

ASIA LUTHERAN NEWS

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LWF Sunday 2006



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The Merimasku Church near Turku, Finland, LWF Council participants going to the evening meditation

Lutherans have always stressed the close connection between faith and worship. Praying, giving thanks and rejoicing together unites the LWF member churches as a communion within the universal Christian church and awareness of the Federation's worldwide role is heightened.

The four-page leaflet is free of charge and available in English, French, German and Spanish. A PDF version can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at: www.lutheranworld.org/Essentials/LWF-Sunday.html

The global Lutheran communion comprises 140 member churches in 78 countries with a total membership of 66.2 million Christians. The size of the communion, together with the many different traditions and customs it embraces, is an impressive expression of Christian unity in our world. The annual Lutheran World Federation Sunday-held on or around Reformation Sunday-celebrates and gives thanks for this rich diversity.

The LWF Council adopted the idea of LWF Sunday in 1995 in hope that churches would celebrate such a day every year beginning in 1997 when the Federation commemorated its fiftieth anniversary. The themes chosen for each LWF Sunday until now can be found in the 1997 Hong Kong Assembly Study Book. But from 2001 focus is being given to particular aspects of LWF work to stress the scope of worldwide Lutheran Christian and humanitarian commitment.

Each year, a member church or churches and LWF Council member(s) in one of each of the seven LWF geographical regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, North America, Eastern Central Europe, Nordic countries, and Western Central Europe) take turns to prepare a suggested thanksgiving and celebration service.

With coordination from the Geneva Secretariat, member churches in the other regions adapt it for their own use. A message from the LWF General Secretary with the liturgy devised by the region and information on the Federation are sent to member churches.

While it may not always be possible to set aside an entire church service for LWF Sunday, churches are encouraged to do so, using their own congregational resources, music, and worship traditions. Thus, LWF Sunday is itself an expression of the values of communion.

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National Youth Work Camp

"Indraiya ilaignargal naalaiya thalaivargal" - an old Tamil saying meaning "Today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow".

The Youth encompasses 40% of the population in India. They are the most vibrant and dynamic segment of the population. They, who represent the next generation, need to be exposed to the reality of life in India, especially the reality of the Dalits in our country. With this contemplation the UELCI Youth and the Dalit Desks jointly organized a National Youth Work Camp under the banner "Youths' Response Towards Dalit Liberation". This camp was held from May 31-30, 2006, in two villages of Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu with about forty participants from eight of the eleven member churches of UELCI.

Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, UELCI's former Executive Secretary challenged the gathering with his Theological Reflection on what is the role of the youth and also the church in general towards Dalit Liberation. The importance and knowledge about human rights were also emphasized.

With other professional builders, the young campers were also mobilized to



National Youth Work Camp

help the villagers of Melamanakudi rebuild their houses that were destroyed by the floods in December 2005. The camp provided the participants not only the knowledge about the reality of the Dalits but also the need to emancipate and help them in their struggle for liberation. With this positive message

towards Dalit liberation instilled in the young minds during the camp, there is no doubt that these young participants will carry forward this attitude and create an impact in their respective societies.

The Indian Lutheran E-newsletter

Dr Rajaratnam at 86!



Dr K Rajaratnam, a leading figure in the Indian Lutheran and global ecumenical scene

A thanksgiving service commemorating the 86th birthday of Dr. Kunchala Rajaratnam was held on August 6, 2006 at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute. A leading figure in the Indian Lutheran and global ecumenical scene, Dr. Rajaratnam has served the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELCI) for more than four decades. From 1975 to 1979, he was Secretary for Asia in the then LWF Department of Church Cooperation. He was a member of the LWF Executive Committee from 1985 until 1990 and had served as President of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), He is currently the Executive Secretary of the LWF National Committee (India). We wish Dr Raja God's richest blessings on his birthday and always.

