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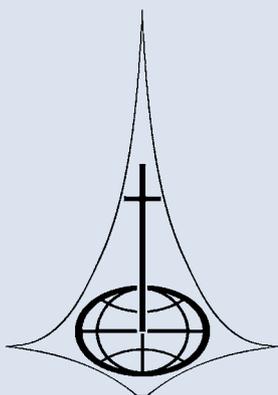
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Gaining New Glimpses of Meaning from the Psalms



Participants in the Eisenach consultation included (left) Dr Jutta Hausmann from Hungary, and Dr Corinna Körting from Germany. © LWF/I. Benesch

Theologians Meet for Second LWF Hermeneutics Consultation

EISENACH, Germany/GENEVA, (LWI) – As theologians from 20 countries gathered to gain new understandings of the Psalms for the 21st century, they were reminded of the relevance of the ancient biblical writings to situations of contemporary violence.

“Singing the Songs of the Lord: Contemporary Interpretations of the Psalms from Lutheran Perspectives,” was the theme of the 21-27 March consultation held in Eisenach, Germany, jointly hosted by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) and the University of Jena.

The 35 theologians participating in the meeting teach at various universities, and represent Lutheran and other churches. The consultation was the second in a series that explores ways of reading the Bible today within the Lutheran communion, and

in preparation for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The inaugural hermeneutics conference in 2011 focused on transformative readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran perspective.

Leading a morning worship service, Rev. Dr Virgil László of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary expressed the hope that “through prayerful, academically rigorous explorations of interpreting the Psalms we may gain some new glimpses of meaning for our life and faith, not only as individual Christians but as a communion of churches.”

Rev. Dr Monica Melanchthon, a professor at the Center for Theology and Ministry in Parkville, Australia, called for

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LWF President Younan Says Arms Trade Treaty Is an Important Tool for Non-Violent Resolution of Conflicts

The first-ever global Arms Trade Treaty will be an important tool for peaceful and non-violent resolution of conflicts, with justice and respect for the dignity and rights of every person, says Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

In a 12 April statement welcoming the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty by the United Nations General Assembly on 2 April, Younan emphasized, “Our world needs more justice and human rights, not more guns. The Arms Trade Treaty will help make that possible.”

Younan who is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, called upon the LWF member churches to urge their respective governments “to quickly sign and ratify” the treaty, which he said is “an important tool toward reducing armed violence in our world.”

The LWF president expressed gratitude and support to the World Council of Churches for its leading role in the years-long

advocacy seeking to regulate the international arms trade and on other disarmament issues. “This has been a sterling example of international ecumenical advocacy, where churches have been able to engage at the local, national and international level, bringing the painful stories of local communities to the global stage,” he said.

According to the Control Arms coalition of civil society organizations, the Arms Trade Treaty creates binding obligations for governments to ensure that weapons will not be used for human rights abuses, terrorism, transnational organized crime or violations of humanitarian law. The treaty will open for signature on 3 June 2013.

The full text of the statement by LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/201304_Arms_Trade_Treaty_Statement_by_LWF_President.pdf

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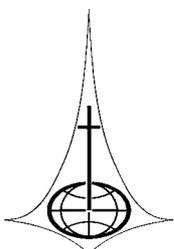
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“Taking One Small Step toward Great Change”

Training in Latin America Equips Lutheran Youth for Advocacy on Climate Justice

MANAGUA, Nicaragua/GENEVA (LWI) – Youth delegates to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) regional meeting for churches in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) expressed their strong support for the LAC churches’ commitment to advocacy and environmental care initiatives that address climate change.

The 16 youth participated in an LWF-led training on advocacy and climate justice, 13-15 April, prior to the Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Conferencia de Liderazgo-COL) hosted by the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope in the capital Managua. The training by LWF Youth included an exposure visit to the “Green Project” in rural Nicaragua, a farm learning center that grows coffee and fruit trees utilizing organic fertilizers.

The local Lutheran church supports the center where community members can learn about irrigation, family gardens, water management and alternative farming, as well as food security, deforestation and water contamination.

In the project visit, some 40 Nicaraguan youth, who had traveled five hours to meet the LAC youth delegates, shared their experiences.

Fabian Bello, a delegate from Colombia, commended the Nicaraguan Lutheran church for its significant support to the “Green Project” and the encounter with the local youth. “It is a beautiful union that we should encourage in other churches around the world,” he added.

Earlier at the advocacy and climate justice training, Maura Ramos from El Salvador led the opening worship, urging the delegates to dedicate their lives to the church.

