

ASIA LUTHERAN NEWS

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NEW YEAR GREETINGS FROM THE LWF GENERAL SECRETARY

Dear friends,

As we enter the New Year 2004 our thoughts are filled with many concerns. Some of these concerns are personal - for ourselves and for our families and relatives. Through our closest network we know how interdependent we are as human beings.

Other concerns relate to our countries and the world we live in. The lack of peace today is a growing preoccupation. In addition to the armed conflicts and other forms of violence that continue, and increase, it seems that there is a deepening and widespread sense of unease, alienation and personal insecurity - also for many who previously felt secure and comfortable.

Our concerns being many, we are still encouraged by the message of the Bible not to lose heart. On the occasion of the birth of John the Baptizer, his father Zechariah prophesied:

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:78-79).

May these words, and the faith that God has inspired in us, guide us and give us hope in the year that we have now entered into.

"For the Healing of the World," the theme of the LWF Tenth Assembly, which met in July 2003 in Winnipeg, Canada, reflects the core of our faith. It recognizes a need for healing that is felt as sharply now as at any time in human history. The Message adopted by the Assembly speaks to this need in many different ways. It reminds us that our hope in the midst of sin and suffering is that God heals us. It witnesses to the fact that the justifying gift of God - the gift of Jesus Christ - transforms us in faith, and gives hope and healing for the whole world.

In our continuing exploration of what it really means to be a communion of churches, there are powerful resources for healing. The participants in the Tenth Assembly gave thanks to God that our communion is blessed - not burdened - with diversity. They committed themselves and called on

the LWF member churches to "receive one another's differences as gifts," and to "respond to situations of injustice in other parts of the communion." They acknowledged that living in communion entails mutual accountability for the effects that our actions have, or can have, on others. The Assembly also made it clear that we are not a Lutheran communion by ourselves, but are fully integrated in the worldwide communion of the universal church and the whole human family.

We are called to participate in God's mission - a mission that is even wider than the bounds of the church itself. Churches must themselves be transformed, therefore, in order to become God's instruments of transformation in multi-faith contexts. Dialogue with people of other faiths is an essential form of ministry in a religiously diverse world - especially in these times of increasing religious extremism.

As the Assembly noted, in today's world, religions are too often used by political forces to divide people and to fuel conflict. It is therefore an urgent missionary task in the New Year that we pursue justice and reconciliation with people of other faiths. This task must be given high priority in our international work, and in the life of our churches. But it must also be given high priority in our own lives, as we relate to neighbors and people around us.

For peace to be built, parallel efforts must be made at different levels - internationally, regionally and locally. The task involves all of us. It is God's will to "guide our feet into the way of peace."

May all we do and engage in this year have the purpose of peace building in it, in one way or another. May we learn to reach out to others in new ways. May we learn to understand each other better. May we learn to appreciate differences. And - more than anything else - may we learn to love one another, as God has loved us.

Let us in God's grace pray and work for a good New Year 2004.

Dr. Ishmael Noko



Dr. Ishmael Noko

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Let's Make Our Dreams Come True

Learning from Students and Church Members

Since leaving the Lutheran Hour Ministries in April 2003, I have been the headmaster of the Holy Hope Lutheran Junior and Senior High School in Hanno City, Japan. The first thing I had to decide as the new headmaster was on the year's catchphrase: "Let's Make Our Dreams Come True!"

Here in Japan, we really need to dream, especially churches and church organizations like our school. For more than 150 years, Christians in Japan have been a minority in the society. Gradually, even unconsciously, our hopes and dreams have also become very small. In Japan, our school is medium-sized with 1200 students and almost 90 teachers. Unfortunately, the declining birth rate and decade long economic recession have hit private schools very hard, including ours. Now we need new dreams and visions.

For new visions or dreams, we need words to express ourselves: simple and clear words. Like in the Biblical age, without words, we cannot survive. Consider the following words, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). What appropriate words the Bible uses to speak to our situation!

Besides words, the clarification of our mission targets is the next element that needs to be looked

into. To whom do we proclaim our words? For church-run schools like ours, do we serve the people who do not yet know Jesus? For us the question is whether we can serve our students by providing them with quality education. The timing was marvelous when in year 2002, the Japanese government require each school to implement a self-evaluation system and to disclose its results to the public.

Several of our teachers have already asked their student for an evaluation on their teaching. When asked why they were doing this, they replied that the information from students are vital in improving their teaching skills, which will in turn improve the student's efficiency in learning. They had shown that they are not afraid to change in order to pursue excellence! While we have been too worried about maintaining the status quo, society has already changed.

Dreams, words, and evaluation. We also need tools to make our dreams come true. These are plans and strategies. It is interesting to note that several prefecture school boards in Tokyo, Osaka, and others have initiated the School Management Plan. Through this plan, the boards will develop numerical targets along with both short and middle term strategies for each school. As a result, some schools have set target percentage scores on stan-



Takashi

dardized tests as well as determined the number of students that would like to enter universities for a one to three year period. The schools are then requested to make their plans known to the public.

This gives us many helpful suggestions and ideas. If secular schools are carrying out these practical strategies, why can't we? We need the courage to cope with these new trends through our faith in the Almighty God.

Let us rely on Him and His Words as we show our Light to the world.