The Indian Lutheran E-newsletter

Christian - Muslim Dialogue in ELCJHL Schools

Dialogue begins at home, at least in the schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Depending on the school, between 40 - 50% of our students are Muslim, and they are welcomed because it is important for all three religious groups here to live together in peace. The Muslim religion classes are taught by Muslim teachers, Christians by Christian teachers, and both with the guiding principles of tolerance, mutual respect and co-existence. The Christian and Muslim classes also meet and dialogue together.

The dialogues at these joint classes in ELCJHL schools are usually a lively exchange of ideas. Tony, the Dar al Kalima Christian religion teacher, was impressed by the maturity of the dialogue with the 10th grade class, which stressed the importance of listening, seeking to understand one another and rejecting violence in any form. One student remarked, "Here we are like sisters and brothers. We worship the same God." Since the founding of the Lutheran Schools by German missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, these schools have been open to both religious groups. The schools



Young students from ELCJHL school

© ELCJHL

would also be opened to Jewish students, according to ELCJHL Schools' Director Dr. Charlie Haddad, but it is impossible because the Israeli government forbids Israelis from crossing the checkpoints and visiting the West Bank where our schools are located. Those Israelis who live in illegal settlements on Palestinian land use separate roads and do not have much contact with Palestinians, who are forbidden to use the same roads as Israelis. Dr. Haddad said they are still involved with some Christian, Muslim and Jewish dialogue in joint workshops and seminars and he hopes for more when the situation improves.

ELCJHL Sept News

The Orang Asli Tribe of Peninsula Malaysia

The Orang Asli (Malay language for indigenous people) of Peninsula Malaysia is divided into three main tribal groups, namely, the Negritos, Senois and Proto-Malays. They speak different languages and have different cultural practices. It is estimated that up to 60 percent of the Orang Asli are currently living in the deep jungle.

The Senois lives along the hilly slope of the Main Range in the interior states of Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. The Proto-Malays are living adjacent to the Malays traditional kampungs (villages) in the state of Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. The Negritos inhabit the interior district of upper Perak and Kelantan. Most of the Orang Asli who live in the Cameron Highlands are Semais.

Most Orang Asli experience much hardship and live solitary life among their own groups with hardly any contact with the outside world. Due to

the rough living condition and lack of nutrition and health care, mortality rate among children is very high.

LCMS Holistic Mission

The Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS) has developed a holistic approach that provides the natives with spiritual nourishment, health care management, raising the education standard among children and improving their general economic conditions.

The LCMS has two full-time pastors serving eight congregations in Cameron Highlands, one in Pengkalan Hulu and two settlements in Tasek Temenggor.

The church is constantly seeking to train suitable candidates among the Orang Asli to serve their own people. At present there is one youth from Cameron Highlands undergoing a B.Th. course at the Sabah Theological Seminary (STS), East Malaysia. A few

youths who had also completed a one-year course at a local Bible school were employed to work with the pastor but they left the ministry after less than a year. Despite its effort, the LCMS has not been able to find suitable candidates to replace them.

Scholarship Funds and Education

Many Orang Asli children dropped out from school at the Primary level due to poverty and poor academic performance. The LCMS has been providing scholarship to needy pupils and also started kindergartens and revision classes to prepare them for primary school education. So far six church buildings were built at Kampung Sekau and at Kampung Chang in Bidor. Although the structures are simple, the Orang Asli are very happy to have a place of their own for worship and social gathering.

LCMS Mission Newsletter

LWF 60th Anniversary in Lund, Sweden

"Living in Communion in the World Today" is the theme of the 2007 meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council to be hosted by the Church of Sweden in Lund from March 20-27, 2007 will include celebrations marking the LWF's 60th anniversary.

In February 2006, the LWF Executive Committee, via mail vote, decided to combine the next Council meeting with the anniversary commemorations in Lund, Sweden, where the Federation was founded

in 1947. The events will include a church leadership consultation bringing together LWF member church leaders, women and youth leaders.

