

## LWF Council Meeting at the Holy Land Aug 31-Sept 6

### Palestinian Bishop Challenges Religions to Work for Dialogue

**B**ishop Dr Munib A Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) has called for a self critical analysis of individual churches and other religions, in order for dialogue among religions to contribute to peaceful co-existence in the world.

"Extremists are vocal and can hijack justice. We should not allow them to do this," Younan told journalists prior to the opening of this year's LWF Council meeting. The ELCJHL bishop addressed the media representatives jointly with LWF President, Bishop Mark S. Hanson and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko.

Younan, also LWF Vice-President for the Asian region, stressed the significance of the Lutheran communion for the ELCJHL not just individually as an LWF member church but also for the Christian community and for dialogue with other religions, in a region in which Christians are a minority. "Your coming here strengthens us and is important for [inter-religious] dialogue," he said in reference to the respective dialogues with Muslims and Jews.



Dividing walls seen around the city

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### Call for Bridges of Peace Not Walls

**C**ommenting on the barrier separating Israel from Palestinian territory in order to protect Israel from Palestinian suicide bombers, the Lutheran bishop said this was not a solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. He stressed the need for peace saying: "We want peace not walls. Walls divide, peace builds bridges." He described the Palestinian community as a good example of religious co-existence to other parts of the world saying, "our people—Muslims and Christians have always lived side by side."

The LWF Council host church ELCJHL has six congregations in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah and Amman the Jordanian capital. It is committed to ecumenical and inter-religious service and dialogue as critical in helping to promote peace and reconciliation. The Lutheran church, like others churches in the region, faces many challenges especially the emigration of Palestinian Christians due to the harsh restrictions of the Israeli occupation.

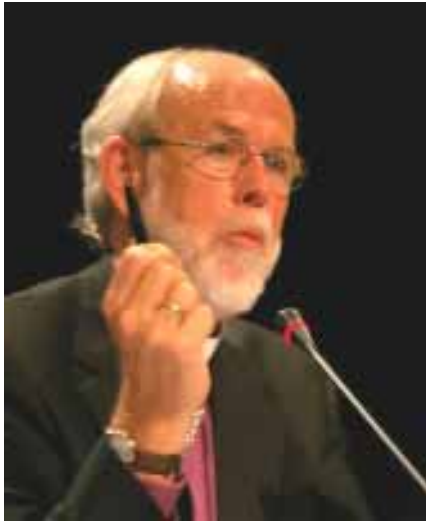
## CONTENTS

<b>stand with the suffering</b>	2
<b>the GS's report</b>	3
<b>lwf council meeting</b>	5
<b>regional news</b>	8
<b>information sharing</b>	9
<b>ecumenical news</b>	12

*The plenary sessions of this year's LWF Council Meeting was held at the International Center of Bethlehem, a conference center belonging to the ELCJHL. The 49-member Council governs the LWF between Assemblies held every six years. The current Council was elected at the July 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. It consists of the President, the Treasurer and 48 people both pastors and lay from the LWF member churches. Advisors, observers and guests will also attend.*

*This year's LWF Council meeting has about 170 participants. Besides the 49 member Council, there were also officials from LWF partner organizations, invited guests, stewards, interpreters and translators, and LWF staff. The Council is the annual governing body meeting among Assemblies held every six years. The current Council was appointed at the July 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. It comprises the President, Treasurer and 48 persons elected by the Assembly. Other members include advisors, who are ordained and laypersons representing the different LWF regions.*

# Stand with the Suffering, Says Hanson



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*The Church called to a ministry of reconciliation ...  
Hanson*

**J**ERUSALEM: "We have come to Bethlehem to listen, to witness, to challenge and to pray for a lasting and just peace," President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Bishop Mark S. Hanson told the LWF Council Meeting there.

Presenting the President's address to the annual LWF governing body, Hanson, who is also Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) reminded the 170 participants from all over the world that they were in the region to also witness the faithful and powerful testimony of the ELCJHL Christians and to share the people's cry.

"May the cries for peace and justice provoke confession, repentance and become a prelude to reconciliation," Hanson said. "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation" is the theme of the meeting at the ELCJHL's International Center Bethlehem from August 31 to September 6.

