

ASIA LUTHERAN NEWS

Christmas is the Celebration of the Unsearchable Love of God



In the midst of our various kinds of experiences, we continue to reflect on the unsearchable love of God, which is one of the main objects of our meditation as we move into the Christmas season. We are taught that there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can be compared with the love of God. No matter how far human love may reach, but God's love reaches infinitely farther. The human mind simply cannot fathom the love of God that is so deep, so divine. Such love, indeed, passes knowledge (Ephesians 3:19). The love, the peace, and the joy of Christmas can be taken into the human heart alone by faith. God does not ask us to understand the unsearchable mysteries of His divine love and revelation in Christ, but He asks us only to believe and trust them. We should not make the mistake of trying to understand the great truths of our salvation, the truth of God's love, of full and free forgiveness through faith in Christ.

In many countries in Asia, Christians celebrate Christmas together with people of all faiths with great enthusiasm. In the multi-cultural, ethnic, and religious Asia, the same occurs that others join in to make Muslim Adilfitri, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, and Buddhist festivals truly festive for adherents of other faiths and beliefs. Christmas is the celebration of the unsearchable love of God and therefore, Christian love is the reflection of God's unsearchable love, which implies that love is not optional in the Christian's life. Christian love cannot be added

to our lives as an ornament is added to a Christmas tree. Genuine Christian love must be an inevitable fruit of the Spirit of God. Christian love is a debt, a debt we owe and a debt we have to pay if we will bear the name of Christ. Faith is the hand that reaches out across the years and brings God's blessings of love, of tender mercy, and, above all, of divine forgiveness - into our hearts. These are the lasting blessings of Christmas that we need to share with all people regardless of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences.

We believe that 2006 has been successful in many ways in our life although there were some disturbing situations. We are celebrating the joy of Christmas in the midst of our continued concerns about some pressure points in our life as the realities of globalization. Christmas is a message of hope and spiritual strength despite all the obstacles that we may deal with in the year 2007.

The Christmas message invites us to renew our faith in God, our love for one another and to reflect on a more just and tolerant world. Christmas seeks to serve one another and all humankind that our enthusiasms and talents can serve God work for human conditions for the dignity of others and all creation.

With this, let me wish each of you peace and happiness during this Christmas season 2006 and a productive New Year 2007.

Rev. Dr Ginda P. Harahap
LWF-DMD Asia Secretary



Dr. Ginda A. Harahap

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Statement from Bishop Munib A Younan on the Gaza Crisis Evangelical Lutheran Church and The Holy Land (ELCJHL)

Nov 9, 2006

As a church, we believe that all human life is sacred. We believe that God's intent for humanity is revealed in the words of Jesus: "I have come to give them life, and life abundantly."



Bishop Munib A Younan

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Accordingly, we are appalled and outraged by the indiscriminate disregard for human life exhibited by the Israeli army in the past week in Beit Hanoun, especially the violent bombardment killing a whole family, young and old, men, women and children, as they slept in their beds. Yet this incident is only part of a week-long military campaign that killed 80 Palestinians and kept a city of 30,000 under siege and in terror. In fact, this month is just part of the recent bloodletting of almost 500 Palestinian lives in 5 months, and a siege on Gaza that included the deliberate destruction of its only power plant. This blatant disregard for innocent human life and extensive destruction of property constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention as stated in Article 147. Also, the Israeli army has failed to

fulfill its obligation to respect the special protection awarded to medical personnel and places of worship, as respectively provided in Article 15(1) of the First Additional Protocol of 1977 and Article 56 of The Hague Regulations, both reflective of customary international law.

In light of all that has occurred, we call on Israelis to immediately stop all military actions. These attacks only create more hatred, desire for revenge and growth in extremism.

We Palestinians are losing hope that anyone, including the so-called Quartet, remembers the Road Map or sees the abhorrent conditions here, especially in Gaza. We call on the Quartet to assume its responsibility, immediately intervene to stop the bloodshed and begin to implement the Road Map. We need an international force of observers here to supervise and uphold a ceasefire and to hold both sides accountable, and we need it now. Having been under siege for 5 months, with borders hardly open at all and no income, we as a church are worried that Gaza is at a breaking point. We are under a military occupation and yet dependent on the occupying power for protection and support. The Quartet, the UN and signers to the Geneva Convention have a duty to insure humane treatment and justice.

