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ILC - Executive Committee prepares talks with LWF

When the Executive Committee of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) met on January 16, 2002, in Oberursel, Germany, one of the main points on the agenda was the resumption of conversations with the Lutheran World Foundation (LWF). After the 19th meeting of the ILC in Wartburg, South Africa in August last year had resolved that conversations with the LWF be resumed, Dr. S. Nafzger, ILC Executive secretary, met with Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the LWF to discuss preliminary plans for the agreed upon discussions between the ILC and the LWF.

The ILC and the LWF will each be represented by seven or eight individuals in these discussions. The talks will provide an opportunity for information to be shared about the history, self understanding, purpose, organizational structure, types of membership, and activities of each organization. Points of disagreement as well as possible areas of cooperation will be discussed. These talks are tentatively scheduled to take place in July of this year.

The second item of great importance was the appointment of a new Seminary Relations Committee, which will have as one of its major assignments the planning of a second World Seminary conference in 2004. It was further decided to publish all papers of the last Seminary Conference held in Brazil.

After the evaluation of the last ILC-conference some initial planning was made for the next conference to be held in southern Brazil and hosted by the ILC churches in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.

The financial situation was discussed with some consideration to the funding of the work of the Council in the light of expenses to be incurred in connection with the discussions with the LWF, the work of the Seminary Relations Committee, and the next meeting of the ILC Executive Committee.

S. Nafzger in his report to the committee mentioned that " it has been less than five months since we met together at the 19th meeting of the International Lutheran Council in Wartburg, South Africa" and continued: "But how much our world has changed. More than ever before, the world senses its vulnerability, and this in turn increases the sense of urgency which we Christians feel to proclaim the Good News of forgiveness, life, and salvation to a sick and dying world."

We are going up to Jerusalem

Editorial by Dr. Diethardt Roth

At the end of the year 2001 a survey in Germany focused on people's experiences following the events of September 11. The survey showed that the attitude of people has changed significantly. One third of the German population look into the future with fear. Two thirds more than ever

before feel that they are subjected to a nameless fate. Similar outcomes may be found all over the world referring to those and other shocking experiences.

The results of this survey show that the world is living in a broken relationship with the living and merciful God. The consequence of this broken relationship is a burden for everyone.

In addition people all over the world - in East and West, North and South - create their own powerful idols and trust in them with all their heart. But in the words of the prophet Isaiah we say: These idols are nothing.

On the other hand we realize that there is a lot of indifference, a lot of disappointment, a lot of fear and a lot of suffering also in our congregations. We realize that those who live in communion with the living God through faith in Jesus Christ, live as a congregation under the cross. They are always sinners and justified at the same time.

When we go to Jerusalem with Jesus, we see his way of suffering and death, the way he proceeds to overcome the broken relationship between the world and God according to the will of his father.

All our sins rest upon him that we realize with the eyes of our frightened conscience. He bears the punishment for our guilt. The cross is a stake of shame because of our sin and guilt, but at the same time it is God's sign of salvation for the world. It is through this cross that we are reconciled.

On Easter morning God declared himself in favor of the sacrifice of his son. He raised him from the dead. Thus, through the cross and resurrection the new world begins amidst the old one. This unique event changes the world more than anything else.

Behold! -- that is what we want to tell our world. Behold, we go to Jerusalem, to the city where still today there is struggling, fighting and suffering. We go to Jerusalem to find peace with God and our neighbors, peace through the one who died just outside the city, peace through faith in him, our savior and Lord.

It is he, whom we want to proclaim to all those who go to Jerusalem with us, to those full of fear and with a frightened conscience. And through this proclaimed word, may God the Holy Spirit fill them and us with faith, love and hope.

LCMS President Kieschnick meets with European church partners

LCMSNews -- No. 4 - A meeting in Germany of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) Executive Committee gave Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick an opportunity to travel around Europe to meet individually with the heads and other officials of the Synod's eight partner churches there.

Kieschnick was elected in August last year to the ILC executive committee, which met Jan. 16 in Germany at the seminary of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church -- known by its German acronym, SELK. Kieschnick and Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger spent a total of 16 days on the relationship-building trip.

"President Kieschnick has not been to these churches, and I strongly encouraged him to do this," Nafzger said of the European visits. "I think it's going to do wonders, just in terms of relationships. I would like to see him visit all our partner churches around the world."

Church relations for the Synod is primarily the responsibility of the Synod president.

"I hope to get to know these men as fellow church-body leaders; discuss matters of theology, mission and ministry with them; and develop a fraternal relationship with them," Kieschnick said of those he met in Europe, shortly before his departure.