*Takashi Yuguchi
Headmaster of Seibo Gakuen
Junior and Senior High School,
Japan
ALN Editorial Member*

A WAKE-UP CALL

The Asia Church Leadership Consultation on HIV/AIDS

"All of us are HIV positive unless tested negative!" This is the slogan taken by the South Africans in their attempt to de-stigmatized the many who are living with the virus in Africa. "Do not wait till tomorrow (to take action) ... for tomorrow may never come" was another wakening message from our African counterparts who were present to share their experiences.

This Asia Church Leadership Consultation on HIV/AIDS, originally scheduled for October, encountered several obstacles but was finally held in December 1-4, 2003 at Batam island, Indonesia. About 85 participants were present out of the 130 expected participants mainly due to visa complications. The group includes bishops, church leaders, women and youth representatives, members of the United Evangelical Mission, 'AIDS survivors', ecumenical guests, a bishop from Africa and youth representatives from Africa and Latin America, government officials, medical experts and resource persons.

This is the third HIV/AIDS Consultation organized by the LWF for member churches. The first was in Nairobi, May 2-6, 2002 for member churches in the African region. The second in



Christine Mangale from Kenya sharing on the situation back home



Sharing of life experiences by Ms. Christine Wahyuni (c) with Dr. Emmy Shartian (left), & Bishop Hutauruk (HKBP-right)

©Jaap Schep

March 2003 for the Latin America and Caribbean Region.

For the Asian church leaders, this is the first time they had gathered to openly discuss and express emerging and alarming concerns on the pandemic. The statistics and strong messages by doctors and experts, the field visitation, experiences by different groups and regions hit the participants hard over the severity of the fast-spreading pandemic in Asia and the rest of the world. The sharing of life experiences by several people with a positive HIV status (positively called 'survivors' of the virus) also opened our eyes to confront our own prejudices and challenged our present practice of being church!

The debate over the use of condoms, myths about the virus and its cure, discussions, deliberations, remembering those who had died of the virus, prayers, etc. were all part of the intensive four-day's program.

These experiences have led us to profess a covenant of life that encompasses theology, biblical ethics, pastoral care, mission and diakonia, religious and socio-cultural barriers, edu-

cation and prevention, economic globalization, and cooperation and networking. Indeed, HIV/AIDS is not only a health problem but it also encompasses spiritual, socio-political-economic issues and challenges.

Through it all we were able to realize the possible role of the churches in addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The youth message during one of the evening devotions was very clear. They showed a poster saying: "In Asia there are "only" 8 million people living with HIV/AIDS". "That's fine" the poster continued, suggesting that we have an attitude that does not recognize the threat. It indicates that we are still in a state of denial.

It is expected that in the next decade the impact of HIV/AIDS in Asia may be even more catastrophic than is presently seen in Africa.

A wake up call to Asia to do something about the pandemic before it's too late! May the Lord help and empower us to act on our commitments!

Please contact the ROAS for a copy of the Statement of Commitment on HIV/AIDS - Ed.

Lutherans among the Himalayan States

Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States (ELCITHS)

The Lutheran churches in Assam and Manipur (India) have existed for a long time and for two decades had repeatedly applied for membership in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI). After serious thoughts and discussions, a working Committee was established to explore the possibilities with the head and representatives of:

Assam Evangelical Lutheran Church - Assam (AELC [A])
 Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church - Assam (BELC)
 Eastern Evangelical Lutheran Church - Manipur (EELC)
 Zomi Christian Church - Manipur (ELCC)
 (Jou Christian Association)

With many series of meetings and visits to meet with leaders and observed the activities of the congregations, reports were submitted during the 24th Triennial Conference of UELCI 1998 where a proposal was made to encourage all four churches to form into one United Church and to function as one Church for a period of 3 years in order to study the Churches status and progress closely before proposing for full recognition.

Meanwhile a separate Constitution was also written where a suitable name was found to encourage other small churches in the north-east to join as "Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States - (ELCITHS)". The General Assembly of ELCITHS convened and elected new Office bearers and also the presiding Bishop. During the 25th Triennial Conference and Festival of Faith in Novem-



Tita & Sally with several Church leaders from the ELCITHS

©ELCITHS

ber 2002 all the four churches was received into the UELCI as ONE church under the name Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States. The consecration of Rev. Godwin Nag as Bishop of ELCITHS was also declared on February 16, 2003 at Jiaghabhoru, Assam. The present officers of the ELCITHS are:

Rt. Rev. Godwin Nag	- Bishop
Rev. Ms. K. Basumatary	- Secretary
Rev. V. Hangminthan	- Treasurer
Rev. Goukhenpau Tunglut	- Vice President

Reported for ELCITHS
 Rev. A. G. Augustine Jeyakumar
 Executive Secretary,
 LWF National Committee in India

South-South Co-operation

The Philippines sent missionary couple to Papua New Guinea

On December 10, 2003, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP) sent off the Rev. Gaudencio Cruz and his wife, Dr. Minerva A. Cruz, as missionaries to Madang, Papua New Guinea. Rev. Cruz will serve as associate pastor in an English speaking Lutheran congregation in Madang while Dr. Minerva Cruz will serve as a medical doctor in a nearby Lutheran rural hospital in Yagum.

This mission endeavor is a concrete way of implementing the "South-South Exchange Program" of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It is made possible through the partnership of the LCP, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Rev. Benjamin, LCP



©LCP

LCA Fourteenth General Convention of Synod

The proposal by the General Church Council to apply for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) during the LCA's fourteenth Convention had triggered a 'long and exhaustive debate'.

