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Meeting between the ILC and the LWF

Geneva, Switzerland - A meeting of representatives of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was held from July 30th to August 1st 2002 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The two bodies have member churches around the world. Each body seeks to promote cooperation and fellowship among its member churches. Some Lutheran churches are members of both organizations.

The meeting, encouraged in 2001 by the ILC Conference and by the Council of the LWF, was the first of its kind since the two world bodies held consultations in 1988.

The two bodies were represented by:

Lutheran World Federation Participants (alphabetically): Archbishop Nemuel A. Babba (Numan/Adamawa State, Nigeria), Rev. Jon S. Enslin (Chicago, IL, USA), Rev. President Huberto Kirchheim (Porto Alegre, Brazil), Oberkirchenrätin Rev. Käte Mahn (Hanover, Germany), Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (LWF, Geneva, Switzerland), Rev. Sven Oppegaard (LWF, Geneva, Switzerland), Ms. Priscilla Singh (LWF, Geneva, Switzerland), Rev. Dr Andreas H. Wöhle (LWF, Geneva, Switzerland), Rev. Wayne Zweck (North Adelaide, Australia).

International Lutheran Council Participants (alphabetically): Rev. Peter H. F. Ahlers (Pretoria, South Africa), Rev. Dr Gerald B. Kieschnick (St. Louis, MO, USA), Rev. Dr Ralph E. Mayan (ILC, Winnipeg, Canada), Rev. Dr Samuel H. Nafzger (ILC, St. Louis, MO, USA), Bishop David Piso (Papua New Guinea), Rev. Dr James Rimbach (Hong Kong), Bishop Dr Diethardt Roth (Hanover, Germany), Rev. Dr Carlos Walter Winterle (Porto Alegre, Brazil).

The meeting was co-chaired by Dr Samuel Nafzger and Dr Ishmael Noko, staff of the two organizations.

Information was shared regarding the history, confessional/doctrinal basis, self-understanding, organizational structure, types of membership, and the nature, functions and objectives of the two organizations. Common ground as well as differences were identified in the area of theology, with particular reference to confessional and ecumenical issues. *Participants of the meeting between the ILC and the LWF (l.t.r.): P. Ahlers, Dr R. Mayan, D. Piso, Dr D. Roth, Dr G. Kieschnick, N. Babba, P. Singh, W. Zweck, Dr A. Wöhle, Dr J. Rimbach, K. Mahn, Dr C. Winterle, Dr I. Noko, Dr S. Nafzger, H. Kirchheim, J. Enslin, S. Oppegaard.*

The participants paid attention to geographical areas where ILC and LWF churches share common history and where cooperation is currently taking place around the world. Attention was also paid to areas where tensions have developed with regard to activities of ILC and LWF member churches. It was noted that relationships among member churches differ significantly from region to region.

It was recognized that often, in inter-church relationships, only issues of tension are highlighted. It was recognized that a number of important projects and programs, with cooperation and mutual support among churches of the two Lutheran organizations, are in place. The meeting emphasized the importance of better coordination, communication, and theological discussion, with a view to improving relations in the years ahead.

The meeting took place in a very cordial and constructive atmosphere that enabled a clear and frank discussion. It contributed significantly to knowing one another better. It involved sharing of positions and practices, of current challenges facing the two world bodies, and of commitments of their churches regarding mission and service.

The Executive Secretary of the ILC and the General Secretary of the LWF were asked to maintain contact with one another on a regular basis.

A next meeting between representatives of ILC and LWF is scheduled to take place 29-31 October 2003. - *The members of the ILC Executive Committee in front of the Ecumenical Center in Geneva (l.t.r): Dr'. S. Nafzger, Dr'. J. Rimbach (representing A. Yung), Dr'. R. Mayan, Dr D. Roth, Dr G. Kieschnick, Dr C. Winterle, D. Piso and P. Ahlers. Dr S. Nafzger, Executive Secretary of the ILC, and Dr R. Mayan, ILC Chairman, during a tea break.*

Remember the Persecuted

Editorial by Dr Ralph Mayan, Chairman ILC

The United Nations has declared freedom of religion to be a universally recognized human right. Yet we are seeing around the world an unprecedented increase in the persecution of Christians. It may even be happening in your country.