The current 49-member Council was elected at the July 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. Its members include the LWF President, the Treasurer, and 48 lay and ordained persons drawn from the member churches. Up to 30 advisers also serve on the Council's Program and Standing Committees.

"The Lutheran Church in the World Today" was the theme of the First Assembly of the LWF, held from 30 June to 6 July 1947 in Lund, and hosted by the Church of Sweden. With nearly 7 million members, the Swedish church is the largest LWF member church.

The LWF currently has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, representing 66.2 million Christians.

LWI

Second Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

The 180 participants in the Astana congress concluded the meeting with a declaration in which they condemned all forms of terrorism "on the basis that justice can never be established through fear and bloodshed and that the use of such means in the name of religion is a violation and betrayal of any religion." The delegates called for the abandonment of "enmity, discord and hatred" to be replaced by "common respect and generosity."

In the declaration, they expressed their concern in regard to "increasing interreligious and interethnic tensions," deriving from "the exploitation of religious and national differences," which could be used as a

justification for violence. The declaration stresses that "extremism and fanaticism find no justification in a genuine understanding of religion." It is, moreover, within "the vocation of all religions" to refuse violence and to respect and peacefully co-exist with other peoples and religions.

The participants, including the 130 members of 27 delegations from 20 countries, met at the two-day congress to discuss issues involving interreligious dialogue, religious freedom, and the crucial role of religious leaders with regard to international security. The delegates, who represented major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shinto, and

Taoism, were joined by representatives of the United Nations, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), European Parliament, and other institutions. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev invited the representatives to meet in Astana at the "Palace of Peace and Accord," especially built for the religious summit.

The Third Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions is planned to convene in 2009.

**Reported by Ms Regina Karasch,
LWF National Committee in Germany**

Lutheran Indigenous Group Calls for Program to Address Their Concerns

KARASJOK, Norway/GENEVA, 29 September 2006 (LWI) - Representatives of indigenous communities and churches from all over the world have urged the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to establish a program to help address the concerns of indigenous people, a group that still does not enjoy full inclusion in church and society.

The 27 participants in the 20-24 September international consultation entitled "An Indigenous Communion" in Karasjok, northern Norway, called on the LWF to establish an advisory group in 2007 to outline guidelines for the indigenous program

in accordance with a 2003 LWF Assembly action on Indigenous Peoples.

The question of land rights was strongly debated at the consultation. "Land rights and territory are crucial to the identity of indigenous people and are fundamental rights," the participants in the consultation stated in a final message.

In their message to the LWF, the group also called for "the elaboration of an indigenous theology" involving ideological change, and changing the way of looking at traditional Christian beliefs (contextualization),"

"incorporating ethical values from indigenous perspectives," and "including indigenous women's perspectives in the formulation of indigenous theologies." Promoting networking for indigenous peoples through regional and international consultations and exchange programs was also underlined.

William Loh of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia said, "The LWF should be more concrete in actions that are needed to promote the living conditions of indigenous people. We face the same struggle worldwide." He belongs to a group of Dajaks, one of 64 indigenous communities in Malaysia.

"We have learned a huge amount by meeting other indigenous people from everywhere in the world," said Samco Chose, an elder of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, who belongs to the San community at Gobabis near the Botswana border. "The Lutheran church is the biggest denomination in our country. We know now how to ask the church to work for the acceptance of the San people into Namibian society. Many of us suffer inhuman treatment in our country," he noted.

Peter Prove of the LWF Office for International Affairs and Human Rights

(OIAHR) summed up his impressions of the consultation: "At the LWF's Tenth Assembly in 2003, indigenous participants demonstrated their great capacity to articulate their own vision and priorities for the LWF. At this consultation, that vision has been further developed, and the LWF as a whole presented with a very constructive challenge in terms of relating to the indigenous identity within the churches."