Helping Congregations

Participants drawn from 13 LWF member churches in the LAC region spoke of their local involvement in



At the “Green Project,” the LAC and Nicaraguan youth get ready to become artistic advocates for the environment. © LWF/Chelsea Macek

the fight against climate change, explaining how they help their home congregations learn more about protecting the environment. Projects included recycling units, training on how to mitigate the effects of natural disasters and selling recycled crafts.

“What we are doing is taking one small step toward great change,” said Mexican youth leader Luis Velázquez, who is advocating for recycling in his local community.

Theology student Danielle Dokman from Suriname noted that even as climate change leads to new diseases, disappearing forests and beaches, and worsening poverty, it is difficult to get people in the region to take notice. As Lutherans, it is important to define the relationship between the Creator and creation, while remembering that Christians are co-partners with God, she reflected.

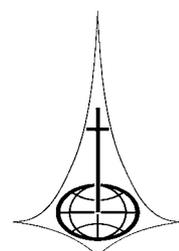
Nahún Stütz from Argentina and Raquel Kleber from Brazil presented “Climate Change—A Challenge to Our Churches,” the international report developed by young delegates who attended the COP18 climate change negotiations as LWF representatives. The report will be presented to the LWF Council in June.

Rev. Ángel Furlan, former president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) in Argentina, spoke on how to implement advocacy efforts in local communities. “When I look into the faces of these young people I see so much potential here,” said Furlan. “They are already making changes.”

Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, LWF area secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, advised the youth leaders to take advantage of the opportunity to meet presidents, bishops and pastors from the different LWF member churches in the region. She emphasized that youth’s voice should be heard in all aspects of LWF’s work.

Soliette Lopez of Nicaragua facilitated a discussion on social networking in church youth work, and a dialogue was held to discuss how to improve such sharing and what methods of communication would work best for the youth.

Caroline Richter, secretary for LWF Youth, presented the LWF youth blog as a platform that young leaders can utilize to share their stories, and she trained the youth on how to start blogging in their networks. She stressed the importance of exchanging ideas face-to-face as



well as continuing to network in the region and globally.

During the visit to the “Green Project,” the LAC and Nicaraguan youth jointly painted a mural rep-

resenting the commitment by youth leaders and churches to climate change advocacy, and a colorful banner on the youth meeting. When the youth delegates delivered their mes-

sage to the COL church leaders on 18 April, they also presented the banner on advocacy and climate justice.

(By Chelsea Macek, communications consultant for the LWF COL meeting.)

Gaining New Glimpses of Meaning from the Psalms

Continued from p. 1

the urgency for justice found in the Psalms to be brought to the forefront. The lament Psalms are about protest, revenge, anger and a cry for justice emanating from experiences of pain, injustice, suffering, abandonment and rejection, said the Indian theologian.

Melanchthon introduced Psalm 140—which begins, “Deliver me, O Lord, from evil doers; protect me from those who are violent”—as a cry for justice and a song of hope, which remains relevant today in the context of the recent rapes of women in India, she said.

Suffering in the World

Dr Craig R. Koester, professor at Luther Seminary in St Paul, Minnesota, USA, noted that the Psalms show God’s power revealed in contexts where it might seem God is absent, such as in situations of poverty, injustice, disease and conflict, secularization and indifference.

Psalm 22, which starts, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” helps inform the Gospel of John, Koester added. “The most important thing about the starting point in the Gospel of John is the reality and brutality of Jesus’ suffering. Given the reality and brutality of his suffering, how can anyone affirm that God is present and active in the world? John tries to disclose that God is present and active in the world.”

Brazilian theologian Rev. Dr Vitor Westhelle, teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA, said the question was about the relevance of this research [into the

Psalms] for the suffering in the world. “For Luther, the suffering of the world is essentially the same as the suffering of Christ,” Westhelle said.

Luther’s way of interpreting the Psalms was to insist on the interpretation of their literal form, relate them to Christ and to emphasize their life-giving spirit, said Rev. Dr

ways, interpreted in the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

While Dr Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr of Friedrich-Schiller University in Jena reminded the participants that there was no single way of reading biblical texts such as the Psalms, Roman Catholic theologian Dr Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, University



*Rev. Bulti Fayissa-Bulke (Ethiopia) and Dr Lubomir Batka
© LWF/L. Benesch*

Hans-Peter Grosshans, a professor at the University of Münster, Germany.

