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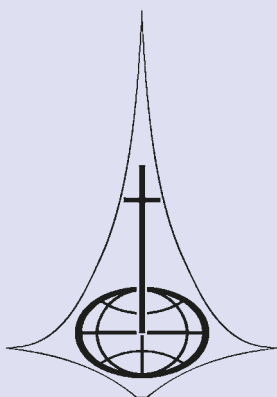
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## Mexican Lutheran Church Celebrates Female Leaders



Rev. Karina García Carmona pastors Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Mexico City. © ILM

### LWF Affirms Women in Ordained Ministry as Step towards Gender Justice

**MEXICO CITY, Mexico/GENEVA (LWI)** – When Rev. Karina García Carmona was installed as pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Mexico City in 2011, her congregation posed a simple question: do you want to be called "Pastor"?

"I don't know if I did the right thing, but at the time I told them they could call me 'Karina,' since I felt that respect and authority had to be earned," García said recently.

García is one of three women ordained to the ministry by the Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM), a member church of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), in a groundbreaking move in April 2009.

"The dialogue and learning process [with the congregation] was long and sincere, a situation that made it possible to establish

a relationship of fondness and respect that I greatly appreciate," García reflected. "I feel supported and welcomed by a congregation that never considered my being a young woman to be an obstacle."

Rev. Ángela del Consuelo Trejo Haager, pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Mexico City, has experienced both highs and lows in her ministry.

"My experience has been a spectrum of emotions ranging from sadness to joy, from frustration to triumph, from despair to the belief that it is possible to continue believing in a church where men and women travel the road together side-by-side," Trejo recalled.

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### LWF Pays Tribute to Pope Shenouda's Commitment to Interfaith Dialogue

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, expressed LWF's sympathy and prayers with the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in Egypt, following the death of Pope Shenouda III.

"We pray for you and the whole Coptic Church ... in this difficult time of loss of a beloved leader," said Younan in a letter of condolence to the Secretary of the Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church Metropolitan Bishop.

Shenouda III served as Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa from 1971 until his death on 17 March, aged 88. He was buried on 20 March.

Younan, who is also bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, described the Coptic Church leader as a person with a "deep passion" for the gospel, church mission, and the well-being of the world.

He was "a man of dialogue, recognizing the importance of cooperation among churches in the Middle East. He was a promoter of interfaith discussions, especially with the Muslim community of Egypt, promoting a dialogue for life," the LWF president continued.

In the context of the Lent season, Younan emphasized the Christian calling to "walk together in preparation for Christ's death on Good Friday, yet looking beyond the tomb to the glorious expression of God's love in the Resurrection."

The Coptic Orthodox Church has an estimated 12 million followers in Egypt.



*Pope Shenouda III and Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan (right) exchange greetings at a past meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches. © ELCJHL/E. McHan*

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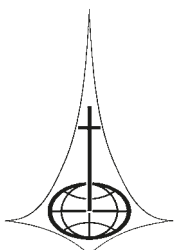
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## Mexican Lutheran Church Celebrates Female Leaders

*Continued from p. 1*

“My most powerful experience was with the women of the congregation; with them I learned to understand life through the lens of their experiences. Their presence and their enthusiasm motivate me to continue.”

They have shared the pain of death and illness, the “crisis” of being women—grandmothers, mothers, single, divorced, widowed—each of them illustrating what it means to live the gospel from a feminine perspective.

“I have the hope that the church will become a space where men and women can meet as a community, a space for healing, for great joyfulness as well as for sadness; a space that encourages us to continue going forward hand in hand with our brothers and sisters, along the path of life, sharing the feeling of the very presence of God,” Trejo said.

### Breaking New Ground

For Rev. Sofia Deyanira Tenorio May, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Mexico City, being a woman in or-

daind ministry has been a marvelous experience that has allowed her to reaffirm the unmistakable presence of God in her life.

Still, it has not been easy. Culture and traditions had to be overcome and she faced the daunting task of forming a church and nurturing its growth.

However, Tenorio is committed “to continue the difficult task of breaking new ground for the next generation of women and [to] be a witness to the fact that, with the help of God, anything and everything is possible when it comes to building the kingdom of God on earth.”