The participants came from 20 different countries, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia,

Malaysia, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Sweden and the United States. The Church of Norway hosted the consultation, convened by the LWF/OIAHR.

The consultation's final message can be downloaded from the LWF Web site at: http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OIAHR/Documentation/Karasjok_Statement-2006.pdf

The LWF communication group has created a blog for the consultation at: <http://anindigenouscommunion.blogspot.com>

African Youth Engaging Themselves in the Fight against Poverty



LWF Consultation on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, on 4-8 September

At the closing of the Conference organized by the LWFDMD Africa Desk on poverty and the church mission in Tanzania from 4 to 8 September 2006, the African youth, during their presentation, have firmly expressed their will to get their continent out of misery.

The most touched by poverty in Africa are the youth. More than 70% live with less than 1 dollar a day and in critical situations: malnutrition, disastrous sanitary conditions, illiteracy are part of their everyday's life. A minority of the youth succeeds in their final

primary school exams and those who have the opportunity to go on to university or in training high schools usually end up without a job.

This sustenance poverty is unfortunately the first cause for moral poverty. It is this sustenance poverty that leads to youth criminality.

As for young women, marriage agreed upon through Internet systems is expanding with many seeking to marry the rich. Those who are pregnant and cannot keep their child abort and throw the child onto the street.

Homosexuality is more and more present in Africa. Because of the lack of education, many youth do not believe that HIV and AIDS exist and continue having sexual relations without protection. The most touched by HIV are the youth. If nothing is done within the near future, Africa will be a continent without future, a continent unable to take over.

YICAS

Justice and Democracy in Nepal

Geneva, 27 April 2006 (LWI) - The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) welcomes recent efforts to restore a democratic system in Nepal, and urges parties to that country's internal conflict to demonstrate a commitment to justice and democracy by respecting the human rights to all people.

In a statement issued on 26 April, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said he hoped that agreements in dealing with the current political crisis would "address

the underlying grievances, which predispose Nepalese society to instability."

Nearly three weeks of pro-democracy street protests in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, forced King Gyanendra to restore the country's parliament, scheduled to reconvene on 28 April. The king assumed absolute power in February 2005, citing government failure in controlling the Maoists whose decade-old insurgency has resulted in the deaths of thousands. The group has declared a three-month cease-fire.

In his statement, Noko indicated that hope for sustainable peace and human development in Nepal could only be created through genuine and committed attention to the underlying injustices that have fed the internal conflict and political crisis in the country.

He also urged the partners of the LWF's work in the country to increase their essential support "at this critical historical moment for the people in Nepal."

RDRS won the award for Best Programme for the Hardcore Poor

Citygroup Microentrepreneurship Awards, a global effort of the Citigroup Foundation were formally announced in Dhaka on 19 September 2006, recognising those who had set outstanding example for others in micro-credit activities in Bangladesh.

The awards were given out by the Honourable Education Minister, Mr Osman Farruk at Dhaka:

- Best Woman Microentrepreneur of the year
- Best Microentrepreneur of the Year
- Best Programme for the Hardcore Poor
- Best Microfinance Institute of the Year
- Best Innovative Micro Business of the Year

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) Bangladesh, an associate program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS), won the Award for Best Programme for the Hardcore Poor.

RDRS



On behalf of RDRS Bangladesh, Mr Tapan K Karmakar, Director (Finance) received the award from the Education Minister, Mr Osman Farruk

God's Kingdom in Mongolia

Come, come away with me to the wind blown land of Chinggis Khan and the Gobi Desert - Mongolia. 2.8 million people. Vast. Landlocked. Mysterious. Ignored. Forgotten.

"Mongolia, sandwiched between China and Russia, has often been forgotten by the rest

of the world," writes Purevdorj Jamsran (Puje) Chinggis from Ulaanbaatar, the Mongolian capital. Puje is a Lutheran pastor, leader, lecturer and the Dena of the only internationally recognized and accredited theological college in the country - the interdenominational "Union Bible Training Centre".