The Lutheran Church of Australia, LWF associate member since 1994, had its fourteenth General Convention at Stanwell Tops NSW from 11-16 October 2003. The theme of the Convention was taken from Romans 10:14: "How are they to hear". Their special guest to the Convention, the Rev. Dr. Thu En Yu, principal of Sabah Theological Seminary (Malaysia), preached on Matthew 10 about the rich young man during the combined Sunday worship on the 12th. The LCA has a membership of 94,000 and that Sunday more than six hundred delegates and visitors communed together to complete the constituting of Convention as the Body of Christ.

During the Convention, the Rev. Mike Semmler and Dr. David Stolz were re-elected to the positions of President and Vice-president of LCA respectively. Other members of their General Church Council (GCC) include Ted King, Norma Koehne, John Paech, Michelle Shepherd, Presidents Robert Voigt, Lionel Otto, Tim Jaensch, Steen Olsen, David Spanagel, John Henderson and Noel Volk.

Among the many matters discussed and approved by the synod was a covenant between the Anglican Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia. This was the result of 30 years of dialogue where the covenant provides for each church to 'invite and welcome members of the other church in a particular locality to share in Holy Communion and to receive pastoral care according to need'. It further commits both churches to 'undertake to continue to work together towards a concordat for full communion and reconciliation of ministries, with full eucharistic sharing and interchangeability of members and ordained ministries Australia-wide'.

However, on the proposal by the General Church Council for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the subject turned into a long and exhaustive debate. Several areas of concerns debated on were the 'unreconciled doctrinal diversity' among the 136 member churches of the LWF and issues on women's ordination. In the end, the vote was 187 'for' and 123 'against' full membership in the LWF. A two-thirds majority of delegates is required for changes that are considered to be theological issues; hence the proposal was defeated.

Source: *The Lutheran*
10 November 2003, vol. 37 No.11

E D I T O R I A L

Each year seems to come and go in a flash. Before we know it, year 2003 is already over and a brand new year is here! How has year 2003 been to you? To some it may have been a year of great joy and achievements, to others maybe a time of sorrow and losses. Whatever it is, let us not dwell on what is already the past, be it successes or failures, instead let us press on to what lies ahead. With God the future is always filled with hope and opportunities.

With this January/February 2004 issue, the Asia Lutheran News would have moved on to its third year of production. My sincere appreciation to all who has contributed and supported it since it was re-launched in year 2002. The ALN could not have carried on till today without you.

At the start of the new year, we would like to take the opportunity to conduct a simple but IMPORTANT survey among our readers over the effectiveness of the newsletter. A survey form is enclosed and we would DEEPLY appreciate if you could take a moment to fill it out and return to us*. Every feedback is important and every suggestion will be taken seriously. We sincerely hope the ALN could continue to cater better to your needs in the coming years! Since this is the Christmas and New Year season, the editorial board is generous and takes pleasure to offer a gift to the first 30 survey forms returned to us.

We look forward to receiving your feedback and suggestions to keep growing and improving. Have a blessed and exciting 2004!

Sally

* OR you may send your feedback electronically through the ALN web site at www.asia-lutheran.org/aln/survey/

Towards Higher Ground

Sabah Theological Seminary's 15th Anniversary

"We are like those who dream", and again "The Lord has done great things for us." (Psalm 126:1, 3). STS is thankful for the many great things God has done for the seminary as they celebrate and remember God's goodness during its 15th Anniversary this year (2003) with the theme "Higher Ground".

In 1980, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM) decided to set up a Bible Training Centre in response to the needs for mission outreach among the indigenous people in Sabah. The initial purpose of the training centre was to provide a one-year elementary theological training in Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language), which would equip the lay leaders in rural areas to assist with evangelism and pastoral work. In 1982, the program, which was modified to upgrade the training, became a two-year program. With the growing membership among the congregations, the need for well-equipped workers for the ministry became more acute. The Bible Training Centre eventually evolved into a seminary in 1988 and provided theological training up to a four-year Bachelor of Theology degree.

Since 1989 STS has been a member of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). The B.Th and Dip.Th were given accreditation by the association in 1990, and the M.Div and B.Div in 2000. Subsequently STS was recognized as an approved center for the study of M.Th under the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST).

Currently STS has a 27-member faculty with 16 full-time, 4 part-time, 5 visiting lecturers and 2 undergoing further training. Among them, twelve have doctorate degrees and the others with masters or the equivalent.

In year 2003, the total full-time and part-time students studying on campus was 113. STS had begun to offer extension courses in 1989 with a Certificate of Church Ministry (CCM) designed to train church lay-leaders. This is now being conducted regularly at centers around Sabah. Some 400 people attend such courses each year.

Since 1994, a class for the Chinese Senior Citizens was offered which has a current enrollment of 52

persons. In the year 2000, the Family Ministry program was established to provide skills training for the wives of students, which includes course such as Bible knowledge, first aid, sewing and tailoring, Sunday school and leadership training. At the same time parallel sessions are conducted for pre-school children to enable their mothers to attend the courses without distraction. Academically qualified wives are encouraged to participate in the regular program of the seminary, while others who have no formal schooling are being helped with basic literacy programs.