While he had never experienced being in a congregation with a woman pastor, lay leader Eliel Huerta said that he has listened closely to Trejo’s sermons, watched her pray with the sick and undertake projects with different groups.

“I am convinced that the ministry is not the exclusive prerogative of men,” he said.

Rev. Moisés Pérez Espino noted that the women’s ministry, though not without difficult moments, has had a great impact on their congregations.

“Female pastors have gradually gained respect and space through perseverance and by resisting patriarchal customs and ideas. But today their presence is appreciated and strongly felt,” Pérez added.

### Ongoing Reformation

ILM president Daniel Trejo Coria maintained that there is only one ministry in the church. “The church is enriched by the work and ministry of believers, women and men, called to serve the community, do it with faithfulness to Scripture and for the honor and glory of God.”

Rev. Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, secretary for LWF’s Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk, said that celebrating the witness of women in ordained ministry is a sign of ongoing reformation as the church journeys towards the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

“The dynamic ministry of these women gives us both a solid foundation and realistic hope of progress on the road to gender justice in the church,” she concluded.

*7 March 2012*

## Seeking Churches’ Commitment for People on the Move

### LWF-backed Group Engages in Global Process on Migration

**GENEVA (LWI)** – Gabriela Liguori is an Argentine social worker whose work on fighting trafficking and commercial exploitation of human beings illustrates how church groups can interact with international organizations on the topic of migration.

Liguori represents CAREF, the Argentine ecumenical relief organization for refugees and migrants, which gets support from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and other church-related organizations.

“We’re concerned about the commitment of churches in the context of vul-

nerability of human rights,” Liguori told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* on a recent visit to Geneva. She spoke about CAREF, which was established in 1973 to focus on refugees and migration, and increasingly works on human trafficking.

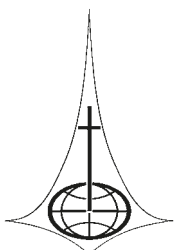
Human trafficking is an issue that has come to the fore for CAREF in the last seven years, said Liguori, the daughter of Italian migrants to the South American country.

She pointed out that trafficking for sexual exploitation is more visible than for labor purposes in Argentina, which is a destination country for women ar-

riving from Paraguay and the Dominican Republic. It is also the exit place for women exported to Spain and Italy.

Between 2009 and 2011, CAREF, supported by the LWF Department for Mission Development, produced a study titled: “Trafficking and commercial exploitation of human beings in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay: contributions for a regional and ecumenical dialogue.”

The study found that human trafficking practices occur at both national and international levels but that there were remarkable differences among the three Latin American





countries in view of their social and political realities.

## Miscommunication about Migrants' Contribution

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) noted in December 2011, that "There are more people on the move than at any other time in recorded history: about 215 million international and 740 million domestic migrants moving within their own territory."

With about 7 billion people in the world, "that means about one out of every seven people is on the move," the IOM points out. Every country in the world is either dependent on the labor, skills and knowledge migrants bring or on the estimated USD 404 billion they remitted in 2011, adds the IOM.

The migration body notes that distorted communication about migration contributes to widespread anti-migrant sentiments that have resurfaced in many parts of the world. It sees an urgent need to help migrants "have a voice in the public arena so they can speak for themselves and talk about the contribution they are making." Its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary report focuses on "Communicating Effectively about Migration."

CAREF takes part in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) which will hold its November 2012 summit in Mauritius. It is the largest and most comprehensive global platform for dialogue and cooperation on international migration and development, and 160 governments took part in the 2011 meeting. Liguori explained the GFMD "is not an event" but a process that started in 2006 as a high-level dialogue in the United Nations (UN) to talk about the migration issue beyond the UN.

At the last GFMD meeting, "We noticed that unfortunately when we

met in common space to talk about migration, development and human rights, there was not a word from the [United States of America] or European nations, the most important receiving countries. Governments that said something were those that have people who emigrate," she remarked.

## Human Rights Framework

"Governments resist talking about migration within a human rights framework. Often they only seem interested in preventing irregular migration. The power countries are interested in the migrant as a worker, or in the remittances," she noted.

She explained that "restrictive policies" make people become "irregular migrants." So an ecumenical group such as CAREF needs to raise the voices of the migrants.