"Lutheran?" How many of us knew there were Christians, let alone Lutherans in Mongolia? Not long ago, a secluded, ex-Communist dictatorship with literally not a Christian in sight, the country is now awaking to a new dawn. "Mongolians deserve to know the love that God gave us on the Cross through Christ Jesus, our Lord," says Pastor Puje.



Pastor Puje and his family

At a time when Christian churches already flourished all over Asia and Africa, Mongolia had none - until 1990. It was then that the first missionaries arrived to share the Gospel with the Mongol people. "I actually became a Christian at that time in the very first Mongolian Church. Originally I was Presbyterian."

Lutheran witness in Mongolia began in 1994 when the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (LCM) established a post in Ulaanbaatar. With their support and after learning more about Lutheranism in Singapore, Pastor Puje started in 1995 the first Lutheran congregation in the country, Bayariin Medee (Good News) Church in the capital.

Now there are three congregations and a preaching place in a remote region. A further church is now in fellowship with his churches. The Finnish Overseas Lutheran Mission has begun work in Mongolia so far establishing a congregation and two home groups.

Things are happening. "I am so delighted to see that our young church has sent our very first missionary to the countryside, to a remote village near the Russian border to evangelize and to plant a church," says Pastor Puje.

Traditionally Mongolians are Buddhists (of the Tibetan type) but years of Communist oppression produced a secular, corrupt and impoverished society, with people longing for light and salvation.

Bayariin Medee Church and the Bible Training Centre are very evangelistic. Hopes are to spread the Gospel from Mongolia to Siberia and North Korea - the last hidden, forbidden society on earth!

Presently there are some 40,000 - 45,000 Christians in Mongolia but the goal is to have won 10% of the Mongol people for Christ by 2020. Pastor Puje, however, thinks they can do significantly better than that!

Pastor Puje's work as the head of the "Union Bible Training Centre" is absolutely crucial. "I am so blessed to be able to serve the future leaders of the Mongolian Church," he says, "The leaders are coming from all over Mongolia and they are going back to serve their people. What a blessing to be part of a vibrant church at this time of history!"



Gathering for an evangelistic meeting. Man in suit is the local governor.

These days Christians are not persecuted in Mongolia. In fact his church is closely working with government offices in matters of social work, support for the poor and disadvantaged, church-based English and computer classes.

"Our church is also starting to facilitate four micro-enterprises (sewing, bakery, green house and carpentry) and a day care ministry. These are big challenges for us. Please pray that all those business and ministry initiatives are funded and will be

successful and effective. With all these we want to improve both the lives of our people and to help the church with its ministries and missions."

What a tremendous witness in the way Pastor Puje's Lutheran Church tries to meet the material and spiritual needs of the people of his land!

Rev. August Fricke
Editor, Asia Focus
www.asiafocus.org.au
Zion Lutheran Church, Australia

Ecumenical News

Latin America is now less Catholic, more diverse, says Lutheran leader

Geneva (ENI). Latin America was once considered a Roman Catholic continent but is now characterised by a religious pluralism that can lead to hostile competitiveness, the main governing body of the World Council of Churches has heard. "An astounding shift is taking place," the Rev. Walter Altmann, moderator of the WCC central committee, said in his report presented to the governing body. "There are no signs to indicate that the consistent trend towards religious pluralism may be reversed over the coming years."

Christianity Faces New Divisions

Geneva (ENI). The new moderator of the World Council of Churches has warned

that Christianity faces new divisions because of doctrinal and ethical differences, and he has urged a recommitment to the goal of full and visible unity among the churches. "Burning and divisive issues, both doctrinal and ethical, run to some considerable extent internally through many of our churches, resulting in inner tensions, if not in new divisions," said the Rev. Walter Altmann in his first report to the WCC's main governing body.

