Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe.”

“We have learned much from the stories of all the participants at this workshop in Finland,” said Iviciak.

“I am a pastor in the Slovak Lutheran Church in Serbia, a minority church in our country,” explained Iviciak.

Parnicki added, “In Serbia most people don’t know about Lutherans. Many consider us as a sect and not

as a church, but in Vojvodina we are quite recognized.”

Vojvodina has great potential, according to Iviciak who noted, “We have energy resources, fertile ground that is underutilized. We have hot springs.”

Yet he rued, “Poverty is rapidly increasing. There is current data showing that each day about 400 people are losing their jobs in Serbia in general. In Vojvodina it is 70 per

cent. A lot of unfair privatization has taken place. The government has been selling good enterprises and those firms are bought by tycoons.”

News reports show that many of the enterprises are bought by Russians.

“It seems only yesterday we were all saying we were communists. We learned at school about equality and rights for the labor class. Yet the highest members of the party are now the biggest capitalists,” Iviciak remarked.

He talked about the impact of the global economic crisis. “Of course we feel it. It also affects the funding for our work. Some donors have difficulties sustaining levels of support. A lot of people write to us asking for jobs.”

Their work in diakonia with the EHO involves projects with LWF member churches and representatives of other churches in Vojvodina.

“Working in the project center for people living with HIV and AIDS, we teach people how to work with those infected and how to advocate for their rights and the removal of the stigmatization of those afflicted with the condition,” Iviciak explained.

FEATURE: London’s Chinese Lutheran Church Reaches Out to Migrants

David Lin advises Chinese migrants in Britain from a London church, but when he was growing up in Hong Kong during the 1960s he was not a Christian.

Going to an Anglican primary school first and then a Roman Catholic secondary school, he attended Bible studies and was interested in the books of the apostles.

Yet it was not until after graduating from university in Hong Kong and working for what is now the Asian Lutheran News service that he became a Christian.

“In Hong Kong when parents want their children to get a good education they send them to church schools. My parents are not Christians.” Lin told a group of 26 people from 14 European countries working

in diakonia who met at Järvenpää, near Helsinki in December.

Lin is a member of the London Chinese Lutheran Church which belongs to the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and he highlighted the plight that many Chinese face as migrants.

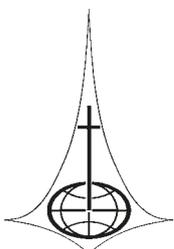
Lin told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, “I leave this place enriched with so many ideas and stories relating to diakonia, which can help me better serve the people who come to us.”

During an evening service he led, Lin quoted from Psalm 121, “The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.”

When Lin became a Christian at the age of 23, he said he realized, “It is no use to just sit in the church without receiving people in need so that we can act like Christ. This has motivated me in work with migrant workers from China.”

In 1982 he went to Boston University to do an MSc in Journalism on an LWF scholarship. After he completed his studies, Lin became the editor of the Asia Lutheran Press Services in Hong Kong where he had started as an editorial assistant. He also studied Lutheran theology while working for the news service.

In 1994 he got a call to work for the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) which was based in London. He worked as



a coordinator looking after regional communication and development projects in the Asia and the Pacific region.

“I liked WACC because it was supporting grassroots communities and was using liberation theology as its base. That eventually brought me into my present work for Chinese migrant workers at the Chinese Lutheran Church in central London.”

A Spiritual Home

His task is to provide Bible study groups for the church members.

“But then it happens that there are Chinese migrant workers who come to the church looking for a place they can call home. Some are curious about Christianity so they join Bible studies’ groups and indirectly we provide diaconical work,” said Lin.

The Chinese come from many different backgrounds and have differing circumstances where they now live.

“Some of the people who come are migrant workers, some are over-stayers. We serve other categories of Chinese—students, professionals or exchange scholars and use them to support migrants.

“Some of the students are Christians of a few generations from China,” explains Lin. “Others might

only have knowledge about Communism and Maoism, and some of them feel a void in their hearts because so-called communism is kind of fading in China. That is because of economic development where materialist thoughts occupy center stage.

“After staying in [a] Bible study group they get confidence, because we show Christian love to them and see them as people. We provide a spiritual home for the people away from home. We don’t question their status. We do not ask if the names they give are genuine. We provide an ear to listen.”