In Argentina, CAREF participated very strongly in a social and political process that involved faith-based groups and civil society organizations in advocating for "a law in our country that was passed in 2003,

in which migration is recognized as a human right," said Liguori.

One of the ways CAREF's work can be supported by church-related organizations such as the LWF is by developing resources that offer theological and biblical perspectives for pastors and local leaders to deal with migration, Liguori added.

Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) affirmed the LWF member churches' support for CAREF in advocacy and awareness raising "about human trafficking that is deeply interconnected with voluntary or forced migration in the region."

She emphasized that "education and empowerment, especially of women and girls regarding their self dignity and responsibility for sexuality are meaningful actions for the LAC region.

"Through CAREF's ministry, the LWF member churches interact with other Christian denominations in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, promoting transformation at different levels in society," Cuyatti added.

8 March 2012



CAREF representative Gabriela Liguori is the daughter of Italian migrants to Argentina.  
© LWF/H. Putsman Penet

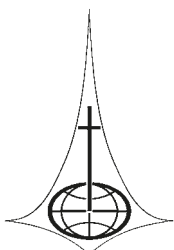
## LWF Equal Salary Certification Affirms Commitment to Gender Justice

A Powerful Encouragement on International Women's Day, Says General Secretary Junge

GENEVA (LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Communion

Office hailed its certification as an "equal salary" employer in Switzer-

land as an important step in the organization's commitment to gender





Left to right: Ms Catherine Currat, Rev. Rudolf Renfer and LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge show the Equal Salary label presented by Ms Véronique Goy Veenhuys (far right) during the certification ceremony. © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

justice and women's participation in church and society.

In the context of International Women's Day on 8 March, the Swiss organization "equal-salary" presented the LWF with the certification label for applying an equal wage policy between male and female employees.

"As we rejoice with this important achievement, we are also mindful that a large number of women in church and society don't see a space for bringing in their gifts and talents," said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge.

Access to their participation "is blocked, or the conditions under which they participate are fundamentally unequal," he noted at an event celebrating the global women's day, jointly organized by church-related organizations at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva.

Presenting the certification label to Junge, equal-salary Executive Director Véronique Goy Veenhuys commended the LWF for its "long-standing commitment to the cause of equality." She pointed out that the LWF was the 11<sup>th</sup> organization in Switzerland and the fourth in the Canton of Geneva to receive this recognition.

She noted that while most of the organizations in the country affirm a salary policy respecting equality between women and men, the difference in remuneration was 18.4 percent on a national scale. This

gap, she added, was partly due to external factors, but "around 40 percent [of such cases] result from discrimination-related factors."

In the context of such realities, "the LWF certification can't be received as a 'mission accomplished'. Rather, we receive it as powerful encouragement so that we remain sensitive to gender justice as an indicator of spiritual vigor and health in the life and witness of the church," Junge emphasized.

The general secretary said the LWF had learned during the certification process that "it is not enough to generate space where women can participate in the life and witness of

churches. It is also important that women and men have the same ability to access such spaces, and even more critical that these spaces offer equal conditions for women and men to contribute their gifts and talents."

Rev. Rudolf Renfer, director of the LWF Human Resources Office, said he hoped the learning on gender equality would be applied to the 3,000 Department for World Service staff around the world, and that member churches would be encouraged to apply this experience in their own contexts.

"I even hope this gender equal salary certification will be a contribution to the ecumenical movement in general, as these questions are sometimes difficult to raise in church contexts," Renfer added.

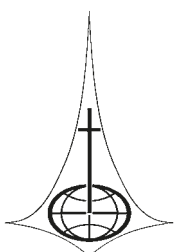
Catherine Currat, program assistant at the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk, described the certification as an excellent opportunity for the LWF to address challenges such as the cultural, ecclesial and political conditions that can limit women's access to leadership positions.

"These are, however, exciting challenges in order to reach, ultimately, full gender justice," she said. Still, Currat noted the need to develop other measures in order to have an even more gender-friendly workplace.

The LWF began the certification process in 2009 as a first step



Sharing of bread crumbs during the International Women's Day commemorations at the Ecumenical Center, symbolized the need for concerted efforts to achieve gender justice. © LWF/Helen Putsman Penet





in assessing the conditions under which women participate as co-workers in its Geneva office. The Swiss Federal Office on Gender

Equality gave financial support to the project.