## New Way of Looking at the Middle East

It was hoped that this year's meeting would enable participants to start re-describing the reality of suffering in the Middle East and to understand more clearly the complexity of problems involved and "the imperative for an independent, viable Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with a secure Israeli state".

Hanson stressed the importance of continued efforts by the LWF in creating channels for hearing those who do not wield power especially the outcasts, suspects, those who are abused, the powerless and the oppressed, whether or not they are within the Lutheran communion.

## Ecumenical Council on Scripture

Hanson pointed to an article by Larson in the *Dialog* magazine, in which the theologian opined that Christianity was in the midst of a global identity crisis, which in his opinion stemmed from not having ecumenically addressed questions about the interpretation and authority of scripture. He proposed that Larson's suggestion for a global ecumenical council should be discussed in the context of the current LWF Council meeting.

## Gospel for Reconciliation

During Hanson travels as the LWF President, he spoke of hearing about the frustration and conflict created when evangelists preach a prosperity gospel "that promises financial gain and success to those who follow these leaders." In the USA where a consumer driven culture values a privatized spirituality and demands a "feel good" religion, there is great pressure on pastors and congregations to get their "market share" of members by "offering some gospel other than the radical good news of God's reconciliation and forgiveness by God's grace through faith for Jesus' sake".

Concerning his travels to Central America and West Africa, Hanson mentioned how he witnessed LWF members engaging in truth telling for the sake of reconciliation. Central American Lutherans had spoken the truth regarding those who benefited or did not gain anything from the peace accords in El Salvador and from free trade agreements. Liberian and Sierra Leonean Lutherans described the painful truth of the horrific cost of extended civil war. Hanson stressed that the truth about violence and exploitations had become the context for broad interfaith initiatives seeking human rights, justice and lasting peace.

A ministry of reconciliation, the LWF President stressed, begins in Word and Sacrament and leads to a critical analysis of power within the communion. For Hanson, the question remained whether the communion of Lutheran churches felt it was being called to continued conversation regarding commitment to the ordination of women and to women in positions of leadership.

A ministry of reconciliation in the LWF, he said, is reflected in relationships of accompaniment, and not by domination.

## Christian Unity

Referring to worldwide ecumenism, Hanson raised the issue question as to how the LWF should respond to Pope Benedict XVI's commitment to Christian unity, and whether it was possible to build upon the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification together so that that it remained a living letter. An important aspect in this context led Hanson to question how LWF member churches could continue to manifest their commitment to eucharistic hospitality and sharing with the Roman Catholic Church without minimizing the theological issues that remain. Would year 2017 and the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation provide an opportunity for shared reflection with Roman Catholics on joint contributions and commitment to the unity of Christ's church and to global work for justice and peace? Hanson wondered.



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*Plenary session*

# The General Secretary's Report

## A New LWF by Year 2010

The general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev Dr Ishmael Noko, has urged the LWF Council to consider putting in place "a new LWF" by the year 2010.

By the time of the next Assembly, 20 years will have passed since the Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, established the current structure, Noko told participants in this year's Council meeting held in Jerusalem and Bethlehem recently. "The changes that have occurred since the 1990 Assembly require a new LWF," he said in the General Secretary's Report.

"The times in which we live are very ambiguous, and so self-definition becomes necessary," Noko said. Since the LWF understands itself as both an instrument for Lutheran unity and for wider ecumenical movement, "participation in the reconfiguration discussion is not an option but an obligation." His report also contained other proposals especially in view of the ongoing discussion on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement, initiated by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

On the outcome of the June 2005 consultation on "The Future of the LWF in the Context of Ecumenical Reconfiguration," Noko asked the Council to consider authorizing the Executive Committee to appoint at its next meeting a Renewal Committee to deal with this issue.

Noko pointed out that the reconfiguration process was not a matter of structures only but it also involved theology and self-understanding and would have direct consequences for the renewal of the LWF as body that brings together member churches.