The European partner churches of the LCMS are in Germany, France and Belgium, England, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Denmark. The heads of two churches with which the LCMS is not in fellowship -- the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States and a new Lutheran church in Belarus have also been met.

Confessional Lutherans worldwide "are facing some of the same theological issues," Nafzger said. "We have to be in closer contact and establish and nurture relationships."

"We can recognize common challenges," he added, "and strengthen each other."

Lutherans in England elect new chairman

The 47th Annual Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) has elected the Reverend Reginald Quirk as its new Chairman. Meeting 26-27 October 2001 at St. David Lutheran Church, Cardiff, Wales, the synod elected Rev. Quirk for a term of three years, in succession to Rev. Karl Fry, who led the church for two terms.

Rev. Quirk is Preceptor of Westfield House, the ELCE's theological college and seminary in Cambridge, and is also pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Cambridge.

The 48-year-old native of London, England, holds a M.Phil. from the University of Cambridge, and served congregations in London and Plymouth before being called to Westfield House in 1988.

The retiring Chairman Rev. Dr. Karl Fry in his report to Synod gave his reason for not standing as "I feel that any office to the Executive council whether Chairman or other should be restricted to two consecutive terms. I have served those two terms." One important part of the retiring

Chairman's report was to encourage the ELCE to continue to support the ILC and to work with the brothers and sisters in the confessional Lutheran world.

The Synod, held under the theme "On this Rock I will Build my Church" (Matthew 16:18), welcomed as its honored guest the Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan AM, First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, who addressed delegates on his efforts to bring church leaders together to advise the government.

In other actions, the Synod passed a resolution allowing women to serve on the ELCE's Executive Council, made plans for supporting struggling congregations, and resolved to observe the hymnal project of the LCMS whilst making plans for a supplement of British hymns. The Synod also expressed gratitude to her sister churches in the International Lutheran Council for their continued support through "prayers, spiritual and financial gifts."

New President of Korean Lutheran Church

LWF News - Oct. 2001 - The Rev. Lee Hong Youl was installed as the fourth president of the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK) on October 22, succeeding President Song Huh.

Ordained in the LCK in 1985, Youl, 47, attended Yon Sei University where he majored in New Testament Theology. From 1984-1989, he served as a lecturer at the Luther Seminary in Seoul, Korea. Prior to his appointment as LCK president, he served on several church committees including education, stewardship and evangelism.

A prolific author in Korean, Youl's writings include "Discipleship," a book of educational resources for newcomers to the Lutheran church, "Pastor, Your Preaching Today was Spoiled," a collection of pastoral essays, and "Planting Love, Harvesting Worth," a second collection of pastoral letters, among others. He has also translated several books into Korean.

Youl envisages church planting and strengthening the LCK in its local mission activities including the promotion of youth and women's ministries.

His wife Mrs. Lee is an active church leader. They have one son.

Lanka Lutheran Church has new President

The Rev. Michael Sivalingam was elected as president of the Lanka Lutheran Church by its Church Council meeting on the 30th of November 2001 at Lutheran Center, Nuwara ELiya.

The 1,200-member Lanka Lutheran Church, Sri Lanka (LLC) was started in 1927 through outreach from the Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), with relationship to the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. At that time the IELC provided pastoral care for Indian Tamils working on tea plantations in Nuwara Eliya district. Today, all LLC members are Indian Tamil plantation workers.

Although freedom of religion is assured in Sri Lanka -- 70 percent Buddhist, 15 percent Hindus, 8 percent Christians and 7 percent Muslims -- there has been some discrimination against minority religions in taxation, employment and education.

Christianity is perceived as a foreign religion.

With 13 congregations served by four ordained pastors and four evangelists the LLC's activities include work among the youth and women. The church has 11 schools and 15 teachers.

Japan Lutheran Church visits Lutheran Church in Taiwan

Delegates of the Japan Lutheran Church paid a courtesy visit to the China Evangelical Lutheran Church in Taiwan.

Kimio Takano, president of the Japan Lutheran Church, reports that all nine executive committee members of the Japan Lutheran Church visited the China Evangelical Lutheran Church from December 3 to 7, 2001.

The visit was aimed at accelerating friendly and cooperative relations in evangelism among the ILC churches in Asia.

The group visited churches, the Seminary and Concordia Middle School, met pastors and lay workers, and enjoyed their visit very much.

The Japan Lutheran Church would like to express its deepest gratitude for having been guests of the China Evangelical Lutheran Church in Taiwan.