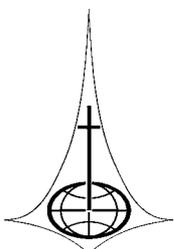
For Luther, Grosshans continued, “the life-giving power is the spirit of the texts that is the divine spirit.” Thus, he concluded that “naming the whole process of reading, listening and understanding aims ... at a verification of the biblical texts in the life of those who try to understand [them].”

Dr Annie Hentschel of Goethe University in Frankfurt addressed the way in which the writer of Hebrews used the Psalms, illustrating how the Old Testament texts can speak in new

of Bonn, suggested that Protestant theologians cannot work without the wisdom of ecumenical colleagues.

Interpretation and Practices

The participants from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America, engaged in plenary and small group discussions, informal gatherings, worship and a pilgrimage to Wartburg Castle, where Luther translated the New Testament during his exile in Eisenach in 1521.



Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, study secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice at LWF/DTPW, and coordinator of the hermeneutics process, said the Psalms' presentations had "raised some questions about the relationship between liturgical practice and biblical interpretation.

"This is an interesting issue to look at because it can help us to

move from theological interpretation to practices," Mtata said. "It is not enough for us to just describe the situation but we must develop some interpretative resources."

A collection of texts from the conference will be published later in 2013. Presentations from the 2011 hermeneutics consultation are available in the publication *You have*

the Words of Eternal Life, produced in the LWF Documentation series. For more information please contact Iris Benesch ijb@lutheranworld.org

(Rev. Dr Robin Steinke, Dean of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, USA, a participant at the LWF hermeneutics consultation, contributed to this article.)

Walking as Partners in the Gospel

Mekong Mission Forum Says Biblical Foundation Key to Identity

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia/GENEVA (LWI) – Lutheran churches in Asia's Mekong Delta are developing a stronger identity by strengthening the biblical and theological basis for diaconal and church ministries, participants in the annual Mekong Mission Forum (MMF) said.

Meeting 4-7 April in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 45 participants representing 16 member churches and mission partners discussed ways to revitalize the theological foundation of MMF's work and enhance Lutheran identity in the region.

The meeting was jointly hosted by The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development (DMD) Asia desk and the MMF, a consortium of Lutheran

churches and partners from Europe, the United States, Asia and Australia and the emerging churches of the Mekong area.

The MMF member churches and its related organizations collaborate through joint activities regionally. Through four days of reflection, participants gained insight into the "inspiring" ministries of sister churches.

"The dependence on the leading of the Spirit of God and the Word of God in all aspects of life and ministries of the emerging churches in the region is inspiring and encouraging and a witness to each of the partner churches," said Glenice Hartwich, program officer for the Lutheran Church of Australia Board for Mission.

"What a privilege we have to walk as partners in the gospel."

The MMF is more than just a network of Lutherans, added Rev. Dr Risto Jukko, director of the Office for Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

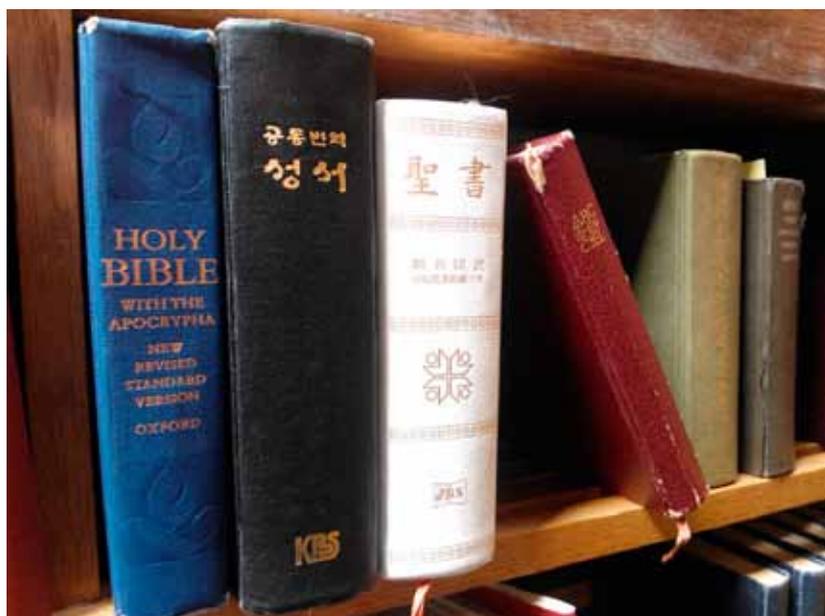
Willingness to Share Resources

"The way the MMF has started its activities in Cambodia, with the common willingness to share resources and proclaim the liberating and empowering message of Jesus Christ in word and deed, in proclamation and diakonia, can serve as a model to all churches in Asia.