He underlined the need to ensure an inclusive process in the renewal process, and suggested that the committee also focus on more topics including the LWF's financial sustainability in the future and the bylaws. The renewal committee should also focus on a review of the governing bodies - size and composition of the Council, the Executive Committee, the Program and Standing Committees' model of working; location and size of the Geneva secretariat; and the role of regional and sub-regional offices. The time rhythm, size and relation of the LWF Assemblies to those of the WCC and World Alli-

ance of Reformed Churches should also be considered.

The general secretary pointed out that some of the agencies were concerned that they felt kept "at arm's length when it comes to making core decisions in the federation, except when finances are needed for the organization." He asked the Council to consider asking the proposed Renewal Committee to suggest an affiliation status for related agencies and mission organizations in the future constitution.

## Excommunication

Noko was concerned about the use of excommunication in ways that raise serious theological and pastoral questions. He said this form of church discipline could only be used as the last resort with the aim to preserve the integrity of the church, its witness, and the faith of its members.

The LWF general secretary said the exercise of excommunication by church leadership in power struggles to marginalize persons who criticize or oppose them was a grave misuse of a pastoral discipline, turning it into a weapon of self-preservation by those in power. Such a practice not only flouts the core of the Gospel and breaks up the church's spiritual communion but also diminishes the credibility of the church.

He also spoke about conflicts in the LWF member churches relating to problems with

power relationships, ethnic tensions, theological disputes and ethical issues; and explained the LWF's intervention by sending pastoral delegations to churches experiencing such a conflict. "It is evident that these conflicts undermine the integrity of both the church and its witness," he said. The Gospel, he observed, always needs to be maintained and proclaimed, not least in cases of tension and such conflict.

## Doctrinal Commission

The general secretary reiterated his proposal for the establishment of a doctrinal commission for the LWF. An Advisory Doctrinal Commission (ADC), he said, would assist the federation's governing bodies in preparation for deliberations and actions that have doctrinal aspects.

He explained that the "governing bodies of the LWF will not themselves, on the basis of advice from the ADC, begin to take decisions binding the churches." He noted that many issues that the Council is required to handle often have doctrinal aspects, and cited the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, economic globalization and human sexuality as among these concerns. Such a commission, Noko explained, "cannot, and should not, in any way infringe on the authority that each LWF member church holds in matters of church teaching and discipline."



Rev. Dr. Hutauruk from Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), Indonesia, making a point during plenary session



Dr. Ishmael Noko, LWF General Secretary

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are illegal in view of the fact that they result from loans granted to illegitimate and undemocratic governments. The LWF has launched a program that supports the work of its Latin American member churches in this area. It is expected that a consultation in Buenos Aires on this issue will establish a new foundation for action on this question by the LWF as a whole.

## LWF's 60th Anniversary

### Illegitimate Debt

On illegitimate debt, Noko reiterated the LWF Tenth Assembly affirmation that substantial parts of the external debts of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean

Noko requested the Council to consider combining its 2007 meeting with a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the LWF. Leaders of LWF member churches could be invited not only for the celebration but also for a joint encounter with the Council. He pro-

posed the city of Lund, where the LWF was founded, as an appropriate venue.

On staffing in the Geneva secretariat, the general secretary expressed his concern at the steady decrease in the number of staff employed at headquarters and in the field. There were 70 persons with permanent contracts and seven interns employed at the headquarters on 1 July 2005. This represents a reduction of 30 percent compared to the 94 persons employed at the end of 2001.

The general secretary said staffing was "now approaching a critical level" and asked Council members, as they discuss the LWF's strategic planning during this meeting, "to do all that is within your ability" to improve the member churches' financial contributions to enable the federation to overcome the present constraints.

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## LWF Council Urges Israel to End Occupation of Palestinian Territories



A scene of Bethlehem

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wall's implication for, among others, church members who could not attend services; farmers who were cut off from their fields; school-children delayed in, or prevented from, reaching their schools; and patients, who were unable to reach hospitals and clinics. The statement was presented by the Council's Program Committee for International Affairs and Human Rights.

In the statement titled, "Challenged to a Ministry of Reconciliation in the Holy Land," the representatives of LWF member churches from all over the world said their stay in Jerusalem and Bethlehem had opened the "eyes of many of us to the daily sufferings of the Palestinian people, often not shown to us by the media, and in which context our member church speaks boldly a message of hope and reconciliation." This year's Council meeting was hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) under the theme, "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation."