Apart from the above program, a three-month Chinese short-term mission program is also being conducted regularly at STS from January to April each year. In addition, The Lutheran World Federation has also recognized STS as one of the centres for Mission Training in Asia for its member churches.

By the grace of God, STS has become what it is today. Its celebration's programmes began earlier in the year with a seminar on **Biblical Spirituality** from June 30 to July 4. Dr. Pfitzner Victor of the Lutheran Church of Australia, Principal of Luther Seminar in Adelaide, was the speaker.

And again in November 6-7, another Seminar on **Christian Witness among Many Faiths** was conducted for STS's alumni. The speakers were Dr. David Wu, the Assistant General Secretary, New Mission Initiatives Evangelization and Church Growth, General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church in America and Dr. Gam Seng Shae, the first STS Dean of Studies seconded by the American Baptist Board of International Ministries.

A thanksgiving dinner was held on November 7 and the 15th Anniver-



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Dr. Thu En Yu - Principal of STS

sary Thanksgiving and 14th Graduation service conducted on November 8 at Kota Kinabalu Basel Church with Dr. David Wu as the speaker. Twenty-eight students graduated with different degrees, diplomas and certificates.

The 15th Anniversary concluded with the Hakka Mission Seminar that was held on Nov. 8-9. This seminar was well attended by participants from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia. Through this seminar, mission towards the Hakka was highlighted and was taken up as a mission commitment and priority by the churches.

Rev. Dr. PANG Ken-Phin



The indigenous people - very much a part of life and ministry of BCCM & STS

© STS

Ecumenical News

Ecumenical leader calls to campaign for a "non-bellucose world"

Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the CCA (Christian Conference of Asia) has called for an "ecumenical campaign for a non-bellucose world" (non-violent). Presenting a report to the General Committee, held in Bangkok from 22-26 October 2003, he said that the campaign was necessary in this age of war and terror, created by a culture of violence which is spreading in many parts of the world.

He said that the ecumenical campaign should be done with people of other faiths, not faith and civil society groups.

The 26-member General Committee, comprising officers and representatives from 18-member countries in the Asia-Pacific, meets once in 18 months between the general assemblies and in the year of the general assembly. The next

assembly will be held in Chiangmai, Thailand from March 31 to April 6, 2005, on the theme, "Building communities of peace for all." Eleven general assemblies have taken place so far.

Ahn Jae Woong in his report observed that "ecumenical enthusiasm has gradually declined." He felt that "ecumenical dreams, visions, theological thinking, agendas, involvement, leadership, resources" may not be attractive to the mainline churches. Decreasing church membership and funds in the mainline churches might affect the ecumenical movement in the future, he warned.

According to the general secretary, four foundations of the ecumenical movement need more focus, which are, "faith in God (requiring metanoia), love for each other and other people (requiring

koinonia), hope in building communities (requiring diakonia) and care of for God's creation (requiring harmonia)."

He also listed the following tasks for the revitalization of the ecumenical movement:

- Re-generate the spirituality of the ecumenical movement
- Re-define the vision and mission of the ecumenical movement
- Re-invent the programmes of the ecumenical movement
- Re-produce leadership of the ecumenical movement
- Re-construct the structure of the ecumenical movement
- Re-mobilize the resources of the ecumenical movement
- Re-develop membership of the ecumenical movement

Philip Mathew
Journalist (CCA)

The President's Visions & Focus on Asia

An Interview with the Rt. Rev. Mark S. Hanson, President of the Lutheran World Federation & Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Mark Hanson was born in Minneapolis on Dec. 2, 1946, ordained in 1974 and served as pastor for over 22 years. He was elected as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 2001 and as the President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at the Winnipeg Assembly in 2003.

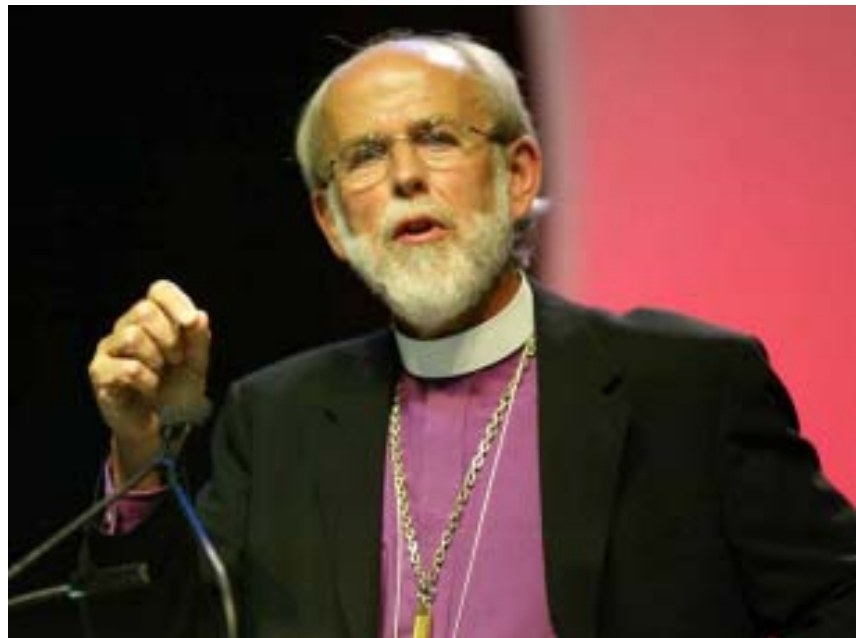
The interview with the President Bishop Mark Hanson began with a note of congratulations on his election to the office of the President of the LWF. In his response Bishop Hanson conveyed his season greetings and expressed his appreciation and gratitude to member churches in Asia for their support to him as the President of the LWF.