The 62 staff persons at the LWF Communion Office represent 27 na-

tionalties, and comprise 61.3 percent women and 38.7 percent men.

8 March 2012

## LWF Hosts Virtual Conference on Ecological Justice

May 2012 “green&just” – An Opportunity for Real Time Learning, Says Junge

**GENEVA (LWI)** – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) hosts church leaders and congregation members in the Lutheran communion and ecumenical partners in its first virtual conference on ecological justice under the motto “green&just.”

focusing on a green economy and sustainable development.

At a lounge area of the “green&just” event participants from around the world can meet each other and hold conversations on subjects of mutual interest.

virtual conference we are entering new ground by using a very small ecological footprint to make real time learning and conversation possible for a larger number of people.”

One of the resolutions from the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly was a call to all LWF member churches to consolidate and enhance their efforts to address the impacts of climate change on development and poverty particularly for vulnerable communities. “And online initiatives such as the virtual conference are needed in order to give greater recognition to issues that have devastating impact mainly on marginalized communities throughout the world,” affirmed the general secretary.

Speakers at the webinars include Esther Hinostroza Ricaldi, a nursing technician with over 18 years of experience at the hospital of the Río Palanga mining settlement in Peru. She is a member of the “Joining Hands” network which advocates against the hazardous impact of mining on local communities.

Prof. Daniel Mirisho Pallangyo from Tanzania explores how climate change is making more and more places hard to live in or even outright uninhabitable, saying some estimates expect as many as 200 million climate refugees by 2050.

For more information visit <http://blogs.lutheranworld.org/wordpress/greenandjust>

Read more about the LWF and eco-justice at: [www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/environment](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/environment)

27 March 2012



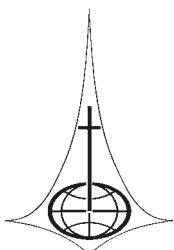
(left to right) Raquel Kleber and Marcelo Leites discuss possible joint initiatives during the Youth for Eco-Justice Meeting co-organized by the LWF in 2011 in South Africa. © WCC/LWF/W. Noack

During the 12 May Internet-based conference, pastors, youth and women leaders and other church workers can listen in real time to keynote speeches and Bible studies on the connection of poverty eradication and care for creation.

Registered participants can choose from 16 webinars (Internet-based seminars) that offer perspectives on subjects such as the theological understanding of ecological justice, deforestation and afforestation, disaster preparedness, or preparation for the June 2012 Rio +20 United Nations Earth Summit

The launching of the May conference coincides with LWF Youth desk 2012 campaign of the “LWF together – the Earth needs you” initiative that first ran from May to October 2011. It linked groups of Lutheran youth around the globe in reflections on how their faith influences individual or community-based actions that promote care for God’s creation and environmental protection.

“One of the key objectives of the LWF is to facilitate trans-contextual encounters between our member churches,” said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge. “With this



## One in Six

### Education Transforms Lives of Southern Sudanese Women

**JUBA, South Sudan/GENEVA (LWI)** – “If you have an education, you value your life,” says Mary Abuk Dow.

Only one in six women in South Sudan are fortunate enough to have an education and those who do, know their worth. Women like Dow are determined and have an imposing presence. You meet them often in South Sudan as well as in refugee camps outside the country and even further afield.

Dow’s confidence springs from a combination of education and the challenges that life has dealt her. When she was only eight years old, she fled, along with her mother, three brothers and a sister, from her home town of Panyagor in Jonglei State. Back then, as it is now, the town was caught up in inter-tribal conflict.

Her family started walking towards neighboring Kenya, often hiding in the bush along the way. They drifted across the country fleeing violence in one place and another.

Dow says that at one point, her mother became seriously ill, so she had to care for her younger brothers and sister.

The family mostly survived by eating and selling their cattle. Over time,



*Mary Abuk Dow counts herself lucky to be among the one in six South Sudanese women who have an education.*  
© LWF/Melany Markham

much of the herd was stolen, leaving Dow’s family with few resources.

Seeking stability and an education for their children after five years on the run, Dow’s parents headed to Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya.