The LWF Council has reiterated its call for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and affirmed the implementation of the Roadmap for peace as crucial to establishing a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, with a shared city of Jerusalem.

In a public statement adopted September 6 at its meeting in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the Council said many of its members had encountered "the [Israeli] separation wall and found shocking its impact on the daily lives of Palestinians." They mentioned the

# Highlights of LWF Council Meeting

## Opening Worship - A Call for Reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis

For true reconciliation to take place people must be willing to hear the truth about each other and to forgive. There can be "no peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness," Younan emphasized in his sermon during the opening worship on the Council's theme, "The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation." He said the ELCJHL chose this theme for this meeting "because we believe so strongly that God is calling us, the local expression of the worldwide



*Processing into the chapel of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer during the opening worship*

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*Waiting for the procession march into The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer*

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Lutheran communion to embody this vital ministry at this opportune time here."

God's divine gift for reconciliation, he said, opens the way not only for reconciliation among churches but also for reconciliation between women and men, among people of different beliefs, cultures, and traditions - and among adherents of other religions. Against the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Younan decried rampant changes worldwide as a result of globalization, making the world rapidly becoming a place without values, where widening gaps are provoking clashes between civilizations. "Our world has come to worship weapons, walls, and war in the name of peace and security," Younan said.

## Treasurer's Report

The LWF Treasurer Mr Peter Stoll reported to the Council that LWF closed 2004 with a balanced Geneva coordination budget. Main reason for last year's positive developments were the high exchange rate gains obtained via the higher market value of the Euro against the US dollar.

Stoll said budget projections for the years 2005 and 2006 did not indicate

any deficits as yet. However, the Geneva coordination budget still reveals a "structural deficit" after 2006 if exchange rate gains are not taken into account.

The total income of the LWF was USD 102 million in 2004, compared with USD97 million in 2003. Of this amount, USD14.59 million covered the Geneva coordination budget costs, which primarily includes staff and operational costs. Some USD87.4 million was allocated to LWF projects and program activities.

The LWF's total expenditure in 2004 was USD105 million compared with USD 100 million the previous year. Of this amount, USD14.16 million was allocated to the Geneva coordination budget, whereas USD90.28 million covered costs of LWF projects and programs. The General Secretariat's total expenditure stood at USD3.9 million; Department for Theology and Studies (DTS), USD1.1 million; Department for Mission and Development (DMD), USD 13.2 million; and USD86.9 million for the Department for World Service (DWS).

## Interim Report on Family, Marriage and Human Sexuality

The LWF Council received an interim report from the Task Force on Dialogue on Issues of Family, Marriage and Human Sexuality. The interim report of the eight-person team appointed by the Council in September 2004, presented an account of their first meeting in April 2005, and the issues that had been considered so far. These included responses from 29 LWF member churches on the subject of family, marriage and human sexuality.

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1741.EN.html>

## Strategic Planning Process (SPP)

The Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) requested the General Secretary to continue with the Strategic Planning Process (SPP) initiated by the governing body in September

2004. The SPP is considered an essential tool in helping the LWF adapt to new challenges that include reduced staff and financial resources and at the same time provide a realistic, relevant and sustainable work plan for the Secretariat. All Program Committees discussed the report on this process and made recommendations on which the Council actions were based.

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1740.EN.html>

## Future of LWF in Context of Ecumenical Reconfiguration

The report of the June 2005 LWF consultation on the "The Future of the LWF in the Context of Ecumenical Reconfiguration" was affirmed by the LWF Council. The General Secretary was requested to bring a proposal to the next LWF Executive Committee meeting on more concrete ways of collaborating with the World Council of Churches (WCC) as outlined in the consultation's report. The Council's decision followed discussions of this report by all the seven Program Committees.

<http://www.lutheranworld.org/News/LWI/EN/1739.EN.html>

## Venue Confirmed for LWF 11th Assembly in 2010

With 23 votes in favor, 19 against and one abstention, the LWF Council members accepted the Wuerttemberg church assembly invitation over that of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic (ECAC-SR), presented by General Bishop Dr Julius Filo.