David Lin leads evening devotions at the Järvenpää workshop.
© LWF/Juho Kuva

Lin’s wife Phoebe and two children were born in Hong Kong. The children attended British schools.

“Although they studied Chinese, they are more British now,” he says.

(Peter J. M. Kenny wrote the LWI stories in this section.)

More information on “Seeking Conviviality” is available at:

www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/themes/reforming-diakonia-europe

15 December 2011

New Year Message Urges Recognition of Human Vulnerability

Continued from p. 1

that the church’s mission should be focused on the marginalized sections of society including God’s creation which has been wounded by human action.

Weakness as the entry point for God’s empowering action connects well with the Christmas story just celebrated, where God comes as a vulnerable baby born to a migrant couple without shelter in a village remote from the political powers of the day, he said.

Junge pointed out the strong link also to Christian interpretation of

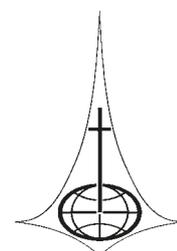
Jesus’ crucifixion, which instead of signifying the cross as the humiliating symbol of the powerful, portrays it as “the expression of God’s most intimate communion with the vulnerable human condition ... the ‘God with us.’”

For the Lutheran communion, the 2012 watchword “comes to us as people liberated by God’s grace, and as a communion of churches that holds together the vision of living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world,” stated the general secretary, referring to the vision statement of the LWF Strategy 2012-2017.

“A church faithfully engaged in God’s mission will seek to empower humanity and creation. By understanding the weakness, fragility and interdependence of human beings, the church will also learn to trust in God’s perfecting power,” he added.

The full text of Rev. Junge’s 2012 New Year Message can be found at http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/New-Year-Message-2012_ENG_final.pdf

6 January 2012



CONSULTATION ON “GENDER AND THE HIV AND AIDS EPIDEMIC”

12-15 December, Johannesburg, South Africa

Church Challenged to Fight AIDS Epidemic As It Once Did Apartheid

Getting to Zero Infections Needs New HIV and AIDS Competence

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa/GENEVA (LWI) – The coordinator of HIV and AIDS work at The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) called on the church to combat the epidemic as it once took on South Africa’s apartheid system.

Rev. Dr Veikko Munyika was speaking at the opening of the LWF and Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) consultation on “Gender and the HIV and AIDS Epidemic” being held from 12 to 15 December in Johannesburg, South Africa.

“Like apartheid and its evil consequence during those days, HIV and AIDS need to become part and parcel of our core business as church,” said Munyika.

“We need to involve all church members, all church ministries and all church institutions in our response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic,” he urged.

Munyika said he was concerned that the spread of HIV was outpacing the church’s response to the epidemic.

“For every two people put on anti-retrovirals (ARV), five others get infected. For every one person put on life-saving drugs, two others are on the waiting list, waiting for their turn when one of those now receiving ARVs dies—like some kind of a last-in-first-out game,” Munyika remarked.

The global family of Lutheran churches should mainstream HIV prevention to complement work already achieved on awareness and support, stated Munyika, coordinator of the LWF HIV and AIDS campaign at the Department for Mission and Development.

“Churches have done a lot about HIV awareness, care and support but it is also true that most of our programs have been stand-alone,” Munyika commented.

When the world marks milestones in the fight against the epidemic, faith-based organizations should feel they have made a small contribution, he noted.

However, he pointed out that such achievements should not overshadow the major challenges still facing AIDS activists.

“HIV and AIDS statistics—especially in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe—are still massive. HIV will haunt us for much longer still,” Munyika cautioned.

The World Health Organisation says there are 33.4 million adults with HIV globally, 22.5 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

The Lutheran communion must grow into an HIV and AIDS competent church, one that responds effectively to the pandemic from a Lutheran point of view, and that is able to access and properly manage available local and international resources, Munyika maintained.

“An HIV and AIDS competent church will be able to contribute to the global vision of ‘Getting to the Zero’: zero new infections, zero stigma and discrimination and zero related deaths,” he said.

