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## PRIORITY AREA 2

# Ecumenism

### DEEPEN ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT AND FOSTER INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Every Lutheran church today lives amid religious diversity—and knows it. Ecumenical engagement with other Christians, a long-term characteristic of the Lutheran family, arises from the conviction that the Church of Jesus Christ is larger than this communion. Equally deep in Lutheran understanding is the basis for interfaith cooperation in the one world which God has created.

In the first years of this third millennium, both the gifts and challenges of the global religious diversity have impressed themselves afresh upon the LWF in all the aspects of its work. It is increasingly evident that Lutheran self-understanding and mission cannot be pursued apart from multiple relationships with other religious communities. These relationships are not achieved easily. They are at once resilient and fragile, and the same cultural and political realities that reinforce their urgency can also

make them more difficult to develop. They demand both thorough formation in the resources of Lutheran traditions and at the same time an openness of mind and spirit to welcome the gifts of others and grasp theological questions in new ways. For the LWF, these relationships will invite a range of transformations, some of them as yet unpredictable.

For many years it was possible to distinguish and even contrast the ecumenical efforts of “faith and order” and “life and work.” Not long ago one could also speak of predictable steps or stages in an ordered journey toward greater visible unity with other Christians. It could seem obvious that the imperatives of ecumenical engagement and interfaith encounter were not only distinct but separate. The recent experience of the LWF, however, shows much more complex and inter-related realities. For example, at a 2008 LWF seminar for teaching theologians in Asia, it was



Students in an LWF community vocational training center in Ramallah, West Bank work together on a mobile phone computer program. © Church of Sweden/Leif Gustavsson

evident that the “religious resurgence” swirling around Lutheran churches there involves both other Christian churches and movements, and other faiths. Cooperation in diaconal work and shared theological explorations can interact with one another to bring religious communities into multi-layered forms of shared life. Energy for building ecumenical relationship can be sparked at all levels of the church, with local and international initiatives strengthening one another. And while the goals of interfaith cooperation cannot be simply conflated with hopes for Christian unity, the interactions of methods, commitments, attitudes and rewards in these two areas are emerging more clearly.

As the LWF grows more deeply into its identity as a communion of churches, the gifts of its first 60 years have become increasingly evident. In particular, its formal work of engagement with other communities of faith is nurtured by the depth and breadth of the global action that marks the LWF. In turn the insights of these faith-based and specifically theologically-focused contacts offer distinctive resources for the healing work of the Federation. Communion life reflects both the diaconal and ecumenical identity of the church itself, both of which are inseparable dimensions.

The aspects of interfaith and ecumenical activity are, in the end, dimensions of relationship. Reception, reconciliation, common witness and mission—all of these share in the complexity of life between peoples.

### **DIALOGUE: A CHOSEN MEANS OF RELATIONSHIP**

The LWF continues to value bilateral theological dialogue as a contribution to Christian unity. This theologically intense method of enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation has produced significant results, especially in relationships which carry scars of a history of mutual condemnations.

As the ecumenical world changes, dialogues have taken on a wider range of subjects and challenges, rooting themselves more explicitly in the experiences of diverse churches. Dialogue commissions increasingly represent the communion’s diversity with respect to regions, theological formation and gender. The new Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, for example, includes members from every LWF region and is equally composed of women and men.

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**01-03.04.05** ▪ A celebration marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research reviews its contribution to ecumenical research, dialogue, reception and communication.

**05-08.04.05 [DMD]**

▪ A DMD leadership conference of LWF member churches in Latin America held in Bogotá, Colombia, engages in discussion on the LWF study on the ministry of episcopé.

**21-25.04.05**

**[OIAHR]** ▪ Over 250 delegates from over 30 African countries attend the Second IFAPA Summit at Kopanong, South Africa, supporting grassroots interfaith peace initiatives in conflict areas. Women from different faith traditions launch an African women’s interfaith network.



Young communicators at the OCS/ YICAS workshop. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

**27.04.05 [DMD: Youth/YICAS]**

▪ OCS and YICAS launch the three-

year “Towards a Communicating Communion – A Youth Vision” program at an international workshop in Lyon, France.

**25–29.04.05 [DMD: WICAS]** ▪ Participants in an African regional consultation explore a faith-based approach to water pollution, commodification and privatization, lack of access to and inequality of water distribution, climate change and desertification.

**May [DTS: Spiritualism study]**  
▪ A booklet in the DTS Studies series focuses on “Ancestors, Spirits & Healing in Africa and Asia: A Challenge to the Church.”

**02–03.05.05 [DWS]**  
▪ The DWS Annual Forum takes place in Montreux, Switzerland.

**23–27.05.05 [DWS]**  
▪ A DWS Latin America & Caribbean regional consultation held in Cobán, Guatemala, explores the theme of “Interculturality and Citizenship.”

**June [DTS: Christian-Muslim study]** ▪ Members of the DTS “Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Conflict and Peace” study team share insights from case studies in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria with Lutheran and Muslim leaders in Chicago and Indianapolis, USA.