The only way out of this stalemate is through dialogue with Israel and the Palestinian Authority. When one bans dialogue and negotiations, it brings

desperation, and desperation has no limits. Dialogue and negotiations are the only alternative to violence. Only when all people are treated as human beings with equal worth and dignity will we begin to make progress. First, dialogue should concern an immediate ceasefire, then a prisoner exchange to build confidence. Then the final outcome must be based on a two-state solution along the 67 borders, political solutions to the refugee problems and the illegal settlements and a shared Jerusalem between Israelis, Palestinians, Muslims, Christians and Jews.

Revenge and counter-revenge will not bring justice and peace. It will only add to the bitterness of the vicious cycle. The time has come for the international community to step in and bring hope in a hopeless situation and dare to take courageous and prophetic actions for the sake of justice and humanity, and to allow our children and future generations to enjoy the blessings of this Holy Land.

As we soon enter the Advent season, I ask our Christian sisters and brothers, and all people of good conscience and faiths, to be with us in prayer and fasting. Many are losing hope, and the relentless killing and calls for retaliation make us afraid that we are on the brink of an even bloodier season. Please, be our voices in your countries to call for an end to the violence and the beginning of dialogue. Thank you for your prayers and support, and may God bless us and bring healing peace to our land.

LCA Maintains Status Quo on Ordination

The Lutheran Church of Australia's 40th anniversary Convention of General Synod voted to maintain the status of quo on ordination

Just over 50 per cent of the 385 registered delegates voted to support

the proposition that 'the church accepts that scripture and theology permit the ordination of women'.

However, the motion was lost because, being a theological issue, a two-thirds majority was required for it to be carried.

This result means the church will continue to ordain only men as pastors.

The vote was taken by secret ballot after two-and-a-half hours of debate in which 42 speakers addressed the proposal. The actual figures were: 194

votes for, 169 against, 20 abstentions, one informal vote and one not lodged.

The result is very similar to that of the 2000 convention, where the ordination of women was last officially discussed by the Synod. In that ballot there were 220 votes for, 195 against and one abstention.

President Mike Semmler of LCA, who called the meeting to prayer ahead of the vote, commended delegates for their demeanour and the tone of the debate, and reminded them that as delegates of Synod their responsibility was to vote 'in the best interest of the church as you understand it'.

Prior to the debate, delegates were told that pastors were almost equally divided over the ordination of women: 111 voting for it, 99 against with eight abstentions.

The formal statement from the conference said that the pastors had aimed to reach consensus. However, 'even though all pastors confess the Scriptures to be the authoritative word of God, it is with regret that we advise the church that we have not come to consensus on the matter'.

The Synod was asked 'to take the lack of consensus into account when it [considered] the proposal on the agenda'.



The Synod further agreed that a task force should be established to determine and implement strategies for promoting greater consensus on the question of the ordination of women.

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'Four Decades, Four Projects'

The 'Four Decades, Four Projects' initiative to mark the Lutheran Church of Australia's 40th anniversary received a significant financial boost on Convention Sunday.

The 1260 people who gathered for worship in the Berghofer Recreation Centre at the University of Southern Queensland lightened their pockets to

the tune of \$22,400 during the freewill offering. This was music to the ears of the people implementing the projects that the General Church Council has nominated to receive special funding under the LCA's 40th-anniversary initiative 'Four Decades, Four Projects', namely:

- the international Giraffe youth leadership program

- the pastoral and linguistic needs of the people served by Finke River Mission
- assistance for Lutheran teachers from overseas partner churches to visit Australian Lutheran schools
- the growing ministry to and with Chinese-speaking people in Australia.

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New Opening for Ministry Among Hakkas in China

People used to say that the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM) is the biggest Hakka speaking church in the world. Hakka dialect is still widely used in the churches as well as in the society in Sabah, Malaysia. There are many Hakka churches in other countries, but most of the people do not speak Hakka anymore. Therefore, we deeply feel that it is our responsibility to spread the Gospel among the Hakka people in China where the dialect is still the sole means of communication.