Living in Kakuma transformed Dow’s life. Like many Southern Sudanese, she completed secondary school in the camp run by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and, 18 years after leaving her village, she returned

to Panyagor. She now works for the LWF not far from the village where she was born.

Women are better off in Kakuma, because they are supported by organizations like the LWF and are entitled to resources, says Dow. Back home they are not as lucky.

#### Years of Civil War

“When you look at South Sudan, it is the women who are suffering. Most women never go to school,” she says.

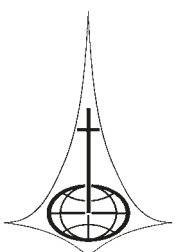
Dow says that men in the country have forgotten how women sustained families during the years of civil war. While their husbands were absent, they took care of the children. A woman might wait 20 years for her husband to return, only to learn that he had been killed.

Some women are beaten by their husbands, and if a woman refuses a marriage, her family might beat her. “Women have no right to refuse marriage,” says Dow.

She herself was married at the age of 19, but it was her education that made her life different to that of millions of other Southern Sudanese women.



*A young woman milks a cow at a cattle camp in Panyagor, South Sudan.*  
© LWF/Fredrick Nzwili





The main roles of many women in the community are to cook and collect firewood. But since becoming educated, Dow is aware of her intellectual capacities. “I know I can do whatever men do,” she says.

Although women in South Sudan are not protected, if they are empowered, they can speak up for their rights, something Dow is well aware of.

“I have a right to say no,” she says. “I know how to claim my rights. If a man says something that is not okay with me, I know how to say no, but [many other women] don’t know how to claim their rights [and] they have no resources to feed themselves or their children,” she says.

Dow’s husband is studying hundreds of kilometers away from where she lives with her mother and her youngest child. Although as one of

two women among some 30 staff in Panyagor Dow gets lonely, she says she has no complaints because her job allows her to support her family.

### Feminist Perspective

Her personal experience has given her a feminist perspective towards her work. She says that programs need to target women because communities will often elect only (male) chiefs and young men to participate.

Dow notes that women also need formal schooling and vocational training. “Farming groups would help women support their families with the food that they grow or they can sell it to earn money,” she says.

“Women have to be strong, because they are the ones who serve the community,” she notes. Although she has three

brothers who are working, she is the one who supports her mother and father.

Despite the situation of women in the world’s youngest nation, Dow is like most Southern Sudanese these days—she is hopeful. She hopes that in the future, education will give women in the country a stronger voice in society and more control over resources.

For her, education and gender equality are the keys to lasting peace.

“I hope that our community will change. I hope that people will understand peace. I hope that people will go to school, because people who go to school value their life and value peace. I hope peace in the future will be sustainable through education.”

*(Written for LWI by Melany Markham in Juba, South Sudan)*

6 March 2012

## Rural Women in Bangladesh Shine Light on Poverty

### LWF Program Supports Women’s Leadership Efforts

**DINAJPUR, Bangladesh/GENEVA (LWI)** – They call her the “shining star” in the village.

Sisilia Murmu is a talented young girl who had always dreamed of gaining an education and financial independence, but her family’s poverty kept her from attending high school in Dhanjoypur village, located in the Dinajpur district of northern Bangladesh.

Her parents are farmers, scratching out a living as daily laborers. Life is difficult for the indigenous Adibasi family that includes three other daughters and two sons.

However, thanks to Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), Murmu’s dream has come true. An associate program of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS), RDRS opened training centers named *Shonglap* (dialogue) for indigenous adolescent girls.

In the centers the girls are taught life skills and made aware of social issues. Murmu joined her local center and has attended regularly, performing well in different sessions. Seeing

her development and interest, RDRS helped get her readmitted to school and provided financial support.

Happy to get a chance to go to school again, Murmu started studying attentively. In 2010 she obtained her secondary school certificate. “I am very much happy about my Secondary School Certificate results,” she said recently. “I would like to

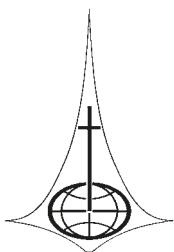
thank RDRS for providing support to continue my study.”

Murmu’s story embodies the theme for International Women’s Day 2012, “Empower Rural Women—End Poverty and Hunger.” Her education continues, and she hopes to train as a doctor.