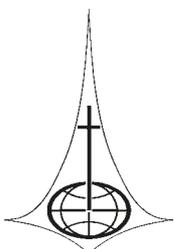
Ms Venah Mzezewa, LUCSA HIV and AIDS program coordinator, said the gathering that brought together 55 participants comprising church leaders and representatives of Lutheran affiliated church groups wanted to help communities analyze HIV and AIDS programs.

LUCSA is one of the three LWF sub-regional bodies in Africa. All its 16 member churches have HIV and AIDS programs with either full-time or part-time workers.

“The idea is to reinforce awareness and sensitivity of participants to pertinent gender-related issues and include them in HIV and AIDS response design, planning and implementation,” underlined Mzezewa.



Rev. Feston Phiri (right), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, challenged the church not to shun those living with HIV and AIDS. © LWF/Percy Musitwa



The other objective of the meeting, Mzezewa said, was to create a communication model on HIV prevention that makes it clear that there should not be stigma attached to those who live with the infection.

“We want to improve on common responses to challenges that drive the

HIV pandemic and explore prospects for participation of faith-based organizations in community mechanisms in accessing global funds,” she said.

Rev. Feston Phiri of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi said the meeting was a good opportunity to respond to the call for help by communities.

Drawing on the biblical story of the blind man outside Jericho who asked Jesus to restore his sight and was told to be silent by those leading Jesus’ procession, Phiri asked: “Are church leaders not behaving the same way to people living with HIV and AIDS?”

Positive Masculinity Needed to Stem Tide of AIDS Crisis

Representatives of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa heard about the urgent need for churches to promote positive masculinity to counter the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Prof. Ezra Chitando told the LWF and LUCSA consultation that prevailing notions of manhood contribute to the global HIV and AIDS crisis, and sexual and gender-based violence.

He stressed the need to change attitudes that make it difficult to respond to the spread of HIV and AIDS from a theological perspective.

“The time to transform boys and men is yesterday; tomorrow may already be too late,” the consultant of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) told the participants including bishops, pastors and HIV and AIDS activists.

Chitando said the social construction of men as strong and powerful makes it difficult to accept that women can lead, make their own decisions and contribute to a functional society. “The challenge before us is a massive one,” he noted.

Quoting an African proverb, the EHAIA representative noted that “The speed with which you run depends on that which is chasing you. [...] The church in Africa is being faced by a challenge that keeps accelerating. Acceleration of the response will not happen without the key involvement of boys and men,” he noted, adding it was “easier to build boys than repair men.”

Chitando emphasized the important role men play. “Positive masculinity is not a call for men to become angels overnight. As human beings, men will continue to strive to do



Rev. Phumzile Zondi, writing down different names of God in African languages when she led a contextual Bible study on gender injustice and justice. © LWF/Percy Musiwaa

better. However, positive masculinity reminds men that they are not passive onlookers in the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence and HIV,” he said.

Uphill Battle

A Presbyterian church minister Rev. Phumzile Zondi told the consultation participants that changing people’s attitudes on gender roles will be an uphill battle.

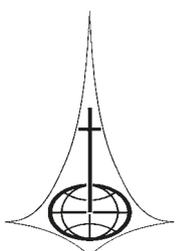
“Men are a product of a patriarchal system and the same culture that has given more rights to men than women has cultivated the belief that women must be submissive, accept things without questioning,” she said.

“Men tend to impose their will on powerless women even in the church and this has perpetuated the spread of HIV and AIDS, with women denied an opportunity to use preventive measures,” Zondi noted.

According to the United Nations AIDS agency, there were an estimated 11.3 million people living with HIV in Southern Africa in 2009. UNAIDS reported that 10 countries in the sub-region accounted for 34 percent of the people living with HIV globally, with women representing around 40 percent of all adults living with the virus. More than 33 million people across the world are living with HIV.

Zondi noted that some church leaders shun people living with HIV from their churches, branding them as sinners and preventing them from disclosing their status.

“I have tried to use gender activism with theological backing to raise thorny issues that remain in our churches and the Bible gives excellent role models who we can learn from,” said Zondi. She spoke of the need to find ways to scale up efforts that help change views “such as those



that suggest that women cannot be ordained in churches.”

Ms Colleen E. Cunningham, a member of the LWF Meeting of Officers and regional coordinator for the LWF Women in Church and Society

(WICAS) desk said there was a need for conscious engagement on gender policy to promote equal opportunities for women in the church.