Oberkirchenrat Heiner Kueenzlen, who presented the invitation from the Wuerttemberg church, said it was a great honor for the German church to host the forthcoming Assembly in Stuttgart. He said he was happy to welcome delegates from all LWF member churches to Wuerttemberg. "The Christian church is a global church, it will be good for us to have Christians from all over the world as our guests.

In Germany, we focus very much on our own problems in church and society, but we want to share in the joys and concerns of the Evangelical Lutheran churches worldwide," Kueenzlen remarked. He said the forthcoming LWF 11th Assembly in Stuttgart would be marked as a celebration of the Lutheran church in the region and of all Christians.



Council members & advisors from Asia

## Cultural Evening

The host church, ELCJHL treated all the delegates and participants of the LWF Council Meeting with a very special and exciting cultural evening that is filled with music and dancing. The presentations by its schools and congregations were impressive and well received with thunderous applause.



Cultural dance by students

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## New LWF Member Churches

The LWF Council extends full membership to three Churches -- India, Norway and Peru, pushing the number of LWF member churches worldwide from the current 138 to 140 from 78 countries.

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, with 21,000 members, has held associate membership since 1997.

The 1,110-member Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church (ILEP) with 1,110

members was a recognized congregation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States (ELCITHS) in India with 24,750.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States (ELCITHS) brings together four different churches representing five distinct ethnic communities in the Himalayan States. The church has had a close association with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) for the last ten years. It is a member of the LWF National Committee in India. Rev. Godwin NAG is the bishop of ELCITHS and the secretary is a lady bishop.



Christmas Lutheran Church that's next to Int'l Center of Bethlehem, venue of the LWF Council Meeting

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## Prayers At the Wall

In one of the morning prayers/devotion session, instead of having it at the meeting hall, LWF Council members and participants gathered at a separation wall to offer special prayers for peace and reconciliation between the Palestinians and Israeli in the Holy Land.

- As of October 2004, the length of the barrier was over 200 km (once completed it will be 832 km) and some 8,000 acres of land have been confiscated for its construction.
- Once completed, 88.6% of settlers will live outside the Wall, while 89.5% of the Palestinian West Bank population will be trapped inside it. (PASSIA-Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of Int'l affairs)



Special prayers at separation wall

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## New Leaders

### Lutheran Church in Malaysia & Singapore (LCMS)

At its recent August 2005 Synod meeting, the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS) elected the Rev Philip Lok, 41, as its new bishop. Bishop Gideon Chang, 68, retired after serving as Bishop for three terms from 1994-2005. The new bishop was consecrated on 28 August.



Bishop Lok with Bishop Emeritus Gideon Chang during the LWF Asian Church Leaders Conference in 2004, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

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### Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS)

The Rev. Belman P. Dasuha was elected to succeed the Rev. Dr. Edison Munthe as the new Bishop

of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church during the Church's Synod meeting in June. The General Secretary is the Rev. M. Rumanja Purba.

GKPS with 198,479 members has been a member of the LWF since 1967.

### Protestant Angkola Church of Indonesia (GKPA)

Due to the sudden passing away of Bishop Bonar Matondang of GKPA, a special Synod meeting was held where the Rev. Sabam Marpaung was elected as Bishop and Rev. Laorensus Pasaribu as General Secretary.

### Indonesian Christian Church (HKI)

The 350,000-member Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) had its General Synod Meeting between July 26 - 31, 2005, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. The Synod re-elected the Rev. Dr. Burju Purba as its Bishop for another term from 2005 - 2010. The General Secretary is the Rev. Rudolf Simanjuntak.



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Bishop Purba (left) & Rev. Simanjuntak, HKI

## Long-Term Assistance in South East Asia 'Communion Tsunami Fund'

The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, has appealed to LWF member churches to enter into a long-term engagement for the rebuilding of infrastructure in the tsunami-affected areas of South East Asia.

In a letter to the LWF member churches, Noko expresses gratitude toward churches and church-related organizations for their swift action by providing assistance in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. These countries were hardest hit by the violent tidal waves that broke out on 26 December 2004, following an undersea earthquake that affected several other countries off the Indian Ocean. Millions in South East Asia were displaced and rendered homeless, while destruction of property and livelihoods was extensive.