I received by email a letter from a Lutheran pastor requesting assistance in appealing an order for deportation of one of the communicant members of his congregation. The member, an Iranian woman, is to be deported in spite of her fear of persecution because of our Christian faith. The judge simply dismissed her confession as a sham and rejected the testimony of her pastor regarding the veracity of her faith.

Today's newspaper reports the attack on a Christian school in Pakistan, resulting in the death of six individuals. It was the sixth attack against Christians and/or Christian institutions this year in that country. Perhaps you will recall the March 17th incident when an attacker hurled a grenade into a protestant congregation in Islamabad killing seven worshipers.

Reports of continued violence also come from India where Christian churches and shrines face increased vandalism. It has created a state of fear and anxiety for Christians.

Christians in northern Nigeria, in the province of Zamfara, a Moslem dominated area, are facing the demolition of some of their churches. There are too many churches, the government is

claiming. "Life in Zamfara is traumatic for Christians", Pastor Ishaya told Compass. "We are pursuing the matter legally. We want our rights and religious freedom respected."

Similar reports come from other countries as well. Christians are experiencing an increase in persecution.

To experience trial and tribulation should not be a surprise to Christians. Our Lord Himself has warned us, "In this world, you will have trouble." Then He adds to give encouragement and comfort, "but I have overcome the world."

We also as brothers and sisters of these persecuted believers have an obligation. We need to encourage and support these believers doing what we can to relieve them of these trials. Most important we need to pray for them and for their persecutors as well. May I encourage you to personally add the persecuted Christians around the world to your prayer list and may I suggest that you request your churches to regularly hold up to God in prayer the cries of our persecuted brothers.

ILC News is published quarterly to provide information for and about churches associated with the International Lutheran Council. Articles for publication and requests for additional copies of the publication (free of charge) should be sent either to the editor or to the executive secretary of the Council.

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Lutheran Church Membership Exceeds 65 Million Worldwide

Growth Up by 50% or More in Madagascar, Namibia and Nigeria

Geneva, 7 August 2002 (LWI) - According to the most recent statistics published by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Lutheran Church membership worldwide has grown by more than 1.4 million, to reach a total of 65.4 million (65,387,677) in 2001, representing an increase of some 2.2 percent. In 2000, global membership fell just short of 64 million, and in 1999 there were 63.1 million members.

The largest 2000-2001 increase was in Africa. The continent now has 1,368,489 more members, reaching a total of 11,953,068. The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria showed the sharpest

increase globally, growing by some 62 percent to reach 1,167,023 members. Two more churches saw 50 percent increases - the Malagasy Lutheran Church, with 2,250,000 members, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) with 300,000. Double-digit percent increases were also reported by the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church with 30,000 members, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi with 25,000 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe with 110,000. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) increased by 9% to a total of 580,000.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is still the biggest African Lutheran church, with an unchanged membership of around 3.36 million. The second largest is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania with about 2.5 million members.

In Europe, overall Lutheran membership decreased by 305,118, down to 36,642,084. Membership of the largest Lutheran church in the world - the Church of Sweden - remained unchanged at 7,399,915, while that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the third largest in the world, increased slightly to 4,606,543. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark has 4,532,635 members, having lost some 3,800.

Of any country, Germany has by far the most Lutherans. The overall 2001 total was 13,649,314, a decrease of about 222,226.

In Asia, the number of Lutherans increased by more than five percent in 2001. Membership of the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chotanagpur and Assam, India, climbed by about 20,000 to 380,135. The South Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church - Telugu, India, grew by almost 50 percent, and now has 45,500 members. The Nias Protestant Christian Church had 333,657 members, an increase of some 6,000. The Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church, in Indonesia, slightly increased its membership to 30,490. Decreases in membership were reported by the Lutheran Church in Australia, with about 85,000, a loss of 9,000, and the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore with 6,000 members, about a 25 percent loss.

The North American Lutheran churches lost almost 24,000 members in 2001. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) had 5,125,919 members, representing an almost 24,000-member loss. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, USA and Canada registered an unchanged membership figure of 2.6 million. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), with 188,654 members, showed a loss of almost 3,000.

In Latin America, the Lutheran Churches showed a slight increase of about 3,400 members, reaching a total of 1,126,547. Membership of these churches remained mostly stable.

All statistics will be published in the printed version of Lutheran World Information (LWI) for August 2002.