## RESULTS OF DIALOGUE: ONGOING TRANSFORMATIONS

A notable example of these results has been the widening impact of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), signed with the Roman Catholic Church in October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. At that time, the Joint Declaration represented a notable accomplishment: both churches declared that, at the level of official teaching, they no longer needed to condemn the other on this crucial doctrine. Using a method of “differentiated consensus,” which respects continuing distinctiveness in piety and theological expression, the JDDJ officially marked a new beginning between the two traditions concerning how they would speak about the other. As has regularly been the case with major theological statements, however, the full significance of the Joint Declaration continues to emerge in the years since its acceptance.

By 2009, when the tenth anniversary was marked with celebrations in Augsburg and around the world, both the Office for Ecumenical Affairs (OEA) and DTS had sponsored consultations on contemporary understandings of justification that helped to map the questions still being explored—both at the level of contextual regional expression and with other ecumenical partners. The Office for Communication Services (OCS) produced for the fifth anniversary an *LWI* special edition that helped to relate the JDDJ to the life of churches around the world, and DTS made available the report *Accepted by God – Transformed by Christ: The Doctrine of Justification in Multilateral Ecumenical Dialogue*, a study on the doctrine of justification by the German Ecumenical Study Commission (DÖSTA).



Pope Benedict XVI receives a framed facsimile of the Official Common Statement of the Joint Declaration from LWF president Hanson and general secretary Noko in November 2005. © L'Osservatore Romano

In 2006, the World Methodist Council also affirmed the JDDJ. A Symposium of Biblical Scholars, conceived in 1999 as a means to “deepen the biblical basis of the doctrine of justification” beyond the level of the declaration itself, began its work in 2008, with Reformed and Methodist scholars joining Lutherans and Roman Catholics. This group is pursuing a three-fold task: to examine justification in contemporary understandings of Paul’s letters in New Testament literature, outside Pauline writings, and in the whole Bible. The report of the fourth phase of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, which completed its work in 2006, provided a study resource for ongoing discussions on its topic, *The Apostolicity of the Church*. All these projects illustrate unfinished tasks in this crucial relationship. The history illustrates also that “reception” of

ecumenical achievements, far from being a one-time event, is a process with unexpected challenges, occasional set-backs, and unforeseen rewards.

### GROWING IN COMMUNION

In two of the bilateral dialogues in which the LWF participates—with Anglican and Reformed churches—the implications of life in communion have shown themselves important not only internally but for relations with other ecclesial traditions. In both cases, the commissions' mandate pointed their work toward closer formal relationships—perhaps even relationships of communion—between the two families. In each case, for unforeseen reasons the partners find themselves asking about the meanings of communion among their own churches, conversations which the LWF recognizes from its own experience.

The third round of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC) began in 2006. As this dialogue explored themes of communion and diakonia, prompted in part by the response of its host churches to HIV and AIDS in Tanzania and Dalit theology in India, its work unexpectedly intersected the ongoing work of DMD in developing a handbook on diakonia. The ALIC report will focus on the diaconal character of the church as a central theme.



*The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LWF dialogue with churches of the Eastern Orthodox family was celebrated in Bratislava, Slovak Republic in 2006. © Stephanie Dietrich*

In the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission, formed in 2006, there were also no church-dividing issues to examine. Instead, the dialogue has focused its attention on the ecclesial character of Christian life. As the Reformed partner emerges from the June 2010 merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council as the new World Communion of Reformed Churches, the LWF experience in claiming a communion identity has been important. The commission chose Namibia for its second meeting since anti-apartheid struggles in Southern Africa were important in developing greater accountability in each family. Both communions continue to face a challenge posed by ecumenical self-awareness: in the absence of church-dividing differences, why have Lutheran and Reformed churches in the same local context not felt more impelled to come together, among

**01-03.06.05** ▪ An international consultation in Geneva on “The Future of the LWF in the Context of Ecumenical Reconfiguration” recommends active LWF engagement in shaping a proposed ecumenical alliance for development.



*Geneva Ecumenical Center general secretaries during the “Reconfiguration” consultation. © LWF/S. Oppeggaard*

**08-13.06.05 [DMD]**

▪ A European church leadership consultation organized by DMD in Reykholt, Iceland, focuses on dwindling church membership in western, eastern and central Europe.

**16-19.06.05 [DMD:**

**WICAS]** ▪ A WICAS “Conference of Women Bishops, Presidents and Leaders with the Ministry of Oversight” in Geneva reports failure to recognize women’s call to ordained ministry in 41 LWF member churches.



*Women ministers [from left] from Sweden, USA and Poland at the WICAS conference. © LWF/ B. Schneider*

**24-30.06.05 [DTS]**

▪ A DTS study seminar in Warsaw, Poland, on “The Authority of the

Bible in the Life of the Church” seeks to enrich and deepen how Lutheran churches understand the Bible.

**27.06.05–01.07.05**

**[OEA]** • The Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission has its first meeting in Strasbourg, France.

**27.06.05–01.07.05**

**[DWS]** • A joint OCS/DWS regional workshop on communication capacity-building for DWS field offices is conducted in Kampala, Uganda.

**27.06.05–01.07.05**

**[DWS]** • A joint OCS/DWS regional workshop on communication capacity-building for LWF field offices is held in Uganda.