The impact particularly on Nias Island in Indonesia, calls for a long-term rehabilitation process, according to the LWF general secretary. "A major effort will be required on the part of the LWF constituency to provide funds for the reconstruction of destroyed churches and other buildings," he writes to the churches. More than 1,300 church buildings were affected, 50 percent of which are completely damaged, not to mention other facilities.

### Diaconal Fund for Reconstruction of Church Buildings, Schools

In order to facilitate this long-term rehabilitation, the LWF Project Committee supported the establishment of a "Communion Tsunami Fund," to be coordinated by the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) in cooperation with the Department for World Service (DWS). The diaconal fo-

cus of the fund is response to human suffering, especially in cases where needs cannot be catered through the regular assistance mechanisms.

Money from this fund will go to churches in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and will mainly be used to reconstruct church buildings, schools and houses. Additional areas of focus include women's counseling, leadership training and children's scholarships. A pastoral support team comprising members from neighboring countries and churches, for example Malaysia, will visit the Indonesian churches and accompany their reconstruction process. A consultation on inter-faith relations in the affected region is planned as a long-term accompaniment program.

### Empowering Communities to Change Social Dynamics

Neville Pradhan, DWS Program Officer for Emergencies, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons explains the impact of the tsunami disaster on the population in South East Asia: "Such a catastrophe affects mainly the poor and marginalized as they survive on the edges of society. It is as if they are knocked down into a ditch. We don't only want to pick them up and put them back on the edge, but to work together with them to reduce their vulnerability to such disasters in the future."

The rehabilitation assistance by the LWF, churches and related agencies goes beyond restoring the livelihood of communities and churches: "We work to empower and change the social dynamics in our operational areas, which we recognize is a difficult task," says Pradhan. He cited some of the fisherfolk communities in India as a good example\*unlike before the tsu-

nami disaster, they now own their fishing boats and can keep the profits earned. By working together they also recognize their own strengths. A majority of those assisted are members of communities that belong to the lower strata of Indian society.

The DMD and DWS partners include the Wuppertal (Germany)-based United Evangelical Mission and Indonesian churches on Nias Island namely: the Protestant Christian Church (BNKP), Christian Communion of Indonesia Church in Nias (Gereja AMIN) and the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) Diakonia Department. For relief assistance, the LWF will work through Action by Churches Together (ACT) and its local implementing partners.

By Julia Heyde,  
youth intern,  
LWF Office for  
Communication  
Services

*As an expression of love and solidarity, the following Asian member churches had contributed to the LWF Common Tsunami Funds to help those affected within the communion:*

- *Basel Christian Church in Malaysia (BCCM) = USD10,000*
- *Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) = USD10,000*
- *Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS) = USD12,000*

*JELC has also contributed USD5,000 to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for brothers and sisters affected by the recent Hurricane Katrina – Ed.*

## Stand on Same Sex Relationship

### Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Winnipeg, Canada - At its Tenth Biennial Convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) rejected a proposal to allow its pastors to perform blessings for same-sex relationships.

ELCIC delegates attending the July 21-24 governing body meeting voted against the measure in a resolution that fell short of the two-thirds majority needed for it to pass. Of the 408 ballot cast, 183 (45 percent) were in favor and 220 (54 percent) were opposed.

At a press conference following the debate, ELCIC National Bishop Raymond Schultz said he predicted the same-sex issue would come up again at future conventions.

The ELCIC is Canada's largest Lutheran church with approximately 182,000 members in 624 congregations. It joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1986.

### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

During its Ninth Biennial Churchwide Assembly (August 8-14) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Orlando, Florida, one of the topics addressed by the Assembly was the proposal on sexuality.

The Assembly considered three recommendations forwarded by the ELCA Church Council. The recommendation resulted from a multi-year study process on sexuality led by a task force.

By a vote of 851-127, the Assembly adopted Recommendation One that urges the church to "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion we share as members of the body of Christ."

Recommendation Two was adopted by 670-323 votes as amended, asking the

ELCA to "continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops," which found no basis for establishing an official ceremony for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. The assembly reiterated the church's welcome to gay and lesbian people and its trust in pastors and congregations as they "discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care for all to whom they minister."