Lutheran Bishops met in Berlin

Regional Conference of ILC Churches in Europe

selk-news - From 19 to 21 July 2002 the bishops and presidents of confessional Lutheran churches met at the regional ILC-conference of European churches.

In addition to an exchange of ideas in regard to the respective challenges of the participating churches, the program included a reception by the church council of the Independent Ev. Luth. Church (SELK) of Germany, a visit to the mission-congregation in Berlin-Marzahn and a Service in the Ev. Luth. Church in Berlin-Central.

Furthermore the guests from France, Great Britain, Latvia, Russia and the Czech Republic together with the bishop of the hosting SELK, Dr Diethardt Roth, had the opportunity to meet the district mayor of Berlin-Marzahn. -

SELK - Thirty Years old:

Bishop Roth encourages reading the Bible and the Confessions

Hanover - selk - On the occasion of the 30th "birthday" of the Independent Ev. Luth. Church (SELK), a worship service was held in Hanover/Germany in the evening of 25 June 2002. On the same date in 1972 the SELK was founded as a merger of several churches.

The date on which the SELK was constituted, was no coincidence, Bishop Roth pointed out in his sermon. The anniversary of the Augsburg Confession had been chosen to demonstrate by this connection to the fundamental confession of the Lutheran Church that the SELK explicitly wants to maintain "the ecumenical and orthodox heritage of the Lutheran reformation and to present it as wholly and binding up to the present day." The clear adherence to the Bible and the confessions of the Lutheran Church is till today the asset of the SELK which is not to be given up; even if this means "to sometimes have to go lonely, contested and attacked ways."

Roth also lamented the widespread loss of Bible studies and encouraged the congregations to go "back to the roots."

At the same time he invited the faithful to read the Lutheran confessions. "Here many a treasure waits to be raised," said the bishop and added: "studying the fundamental texts of the Lutheran Church enables to clearly say what is decisively important for the Church and for the faith of every Christian." -

ELC-SFB decides on Role of Women in the Church

Strasbourg - May 2002 - Under the theme "Rejoice in the Lord" the Ev. Luth. Church - Synod of France and Belgium experienced an edifying and peaceful convention.

One of the more important resolutions was the decision to open all positions on congregational, regional and synodical levels to women - except for the Pastoral Ministry and the functions reserved for the Pastoral Ministry.

Another important development was the withdrawal of the congregations in Antwerp and Brussels from the ELC-SFB. The Belgian congregations have decided to become an autonomous church.

The jubilee Service on Ascension Day was celebrated in a particular festive way with choir music and a contemporary (jazz-like) liturgy. In his sermon, President Jean Thiébaud Haessig showed how the history of God's people - including that of the 75 years old ELC-SFB - always stands in the tension between promise and fulfillment, and that the Church can rely on God who keeps his word for Christ's sake. -

State Recognition for Lutheran Church in Belgium

selk-news - The Flemish government has granted the "Protestant-Lutheran Parish (Augsburg Confession) in Antwerp" official state recognition after the Antwerp Town Council and the permanent committee of the provincial Council had recommended the recognition, reports Gijsbertus van Hattem, pastor of the Lutheran congregation.

This recognition has the advantage of the pastor's salary being paid by the state.

In order to present itself to the state as an autonomous Belgian church, the parish had recently left the Ev. Luth. Church - Synod of France and Belgium.

The parish consists of the Flemish speaking congregation in Antwerp and an English-speaking congregation in Brussels. -

Lutheran Church Canada re-elects President Mayan

LCC-News - Rev. Dr Ralph Mayan was re-elected unopposed to a third three-year term as president of the Lutheran Church-Canada at its convention held from June 6 to 10.

Serving with him during the next three years will be Rev. Dan Rinderknecht, First Vice-president, Rev. James Fritsche, Second Vice-President and Rev. Robert Krestick, Third Vice-president.

Delegates representing more than 325 congregations of Lutheran Church-Canada convened in Kitchener, Ontario to help chart the course of the 80,000-member church body. The triennial convention considered more than 48 resolutions based on submissions from congregations, church boards and institutions. Major topics included inter-church relations, life issues, family and marriage, the need for pastors - especially in remote areas of Canada - and how the church is structured and governed.

Three new congregations have been welcomed to Lutheran Church-Canada at the convention, including a Spanish-speaking congregation in Vancouver.