“We need to deconstruct the fallacy that women are there to be

enjoyed but not contribute to society,” said Cunningham, a member of the Moravian Church in South Africa. In 2004, she was part of the team that trained gender liaison officers of the 16 LUCSA member churches.

HIV Prevention Tool Kit to Help End Silence on AIDS

Lutheran leaders in Africa attending the LWF/LUCSA consultation on gender and the HIV epidemic were trained with a new HIV prevention kit. The model is designed to help end the silence on sex and responsibility in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The SAVE model, which stresses safer practices, access to treatment, voluntary counseling and testing and empowerment, will help boost the LWF AIDS campaign.

“There is a deafening silence by the faith-based community around issues related to sex, so we have to empower our leaders on how to tackle the problem,” said Vanessa Michael, monitoring and evaluation officer with the International Network of Religious Leaders Living With or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA).

“We thought we had to break the taboo involved with sexuality at the faith-based level and this is a tool kit that religious leaders have felt comfortable to work with,” said Michael, one of the editors of the tool kit.

She added that the kit directly addresses issues of prevention by focusing on the impact of stigma, shame, denial, discrimination, inaction and misaction that have often been ignored.

The SAVE model has been around since 2007 but has only been produced as a manual for use in churches and communities in Africa this year. Michael said it has been accepted by the World Health Organization.

Agents of Change

Religious leaders are powerful agents of change and the guide provides space for them to explore the difficult subjects of sexual and cultural practices that can lead to new infections, she noted.

“The methodology is old but the tool kit is a first for many people in



Vanessa Michael demonstrates how to use the SAVE Toolkit at the LWF and LUCSA consultation held in Johannesburg. © LWF/Percy Musiiwa

Africa. We are already supporting its adoption in the region—Kenya, Malawi, and Mozambique, among other countries,” said Michael.

This tool kit is about both sex and responsibility, added Ivan Lloyd, INERELA national coordinator in South Africa.

He said that after the ABC campaign, which focused on abstinence, being faithful and consistent and correct use of condoms, there is now a sense of finally getting a tool kit that covers a broad range of issues.

“Human vulnerability is treated in a direct but compassionate manner,” he said.

“It is certainly something that I will recommend some people to use because it addresses a broad range of subjects in a less confrontational manner,” said Rev. Gerson Neliwa, who heads diaconal and social services programs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia.

Nokhanyo Mswewu from Matatiele, a Moravian Church in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, said the tool kit was useful because it explains simply how HIV transmission occurs.

“There are deep rooted cultural beliefs in some communities and they still think AIDS is some form of witchcraft, but our coordinators can now translate this into local languages and give people hand outs,” said Mswewu.

“Where people cannot translate names of anti-retrovirals, they will coin local phrases to make it understandable. This will certainly help,” she noted.

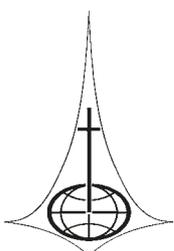
The church leaders and AIDS activists attending from across Africa were urged to share the tool kit widely in their constituencies.

“The LWF is promoting the SAVE method of HIV prevention and encourages its member churches to use it in their response to the epidemic,” added Rev. Dr Veikko Munyika, coordinator of HIV and AIDS work at the LWF.

(Stories in this section were written for LWI by Munyaradzi Makoni.)

Read about LWF HIV and AIDS work at: www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/hiv-aids

21 December 2011



FEATURE: Hope for the People at Cape Town Lutheran Center

Support to AIDS Patients and Local Community

CAPE TOWN, South Africa/GENEVA (LWI)

– The rhythm with which Stembele Ndenetya tenderly rakes dry leaves from the green lawn betrays his deep love for a sanctuary that gave him life when he was almost dying.

His wife had just died in 1987 and was buried in the rural Eastern Cape. He came back to Cape Town to resume normal life. Ndenetya became very sick. He got tested and learned he had AIDS.

The will to survive drove him to look for an AIDS support group for moral support. There were none in the Samora neighborhood where he lived, he decided to start one. That was in 2003.

A nurse at Mzamomuhle, a local clinic where he went for a check-up told him there was a *mlungu* (white person) looking for people like him at the Lutheran Church in Philippi.