Our fore-parents came from the Hakka areas in the southern part of China, namely, Ho Yuan, Lau Loong, Ng Fah, Hin Nyen and Moi Yen. As the Chinese saying goes "when you drink water you have to think about the source". Therefore, it is our turn to go back to



Young & old in action



Children attending Sunday School for the first time

serve now. For the past years, BCCM had participated at least twice every year in the training of lay leaders and pastors. BCCM had also been sending visitation teams to the rural areas. On the personal level, my husband and I have also committed to devoting our retirement time for this Hakka ministry since last year. Besides us, there is another young couple serving in Tianjin as English teachers.

Children are the future of the church. However, there is no children's ministry in most of the congregations especially in the rural areas. Therefore, building the capacity of women to be Sunday School teachers in the local level has become our

vision. From October 8 to 26, six of us conducted a four-day Sunday school teachers training in one of the five Hakka districts - Hin Nyen. There were 39 participants from the various congregations. After the training sessions, the group divided itself into teams of two and went to 17 local congregations to do the follow up work through talks and teaching demonstrations.

We are very thankful to our almighty God that the ministry are reaping results. We received very good responses from church leaders, pastors and congregation members. We were encouraged by those who had attended the training and seriously taking up the tasks of



Packed to the brim for worship



Women's choir

establishing Sunday school classes for children in their own congregations, with many doing it for the first time.

However, there is still a shortage of trained teachers, teaching materials, classrooms etc. They need our support for further training and teaching materials. This was the first training course on children ministry in the Hakka areas in the southern part of China. We hope this ministry will be conducted in the other districts in the years to come.

Dr. Pang Ken Phin, BCCM



ASIAN INSTITUTE OF LITURGY & MUSIC AILM

THE AILM COLLECTION, published by the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music (AILM), that includes new hymns, psalms, and songs for worship is now available.

The Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music, the Asian center for church music training and liturgy in partnership with LWF, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, has published the AILM COLLECTION, Volume I.

This collection contains works by AILM composers including those of Francisco

Feliciano, Lee Geonyong, I-to Loh, John Barathi, Daud Kosasih, Chris Tamaela, James Swu, among others. The music and the texts were carefully chosen by the Editor, Francisco Feliciano, to reflect the development of new songs for worship in Asia in the last 25 years, particularly those that were created in AILM by its multi-denominational, multi-cultural community. The collection is divided into songs and hymns, psalms, canticles and service music.

AILM has just celebrated its 25th year of founding with the AILM Chorale

performance tour of Sweden, the Netherlands and Bavaria introducing to congregations the songs from the AILM Collection in cooperation with the Church of Sweden, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria.

For information on the AILM Collection, please e-mail AILM, fffsamba@pacific.net.ph

Lilibeth Nacion
Executive Director
Samba-Likhaan Foundation-AILM



ECUMENICAL NEWS

◦ **Bielefeld, Germany (ENI)**
A new translation of the Bible in inclusive language intended to do justice to women, Jew and marginalised groups has been officially launched in Germany - and is already sold out.

"It was a risk, and for a long time we did not know if we meet the deadline. But we are happy and thankful for achieving this day," Hanne Koehler, head of the publishing team, said at a service in Frankfurt to celebrate the completion of the project on Reformation Day, 31 October.

◦ **Kyoto, Japan (ENI)**
Korea-Japan dialogue starts for Asian theology of reconciliation. Theologians from Korea and Japan, its coloniser in the first half of the 20 century, have begun a dialogue in search of an Asian

theology that can act to reconcile, and that goes beyond nationalism in both countries. The two-day Korea-Japan Theology Forum 2006 was held in Kyoto. It was hosted by the Japan Society of Christian Studies. Organizers said the meeting was unprecedented and that it was the most significant communication between theologians from the two countries in recent years.

◦ **Rome (ENI)**
Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, have prayed together and committed to strengthening Roman Catholic-Anglican ties. But the two churches remained divided over key issues, including the ordination of women priests and the role of homosexual clergy. The Pope and the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion met at the

Vatican to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the meeting between the then spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion, Michael Ramsey, and Pope Paul VI, in 1966.

◦ **Lusaka (ENI)**
The Roman Catholic Church in Zambia and excommunicated archbishop Emmanuel Milingo who defiled the Vatican by ordaining four married bishops, are waging an intercontinental war of words over the celibacy of clerics. The latest salvo came from Milingo, who was the archbishop of Lusaka, with the release of a statement of reaffirmation last week by Pope Benedict XVI that the Catholic Church remains committed to celibacy. Milingo responded from Washington saying, "Our organization also reaffirms the married priesthood in the same Roman Catholic Church."