In addition to her academic studies, Murmu has received training on cow and goat rearing, a skill which



Community leader Anna Rani with her four children © RDRS





she has turned into an income-generating activity. After nine months of rearing goats, she could give financial support to her parents.

Thanks to her training at the Shonglap center, Murmu also teaches her community about issues that have an impact on their daily lives, such as cleanliness, schooling, children's immunization and safe motherhood.

The center has brought new hope for the Murmu family and for the whole village—they are much more aware of sanitation and other preventative health measures. And it has given Sisilia Murmu a new name in the village—"shining star."



Ruby Biswas (left) teaching braille to visually impaired children in a rehabilitation center supported by RDRS in the northern district of Lalmonirhat. © RDRS

### Long Association with the LWF

One of Bangladesh's longest serving and largest non-governmental organizations, RDRS began as an LWF program in 1972 following Bangladesh's war of independence. It has been a DWS associate program since 1997.

RDRS challenges the causes and effects of poverty, ignorance and powerlessness, working to enable the rural poor, including their institutions, to achieve meaningful political, social and economic empowerment; democracy and gender equality; and a sustainable environment through individual and collective efforts.

RDRS development programs benefit more than 1.5 million of the poorest people in almost 17,000 groups and 262 federations in the northwest

regions of Bangladesh, including Rangpur and Dinajpur districts.

### Public Trust

While Anna Rani's association with RDRS has not given her a new name like Sisilia Murmu, it has helped give her a new identity.

The 45-year-old mother of four children lives a life of hardship in Balakondi village in Umormajid Union of Kurigram district. Her husband Feloram Das is a fisherman but they have few assets—a tiny patch of land, a small house, one sheep, six ducks and two hens.

But since she joined the RDRS group and became an active member of the Umormojid Union Federation, she plays an important role in the community.

Her popularity was proven in 2011, when she was elected to the Union Parishad (UP), the lowest tier of government, defeating her nearest rival by 1,721 votes.

"When it was first proposed [to] contest the UP polls, I was not courageous enough. But later the Federation encouraged me and gave me support," Rani said. "I felt that I might be a winner. I started campaigning for votes.

"Federation members and their families, vulnerable groups, community people gave enormous support to me and I won the election," she added.

Now she wants to keep the public trust she has gained by playing an uncompromising role in support of the rights of the poor.

*(By RDRS communications office.)*

8 March 2012

## Nepali Women Embrace Opportunity to Change Society

### LWF Partners on Women's Rights

**LALITPUR, Nepal/GENEVA (LWI)** – It was a shock for Manmaya Shrestha when her husband broke his legs in a farming accident 15 years ago in Nepal's rural Lalitpur district. Her family lost its only source of income.

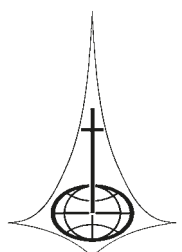
"I went to get some money from local merchants but they denied me as we were very poor and we did not have any source to pay back the loan.

Local shopkeepers even refused to provide me with one kilogram of rice on credit, so we slept without food for many days," Shrestha recalls.

Today, she is the head of a women's cooperative, an entrepreneur and a community leader. "People come to seek my advice to get loans from the cooperative or training on incense-making and I always provide support

to the poor and needy people, which gives me great satisfaction," she says.

What happened after her husband's accident involved both hard work and opportunity. Shrestha labored in other people's fields to give her family two meals a day. Then her husband got work in a garment factory so there was enough food to eat. However, they still had loans to





*Kaushila Chaudhary, a former bonded domestic laborer, advocates now for the rights of Nepali women.*  
© LWF/DWS Nepal

repay, so she started making liquor to sell in the local market.

Joining the group SOLVE Nepal in 2009 provided Shrestha with the opportunity to receive support in entrepreneurial development. SOLVE Nepal is a partner organization of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) program in Nepal.

Shrestha's involvement with SOLVE Nepal increased her awareness about activities related to women's rights and campaigns against domestic violence in a country where women are paid less than men for similar work, have few property rights and little access to the power structures.

Eventually she paid off her family's debts and began to put some savings aside. She is considering purchasing land, is growing vegetables, rearing goats and teaching budding entrepreneurs.