Recommendation Three, which would have established a process by which a person living in a committed long-term homosexual relationship could seek an exception to current ELCA policy concerning rostered leaders, required a two-thirds vote to be adopted. It was defeated by 490-503 votes..

The Assembly was attended by 2,300 people including 1,015 voting members.

[www.elca.org/assembly/05](http://www.elca.org/assembly/05)

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## LWF Mourns Taize Movement Founder Brother Roger Schutz

### LWF General Secretary, Dr. Ishmael Noko, Pays Tribute to an Icon of Peace

GENEVA, 17 August 2005 (LWI) - It is with sadness and great shock that the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) received news about the death of Brother Roger L. Schutz, founder of the ecumenical Taize Community. Brother Roger, aged 90, was reportedly stabbed to death yesterday evening, August 16, during a religious service in eastern France.

LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko hailed Brother Roger as an icon of peace who developed the monastic com-

munity that he founded in 1940 "into a world-encompassing movement inspired by strong and focused commitment to reconciliation and unity across religious and cultural barriers."

The Swiss-born Protestant pastor was reportedly attacked with a knife during evening prayers attended by some 2,500 young people in Taize, in France's eastern Burgundy region. He was seriously wounded and died from his wounds.

Full text of the statement of the LWF General Secretary can found on the LWF website at: [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

*Paris (ENI). The funeral of Brother Roger, the founder of the ecumenical Taize community in the Burgundy region of France, who was killed at the age of 90, was attended by about 12 000 people from many Christian denominations. The service was led by a cardinal from the Vatican. Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, at the Vatican, led the service at the Church of the Resurrection, at the Taize centre in the Burgundy region of eastern France.*

*(ENI - Ecumenical News International)*

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## Theology in Life of Lutheran Churches - Revisiting Its Critical Role

### A program of the LWF Department for Theology and Studies (DTS)

To encourage and develop theological work that can more persuasively engage major contextual challenges that the global communion of Lutheran churches face.

The points of departure for this theological work are the pervasive challenges that

churches throughout the world are facing, but which have particular urgency for churches in the global South or East. These challenges include:

- Struggles for basic survival, dignity and justice
- The influence of other faiths
- Pentecostal and charismatic influences
- Are more differences church diving?

The intent of this program is to address these challenges theologically. It will be an opportunity for theologians from around the world, with their different contexts and approaches, to interact, mutually challenge and support one another, so that the theological work they do through this program can help to deepen the self-understanding, life and practices of churches of the Lutheran communion.

## You Are Invited to Take Part

The invitation is open to any Lutheran-affiliated theologian (whether in systematic, biblical, historical, ethical or practical fields) and related institutions/organizations. "Theologians" here include not only those in universities, colleges or seminaries, but also those teaching theology in other settings, including in local congregations and special centers, whether lay or ordained. The participation of theologians who are female and/or from the global South or East is especially being encouraged and supported.

This Work Will Be Pursued Along Four Thematic Tracks:

Track 1: Life and Hope in the Face of Death and Injustice

Track 2: The Triune God and the Divine Reality in Other Faiths

Track 3: The Holy Spirit in the Life and Renewal of the Church

Track 4: Church Unity Amid Moral Diversity

Interested participants are to submit a brief paper (up to 500 words) related to one or more of the themes indicating:

- How this theme relates to your particular context
- How you would develop this theologically (e.g. what resources, emphases, approaches)
- Possible critical perspectives or tensions this poses for your church
- How you might pursue this with others in your setting, and your interest in do-

ing so in interaction with those in other contexts

- Other relevant factors about who you are and what you have done (name, address, email, educational background, positions, writing)

On the basis of the initial papers received, a small number will be invited to prepare more extensive papers to be considered at a seminar focused on each of the thematic tracks (2007). A global symposium (2009) will reflect on and assess what has occurred and make specific recommendations regarding how the critical role of theology in the life of Lutheran Churches is to be encouraged and pursued further in diverse global contexts.