EROSION OF CHRISTIANITY

A top church official has taken aim at the 'systematic erosion' of Christianity in British public life, citing among other things official refusal to acknowledge Christmas for fear of offending other faiths.

Archbishop of Yoke John Sentamu, a leading official in the Church of England, objected to official government Christmas cards that merely wished "Seasons Greetings" as well as to Santa on stamps instead of Jesus Christ.

Speaking to church lay leaders in the northern English city of Newcastle, Archbishop Sentamu also complained

that official documents now invite people to write their 'first name' rather than 'Christian name'.

He also cited the decision eight years ago by the Birmingham City Council, in central England to rename Christmas 'Winterval', which was done to avoid offending others.

He said the then Bishop of Birmingham Mark Santer led a campaign, backed by other faiths, to reinstate 'Christmas'.

"But in the eight years since Winterval, there have been many other instances

and decisions where Christianity is being systematically eroded from public view - more often than not in the fear of offending those who would not be offended in the least or because of the mistaken belief that Christianity has no role to play in the public arena," he said.

"This systematic erosion is subtle, with minor changes which drip by drip erode centuries of Christian heritage and identity."

Agence France-Presse (TST, 13/11)



CHRISTMAS ASIAN & TANZANIA PERSPECTIVES



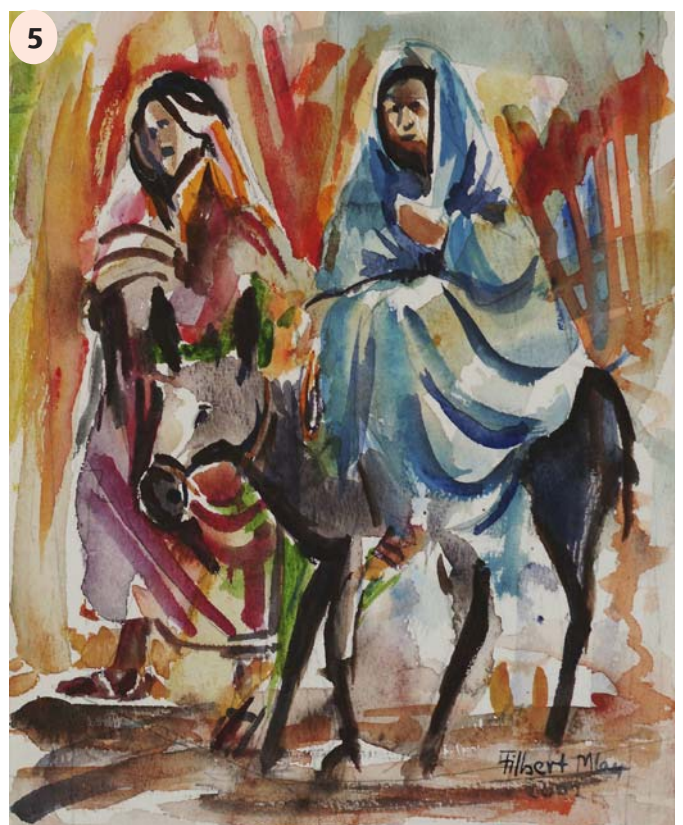
1. Child is born! Philippines Edgar T. Fernandez Oil paintin on canvas

2. Birth. Thailand Sawai Chinnawong Oil paintin on canvas

3. Christmass Indonesia Komang Wahyu Sukayasa Oil paintin on canvas

4. Holy Family, China Zhang Shu Liang Oil paintin on canvas

5. Escape to Egypt. Tanzania Philbert Mlai Akvarell



1 Study Secretary for Theology and the Church

Basic Purpose

Pursues strategic theological questions and challenges that emerge in the life and work of the LWF as a communion of churches, from especially Lutheran perspectives, through collaborative study processes, research, writing, and networking with member churches, ecumenical partners, and theologians from throughout the world, in line with the Terms of Reference for the department and LWF policies and procedures.