Having served as a pastor for 22 years before becoming the Bishop, Hanson expressed that, "our churches will be more vital and vibrant only if they focus on the local congregations." He further commented that, "the challenge is how one who leads world organization or a national organization does or impact on what goes on in the congregations. I had spent large amount of time interacting with local pastors - strengthening, teaching, listening and praying with our pastors and my strength to lead the national organization like ELCA rests in listening to them"

When inquired about his vision for the Lutheran World Federation as the president, he said:

"The leadership of the President of LWF is different from that of the national bishop of ELCA and also differs from that of the General Secretary of LWF, who is the administrative leader of the LWF.

However, I would like to focus on: How do we as Lutheran Christians continue to claim the gifts of the Lutheran reformation that continue to shape Lutheranism as a reforming movement within the Church



Rt. Rev. Mark S. Hanson

© LWF/D. Zimmermann

Catholic? I think there is a temptation when we begin to think of denomination, to say, what success we have, apart from the rest of the Christians. I think one of our challenges is: what gifts do we bring to the Body of Christ and what gifts do we receive from others? In my opinion, there are very strong gifts of the Lutheran reformation that are uniquely ours as Lutherans - the understanding of justification by faith through grace, theology of the cross, the vocation of the baptized, and the means of grace. My concern is that we do not lose sight of the theological confessional gifts we bring and that we do not become so preoccupied with Lutheran identity that we forget that those gifts are given to us for the sake of the whole Body of Christ and for the whole of God's creation! So how do we hold in tension the strengthening of the Lutheran communion but not to the exclusion of Christian unity in the world? Or as a way of retreating from the very complex or urgent question about how as Christians we are to live along side persons of other faith and religions joined together as common

stewards of God's creation in our shared vocation of building peace and justice in the world?"

When asked, what do you consider are your challenges as the president, he described:

"One of the challenges I have as the President from the North America is how to create a context as a leader from the dominant cultures to put myself in a position of listening. I am afraid that we in the United States have difficult times finding places to listen to the voices of the rest of the world. I read the cries of the Asian people during the pre-assembly gathering - those human, painful events born out of the realities of Lutherans in Asia. How do we make sure that the world hears those cries? That's a great challenge! The real issue is, people are eager to speak rather than to listen. When President Bush went to address the United Nations regarding the Iraq issue, the commentator said, 'President Bush didn't come to listen, rather he came to tell.' This is the tendency of the world today."

Secondly, "the huge issues of the world focuses around the globalization of economy, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the reality of hunger and hunger related diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, violence against women. The LWF has deep commitment in these areas to which we need to honor. Although we don't have too much of an answer, yet, we need to explore how to end such misery and affliction."

In answering a question on his vision for Asia, Hanson said, "the voices of Asian Christians and Asian Lutheran Christians would not only be heard, but they would be key participants in shaping the agenda for the LWF and will find ways where Asian Lutherans may come and teach us what it means to be followers of Jesus in the world today. I think you (Asian Churches) know more about being evangelists and you know more about working for social justice, and you know more about standing with people in poverty and together to end poverty than we (the West) do. So we have to find ways that you can teach us and lead us."

He further said, "We in the north and particularly in the United States have great existential problem with the notion of power and images. We need to accept that we are empty earthen vessels instead of thinking that we are over flowing with our wealth and goods. When it comes to being the Body of Christ in a complex world, pluralistically in terms of religion, violence and poverty, we, amidst our affluence, are very empty. We need to look to other Christians to proclaim the Gospel to us and challenge us to be the Gospel in the world. When Jesus took the prophetic book of Isaiah as his inaugural address in the temple, He said, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon us to preach the Good news to the poor", I read it to say that, "if the good news we are proclaiming of Jesus Christ isn't the good news to the poor it is not the Gospel! How do we know that it is the Gospel or not, depend on whether we are standing with the poor, hearing the Gospel through the lives of the poor".

To a question, "What is your response to some of the Asian issues?" Hanson responded:

"How the issues in the Asian Churches should be taken will depend on the churches themselves. For instance, the issue of Dalits in India cannot remain as an internal issue but has got to be a global issue. The US and the LWF has to exercise its leadership to demand more equitable justice in response to that issue. I think the issue of women and violence against women in so many countries, and the complex issues as I read it among other Christians who live as a minority population - particularly in those countries in Asia, where the dominant religion is Islam - we need to build bridges and good understanding but shouldn't diminish our devotion to Christ, as Christians. This is a great, great challenge.

Another area that needs our attention is the environment. The tragic reality is that humanity which is placed as stewards of creation and that the creation itself is in a threat of extinction. How that might grieve God's heart. The image of God is weeping. God must look upon the beauty of God's continuing life giving work. What are we doing to the fragile, beautiful interwoven creations?"