"My years of hard work helped me to repay the loan and I have been able to spend a dignified life in society," she says.

But Shrestha is not done yet. She is also back at school, trying to complete her education, even while putting aside money for her children's education.

"I realize that all poor women can change their lives as I did in the last 15 years if they receive opportunities," Shrestha maintains.



*In Kailali district, western Nepal, a freed Kamaiya (bonded laborer) woman trained by LWF Nepal works at her hair salon, which was traditionally perceived as a male enterprise.* © LWF/DWS Nepal

## Literacy Skills

This is a sentiment Kaushila Chaudhary understands well. Until she was 15 years old, she worked as a bonded domestic laborer (*Kamaiya*) in her landlord's home in Kailali district, a far western region of Nepal, without ever receiving any pay.

By the time she was 15, however, she was able to gain both literacy skills and other training through an LWF Nepal-run girls' school. After receiving schooling there she started a weaving business and the income from this venture helped lift her family out of bondage.

"We bought a cart and 300 m<sup>2</sup> of land in our village. We were able

to do it through the profit from the business," Chaudhary says.

From there, with the LWF's support, Chaudhary helped found a community-based organization that contributed significantly to the Nepali government declaring all *Kamaiyas* free. Still, she persisted, and formed the Freed *Kamaiya* Women's Group, to rehabilitate *Kamaiya* women. "Once they are rehabilitated, I will start working against violence against women," she declares.

## Banished to a Small Hut

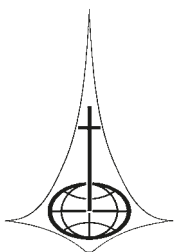
For Laxi Devi Saud of Sripur the courage to challenge the long practiced system of keeping women apart from

the community during menstruation came from Ekta Samaj, a human rights group and partner of LWF Nepal.

Saud, now a member of the Namuna Women's Group, recalls what it was like 16 years ago when she was banished to the *Kunda*, a small hut built on the outskirts of her village to keep women during their menstruation.

"It was windy and was blowing so hard that it felt like it would sweep [away] me and my small baby. The next day I could see scattered tree branches all around the farm and damaged houses in the village," Saud says.

In those days the practice was never questioned, she adds. Today, the tradition is not followed and menstru-





ating women sleep in a specified place in their homes, which gains them a sense of protection and freedom.

“When we learned that it is our human right to be protected and live in a safer place, we changed the system,” she concludes.

LWF humanitarian work in Nepal began in 1984, at the time focusing on water resources and women’s development programs. The current engagement at community level includes emergency response and disaster risk management; sustainable

livelihood for economic and social empowerment; and peace, reconciliation and human rights issues.

(By DWS Nepal.)

8 March 2012

## Lutheran Dalit Feminist Pastor Challenges Patriarchal Systems

### Anderson-Rajkumar: “Support for the Underprivileged Is but a Form of Worship”

**CHENNAI, India/GENEVA (LWI)** – As Rev. Dr Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar recounts moments in her life that have shaped what she is today, her mind is already occupied—preparing for next week’s national program, presentations for national or international conferences, Lenten sermons, supervising four of her students’ theses, and all this along with helping her 11-year-old daughter Davina with her homework and exams.

She attributes her ability to balance her multiple roles—ordained minister in the Arcot Lutheran Church (ALC), Dean of Doctoral Studies and Research Programmes at the United Theological College (UTC), Dalit rights activist, feminist theologian—efficiently in a patriarchal context to her “faith in the Word of God” that “has given the inner strength to emerge as a person with self-confidence.”

“Women are in no way inferior to men. It could be a healthy and harmonious relationship between women and men—at home, in church and in society—when they are ready to recognize in each other the God-given potential of being loved and loving human beings,” says Anderson-Rajkumar.

She sees Genesis 1: 26-27 as not “mere” verses but as “a core tenet of faith that binds the whole humanity together (...) endowed with equal worth and dignity before God—regardless of race, sex, gender, creed, color or caste.”

“If this verse has given me a reason to believe that all are equal before God,” she asserts, “I will not give any power to any ideology, however long it has survived in this world, to

replace, reject or deny this gift of utter common worth as a human being,” she says.