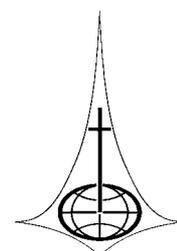
"The mission initiatives of the MMF in Cambodia are Asian, which shows how mission is today from everywhere to everywhere. Admittedly, Western churches still have a supporting role in mission in Asia, where Asians themselves know better how to do mission work," Jukko said.

Rev. Juanito Basalong of the Eternal Life Lutheran Church in Cambodia said the meeting underscored the need to make biblical teaching foundational for programs of the Lutheran churches in the region.

"There is a strong commitment to proclaim and convey the gospel and the person of God through diakonia so that member churches are not seen as NGOs [non-governmental organizations] but as churches," Basalong concluded.



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FEATURES & THEMES

World Water Day 2013

Timely Delivery of Safe Water through LWF's Cooperation with Local Communities

GENEVA (LWI) – “Water Cooperation” was the theme for this year’s World Water Day, marked globally on 22 March.

For The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), World Water Day 2013 was an opportunity to highlight how decades of collaboration with local and international partners facilitate the timely delivery of safe drinking water to people caught up in conflict and weather-related disasters across the world.

A short video at youtu.be/iLFsFqvjYHw demonstrated how the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) supports local communities in making better use of available water resources, with a goal to improving livelihoods and ensuring a life with dignity.

The United Nations has dedicated 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the day set aside to focus on the importance of fresh water. According to UN sources, an estimated 780 million people globally do not have access to clean drinking water and nearly 2.5 billion lack adequate sanitation.



LWF collaborates with local communities to provide safe water for vulnerable groups in Ethiopia, Nepal and South Sudan.

Supporting Refugees and Pastoralists in Ethiopia

As one of the largest global implementing partners of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), LWF is involved in caring for more than 200,000 Somali refugees in seven camps inside Ethiopia. At the Dollo Ado refugee camps, the LWF country program provides water, hygiene and sanitation to more than 37,000 Somali refugees and 8,000 members of the hosting community. Boreholes are the main sources of water supply, powered by diesel generators and emerging pumping technologies using solar energy.

Elsewhere in the country where the LWF program has been present

since 1971, integrated community development projects in arid and semi-arid areas work against the migration of pastoralists by supplying water to people and their livestock. In the northeastern district of Jijiga, local residents are actively involved in the construction of improved traditional water storage ponds (*birkas*) to harvest run-off water during rains, securing water for use when the dry season sets in. Between 2009 and 2012, LWF Ethiopia and communities in the district built 12 *birkas*, directly benefiting some 80,000 pastoralists. The supply of clean water to pastoralists has contributed to a significant decline in migration to neighboring regions, and reduced the incidence of conflicts between ethnic groups over grazing grounds and watering points.

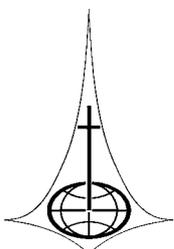
South Sudan: Small-Scale Farming and Fishing

Through the DWS country program in South Sudan, the LWF continues to support reconstruction efforts in the newly independent country, recovering from decades of conflict with Sudan. Over 200,000 people including returnees from Sudan and from refugee camps in other neighboring countries directly benefit from community based involvement in the delivery of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, in providing education, and promoting peace building and food security initiatives.

During the rainy season, huge populations in low-lying parts of South Sudan are especially vulnerable to flooding when the River Nile banks burst. Unusually heavy rainfall in the June to September 2012 period affected an estimated 220,000 people in Jonglei State alone, destroying



A splash of fresh water from a newly constructed borehole at Teferi Ber refugee camp, Ethiopia.
© LWF/R. Bueno De Faria



crops, houses and basic infrastructure including roads. Thanks to collaboration between the LWF and local residents in 2011 and 2012, it was possible to repair a 34-kilometer dyke originally constructed by the government in the early 1980s to mitigate the effects of heavy rainfall and provide alternative livelihoods such as fishing.

In Twic East and Duk counties in Jonglei, around 33,000 returnees currently receive LWF's support towards small-scale farming and fishing.

Irrigation Improves Livelihoods in Nepal

In Nepal, where the LWF country program has been supporting refugees from Bhutan since 1991, provision of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, and creating opportunities to make a living are major components of LWF's cooperation with the host communities and refugees.