**17–21.07.05 [OIAHR]**

• Visiting Togo, a delegation encourages the country’s religious communities to join forces to overcome the country’s political crisis.

**26–29.08.05 •**

President Hanson, Dr Noko and Bishop Munib Younan visit religious, political and community leaders in Jordan.

**30.08.05 •**

The LWF Executive Committee meets in Bethlehem and Jerusalem ahead of the Council meeting.

**31.08–06.09.05 •**

The LWF Council meeting chooses Stuttgart as the venue for the Eleventh Assembly in 2010, resolves to inten-

themselves and with one another? These are questions of the church, of ecclesiology, therefore, the report from this commission will center on meanings of communion and of the repentance and imagination involved in sustaining it.

In recent years, the LWF dialogue with churches of the Eastern Orthodox family has also been engaged with questions of the church. This is the longest continuous LWF dialogue; its festive 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Bratislava, Slovak Republic in 2006 was marked by an *LWI* focus on its significance. While this dialogue builds mutual understanding across difficulties created by long years of separated histories, it has found many common affirmations, as well as continuing differences on aspects of the “mystery of the Church.” As with churches of the Oriental Orthodox family, with whom the LWF began conversations in 2008, the impulse toward mutual appreciation is increased by global mobility, which brings both communities into contact not only in a few locations but around the world.

Against the backdrop of these ecumenical involvements, a study process is currently underway through DTS on how Lutheran churches throughout the communion understand and live out what it means to be “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,” as confessed in the Nicene Creed.

*Continued on page 28*

## OFFICE FOR ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS

Over the past six years, OEA continued its critical role of implementing the LWF’s commitment to bilateral dialogues and conversations that foster closer relations among Christians.

The fourth **Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity** completed a study document on the crucial question of “The Apostolicity of the Church.” A new Commission examines “Baptism and Growth in Communion” and ecumenical perspectives for the 2017 anniversary year. The **Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission** continued with aspects of the “Mystery of the Church.” Its work on the Eucharist concluded with a timely statement on social and ecological implications.

A third **Anglican-Lutheran International Commission** has sought to encourage relationships of communion around the world, focusing on the church’s diaconal character.

A new **Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission** has accompanied the creation of a new “World Communion of Reformed Churches” and emphasized the indispensability of the church for heirs of a Reformation identity.



*Celebration in Johannesburg, South Africa of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the JDDJ—a landmark in the history of Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations. © LWF/S. Oppegaard*

Careful historical work from the **Lutheran-Mennonite Study Commission** has led to a proposal for Assembly action in 2010 to address the legacy of condemnations of “Anabaptists” in Lutheran confessional documents.

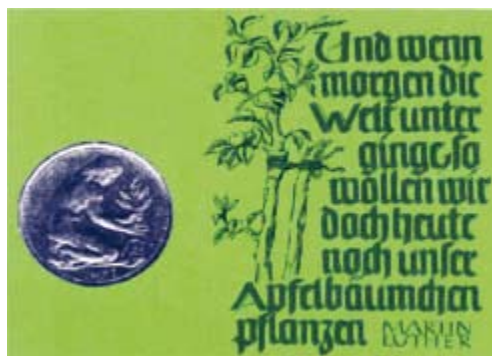
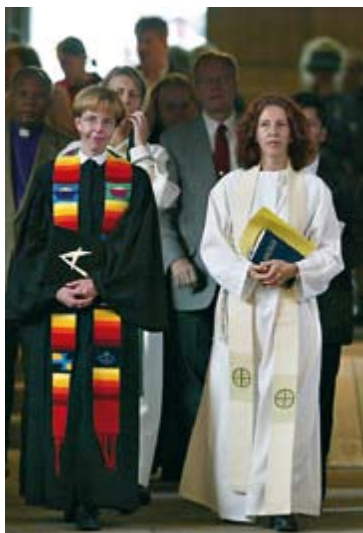
In the wider ecumenical arena, OEA strives to be a strong and innovative partner in diverse efforts for unity in Christian work and witness. For example, it has fostered constructive contact with the International Lutheran Council, and continued to seek multiple ways to reach out to growing movements like Pentecostal churches.

### TOWARD 2017: A RENEWED SPIRIT OF REFORMATION

What a difference a century makes! Lutherans are approaching a major anniversary, designated “Luther 2017: Five Hundred Years of Reformation.” It is striking how this half-millennial anniversary will be shaped by the transformative effects of the ecumenical encounters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lutherans will have much in these anniversary celebrations to celebrate with thankfulness, as this confessional tradition has been life-giving over the span of many generations. But the 16<sup>th</sup> century reforms and insights came also with consequences in division and mutual condemnations. As these are addressed, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary will have a notably different tone than the major milestones which preceded it.

As its first task, the fifth round of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity will prepare a statement on the ecumenical significance of 2017 for the churches’ use. The statement’s goal is not to break new ground in historical research or theological perspective but to harvest the work already done through decades of ecumenical relationship. From this perspective, “reformation” is a perpetual need and an ongoing process in the church, allowing the urgent circumstances of Martin Luther’s 16<sup>th</sup> century contributions to be seen in their significance for the whole church. The note of ecumenical inclusiveness will be strong also in events planned for Lutherstadt Wittenberg itself. The establishment of the LWF Center in 2008 is intended to provide a setting of ecumenical welcome in Luther’s city. Its Luther Garden will include 500 trees from communities around the world, and incorporate in an honored location trees planted by the LWF’s ecumenical partners.