IELB Synod discusses 'Theological Education and Mission'

The Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) held its annual general meeting in October 2001 at Curitiba, (Parana), with the participation of 107 voting members and eight consultants. Amongst the attendants were District Presidents and Councilors, Presidents and Directors of the Faculty of Theology and representatives of auxiliary organizations such as the

League of Lutheran Councilors of Brazil, League of Laymen of Brazil, Lutheran Youth of Brazil, National Association of Lutheran Schools and Christ for All Nations.

The main theme was "Theological Education and Mission" for which very useful papers were presented. Amongst the many decisions taken in the areas of finance, administration, mission and organization the most important subject discussed and resolved was in respect of the two Seminaries in Sao Leopoldo and Sao Paulo.

The Concordia Seminary of Sao Leopoldo celebrates its centenary in 2003. The Sao Paulo Seminary has been in existence more than 50 years as a pre Seminary and for the last 18 years as a High School of Theology. Mainly due to financial constraints, it was proposed to close one Seminary and combine both into one campus. The voting was almost even, with a slight majority of 54 to 52 votes in favor of retaining both Seminaries.

This means a larger responsibility to maintain both Seminaries, in view of the fact that God has greatly blessed our Church in Brazil with many vocational opportunities. We have 102 students in Sao Paulo and 150 students in Sao Leopoldo, which provide approximately 50 new pastors every year. Various proposals in respect of reducing costs and raising funds were put forward to the Synod.

In regard to the mission expansion program within IELB and the world, the Synod approved a major mission expansion plan. Various motions were adopted such as the strategic appointments of new pastors, the subdivision of large congregations, the introduction of second and third pastors for large congregations, and the founding of new congregations and missions.

In view of the large number of students at the two Seminaries, a motion was adopted to allow students to learn Spanish, English and German so as to prepare them to serve as pastors in other countries, thereby assisting our sister churches.

In view of the IELB centenary, a motion was approved to find 100 donors prepared to give R\$ 100 per month for a hundred months to collect one million Reais (US\$ 500 000) for the purpose of establishing these new missions.

IELB prepares for national convention

From 29 April to 3 May 2002, the 57th National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) will take place in Foz do Iguacu, PR.

Approximately 1,000 Pastors, Church Councilors, Congregation Representatives and Seminary Representatives are expected to attend the convention, which will take place under the theme "God's Mission - Challenge of the Church," with a strong emphasis on the mission challenge.

The Lutheran Church of Brazil started off with German Lutheran immigrants. However, for many years since it has opened up more and more towards the general population of Brazil. All churches in Brazil use Portuguese as the main language with few exceptions, which still use German or a Pomeranian dialect.

At the Convention there will be elections for the President, two Vice Presidents, Secretary and Treasurer. Various other commissions will also be elected. The electoral process is already under way, with various congregations having put forward their nominations. Voting takes place such that only the five top candidates in the various districts become eligible for office in the National Convention.

Prior to the Convention a meeting of the "Board of Directors" as well as another conference of "District Councilors" under the theme "Pastoral Treatises" will take place.

New executive director for LCMS Missions

LCMSNews -- No. 89 - Rev. Robert M. Roegner of Westwood, N.J., has accepted a call from The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's Board for Mission Services to serve as its executive director. He succeeds Dr. Glenn O'Shoney, who retired Nov. 1, 2001, after serving in the post since 1989.

Roegner, 48, prior to taking up his new post on Jan. 2, was pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Westwood. From 1996 to 1999, he served as executive director of Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) in Aurora, Ill.

Prior to joining LBT, Roegner served the Synod's mission board for six years as area secretary for Africa, Europe and the Middle East, and for nine years as a missionary in Liberia, West Africa. He is a 1981 graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

In his new post, Roegner will oversee the Synod's mission work in more than 60 countries worldwide.

"My family and I see God's will in this, and we count it as a privilege to be able to serve Him in His mission and ministry through the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod," Roegner said. He and his wife, Kristi, have four children -- Amy, 22; Jeremy, 20; Stephanie, 17; and Tracy, 12.

Roegner said he is looking forward to the challenges of the position, and he believes that God will continue to bless the Synod's mission work, as He has done in the past.

LCMS missionaries resume volunteer role in Kyrgyzstan

LCMSNews -- No. 101 Two volunteer Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod missionaries returned in late November 2001 to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to resume their work, and four other missionaries plan to return next year.