Reject idea of Islam as 'oil and terror' says Indonesia Christian leader

Geneva (ENI). The Rev. Soritua Nababan, a Christian leader in the world's most populous Muslim nation, says the stereotyped idea of Islam tied to "oil and terror" should be rejected and he believes strengthening Muslim moderates in their own communities through dialogue can help reduce conflict. One of the

eight presidents of the World Council of Churches, Nabadan knows conflict. "I was a freedom fighter against the Dutch as a schoolboy," in Indonesia, he noted. But, he said, "I have an idea to widen Christian-Muslim relationships dictated by the centuries-long paradigm of Crusade against Islam, or jihad, or Islamic war."

World church group calls for action against HIV stigma

Geneva (ENI). The world's biggest church grouping is urging religious leaders to examine behaviour, attitudes and actions that stigmatise people living with HIV and AIDS, while also calling on churches to adopt workplace policies inclusive of HIV-positive people. "While the churches have been on the front line of care and support for people affected by the pandemic, many of us have also been complicit in stigmatising and marginalising people living

with HIV and AIDS by our silence, our attitudes, our words and our deeds," the main governing body of the World Council of Churches said in a statement.

Pope says Christians and Muslims must work together to oppose violence

Rome (ENI). Pope Benedict XVI has told diplomats from Islamic countries of his respect for Muslims, following a furore about a speech in which he quoted a 14th century Christian emperor who referred to "evil and inhuman" aspects of Islam. "I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers," Pope Benedict told the ambassadors of Islamic countries accredited to the Holy See, as well as representatives of various Muslim communities in Italy. Christians and Muslims needed to learn to work together, Pope Benedict said, "to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence".

Indian Christians protest at new anti-conversion measures in Gujarat

Calcutta (ENI). Christian groups in India say that moves in the state of Gujarat to amend an existing anti-religious conversion law will further inflame communal tension. "The amendment, passed amidst enormous opposition, takes away the fundamental rights guaranteed to an individual," the Evangelical Fellowship of India said in a statement. "Only those converting to Islam and Christianity have to report to the government." The Gujarat legislature excluded Buddhism and Jainism from the scope of the law by declaring them to be branches of the Hindu religion, thereby exempting people converting to these faiths from the need to seek government permission.

Norway's Sami president says churches play key role for indigenous

Karasjok (ENI). The president of Norway's Sami people has told a gathering of indigenous people from throughout the

world meeting near the Arctic Circle that the Church and religious communities play a vital role in promoting indigenous issues in her country and internationally. "The Sami parliament is deeply indebted for the work that religious communities perform locally, nationally, and at the international level to promote indigenous issues," said Aili Keskitalo in Karasjok, in northern Norway, the seat of the Sami parliament. The Sami are a group of indigenous people, most of whom inhabit the northern parts of Norway, but who straddle Finland, Sweden and Russia as well.

Canadian church opts for tap water in anti-privatisation campaign

Toronto (ENI). Members of Canada's largest Protestant denomination are going to drink tap water at meetings in future and not the bottled variety that has become institutionalised at gatherings, if church leaders have their way. United Church of Canada leaders say this stems from decisions taken at the general council of the church when the denomination's main decision-making body demanded an end to the privatisation of water. "Bottled water containers labelled with images of pristine natural environments are rapidly becoming a major threat to the environment and to our health," notes the Web site of Kairos, a social justice group supported by the United church and other Canadian denominations.

Church musician encourages Asians to eschew Western harmony

Kobe (ENI). Asian Christians need to learn to use traditional cultural elements to enrich their hymns, despite their long-standing preference for western melodies and words, according to one of the region's leading exponents of liturgical music. "The great majority of Asian Christians have internalised Western hymns so much that it is difficult for them to develop their own traditional hymns," says I-to Loh, general editor of "Sound the Bamboo", an Asian hymnal used by the Christian Conference of Asia. "However, the situation has been changing during the last two or three decades."

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