Equally significant in setting the tone for the 2017 observances will be the re-telling, re-evaluation and regret surrounding the history of relationships with churches of the Anabaptist family. The LWF has had extensive experience in ecumenical dialogues where there has



[Left] A eucharistic service in Wittenberg, Germany in March 2009 marks the official opening of the LWF Center in the Reformation city. [Above] For the jubilee of the 2017 Reformation, Wittenberg plans to create a “Luther Garden” with trees planted by partners and partner churches. The painting by Martin Schloemann illustrates a saying attributed to Luther: “If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today!” © KLA milano-duisburg/www.kipariland.com

been a history of mutual condemnations. In this relationship, however, explicit condemnations were only on the Lutheran side. Lutherans had not only formulated theological anathemas but also engaged in persecution and even executions of Anabaptists, persecutions which the latter did not return. Building upon accomplishments in regional dialogues, the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission examined this difficult history between the two families. Even telling this story in a common narrative itself becomes an act of rec-

sify LWF HIV and AIDS work, and support Dalit liberation. It extends full membership to churches in India, Norway and Peru; calls for an Information Society policy; and receives an interim report on Family, Marriage and Human Sexuality. LWF president Hanson, general secretary Noko and ELCJHL bishop Younan visit political leaders and Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.



Bishop Hanson meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. © LWF/John Brooks

**21–23.09.05** • An international consultation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on “Illegitimate External Debt” calls for debt cancellation.



A former minister of economy and finances in Argentina, Mr Rafael Correa, at the illegitimate debt conference. © LWF/P. Prove

#### September [DMD] •

A DMD Consultation on Diakonia and Development in the Asian Context affirms that the church’s mission involves building congregations’ capacity to explore life-giving alternatives to poverty and disease.

#### September [OEA]

▪ The Lutheran-Pentecostal conversation holds its second

meeting in Strasbourg, France, asking, "How do we encounter Christ?"

**22-30.09.05 [OEA]**

▪ Members of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity meet in Bari, Italy, to finalize their report on "The Apostolicity of the Church."

**12-14.10.05** ▪ President

Hanson visits the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

**16-18.10.05** ▪

President Hanson visits the two LWF member churches in Chile.

**29.10.05 [DMD: HIV & AIDS]** ▪ The LWF

invites its member churches, ecumenical and other partners to make HIV and AIDS the focus of LWF Sunday.

**November [DMD :**

**HIV & AIDS]** ▪ OCS publishes an **LWI special issue** titled "PositHive Church" relating to breaking the silence on HIV and AIDS.

**02-07.11.05 [DTS]** ▪

Held in São Leopoldo, Brazil, an international consultation urges the churches to identify elements in the ministry of deacons and deaconesses that are solidly grounded in the Bible.

**07.11.05** ▪ Dr Noko

and President Hanson visit Pope Benedict XVI.

**09-14.11.05 [DMD]**

▪ Participants at the



*A memorial plate for Anabaptists murdered in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Zürich city government. © Flickr Creative Commons/Roland Herzlich*

conciliation. Lutherans discovered that they had often played down or even forgotten the stories of persecution, which had continued to be important stories of community formation in many Anabaptist communities. Yet there are also important Lutheran resources for resisting persecution: while Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon lent their support, a comparatively overlooked figure like Johannes Brenz shows that acceptance of the Augsburg Confession did not require violent suppression of the Anabaptists. Stories like his deserve more attention in contemporary Lutheran teaching.

Important differences remain between these two families, especially in understandings of baptism and the relations of church and state. Yet Lutherans and Mennonites already work together in a number of places around the world, responding to human needs. When Lutherans address the painful history of wrongs with this part of the Christian family, a new climate of relationship can be created. The 2010 Assembly in Stuttgart will consider an action to express regret and repentance for the legacy of violent persecution.

## **EXPANDING CIRCLES OF CHRISTIAN COOPERATION IN A CHANGING WORLD**

The LWF continues to be an active and supportive partner for the work of other ecumenical organizations. While Christian cooperation is expanding far beyond the familiar structures of the ecumenical movement, the work is far from complete.

Among the many partners, the World Council of Churches (WCC) retains its unique and indispensable place. The Commission on Faith and Order, for example, regularly convenes Bilateral Forums, which encourage coherence among partners in bilateral dialogues. As an example of programmatic collaboration, the LWF decided that a principal focus of its participation in the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) would be through a focus on gender, in continuity with the efforts of the WCC Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women. The booklet, *Churches Say "NO" to Violence Against Women: Action Plan for the Churches* provides a distinctive faith-based perspective and is one of the most widely translated LWF resources, with most of the versions initiated at local levels.

In its work rhythms, the LWF Secretariat staff depends in countless ways on partnerships with the WCC, some of which are highlighted here.