LCMS World Mission withdrew the six missionaries Oct. 1 last year because of safety concerns. In recent weeks, the U.S. State Department has given the green light for Americans to return to Kyrgyzstan.

Back in Bishkek are Carole Raymond and Daniel Schelp. Rev. Robert and Susan Pfeil plan to return to the field in January, following six months of home service. Rev. Tim and Marguerite Nickel expect to return to Kyrgyzstan when their home service is completed in May.

Eight missionaries withdrawn by LCMS World Mission from the southern Philippine island of Mindanao in June have not returned because the situation is not yet considered safe, according to Ken Reiner, counselor for missionary care with LCMS World Mission. Guerrillas have kidnapped Americans in the Philippines, so the missionaries were withdrawn as a safety precaution.

Director of LCMS World Relief retires

LCMSNews - No. 90 - Dr. Elaine (Richter) Bryant, the first woman to head LCMS World Relief, has retired from the post, effective Nov. 30, 2001. Rev. Jarold Rux, manager of program support for LCMS World Relief, will serve as interim director.

Bryant has served as director of LCMS World Relief since 1994, and as associate director of Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), since 1993. LDR, a cooperative ministry of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, assists victims of natural disasters in the United States.

Bryant served with the Synod's Board for Human Care Ministries, since 1986, and was associate director of LCMS World Relief from 1991 to 1994. She worked for the Synod's national offices for a total of 16 years, and taught for 10 years in Taiwan and Germany.

"Most remarkable" during her tenure with LCMS World Relief has been "the increasing number of opportunities to bring peace in the name of the Prince of Peace," Bryant said. Since 1997, humanitarian assistance provided by LCMS World Relief has opened at least nine countries to LCMS mission work.

LCMS World Relief also has fostered partnerships among Lutheran entities to provide a coordinated response to natural disasters and to support specific human-care projects, such as a multi-service center for refugees in Philadelphia.

In the past 12 years, LCMS World Relief has offered more than \$10 million to congregations and agencies for U.S. social-ministry projects, and its financial support from donors has grown from \$3 million per year to an average of \$8 million annually.

Serving LCMS World Relief has been "an opportunity I never dreamed I'd have," Bryant said. "I've been blessed."

Her "greatest joy," she added, was in the personal relationships she enjoyed with others, "especially the people I've met in other countries."

Prayers for the Persecuted

On Sunday, November 4, 2001, churches across Canada and around the world were encouraged to pray for Christians who are persecuted for their faith. Canada's theme for this International Day of Prayer (IDOP) was "A Voice for the Voiceless" taken from Proverbs 31:8, "Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die."

This year IDOP Canada has focused special attention on China, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Mexico. In China, pastors of house churches are jailed and tortured for preaching the gospel. In Indonesia, many Christians are fearful for their lives because militant Islamic extremists are killing Christians and burning churches in some areas. In Nigeria, there are ongoing tensions between Muslims and Christians, particularly in the north where Islamic law has been declared the law of the state. In Chiapas, Mexico, some Catholics are intolerant of evangelical Christians.

Christians in many other countries face harassment, discrimination, jail and torture for their faith. A dozen Christians are in jail in Saudi Arabia for having a Christian prayer service. Thousands of Christians face threats of war and displacement in southern Sudan.

Amazingly, the churches that are growing the most are in areas where there is persecution. Where house church leaders are jailed in China, many more house churches have sprung up. In Nigeria, the church is growing so rapidly that there are not enough pastors.

But those who face persecution ask for one thing above all else--prayer. That is why the International Day of Prayer is such an important day for the Christian church to observe. While many Christians and churches pray for those who are persecuted, IDOP Sunday is a day when Christians around the globe focus on those who are persecuted.

For more information visit the IDOP web site: <http://www.idop.ca>.

Kieschnick, LFL issue statements critical of human cloning

LCMSNews -- No. 96 - Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick and Lutherans for Life (LFL) each have issued statements critical of human cloning experiments.

The statements were prepared in response to an announcement by Advanced Cell Technology, a laboratory in Worcester, Maine, that it has successfully cloned a human embryo.

In his statement, Kieschnick referred to a 1998 LCMS Synod convention resolution that directs us to "reject without reservation as contrary to God's Word any technique or method of human cloning that results in the destruction of human embryos or the creation of human embryos for the purposes of fetal tissue research or organ harvesting or transplantation."

"Today's biotechnology is complex and fast-developing," Kieschnick continued. "New developments are challenging our best theological and ethical minds to give serious, reflective discussion to the specific issues that arise on an almost daily basis. Our Commission on Theology and Church Relations is preparing a study document to help the church, on the basis of God's Word, make informed ethical judgments concerning cloning and attendant issues."