“That is how I came to be here,” says Ndenetya, the resident caretaker at iThemba Labantu Community Center who has lost five children to AIDS related illness. “I learnt about AIDS. I got a focus on life and became more responsible.”

He got regular work at the center working in different capacities. iThemba Labantu literally means hope for the people

Confidence, Value to Life

“I have seen the hope that this center holds for many people. I have worked for the ceramics department. I have made beads. I built two of the buildings here. We fed the hungry,” said Ndenetya.

“It is this spirit of kindness that keeps people dropping in daily to seek help for their specific problems,” he adds.

At 46 Ndenetya is among many who hold the iThemba Labantu center in high regard.

“This place has changed my value to life,” says 26-year-old Nokhuthula

Gxota. “I am now confident that I will be strong and be there for my children,” the mother of three adds.

Nolitha Mgwebi from Lower Crossroads in Philippi brims with confidence. “I was so sick, but the care I got here revived me in a week,” says Mgwebi whose 61-year-old mother is looking after her child.

“Here we give them more than personal hygiene. There is medication. We attend to their social and economic needs,” says Lindy Mkuzo,

“Whenever there is a free bed, we take in patients who have no one to care for them,” says Mkuzo. “There are no beds in South African hospitals for people living with HIV and AIDS, we take in those secondary patients,” she notes.

After six to eight weeks 99 percent of the patients will have improved well enough to go home, says Mkuzo. But not until after being taught not to skip their medication and how to make ends meet if not employed, she adds.



iThemba Labantu caretaker, Stembele Ndenetya © Arjuna Kohlstock

a nurse at the 18-bed hospice who oversees nine care givers.

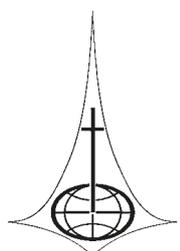
Mkuzo says they assist the sick to get social grants for their children. The center provides transport to those who need to collect antiretrovirals from various community clinics. Help for those without identity documents is facilitated with the South African Department of Home Affairs.

The center conducts counseling and testing. It helps people in the neighboring communities of Philippi—one of the larger townships of South Africa whose exact size is unknown. What is known, however, is its abject poverty and high incidences of HIV and AIDS. Some estimates put its population at about 150,000 people.

Bead-Making, Plumbing, Arts

Bead-making skills are a great help for many people without any other source of income, says Khuthele Caphukele, who makes an average of six beaded artifacts per day, earning him ZAR 60 per day (USD 7.50). Caphukele only gets paid at the end of the month after having accumulated substantial amounts from undertaking more work.

“Sometimes AIDS patients are too weak to do anything. Beading becomes the most suitable activity they can do with their hands,” says Nodume Lurafu, a crafts teacher who has lost count of students that she has taught at iThemba Labantu.





Crafts teacher Nodume Lurafu (right) © Arjuna Kohlstock

The doors of the center are not only open to people with HIV and AIDS, but also to the general population.

“Our solar and plumbing four-month basic course is on a first-come first-served basis,” says Peter Arendse, the course teacher, adding that students don’t pay anything to study. They are actually paid for attending school.

“In the past we could not take students from far flung community areas because they would miss lessons as they could not afford travelling expenses but there is now a sponsor that gives them ZAR 400 (USD 50) monthly,” he explains.

While the center has had some success with some students getting formal work after their courses, the biggest joy is that they ultimately leave the institution with skills, says Arendse.

The same applies for the motor engineering course, but the trainees have to pass a matrix exam for admission. There are also computer lessons for students. Those passionate about the arts can find space in the music and dance school.

English for Children

“We have taken the challenge to teach children to speak English, because most learners are faced with the English-speaking barrier,” says

Selina Morta, the principal of the center’s pre-school with 34 children.

“We are preparing them for the next level,” she says.

For a child to be in class a nominal fee of only ZAR 50 (USD 6.20) has to be paid but this is in most cases a responsibility of the center.

Some of the children attending the Center come from the poorest homes one can imagine. Others are raised by single parents and some had lost parents to AIDS while they were attending the Center, so it becomes a responsibility of the school to look after their welfare, Morta says.