## Priority Area 2: Ecumenism

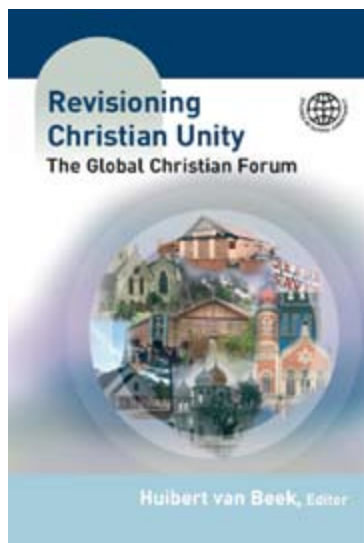
Specialists from the WCC join with LWF Geneva staff in teaching an annual course for theological students, “The Ecumenical Church in a Globalized World,” which aims at ecumenical and interfaith formation of new leaders from churches in every region. Whenever possible, the LWF seeks to address urgent social, economic and political issues in ways related to what is occurring through the WCC. Shared concern prompted LWF and WCC colleagues together with local partners, to plan and sponsor the March 2009 Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in Bangkok, Thailand. The common location of international offices in Geneva provides the opportunity for shared resources in such areas as technology and other aspects of operations. The LWF Offices for Finance and for Personnel seek to coordinate a number of administrative services. While these arrangements can be challenged by strained resources, they have on the whole served the LWF well.

Perhaps a good in-house ecumenical collaboration has been developed with careful intentionality by OCS, enabling both organizations to provide media coverage of significant events like the annual World Social Forums, and to produce an ecumenical terminology resource. The communication partnership extends more widely to embrace the four Ecumenical Center-based church bodies including WARC and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), especially through the work of Ecumenical News International (ENI), which they jointly founded in 1994. ENI profiles the organizations’ shared objective to provide a theologically informed and culturally sensitive independent global

news service, which reports on ecumenical developments and other church news, and gives religious perspectives on news developments worldwide. OCS also provides layout services for the WARC newsletter *Update* and regularly lends its expertise to forums and processes which seek to improve the communication work of church bodies.

Work with youth provides another good example of growing alliances with a specific focus. Collaboration with ecumenical youth organizations (World Young Men’s Christian Association – YMCA, World Young Women’s Christian Association – YWCA, World Student Christian Federation and the WCC) has been strengthened by regular meetings, joint youth delegations to UN meetings, and close cooperation in accompanying youth interns in Geneva.

Increasingly, the LWF also seeks relations with Christians outside structures developed by the ecumenical movement. This 25 percent of the world’s Christians includes many members of the rapidly growing churches who are changing the map of world Christianity. The LWF has been building a web of relationships with Pentecostal Christians, for example. The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, has conducted, on behalf of the LWF, a multi-year conversation with Pentecostals. Reflection on Lutheran understandings and practices in the face of neo-Pentecostal movements, especially in Africa, was the focus in 2008 of one of the DTS Theology in the Life of the Church seminars. Pentecostal presence is central to the character of the Global Christian Forum, a structure specifically designed to include such groups that has received significant Lutheran support, both from the LWF and from member churches. All these activities have supported the desire for



*The Global Christian Forum – including Pentecostal churches – met for the first time in Limuru, Kenya in November 2007 with support from the LWF. © Global Christian Forum*

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the All Africa Lutheran Conference (AALC) in Marangu, Tanzania, resolve to establish a pan-African Lutheran Council and endorse the creation of the Africa Lutheran Communication & Information Network (ALCINET).



ELCRN Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta preaching at the AALC 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. © LWF/D-M. Grötzsch

### **23-27.11.05 [DMD:**

**WICAS]** • Economic globalization, HIV and AIDS, violence against women and women’s ordination are discussed at a WICAS regional coordinators’ meeting in Chennai, India.

### **13-18.12.05**

**[OIAHR]** • The LWF represents EAA at the World Trade Organization’s Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong, China.

## **2006**

### **During the year**

**[DMD/OCS]** • Youth work alongside professional communicators at five regional



A workshop for young communicators during a church leadership conference in Costa Rica in 2006. © LWF/Youth Leadership Training



workshops to develop communication skills within a joint OCS/YICAS Youth Leadership Training in Communication program.

**13-19.01.06 [OEA]**

- The third ALIC round in Moshi, Tanzania, receives the report of the 2000-2002 Working Group, recommending continued development of Anglican-Lutheran relations.

**12-18.01.06 [DTS: Spiritualism study]**

- A four-year DTS study program on "Spiritualism as a Global Challenge for Churches" drafts guidelines in Berlin, Germany on the challenges of spiritualism and worship of ancestors.



Discussing the results of regional seminars in the DTS study on "Spiritualism as a Global Challenge to the Churches". © LWF

**01-06.02.06 [DTS]**

- Participants at a final Warsaw, Poland, meeting in the DTS study on "The Authority of the Bible in the Life of the Church" discuss a resource to help LWF member churches "listen to the gospel creatively and responsively in the midst of burning issues of faith and life."

**04-07.02.06 [DMD: HIV & AIDS]**

- A DMD capacity-building workshop in Nairobi,

more intense and systematic engagement with Pentecostals, and a formal dialogue will be recommended for the coming years.