While discussing about the priorities set by the Assembly for its work during the next six years and how the Council is going to choose what is more appropriate in terms of the availability of resources, the Bishop expressed:

"I have more questions than answers about setting up priorities. The priorities are huge but the resources are very small. When the participants leave Winnipeg, they go with satisfaction that their concerns are taken care of and great things are going to happen during the six years period. But when they hear that their concerns are not addressed due to the resource constrains they will become frustrated. Therefore I am of the opinion that, the assembly itself should set priorities within the limits of our resources. I also think we who are in the more dominant countries in terms of economic resources need to be very realistic about our commitment. This is very confusing especially in Europe, when we move away the taxation and supporting churches' voluntary contributions that

are going to have huge impact. I think the tension before LWF is how much of relief and development work should be done through NGOs and Government grants and how much should be done by LWF."

To a question of how do we compromise with the resources spent for mission, development work and the relief work, Hanson said:

"We have to keep talking about 'the theology of mission'. As Lutherans, we use it very freely but we have not pondered enough to say what it means? When I talk of 'mission', I first talk of "missio dei" - God's work in and for the sake of the life of the world. Then second, I say, "missio ecclesia" - what is the particular piece in God's mission for the sake of the world that we who have been baptized in Christ's death and resurrection bear His presence in the world? I think, if we keep asking how the mission of the Body of Christ in its particularity and how does it fit into the mission of God for the sake of the world, we will be able to find an answer. We should always have that tension, not tension in a bad sense, but tension in a good sense. We should not loose sight of the proclamation of the Gospel, the community gathered around the Word and Sacrament, the deepening of the life of faith, the lament of the people to pray for the world and to gather for worship; that's how we are and exclusively we are for that."

In conclusion Bishop Hanson said, "The passion for justice, for the poor, peace in the world, and care for the environment belongs to our understanding of God's Will for the world. We may differ as to how to establish justice and peace in the world, but we have to have commitment towards it. This world is God's creation, it is also the place where evil is at work at the same time. We have to discern how to engage in the world and how we are going to resist evil in the world".

May God give us the courage and wisdom to face the challenges and shower his grace upon us to discern His Will and deepen our commitment to serve God more and more amidst various challenges.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Meshack

LWF Facts & Figures – 2004

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947, the LWF now has 136 member churches in 76 countries representing 61.7 million of the world's 65.4 million Lutherans.

<i>Continent</i>	<i>Member Churches</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>LWF Membership</i>	<i>All Lutherans</i>
Africa	29	21	11,896,817	11,953,068
Asia	46	16	7,042,063	7,146,011
Europe	42	24	36,602,324	36,642,084
Latin America	15	13	848,058	1,126,547
North America	4	2	5,331,573	8,519,967
TOTAL	136	76	61,720,835	65,387,677

The LWF acts on behalf of its member churches in areas of common interest such as ecumenical and interfaith relations, theology, humanitarian assistance, international affairs and human rights, communication, and mission and development work.

Ecumenical Affairs

The LWF is committed to the search for Christian unity. An important part of this involvement is the co-sponsoring over the years of bilateral dialogues on the global level – with the Anglican Communion, Orthodox churches, Roman Catholic Church, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and World Methodist Council. Ecumenical conversations have been held with the Baptist World Alliance and Seventh-day Adventists. The LWF also seeks to further ecumenical involvement of its member churches on national and regional levels.

Theology

The Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) probes basic theological, ecclesial and ethical questions that confront the churches of the Lutheran communion as they carry out ministry and mission in today's pluralistic contexts. Through study desks focused on theology and the church, socio-ethical issues, worship and congregational life, and relations with people of other faiths, the department carries out study processes and produces publications intended to assist and challenge churches, contribute to ecumenical discussions, and network with those pursuing theological work in other venues.

Humanitarian Assistance

The Department for World Service (DWS) serves as the LWF's international relief, rehabilitation and development agency. DWS maintains 24 service programs and emergency operations in more than 31 countries with over 50 international staff and 5,500 local staff. Guided by its Strategic Plan, DWS endeavors to meet the needs of people irrespective of race, sex, creed, nationality or political conviction. DWS works to foster awareness,

advocacy, solidarity and action at local, national and international levels on a wide range of human rights, humanitarian and development issues. DWS responds to emergencies in collaboration with Action by Church Together – ACT, a worldwide alliance of churches and agencies. In 2001, DWS allocated more than USD 80 million in program and emergency support in addition to donated commodities and material aid.

International Affairs & Human Rights

Lutheran Churches see the protection of human rights as a basic Christian concern. The LWF monitors human rights abuses around the world closely and, in consultation with its member churches, makes representation in relation to crucial issues. The Federation also supports the human rights ministries of member churches with training, financial and other support. The LWF peace fund has enabled progress by encouraging peace efforts in such areas as Central America, the Middle East and places of actual or potential conflict in Africa. Pastoral delegations, staff visits and consultations contribute to a global ecumenical ministry for justice and peace.

Mission & Development

The Department for Mission and Development (DMD) works with the member churches as they endeavor to create, maintain and develop ministries that integrate proclamation, service and advocacy for justice. Through LWF sponsorship, church leaders and workers, clergy and lay, are trained for witness and ministry. About 450 ongoing mission, communication and development projects and programs are carried out annually for the benefit of churches and communities. Of special focus is the role of women and youth in

church and society, as well as Christian and theological education and communication capacity. Special attention is given to issues of gender and strengthening of mission understanding and practice worldwide.