This assertive personality took time in the shaping. During her interview for admission into the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) course at UTC in 1983, she evoked laughter when she replied to the question about what she would do after completing her BD since there was no women’s ordination in her church. “Perhaps return to teach at the college,” she said.

She was the only woman in a divinity class of 21 students, but says that she hardly felt any difference with her male classmates. “I was quite comfortable being ‘one of the boys’ and competed with them in academics and extra-curricular activities.”

“Though theology was a male bastion, and women’s ordination was unheard of, especially in the Lutheran church, my father’s faith inspired and led all [of us]

eight children into the field of theology and ministry,” she comments.

#### Eye-opener

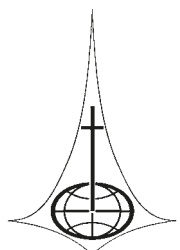
After completing the BD course at the top of her class, Anderson-Rajkumar applied for a job in her former church, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC). She was told that she could work as a “women’s worker” but without a salary. Two of her (male) classmates, however, were accepted immediately and placed on the church roster. She recalls that moment as an “eye-opener.”

“I realized it does not matter how academically excellent you are, you have no place in the church if you are a woman.”

This eye-opener kindled her “fire” of feminism. She pursued a Master’s of Theology at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, and then



Rev. Dr. Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar leads worship at the All Saints Church in Bangalore, India.  
© UELCI/C. Anirudh





proceeded to teaching Theology and Ethics at the Serampore College in West Bengal. After securing a Doctor of Theology in Systematic Christian Theology, she joined UTC as a faculty member, where she is a professor of Feminist Theology and Hermeneutics.

## Rightful Place to Women

Her classes challenge students to re-read the Bible through feminist lenses. In one exercise, she asks her students to read aloud 1 Corinthians 15: 3-5. Students often are surprised that Paul ascribes the first witness to the risen Lord Jesus to Peter and that Mary Magdalene is missing from the text.

“What happened to her? Can we ignore this as something unimportant?” she pushes her class. When the students are made to think long and hard in this way, this is how “learning begins” to realize and assert women’s rightful place in the Bible, church and society, says Anderson-Rajkumar.

The theologian had a long wait before her desire to serve the larger Lutheran communion was realized.

Ordination came only in 2006, some 20 years after completing her theological education, when the board of the ALC, one of the 12 member churches of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UEL-CI), opened its doors for Anderson-Rajkumar to join the church ministry.

In the same year, she was elected as the first woman vice-president of UELCI after the Lutheran communion in India made a constitutional amendment to allow women’s participation in governance.

As an ordained minister, she even solemnizes weddings as a feminist. “Usually, the bride is given to the



Members of a women’s group in Uttar Mundapara village, West Bengal, India, meet to discuss community development activities. © LWSIT

groom in marriage by her father. In my church, I insist that both parents do the same, together.”

Anderson-Rajkumar encourages women to step up and invites mothers—especially widows—who tend to shy away from such ceremonies, and they have started coming forth to participate. “This is how it should always have been,” she adds.

The ALC pastor identifies herself as a Dalit feminist, and her sermons address discrimination against Dalits, *adivasis* (tribals), women and the underprivileged in general. “To support their struggles is but a form of worship.”

## A Strong Message

However, she feels sad and even pained when she sees the intensity of patriarchal structures, power and practice at work within the church. “How can the Church, the Body of Christ—which should take a lead in the world to be a gender-just com-

munity—turn against members of its own body, and deny them their rightful value, human dignity and identity within the Church?”

Anderson-Rajkumar challenges women: “Anger, sadness or even frustration with the system of patriarchy or corruption cannot be the last word because our faith is grounded in a God of justice and love.

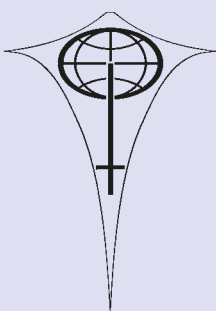
“We can turn these emotions, experiences and tears into ingredients of faith for struggle. Such a faith can become a power that can dislodge the tombstone of patriarchy that stifles life and release in us, the energy, spirit and power of Resurrection,” she affirms.

(UELCI communications secretary Timothy Melvyn interviewed Rev. Anderson-Rajkumar.)

Read more about women and the LWF at:

[www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/women](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/tag/women)

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