Also important for these expanded circles of Christian relationships is the burgeoning cooperation in all aspects of church work in what are sometimes called "dialogues of life." Formal relations among Christian bodies exist in a much larger ecology of shared life around the world. Diakonia, a hallmark of LWF's work for over 60 years, is increasingly done with self-conscious ecumenical awareness and collaboration. The March 2010 launch of ACT Alliance, bringing together the work of the emergency and development networks of Action by Churches Together (ACT), is further emphasis rather than a beginning of such common witness.

### UNFINISHED WORK

Any examination of the work of the LWF shows the seriousness of ecumenical commitment at all levels of its life. Yet in this communion, as everywhere in the church, commitments to unity call out for fuller embodiment.

On the one hand, theological agreements already reached would allow more common life among the churches than what they have often adopted. With Reformed churches, for example, or with Anglicans, there are no church-dividing differences to prevent many churches from joining those who are already living in communion, in "pulpit and altar fellowship" with one another. With other traditions also, more common life is possible than is generally claimed. Much remains to be done in shaping theological education and spiritual formation for new generations in accordance with ecumenical insights.

On the other hand, the countless local arrangements of shared mission and witness could be more fully harvested in formal agreements. One such example is the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (Interdiac) in Český Těšín, Czech Republic. Founded in 2008 with partners from nine countries in central and eastern Europe, Interdiac brings together Lutheran and Reformed churches and ecumenical organizations, including participants from Orthodox non-governmental organizations. Such initiatives could serve as models and inspirations if there were means to make them more widely known. However, the existing structures and habits of communication do not

*Commission members at the 2006 Anglican-Lutheran International Commission meeting in Moshi, Tanzania. © Anglican Communion*



sufficiently make known the results of one aspect of inter-Christian encounter in other parts of church life.

Reception, the ecumenical term for the “so what?” question thus remains the principal challenge for ecumenical work: what differences are made “at the grass roots” by agreements reached by ecumenical specialists? Increasingly, it is clear that the question goes also the other way: how can theological discussion be enriched by the progress and challenges in ecumenical cooperation achieved in local communities? Ecumenical wisdom springs from many wells, thus it must be informed by both the resources of classical theological study and astute contextual analysis in the service of faithful witness. While the LWF has a wide range of resources to contribute to the work of Christian unity, they must be held together. Too often, dialogue results prove difficult to integrate fully into pastoral preparation, local church relationships and congregational life. LWF National Committees, where they exist, can take an active role in encouraging reception and providing valuable feedback, even as individual churches also make helpful responses. Too often, however, more seeds of closer Christian cooperation are sown in ecumenical initiatives and reaped in greater understanding than are baked into the common bread that could nourish the churches’ life.

### NEW CONCENTRATION ON INTERFAITH RELATIONS

As circles of Christian conversation and collaboration grow, they intersect with similar activities on interfaith levels. Growing awareness of religious diversity is one of the most striking marks of our time, and the desire to engage it faithfully becomes also more urgent. The global churches’ responses to the 2004 tsunami showed the possibilities for common effort. Project work in DWS has long assumed not only interfaith settings but also an interfaith workforce, which serves as a reservoir of experience and wisdom for the whole Federation. In interfaith relations as with ecumenical work, the LWF has realized that its advocacy and development work and its efforts for mutual understanding and transformation among faith communities—“diapraxis” and “dialogue”—are two legs which must walk forward together.

*DWS has a long history of initiatives with an interfaith workforce in countries such as Mauritania. Here, the LWF house in Magta Lahjar, Mauritania. © Paula Laajalahti*



Kenya, for AIDS coordinators from member churches and LWF-DWS field programs allows an enriching exchange of experiences.

#### 20.02.06–10.03.06

**[OIAHR]** ▪ LWF facilitates direct participation of NGOs in the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.



Guatemalan NGO delegates at the UN CERD meeting. © LWF/G.Dyrhagen

#### 09-11.03.06 ▪ The LWF

Executive Committee meets in Geneva.

#### 13-17.03.06 [DWS]

▪ A DWS North, East and West Africa regional consultation on “Repatriation and Reintegration” is held in Kigali, Rwanda.



Closing service at the “Stirring the Waters” consultation in Cambodia. © LWF/D.-M. Grötzsch

#### 17-22.04.06 [DMD:

**WICAS]** ▪ A WICAS “Stirring the Waters” consultation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, calls on churches to educate congregations on gender-related water issues.

#### 24-25.04.06 [DWS]

▪ The DWS Annual Forum takes place in Montreux, Switzerland.

#### 25-28.04.06 [DMD]

▪ Representatives of member churches in

Latin America and the Caribbean meet in San José, Costa Rica, to consider the sustainability of church mission in the face of declining membership.



LWF AIDS campaign coordinator Rev. Lisandro Orlov preaching at the Costa Rica conference opening worship. © LWF/Youth Leadership Training

**08.05.06 [DWS] ▪**

Meetings in Jerusalem mark the beginning of negotiations with the government of Israel concerning the tax status of the LWF Jerusalem program.

**20–22.05.06 [DMD]**

▪ A DMD workshop in Bangkok, Thailand, for AIDS coordinators in Asia shares challenges in a region where the epidemic is still partly unrecognized and/or denied.

**22–26.05.06 [DWS] ▪**

A DWS Asia regional consultation is held in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina on “agro-based income generation”.