Communication

The LWF provides a news and information service, Lutheran World Information (LWI), available via e-mail, posted on the news pages of the LWF World Wide Web site: www.lutheranworld.org and in printed format, in English and German. Other activities include overall administration of the Web site, electronic and traditional book publishing, a directory, magazines and promotional material as well as audio-visual, editing, translation and interpretation services.

Staff

There are 85 staff members in Geneva from 20 different countries. There are also over 50 expatriate staff from 24 nations who work alongside 5,500 local staff in DWS field programs.

The LWF Tenth Assembly took place in Winnipeg, Canada in 2003, hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

LWF Executive Committee:

President

Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson (USA)

Vice-Presidents

- Bishop Dr. Ero Huovinen (Finland)
- Bishop Dr. Zephania Kameeta (Namibia)
- Bishop Dr. Christoph Klein (Romania)
- Rev. Victorial Cortez Rodriguez (Nicaragua)
- Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan (Jerusalem)

Treasurer

Mr. Oberkirchenrat Peter Stoll (Germany)

Program Committee - Chairperson

- Communication Service -
- Ecumenical Affairs -
- Finance & Administration -
- International Affairs & Human Rights -
- Mission & Development -
- Theology & Studies -
- World Service -

Standing Committee - Chairperson

- Constitution -
- Membership -
- World Service -
- Project Committee -

Budget

The LWF administration handles more than USD 100 million annually of which USD 95 million are allocated to projects, programs and emergencies in 70 countries. The LWF has recently established a foundation for long-term financial support: The LWF Foundation – Endowment Fund.

Institutional Structure

The LWF's highest decision-making body is an Assembly, normally held every six years. Representatives from each member church participate. Between Assemblies, the LWF is governed by a 48-member Council, which meets annually, and by its Executive Committee.



LWF New Council Members

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- Rev. Kristin Tomassdottir (Iceland)
- Rev. Dr. Joachim Track (Germany)
- Mr. Oberkirchenrat Peter Stoll (Germany)
- Ms. Diadem Depayso (The Philippines)
- Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann (Brazil)
- Rev. Dr. Barbara Rossing (USA)
- Rev. Marie J. Barnett (Sierra Leone)

- Mr. Helge Aarseth (Norway)
- Rev. Claudia Schreiber (Germany)
- Bishop Julius Paul (Malaysia)
- Bishop Anders Wejryd (Sweden)

ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE CHURCH

The OBSERVATIONS of an Australian Pastor on Lutheranism in Australia, Sumatra, and Thailand

I am a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia and in recent years I have been privileged to visit South East Asian Lutheran churches on a number of occasions.

It was awesome to preach recently to a total of some 1500 worshippers at two consecutive services in a church in Medan, Sumatra. All those young people! Unbelievable! As usual, not everyone was lucky enough to snare a seat. And the singing! Wow! These Bataks can sing! And their choirs are top class!

Another time I found myself worshipping in a Thai Lutheran church. It's a young, small but growing church that largely consists of recent converts. No solemn organ music here, and no fixed liturgical formulas. A band of young people leads the worship. A relaxed, informal atmosphere prevails.

Here the congregation is invited to share. Three people get up and tell everyone what God has done for them. At another point, two 19-year olds step forward to make known their new found faith and their desire to be baptized.

Many of our churches back home are struggling. We have lost a lot of our young people. Old people keep our church going. Many a congregation fights for survival.

We in the West "believe" in God but worship the gods of materialism and comfort. We largely live for this life alone and give scant thought to heaven, hell, death unless we are in real trouble.

Even for many Christians God is not "really real". We all are infected by a secular, rationalistic mindset.

Seeing the different manifestations of Lutheranism in South East Asia, I ask myself, "What is Lutheran?" Is it Lutheran to have Communion three times a year only, like in Sumatra, or every Sunday as in many Australian congregations?

The differences between our churches can be immense but our unity in diversity is wonderful!

I have had to learn that the use of the word "Lutheran" is dispensable in Asia. However, the need for good Lutheran theology is not!

Our church has a tremendous Reformation heritage with its single-minded emphasis on the Gospel - grace, salvation by faith alone. We are happy about the Ten Commandments but there is no need to introduce all sorts of extra laws - unalterable church rules and sacred traditions. We refuse to be legalistic and judgmental. Our theology enables us to release people into freedom and joy beyond guilt and fear.

Christ's New Commandment of radical love is revolutionary - at the heart of all Lutheran ethics.

In the freedom that Christ gives I believe our churches need to examine some of their practices, tabus and traditions.

I am certainly not anti-tradition if tradition is a servant of the Gospel. I en-

courage local culture. I hope, for example, that the beautiful Batak music is not swallowed up by this modern feel-good, big-smiles, high-tech, global Gospel cult or culture.

In Australia and Sumatra the church is an established institution. With it goes, unavoidably, power structure and bureaucracy. By contrast, the church in its early days used to be a movement - a church on the move! I noticed that the Thai Lutheran Church has kept alive something of this frontier and pioneering spirit.

I also found that the social work of the Thai Church is an arm of evangelism. Its social workers and lay staff at institutions generally are actively witnessing church members. Clients often join the church.

In Australia this is rarely the case. Our institutions employ many nominal Christians. Our schools and homes are run at arm's length from the church.

Church history shows that power and privilege corrupt. As the church loses influence in Australia and possibly Sumatra, spiritual renewal gets a chance.