Although the Bhutanese refugee population declined from 110,000 in 2006 to around 54,000 in December 2012 due to large-scale departure



Irrigation improves food security for 70,000 refugees and host communities in Nepal.
© LWF/DWS Nepal

for third-country resettlements, access to water and livelihood support remain key priorities. LWF Nepal has recently constructed a reinforced concrete water tank with a capacity of 100,000 liters at the Beldangi refugee camp in eastern Nepal.

Since 2010, LWF Nepal has also been providing assistance to more than 13,300 Tibetan refugees and

over 2,000 host community members in different locations across the country. Support to both communities includes construction of improved irrigation methods to enhance livelihood opportunities.

(The LWF/DWS country programs in Ethiopia, Nepal and South Sudan contributed to this article.)

Winterization Kits Make Camp Life "More Bearable" for Syrian Refugees

LWF's Gratitude for Generous Support from Churches and Partners

Z'A'TRI, Jordan/GENEVA (LWI) – "We received the shelters during the rains, but before the snowfall. Our first night in the prefabricated shelter was the first night we felt safe and warm in Za'atri refugee camp," Omm Yaser recalls, with tears welling up in her eyes.

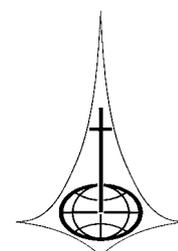
Thanks to humanitarian support from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and other organizations collaborating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the family of the 55-year-old mother and grandmother was protected from freezing and cold temperatures between December and March. They can sit together in the

family's "winterized room," which is connected to the main prefabricated shelter attached to another four shelters, currently home to the household of more than 20 people.

Yaser's family is among the 158,000 Syrians who were living at the Za'atri refugee camp in northern Jordan by mid-March. After two years of intensifying conflict at home, more than 1.2 million Syrian refugees are registered or awaiting registration in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt, with new arrivals estimated at around 8,000 a day, according to the UNHCR. Another 3.6 million are displaced internally, the UN refugee agency says.

Through a program coordinated by its Department for World Service (DWS), the LWF has been providing relief and support for refugees at Za'atri camp in collaboration with the Jordanian government since August 2012. This included setting up 270 prefabricated shelters; equipping 2,200 tents each with winterization kits, cooking gas cylinders and an open porch; and distributing more than 33,000 sets of winter clothing.

An ACT appeal for financial support toward Syrian refugees had realized USD 1.96 million (over EUR 1.5 million) from LWF partners by the end of last year. An additional EUR 90,000 was received from one back





Children in the Za'atri refugee camp play outside their newly installed winterized shelter.
© A. G. Riisnes/NCA

donor, the Czech Republic, while congregations of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) gave more than EUR 10,000.

The ECCB is one of the two LWF member churches in the Czech Republic. It has 115,000 members organized in more than 250 congregations.

In a letter mid-March to Rev. Joel Ruml, head of the Czech church, DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler thanked the ECCB for its first-time contribution towards LWF's work among Syrian refugees. "Your support is also a beautiful expression of the international solidarity that has characterized the work of LWF World Service since its very beginnings," Hitzler wrote.

The LWF partners' response has contributed to making the situation for especially women and children living in Za'atri camp "a little more bearable" during the harsh winter months, Hitzler said. Still, additional support will be required to respond

to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Syria, characterized not only by widespread fighting and violence, but also by the breakdown of public order and loss of livelihoods for large sections of the population, he added.

Back at Za'atri camp, Yasser's 30-year-old son Amjad is happy that the children have an alternative safe

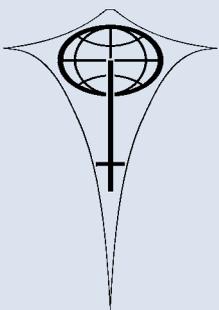
playing ground, thanks to LWF's support. "We were always worried about the kids playing outside. The only outdoor spaces are basically in the street where camp vehicles are operating, making it dangerous for them to play. When we received the six prefabricated shelters, we arranged them to make an inner courtyard which became a safe playground for the children," he explains.

LWF member churches contributing to the Syrian refugee crisis appeal issued under ACT Alliance also include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Church of Sweden, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany). Support also came from the German Protestant aid agency Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, DanChurchAid and United Church of Canada. The related agencies received government funding from Denmark's international development agency DANIDA and the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

(LWF Jordan program staff contributed to this article.)



Boys run amid the tents in the Za'atri refugee camp.
© Paul Jeffrey



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