**June [DMD] ▪** Member churches in the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) sub-region and Nordic partners, meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, establish a diakonia capacity-strengthening initiative, the LUNODIA initiative, to work with DWS associate programs in the region.

**01–04.06.06 ▪** An LWF delegation visits

Member churches express the need for theological resources to help them engage with people of other faiths. For example, the concern of some in the global South about the popularity of various spiritualistic movements in their contexts led to a DTS study program on these phenomena, with consultations in Europe, Asia and Africa, and a concluding resource, *Spirits, Ancestors and Healing: A Global Challenge to the Church*. A number of issues of the *Thinking It Over* Web-based pamphlets for use in local settings have addressed theological aspects of interfaith relations.

Given current world events, it is not surprising that in recent years the LWF has concentrated especially on relations with Muslims. Through DTS, the subject has been engaged in diverse ways. The book *Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together on the Way* (LWF Studies 01/2003) brought together work that had been ongoing for many years. Christian-Muslim relations in situations of conflict and peace in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria were analyzed and compared in the study program and book *Bridges Instead of Walls*. As part of the *Theology in the Life of the Church* series, the book *Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths*, rooted in these three basic dimensions of Christian identity, explored some of the theological questions evoked as Christians engage with neighbors of other faiths in Europe and throughout the world. The LWF co-hosted in cooperation with Christian World Communions and the WCC, a unique “intra-Christian consultation” among church leaders and scholars in response to “A Common World Between Us and You,” a 2007 letter from a number of Muslim leaders. This consultation was distinctive in bringing together scholars in Christian-Muslim dialogue with Christian leaders, whose communities have a wide variety of experiences living among Muslims. In 2009 in Indonesia, the LWF gathered Christian and Muslim scholars from around the world for a consultation in which they considered their respective perspectives for understanding “freedom and responsibility” in theology, faith identity and mutual relations for the common good. In many of these conversations, characteristically Lutheran perspectives have been highlighted.

Earlier the LWF has carried out work in relation to other world religions. With Buddhists, it is about to explore perspectives on economic life today. Furthermore, indigenous religious traditions have been increasingly at the forefront of LWF attention in furthering solidarity with indigenous peoples, and in discerning how crucial these spiritual perspectives are in communities for responding to and redressing the effects of climate change. In view of the LWF’s focused advocacy on discrimination against Dalits, which is rooted in Hindu tradition, perhaps a broad-based dialogue with Hindus could be helpful.

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Dr. Siti Syamsiyatun, associate director of Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) speaking at the June 2009 DTS Christian-Muslim dialogue meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. © ICRS/Ellis Zuliati

**EXAMPLES OF INTERFAITH DIAPRAXIS:**

*Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa*

Interfaith diapraxis describes a practical relationship, a lived experience of togetherness and cooperation across faith boundaries. The LWF has extensive experience of interfaith diapraxis—both through the experience of member churches living in multi-faith settings and

## INSTITUTE FOR ECUMENICAL RESEARCH, STRASBOURG

IERS in Strasbourg, France, is managed by the LWF-related Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research. It works closely with OEA in providing theological

*Participants in the 41<sup>st</sup> International Ecumenical Seminar at the IERS in July 2007. © T. Dieter*



assistance to all international LWF dialogues, and with DTS.

Over the reporting period, IERS professors served as consultants in Lutheran bilateral dialogues with the Anglicans, Orthodox, Reformed and Roman Catholics. In addition, they guided the Study Commission with the Mennonites and, on behalf of the LWF, conducted valuable exploratory conversations with Pentecostals. The institute's leadership played a crucial role in the process leading to the 1999 signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Roman Catholic Church.

The regular IERS international consultations on fundamental ecumenical questions focused on the episcopal ministry in 2005 and on the authority of the church in 2007.

The annual International Ecumenical Summer Seminar continued to offer a meeting space for those engaged in cutting-edge ecumenical research. Themes covered included genetic engineering and homosexuality (2005), the implications of charismatic renewal and Pentecostalism for ecumenism (2006), church-state relations (2007), "Spiritual Ecumenism – Ecumenical Spirituality" (2008), and "The Liturgy as Ecumenical Chance and Challenge" (2009).

The IERS celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005.

*Continued from page 33*

through the extensive diaconal and humanitarian work that in many places largely serves and is staffed by people of other faiths.

A prominent expression of this experience of and commitment to inter-diapraxis is the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) process, which the LWF launched with a summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in October 2002 and has continued to support throughout the period since the Tenth Assembly.

Participants in the inaugural summit made the commitment which has guided IFAPA in the years since: to embrace "the gift of peace that comes from all of our religious traditions and values, to working for peace as well as speaking of peace, to moving beyond common declarations to common actions, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and to seeking to heal the terrible memories of violence and conflict that haunt our people."

A second and much larger summit in April 2005 in Johannesburg adopted the Kopanong Manifesto, outlining a plan for further work. Since then, IFAPA has pursued a wide range of further activities and initiatives—peace-building encounters in conflict-affected or post-conflict settings; capacity-building for women's interfaith groups, with a focus on water issues; and youth engagement. "A Mother's Cry for a Healthy Africa" is one of IFAPA's signature campaigns, advocating women's greater involvement in peace-building initiatives on the continent.

the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.