Money is a major problem for the churches of Indonesia. We in Australia cry poor but are so rich! We should help and give more than ever before but without creating dependencies.

With poverty comes temptation of dishonesty, corruption and lack of transparency, even in high places. Can we face this problem?

Maybe our style of worship needs urgent attention. Traditionally famous for its music, the Lutheran Church now needs to reinvigorate worship through inspirational music and song.

As for the emerging Lutheran presence in Thailand, I am hoping for a true "reincarnation" of the Gospel in Thai culture and spirituality. We cannot simply translate Western concepts and practices into a foreign culture.

Lutheran churches in S-E Asia are rich in many ways - rich in talent, faith and commitment. I am looking forward to



The author with Dr J Sirait, Principal of STT-HKBP, P Siantar, Sumatra

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the day when Asian Lutheran missionaries will serve in our Australian towns and cities! In fact, as the Lutheran Churches of the West shrink and their missionary spirit wanes, our church's hope and future lie more and more in Asia and Africa.

Born and bred in Germany, I am a child of European liberalism. Over the years I have put my energies into the pursuit of social justice campaigns, like Aboriginal rights.

But when I exposed myself to the contemporary Asian scene, I found myself engulfed in a world of great religiosity and spirituality, a world in which spiritual forces and the afterlife figure prominently.

I discovered that Luther's question, "How can I find a merciful God?" was still relevant. For I saw people burdened with having to try so hard daily to find a merciful God. I rediscovered the centrality of the Gospel that "saved a wretch like me" just as I am.

I sincerely hope that Lutheran churches learn to spend as much money on mission as it does on world service and development.

Our ministry is (w)holistic. Healing, wholeness, personal and community development come through ministry to



Batak Church in Medan filled with mainly young people

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body, mind and spirit. The Gospel itself is a weapon against world poverty!

Why should we leave mission to the reformed, fundamentalist and charismatic churches? We have so much to offer ourselves!

Let's go beyond nice declarations on peace, disarmament etc. Let's answer the challenge of the world religions, like newly militant Hinduism and aggressive Islam that has now introduced Sharia Law in Aceh. A battle awaits us. The Gospel of God's all-embracing love

needs to be pitched against all the hates and "jihads" of this world.

Life is learning. If I am wrong or sound critical, please forgive me. Correct me. My dream is that we can humbly challenge each other beyond national boundaries and exchange views and ideas without fear. How much we can learn from each other! How much we need each other! One Lord, one faith, one church!

Rev. August Fricke
Gympie 4570 Australia

L W F P U B L I C A T I O N S

Publications from LWF Study Program on "Spiritual Life in Community"

The LWF desk for Worship and Congregational Life of the Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) has recently published three booklets – *Community in Christ*, *Gathered for Worship*, and *Praying the Word*. The publications are a result of a 3-year study program on "Spiritual Life in Community" which present descriptions of the spiritual journeys of Christians from different cultures in situations of poverty, hunger and war, or relative peace and prosperity.

The booklets describe patterns and practices that shape the lives of the communities visited and the worldwide church. The study seeks to help churches at all levels to focus on and strengthen basic Christian practices.

The booklets are available in English, French, German and Portuguese. Copies can be ordered **free of charge** from the LWF, DTS through fax at + 41-22-791-6630 or E-mail cmu@lutheranworld.org.

Study Team on Intercultural Challenges in Ethical Issues

How to address ethical challenges in different cultural contexts is the focus of a LWF study program began by the Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) recently.

A team of eight theologians from around the world held a first meeting to share their initial perspectives and plan the content for the eventual book to be expected in 2005.

In their discussions, what it means to live humanely emerged as a key question, focused around different cultural understandings of body, self and power. Participants affirmed that there tends to be a Lutheran approach to ethical concerns, which they will use to explore specific contextual issues. The challenge emerge, for example, in areas of sexuality, migration, ethnic integration, governance, citizenship and institutions, education, economic life, agriculture and biotechnology.

"We hope to develop a book that can be used in theological education settings around the world to engage critical questions of moral life in different contexts in the light of the faith we share," commented DTS Director, Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist, who serves as staff for the study program.



Thank
God
for
2003





Event	:	Project Committee Meeting
Date	:	May 24-28
Venue	:	Geneva, Switzerland
Participants	:	Project Committee Members, Representatives from Mission & Funding Agencies
Event	:	ACTEAS Meeting (Advisory Committee for Theological Education in Asia)
Date	:	June 1-3
Venue	:	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Participants	:	ACTEAS Members
Event	:	ACCREA Meeting (Advisory Committee for Coordination of Regional Expression in Asia)
Date	:	June 1-3
Venue	:	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Participants	:	ACCREA Members
Event	:	ACLC (Asian Church Leadership Conference)
Date	:	June 4-7
Venue	:	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Participant	:	Church Leaders, Youth & Women Representatives, Speakers
Event	:	Training for Mission in Asia
Date	:	August 9 – September 10
Venue	:	Sabah Theological Seminary (STS), Malaysia
Participants	:	Selected Participants from LWF Member Churches in Asia
Event	:	Mekong Mission Forum (MMF)
Date	:	October 6-7
Venue	:	Bangkok, Thailand
Participants	:	MMF Members

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Regular Sources of Information:

The Lutheran World Information (LWI); The Lutheran (LCA)

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ALN Website at www.asia-lutheran.org/aln