"As always in issues that deal with life, our Synod adheres to the fundamental truth that life begins at conception. We will always reaffirm and celebrate life, and we must always protect the sanctity of life."

In its statement, released Nov. 27, LFL says human cloning "removes the procreative act from the context prescribed in Scripture. ... It turns the gift of life as the work of God's hands into the product of science completely controlled by the hand of man."

The LFL statement calls human cloning "a grievous assault on God as the author of life and an insult to Him as Lord of Life. Human cloning of embryos for the purpose of destroying them for their stem cells multiplies this horror immeasurably."

The statement thanks God "for His many gifts and for the human wisdom to create and use technology to sustain and enhance the life He gives us," but calls cloning "an idolatrous misuse of this technology."

Finland's Bishops say 'no' to ceremonies for same-sex couples

LWI - Following a Finnish parliament vote accepting a law on registration of same-sex relationships, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) says it will not conduct ceremonies for same-sex couples.

In a statement, the ELCF bishops stress the difference between registration and marriage, emphasizing that society must support child upbringing that strengthens the relationship between

a man and woman. The marriage service and blessing of marriage are one way for the church to support this relationship, the bishops say.

Under the proposed law, passed in September 2001 by a 99 - 84 vote, same-sex couples will be able to register their relationship with the civil authority. Once registered, they will have almost the same legal rights as married couples except the right to adopt or to have a family name. The law comes into force in 2002.

However, the bishops say the equal dignity of homosexuals must be respected in church and society. Church workers are ready to deal with questions of homosexuality in pastoral counseling. According to the statement, the Lutheran church will require its workers to follow its traditional teaching.

The ELCF has 4.6 million members comprising 85 percent of the Finnish population.

CELC to meet in Sweden

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), an association of Lutheran churches in fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is scheduled to meet in its fourth triennial meeting at Gothenburg, Sweden, on April 23-25 of this year.

Under the theme of, "Jesus Christ, the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever," the person and work of Christ are to be discussed in five essays.

Armin Panning, president of the CELC announced that requests for membership from about five or six national churches are expected, thereby bringing the total membership to some 20 church bodies.

Plans for Better evangelistic outreach in France

When the Ev. Luth. Church - Synod of France and Belgium (ELC-SFB) meets for its next convention from 8 to 10 May 2002 in Strasbourg, it will celebrate the occasion of 75 years of the creation of the Synod in Strasbourg by seven Alsatian congregations during the main worship service on Ascension Day (9 May).

Under the theme "Rejoice in the Lord always!" (Phil 4:4) the ELC-SFB will, however, not only look back on the blessings of the past, but also prepare for the future by deciding on three important matters.

The main issue will be a progressive reorganization of some pastoral positions in the next ten years for a better evangelistic outreach in France.

Furthermore a proposal of the General Pastoral Conference will be put before the convention, entitled "The responsibility of women in the Church," which proposes to open to women all positions (on congregational, regional and synodical levels) - except the Pastoral Ministry and the functions reserved for the Pastoral Ministry.

The third major issue is the autonomy of the Flemish congregation in Antwerp (with its English preaching station in Brussels) as an independent Belgian Synod.

Upcoming conventions

Japan Lutheran Church: The Twelfth General Convention will be held in Tokyo, May 2 and 3, 2002. The theme will be "New Challenges in the New Century." The Convention is held every three years with election of the executive committee members.

Lutheran Church Canada: June 6-10 2002 in Kitchener, Ontario under the theme, "With Great Boldness: That All may Know His Name."

The **European Lutheran Conference** of the ILC-churches in Europe will be held in Berlin from July 22 to 25, 2002. Its topic will be "The Work of Lutheran Churches Among Young People."

Independent Ev. Luth. Church (SELK) in Germany: 10th Church Synod June 16-22, 2003 in Melsungen (North Hesse).

Urgency of the message

Meyer Mission News - Statistics on the AIDS epidemic in South Africa are frightening, reports Delano Meyer, LCMS area secretary for West and Southern Africa. South Africa's Farmer's Weekly magazine states that "KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa's worst affected province, has more than 65,500 AIDS orphans. By the year 2010 it is estimated that this number will have risen to 750,000." The desire to better minister to AIDS patients and their families is one of the goals of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA).

Meyer concludes this fearsome outlook with: "What can comfort a victim with no earthly hope? Only the infinite love of our Savior, who forgives the penitent and promises to be near to all who call on Him."

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