Every three years we have the opportunity to gather as a national church body and set directions for the future, explained LCC President Dr Ralph Mayan. "The decisions made at our conventions assist congregations in communities across Canada to share a common focus."

The convention began with an opening worship service at Historic St. Paul's Lutheran Church. The church is one of the oldest buildings in Kitchener and is regarded as the "mother church" for LCC congregations in the area. -

HONG KONG SYNOD CONVENES ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE

Hong Kong - JRimbach - The Annual Spring Conference of the Hong Kong Synod was held on April 27 at Concordia Seminary. No elections were on the docket this year. The Synod initiated a number of new projects. It will open three private schools in the coming year; one to operate as an "all day" school, and two as evening schools only. The Synod personnel has deep resources in operating schools, having run some 40 schools in Hong Kong over the past thirty-five years. The particular feature of the new venture is that the newly established schools will not be subsidized by the Hong Kong government.

The Synod also endorsed the plan to place three young evangelists in Synodical High-Schools this summer. The evangelists will work with high-school youth in establishing fellowships and building church relationships. The Synodical treasurer reported that church income during the past year was ten times what it was five years ago - the year when the "Asian financial crisis" hit!

EAST ASIA AND SOUTH ASIA JOINT ILC MEETING

Hong Kong - JRimbach - April 3 to 5 saw ILC representatives from the East Asia region and South Asia region come together in Tokyo, as guests of the Japan Lutheran Church. National churches represented were from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India and Sri Lanka. There was no representation at this meeting from Papua New Guinea, the Philippines or Australia. The theme of the keynote address was "Evangelism in Large Cities."

Emerging from the meeting was a resolution backing the establishment of an "Asian Lutheran Educators Conference [ALEC], to provide a forum for teachers in the many national and international schools in Asia on the primary, secondary, and high-school level. An October "mini conference" of about 50 persons will convene in Taiwan October 23-26 at the invitation of the Taiwan Lutheran Church, to plan for a much larger gathering (approx. 500 persons) the following year. A major concern of the conference is the training of teachers for Lutheran schools throughout Asia. -

Bishop Piso re-elected for another Four Year Term

The 32nd biannual General Conference of the Gutnius Lutheran Church - Papua New Guinea (GLC-PNG) has re-elected Bishop David P. Piso to lead the church for another four year term. Out of four candidates he was elected by a great majority for the position of head bishop.

The conference was held at Yaibos Lutheran Primary school from June 4 to 9 2002. About 696 official delegates including 35 council members attended the meeting together with 200 visitors. The theme was "And I will be with you always to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

One important resolution passed by the GLC-PNG convention was to extend its mission work in Irian Jaya province of the Republic of Indonesia as well as to open congregations and new preaching stations with the hope of adding more souls to the Church. -

E-mail leads to New Church

LCMSNews - No. 36 - Paula Schlueter Ross - In early 2000, Samuel S.S. Thomas, president of the year-old Lutheran Church in The Gambia, clicked onto the Web site of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and discovered that the U.S. church body held beliefs remarkably similar to those of his own West African church.

So he dispatched an e-mail asking for help with leadership training and church planting.

Months of correspondence between the church bodies led to visits to The Gambia by LC-MS World Mission staff members, who invited the Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) to get involved.

Now, two-and-a-half years after that first e-mail inquiry, Gambian Lutherans have built and dedicated their first church, and baptized and confirmed dozens of people, with assistance from the LCMS-LCN partnership.

At a dedication service last month in Kitty, The Gambia, LCN President Samuel Udofia and Rev. Samuel Essien, LCN's missionary to The Gambia since October 2001, baptized 104 people and confirmed 84.

Some 500 people attended the dedication, including the two LCMS World Mission staff members who had been involved from the beginning - Delano Meyer, area director for West Africa, and Rev. Ken Greinke, director for world team support.

We were pleased to be present for the service and praise God for seeing how the Holy Spirit has been at work in the hearts of Gambians, Meyer said. "Mission work in The Gambia is an example of the benefits of working with our Lutheran partner churches in Africa to bring the Gospel message to more areas."

Greinke, who served as a missionary in Nigeria for 24 years, described the event as "a very emotional and happy occasion because here was a church that I had seen in its younger years [that is] now a mission church, sharing the Gospel in another land, with the work being done by one of its pastors."

The Gambian church body includes five preaching stations with a total of about 300 worshipers.