Position Qualifications

- Advanced university/seminary degree (at doctoral level) in systematic or dogmatic theology, with attention to ecclesiological, hermeneutical and/or inter-religious concerns.
- Articulate in expressing Lutheran theological perspectives, especially as they relate to contemporary discussions
- Familiar with and committed to the global and local dimensions of what it means to be the church, and with the theological perspectives emerging in these different contexts.
- Extensive experience in theological research and in communicating theological understandings, through speaking and writing, in ways that are clear and accessible to non-specialists.
- Proven ability to take the initiative and accomplish work in ways that are timely and effective.
- Experience in planning, writing and editing theological articles for publication.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively and flexibly with staff colleagues and with groups of persons from a variety of cultural backgrounds, especially those from the global South, and in planning and carrying out international consultations.
- Very fluent in speaking and writing in English, fluency in German also important; some knowledge of French or Spanish would be helpful.
- Experienced in working with relevant computer programs.

Candidates for this position require a Church Endorsement

Closing Date: by 5 January 2007

Nominations/Applications should be sent in English with:

- two theological articles they have written that indicate their current or recent interests;
- copies of relevant diplomas/certificates and names, e-mail addresses or fax numbers of three persons who know the applicant professionally and can be contacted for references;

2 Secretary for Program and Project Coordination, DMD

Reports to: Director of the Department for Mission and Development, DMD

Place of Assignment: Geneva, Switzerland

Starting Date: 1 May 2007

Duration of Contract: Initial contract of four years

Basic Purpose

To be responsible for the coordination and assessment of all projects in the Department for Mission and Development, the coordination of the Project Committee meetings as well as the fundraising of approved projects and programs in line with the Terms of Reference for the department, LWF policies and procedures as well as the decisions of the Program Committee for Mission and Development / Council.

Position Qualifications

- University degree or equivalent in education, development studies, agriculture, technical or social studies or administration.
- Several years of working experience in a senior position involving project/program planning, management and administration in an international environment, preferably in the area of mission and development with LWF member church, mission society, related agency or ecumenical organization. Sensitivity for church and social concerns and ability to share the motivation of a Christian commitment for the services carried out by the Department in partnership with LWF member churches, mission societies and supporting agencies.
- Working experience in a developing country and a first-hand knowledge of LWF member churches.
- Proven skills in fundraising.
- Fluency in English, working knowledge of French, German, Spanish would be an asset.
- Good computer skills and solid Excel spreadsheet knowledge.

Candidates for this position require a church endorsement.

Closing Date: by 31 January 2007

*Applications for the two positions to be sent to: Rev. Rudolf Renfer, Director for Personnel,
The Lutheran World Federation, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland,
E-mail: sw@lutheranworld.org Fax: +41 22 791 66 28*

Please submit in English with copies of relevant diplomas/certificates and names, e-mail addresses or fax numbers of three persons who know the applicant professionally and can be contacted for references

*For more details on the main duties and major challenges of the positions,
please log into www.asia-lutheran.org*



ALN Subscription Crosses the 800 Benchmark

The mailing list of Asia Lutheran News (ALN) has crossed the 800 benchmark in the beginning of November 2006. There are visitors subscribing to the email list regularly but the ALN editorial board is looking forward to having many more subscribers. Anyone who finds the Asia Lutheran News relevant is welcome to subscribe and to forward the link to those who may find the site useful.

It is easy to subscribe to the mailing list. Just click the internet explorer (or any browser icon) and type the website address: asia-lutheran.org. This will take you to the home page of the Asia Lutheran website where you simply type your email address on the 'subscribe' field on the left column of the page. Then hit the subscribe button and your name will be added to the list and a

confirmation message sent to you automatically. After you get the message, just click on the link in it to confirm your subscription. When you hit 'Asia Lutheran News' that is included in the message, you will be taken to the main site.

The system will send out a bimonthly message as soon as the latest ALN in PDF format is posted on the site. There is no worry about spam or security on this list because no email addresses will be given to a third party organization.

Every email sent to you will have the following footer:

The first "Unsubscribe" link will facilitate an easy and anonymous way to leave the list. Just click the unsubscribe link at the footer of the message and your name will be taken out. You can re-subscribe again

anytime by typing in your email address in the 'subscribe' field.

The second line (web link) is to change your preferences. Typically, it is used to change you email address. There are optional fields the subscribers are requested to fill in. If you wish to receive only targeted mail, please click on the second link and fill in the form. After updating, do not forget to hit "Update" button. Readers may also check the information stored with their username by clicking this link.

PHP list is the software behind the Asia-Lutheran list. You can download PHP-List free of charge and use it in you mailing list. For more details and download go to <http://www.phplist.com>

Timo Reuhkala
Webmaster, ALN



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