**04-09.06.06 [DMD: HIV & AIDS]** ▪ The Nairobi+4 DMD consultation with senior church leadership agrees on the contents of a HIV and AIDS handbook "Grace, Care and Justice."

**14-18.06.06 [DMD: Youth/YICAS]** ▪ An international roundtable in Vienna, Austria, recommends that LWF-Youth focus on advocacy, for youth participation in decision-making.

**19-22.06.06 [OIAHR]** ▪ African religious leaders agree to use IFAPA as an instrument for a peaceful future for the continent at the inaugural IFAPA commission meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. Dr Noko presides at subsequent annual meetings in Libya and Uganda.

**27-30.06.06 [DMD]** ▪ A DMD/DTS seminar on "Dialogue and Life in Indonesia" focuses on diapraxis and the search for peaceful collaboration among Christians and Muslims.



Flanked by Muslim and Christian leaders, Bishop Hanson addresses the "dialogue" meeting in Indonesia. © ELCA/F. Imhoff

**01-07.07.06 [OEA]** ▪ At its first meeting in Utrecht, Netherlands, the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission dis-

cusses structures and practices of Lutheran-Reformed relations from regional perspectives.

**03-09.07.06** ▪ Dr Noko and President Hanson head a 16-member delegation participating in the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first missionary in Tranquebar, India.

**23.07.06** ▪ In an address to the 19<sup>th</sup> World Methodist Conference in Seoul, South Korea, Dr Noko expresses his satisfaction at the affirmation of the JDDJ by the Methodist World Council.



Faith-based delegates at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto. © EAA/M. Engle

**10-18.08.06 [DMD: HIV & AIDS]** ▪ In the context of the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, 21 AIDS coordinators from LWF member churches and DWS field programs attend ecumenical/interfaith pre-conferences. LWF president Hanson addresses the ecumenical pre-conference.

IFAPA has helped sensitize many in the LWF, especially among the member churches in Africa, to the potential of practical interfaith cooperation, both for the pursuit of shared objectives such as peace and development, and for the building of stronger relationships of trust across faith boundaries.

### *Dialogue in Life: Finding Common Cause Amid Suffering*

In 2006, an LWF consultation in Medan, Indonesia, brought together Muslims and Christians in that country to lift up the experiences that had followed the tsunami disaster. In the face of suffering and need, people of faith had responded together, out of a shared recognition that caring for the divine gift of life is a divine mandate. In such circumstances, when people find themselves as companions rather than as the “other,” differences of faith also begin to be considered less defensively. Practices of hospitality toward each other help to create new realities in which new forms of common purpose are possible.

### CONCLUSION

Encounters with other faith communities both elicit and require more than knowledge: they call for a transformation which involves the whole person and the entire community. Such formation for leadership is at the heart of LWF consultations with theologians, students and church leaders. Formation for ecumenical and interfaith encounter demands capacities that are able to reflect on common concerns “from within and without” one’s own tradition. Thus, “The task of theological reflection is to enable discernment in the midst of these processes; the task of inter-religious competence is to make productive use of theological reflection and to participate in interreligious discourse in fruitful ways.” (Simone Sinn in *Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths*, Theology in the Life of the Church Series, vol. 2, p. 16)

*“Mothers and daughters” at the opening procession of the April 2005 IFAPA summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.*  
© LWF/Andreas Vlachakis



# A Role Model for Interfaith Collaboration

The world is rich in cultures, beliefs and perceptions, but for some this diversity is perceived as a threat. Religious diversity within the Christian family and among other faiths is a key challenge.

In addition to work in interfaith study and dialogue, the LWF is engaged in practical reconciliation in situations where diversity could potentially result in division. In these settings, its interfaith engagement focuses on diapraxis, the lived experience of co-existence and cooperation.

An important example of this approach is the LWF-supported IFAPA piped water project in Kirehe district, eastern Rwanda. It is implemented by the country's interfaith commission in close collaboration with local government authorities, public, private and non-governmental partners.

As LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko remarked at the project's inauguration in 2008, "It is not just about bringing clean water to people who did not have it before. It is also about bringing a model of

harmonious interfaith cooperation for human development and peace back to the rest of the continent and the world."

For local residents, a lot changes, almost immediately, as expressed by 63-year-old Judith Mukurugwiza upon the launch of the clean water project in Muganza village. "Women and children spent countless hours looking for drinking water, and it was neither clean nor safe. We would often fall sick," she explained, pointing at the ochre-red color in the local springs and streams.

Alexis Ngarukiyentwari and his family will now spend less time fetching water, and pay a reasonable rate. "The children will go to school in good time. We will also water our small gardens," he said of the project whose long-term goal is to boost school enrolment, reduce poverty and improve health and sanitation.

This initiative stands out as a role model in strengthening interfaith collaboration in the reconciliation process after the 1994 genocide, added Bishop George W. Kaliisa of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda.

*An example of diapraxis, the IFAPA piped water project in eastern Rwanda is implemented by the country's interfaith commission with local government authorities, public, private and NGO partners. © LWF/F. Nzwili*