African Lutheran Church Presidents Meeting in Abidjan

Meyer Mission News - In May this year a two-day meeting was held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast for several African Lutheran church leaders, LCMS World Mission leaders from St. Louis, and Area Directors for Africa. The Presidents of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, the Ev. Luth. Church of Ghana, and the Free Ev. Luth. Synod in South Africa attended.

The new Executive Director of LCMS World Mission, Rev. Bob Roegner, addressed the gathering and emphasized: "Our goal is to work with our partners to bring the Word of salvation to thousands in Africa." -

Team explores Possible Work in Afghanistan

LCMSNews - No. 35 - On the heels of its two-week fact-finding trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan, a mission survey team is suggesting ways the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod can assist the people of those two countries.

The May 10-26 trip was sponsored by LCMS World Mission to "assess the opportunities for establishing mission work in the countries," according to Dr Allan Buckman, director for world areas with LCMS World Mission. The three-member team visited schools and refugee camps, among other sites, and spoke with representatives of Protestant mission agencies and with government officials.

As a result of the on-site survey, Synod mission leaders are discussing how the Synod might provide, for example, English-as-a-second-language training, school supplies and tuition

assistance for those who cannot afford to attend Christian schools, job training and equipment, shoes and other humanitarian aid, and healthcare and medical services. -

Majority of new LCMS Missions are among Non-Typical Groups

LCMSNews - No. 44 - Less than half of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's 47 new missions started in the United States in 2001 are among typical white, English-speaking groups, according to Dr Robert Scudieri, director of North America Services, a division of LCMS World Mission.

A total of 25 new church plants were among African Americans, African immigrants, Asians, Hispanics, Muslims and Russians. Also included are three blind or deaf congregations, which use special worship materials and styles, such as braille hymnals and sign language.

Reaching new ethnic groups in North America has "allowed us to share the Gospel with many people who would not have heard the Good News of God's love in their homelands", Scudieri said.

LCMS World Relief, Human Care Merge

LCMSNews - No. 46 - More compassionate, more efficient care in the name of Jesus to people in need. That's the goal behind the merger of long-related ministries LCMS World Relief and LCMS Human Care Ministries as "LCMS World Relief and Human Care," according to Rev. Matthew Harrison, former executive director of the Board for Human Care Ministries, now executive director of the newly christened ministry.

LCMS World Relief is the biggest and best known of five major ministries under the Human Care umbrella.

Established in 1914, LCMS World Relief is the Synod's disaster relief and long-term, self-help arm.

Rev. Jarold Rux, LCMS World Relief interim director and manager of program support, will assume duties connected with Lutheran Disaster Response, a cooperative ministry of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that assists victims of natural disasters in the United States.

LCMS Housing Ministry Manager Marie Kienker has been appointed director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care Management. Kienker will oversee the day-to-day operation of the LCMS World Relief - Human Care alliance and will continue management of LCMS Housing Ministries.

Today, LCMS human-care outreach includes Lutheran social-ministry organizations that serve approximately two million people in 3,000 communities. Also, some 380 LCMS chaplains and pastoral counselors provide ministry in specialized settings, including hospitals, nursing homes and police and fire departments.

Report on Cloning is based on Marriage and Family

LCMSNews - No. 28 - David L. Mahsman - A new report on human cloning gained approval last month from The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR).

The report, "What Child Is This? Marriage, Family and Human Cloning," was adopted without dissenting vote during the commission's April 18-20 meeting in St. Louis.

Dr Samuel H. Nafzger, the CTCR's executive director, said he hopes the report will be edited, printed and ready for distribution to all LCMS congregations and rostered church workers by mid-summer. It also will be placed then on the commission's Web site, <http://www.lcms.org/ctcr>.

As the title suggests, the report considers cloning within the context of a discussion of marriage and family.

The aim of this report is to make a contribution to the ability of Christians to discern when to celebrate emerging gifts and when to witness against looming evils, says the report's "Introduction."

Nafzger said that the "guiding principle" for the report is found in the concluding affirmations of the CTCR's 1981 report on human sexuality. That report says, "We honor God and the neighbor rightly when we ... affirm that this union of mutual love [between husband and wife] is the only proper context for human procreation."

At the same time, Nafzger said, the new report "goes into some length saying that a child from cloning would be a human being, a creation of God. We distinguish the process from what a child is." -

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