The center has stayed afloat in face of economic upheavals and unending requests for help from impoverished people. It has been a global team effort, but it also takes the ingenuity and commitment of its leader Rev. Otto Kohlstock.

Dignity

“When we started there were no anti-retrovirals then. We wanted people to die with dignity,” says Kohlstock, a missionary of the Berlin Mission Society, and a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). “We started this hospice with ten beds and the provincial health department has backed us ever since.”

Kohlstock says the center now has five pillars including education; health; income generating initiatives such as ceramics and bead-making projects; nutrition involving soup making; and sports and recreation.

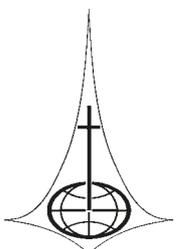
“I get a personal reward to see that lives can be changed,” he says. I discourage donations: place an order for our products, you aid the center, you help the people who make the products,” he adds.

(By LWI correspondent Munyaradzi Makoni)

21 December 2011



The Lutheran center leader, Rev. Otto Kohlstock © Private



FEATURE: Siahaan Looks Forward to a Family Christmas Visit

Medan Center Gives New Lease on Life to HIV Infected

MEDAN, Indonesia/GENEVA (LWI) – Christmas is the one day of the year Amran Siahaan can visit his wife and two children. He says he is no longer on the brink of committing suicide because of his HIV positive status, but still cannot live with his family.

When he first discovered in March 2007 that he was seriously ill, Siahaan was rushed to hospital, where doctors promptly identified his condition, and then threw him out.

Upon his return home, his parents shouted at him to “get lost,” and his wife kept his children from him.

After banishing him to the attic of a simple house in a remote North Sumatran village, his family maintained minimal contact with him, only coming by from time to time to bring him food.

“I was saved by the love and support of our pastor,” 40-year-old Siahaan told *LWI* in a recent interview in the office-cum-rehabilitation center of Medan Plus, the leading HIV advocacy, care and support group in North Sumatra province.

Based at Medan, the capital of North Sumatra, Medan Plus cares for over 2,100 people living with HIV—more than 80 percent of the cases that have been identified in the province.

“When he heard about my problem, the pastor visited me. He started praying for me and consoled me at a time when my family disowned me. He used to visit me at least once every week,” explained Siahaan, whose eyes filled with tears as he recalled the three difficult months he spent at home.

The pastor soon made arrangements for treatment of the distraught, penniless manual laborer and referred him to Medan Plus, which moved him to a government hospital in Medan and made sure that he was able to receive antiretroviral therapy.

Helping Others

When his health improved, Siahaan was transferred to the Medan Plus

center, where more than a dozen stigmatized HIV patients are knitting back together their tattered lives, while also working to save hundreds of others from the brink of death.

“The pastor came to me when I was planning to commit suicide. This is my new resurrected life,” said Siahaan proudly. After three months of training at the center, Siahaan started visiting government hospitals as a care and support worker identifying those infected with the virus.

“I have already brought back to life more than 200 dejected [HIV positive] people. That gives me a lot of satisfaction,” said Siahaan cheerfully.



Medan Plus officials and support staff in a meeting last November at the center's office in Medan, Indonesia.
© LWF/Anto Akkara

Challenging Stigma

Rev. Eban Totonta Kaban, founding director of Medan Plus, said that the advocacy group that he founded in 2003 has helped hundreds of people stand on their feet and lead normal lives.

“Fighting the stigma remains a big challenge,” said Kaban, the pastor of an independent church.

Pointing to the deep-rooted prejudice that HIV and AIDS carry, Kaban noted that his parents have pleaded with him several times to stop his work. “Why can't you do better things and find a good job?” they ask him.

Addressing leaders of the 12 Lutheran churches in Indonesia at a consultation on HIV and AIDS in November 2011, Kaban urged: “The church should never discriminate or ask HIV infected people to keep away from the church.”

Kaban cautioned that the HIV and AIDS crisis in Indonesia, one of the worst in Asia, is set to deepen. He added that HIV is spreading fast in the country, especially among youth, due to needle sharing by injecting drug users and unprotected sex.