Please submit as early as possible but no later than December 31, 2005 to:

**Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist**  
**LWF Department for**  
**Theology and Studies**  
**150 route de Ferney,**  
**P O Box 2100, CH-1211,**  
**Geneva 2, Switzerland**

## ASIA: Half of the Region's Children Live in Poverty

[LONDON, 22 August 2005] - Despite Asia's booming economy 600 million children -- almost half the region's 1.25 billion under-18s -- are severely deprived of basic needs such as food, healthcare and shelter (compared with 265 million in sub-Saharan Africa). And over 350 million Asian children live in absolute poverty, according to a new report by the international children's agency Plan.

The 55-page report, "Growing up in Asia", says that half of Asia's families are failing to benefit from economic growth and globalisation. This is largely due to a combination of the pressure of population growth on scarce resources; lack of access to education, healthcare, clean water and sanitation; caste discrimination and dominance by social elites; as well as weak governance and corruption.

Tom Miller, Chief Executive of Plan says: "Despite the focus on poverty in Africa at last month's G8 summit, Asia has more than twice as many severely deprived children as sub-Saharan Africa. If it is not ad-

ressed now, this scale of child poverty will have a serious impact on Asia's future prospects."

Plan says that investing in children and their families is the most effective and cost-efficient way of breaking the cycle of poverty. The organisation pledges to invest US\$1 billion on poverty reduction across twelve Asian countries over the next decade, but says the real challenge will be getting governments to face up to the levels of poverty.

The report says that to truly combat poverty the international community would have to reduce the subsidies given to US, European and Japanese farmers and forgive billions of dollars in debt. It also says that richer countries could make a difference by paying more for the goods they buy from developing countries. And they should not allow concerns about international security and terrorism to override insistence on good governance in developing countries.

But it asserts that foreign development assistance, while playing an important role, remains very small compared to national income. And there is justified concern that debt forgiveness without improvements in governance will not lead to increased public spending on health, education and income security for the poor.

The report says Asian governments could do more to combat poverty by decentralising more of their public spending to the local level. (In South Asia local government gets less than ten per cent of total revenue despite playing a dominant role in public service provision.) It adds that democracy and grass roots political movements have a crucial role to play in ensuring that governments do not neglect the poor.

**Plan, International Headquarters**  
**Website: <http://www.plan-international.org>**  
**Visit: <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=6070>**

## **Bangladesh Murders Show 'Our' Vulnerability, say Christians**

New Delhi (ENI). Following the murder of two workers belonging to a church group in Bangladesh, Christians in the Muslim majority nation say the killing shows "our vulnerability". "We are free under the law to preach our faith. But, in reality we do not have much freedom," lamented Sunil Adhikari, director, Christian Life Bangladesh.

## **Nun Protests Da Vinci Code's Filming at English Cathedral**

London (ENI). A Roman Catholic nun, Sister Mary Michael, has led a prayer vigil outside England's Lincoln Cathedral in protest at the filming there of "The Da Vinci Code" and has accused

the dean and those responsible for the Anglican building of the sin of buying pardons. The film's producers are reported to have donated 100 000 British pounds (US\$180 000) for the facility after Anglican church officials at Westminster Abbey in London refused permission.

## **Israeli Troops Storm Settlers Holed Up in Synagogues**

Jerusalem (ENI). Hundreds of Israeli troops stormed synagogues in Jewish settlements in the southern Gaza Strip to remove ultranationalist protesters resisting Israel's withdrawal after a 38-year occupation of the coastal strip that partly borders Egypt. In the most violent incident, settlers turned a synagogue in the settlement of Kfar Darom

into a fortress, surrounding the building and its rooftop with barbed wire. At first they waved Israeli flags and sang patriotic songs from the rooftop but when troops arrived to evacuate them the protesters pelted them with light-bulbs filled with paint, sand, eggs and acid.

## **Billy Graham's Last Crusade?**

Evangelist Billy Graham has concluded what may be his last crusade in a three-day New York event that drew some 230,000 followers and pilgrims. Looking frail and suffering from a number of ailments, including Parkinson's disease and prostate cancer, Graham (86) spoke in a clear but halting voice. Despite speculation that this was his last crusade, Graham hinted that one in London might be a possibility. (ENI)

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