For Siahaan meanwhile, the compassion of his pastor and the care of Medan Plus have made all the dif-

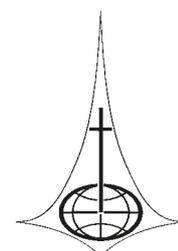
ference in the world. From being on the verge of suicide, he is now full of zest for life.

Since his wife is still angry with him for passing on the HIV virus to her, Siahaan visits the house only once a year—for Christmas.

But with his salary from Medan Plus, he is now able to pay for the education of his two teen-aged children, while his elderly parents no longer curse him.

(Written for LWI by Anto Akkara)

14 December 2011



Lutheran Church in Great Britain Celebrates 50th Anniversary

The Lutheran Church in Great Britain (LCiGB) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011. The 15 October event at the Christuskirche German church in London was attended by members and guests from around the world—a good reflection of the make-up of this Lutheran family in the United Kingdom.

In her greetings, LCiGB Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga welcomed participants to the anniversary celebration of a relatively small church and a relatively young church. The LCiGB comprises 2,745 members, worshipping in seven languages—Amharic, Cantonese, English, Kiswahili, Mandarin, Polish and Tigrinya.

The celebrations included Eritrean and Chinese choirs singing hymns, a violin performance from an American, and greetings from all corners of the globe. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge in greetings he sent, emphasized the “welcoming of the stranger” profile of the LCiGB, which has helped this LWF member church grow into a diverse yet unified family.

Oberkirchenrat Nobert Denecke, general secretary of the LWF German National Committee emphasized that the LCiGB belonged to a church thousands of years old, and was part of a church with millions of brothers and sisters in Christ.



A choir sings during the anniversary celebrations © LCiGB/Stanley SL Gob

The celebrations ended with a eucharistic service presided by Bishop Jeruma-Grinberga. Rev. Ron Englund, a former pastor of St Anne’s Lutheran Church in London, preached on the theme of the LCiGB as a family that has provided many with a “Lutheran home” in the UK. *(Written for LWI by Sarah Farrow)*

Surinamese Church Celebrates 270 Years

Last November, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS) celebrated its 270th anniversary.

“The ELKS was established through an agreement by the government of Suriname and Lutheran descents in 1747 and from the beginning was a church that owned slaves as partial payment of the salary of the pastor,” said ELKS pastor Rev. Kenneth Kross.

He noted that during the early 18th and 19th centuries the church was “for and of” white rulers. Some people of African descendant were baptized and took confirmation classes” continued Kross. By

1840 “the Lutheran Church no longer owned slaves and in 1863, when slavery was abolished, people of African descendants worshipped on a regular basis and were gradually involved in ministry.”

Celebrating life in God’s grace, “the ELKS constitution set foundations for lay ministry. Rev. Leo King, the first Surinamese ordained in 1974, opened paths for national ordained ministers” added Kross.

ELKS continues expressing love and compassion through the orphanage and hospitals, and elderly people’s ministries. The 4,000-member ELKS joined the LWF in 1979.

Argentine Church Endorses Lay Members Inclusion in Ministry

“The transformation process in the IELU never ceases to amaze me” remarked Rev. Alan Eldrid, president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina following an agreement to authorize and incorporate lay members in administering the Word and Sacrament each Sunday. The church supported this proposal in response to its growing mission.

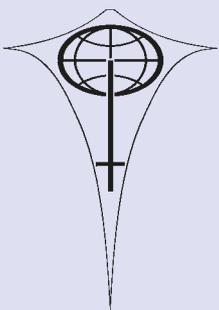
Eldrid announced that the 13-14 November assembly recommended that “for the purpose of God’s mission, each Sunday the Word and Sacrament must be ministered. To make this happen, the church will incorporate *authorized lay members*.”

This significant step was marked in a vibrant Sunday worship attended by many IELU members including Ms Andrea Lindquist,

who 30 years ago proposed the motion for women’s ordination which was approved. “In the midst of controversies, the ordination of women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament was approved, and the IELU set one more historical trademark on inclusiveness of all the saints involved in God’s mission,” concluded Eldrid.

IELU has 11,000-member and joined the LWF in 1951.

On the significant celebrations in the ELKS and IELU, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean said, “Both churches affirm through particular events the meaning of being a communion in Christ liberated by God’s grace seeking justice, peace, and reconciliation through the involvement of lay ministry”.



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