



ILC NEWS

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ILC and LWF Met in Finland

Järvenpää, Finland - The Executive Committee of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) met in Järvenpää, Finland, from 30 October to 2 November 2003. The theme was "*What unites us? What divides us?*"

The meeting took place in a cordial and constructive atmosphere, which enabled clear and frank discussion and followed the tone set by an initial meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from 30 July to 1 August 2002.

ILC Executive Secretary Rev. Dr. Samuel Nafzger and LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko made presentations focusing on a Lutheran understanding of the authority of Holy Scripture, what is meant by subscription to the Lutheran Confessions and how Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is understood and practiced.

All participants reflected on core issues from their own experiences or perspectives concerning Lutheran church life and relations between churches belonging to the ILC and/or the LWF in their regions.

It was apparent that formal acceptance of the biblical and confessional writings has not led to agreement in all matters of faith and life. The representatives from both organizations expressed recognition that the confession of faith they hold in common includes the belief that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule, source and norm of faith, doctrine, life, service and practice and that the Lutheran Confessions are correct and pure expositions of the Scriptures.

They affirmed their gratitude for the God-given blessing they share as members of the Body of Christ, the One Holy Christian Church confessed in the Ecumenical Creeds. However, the meeting recognized and identified significant and deeply held areas of theological disagreement that remain among the churches of the two worldwide Lutheran organizations.

It was agreed that further contact should be maintained and conversations held, enabling the ILC and the LWF to deal with different areas of theological agreements and disagreements between churches of both organizations. Specifically, it was agreed that

- the ILC Executive Secretary and the LWF General Secretary will convene a small group of representatives from each organization to take into consideration tensions resulting from activities, statements or policies of churches of the two organizations or agencies related to them;
- the ILC and the LWF should consider hosting joint symposiums on issues of faith and life that affect Lutherans and people throughout the world;
- the ILC and the LWF and/or their member churches should be encouraged to invite observers to each other's official meetings and consultations;
- the ILC and the LWF should encourage their member churches to seek or improve positive relations in their respective regions and to cooperate wherever possible in local events, public issues, outreach endeavors, and provision of human care.

The ILC Executive Secretary and the LWF General Secretary were asked to continue their contact and prepare for the implementation of the agreements reached.

The participants joined in daily morning and evening prayers. On Friday 31 October, the Morning Prayer celebrated Reformation Day and on Saturday 1 November, All Saints' Day. The participants were present as invited guests for worship in the (Lutheran) Helsinki Cathedral. The service was presided over by the Bishop of Helsinki, Dr. Eero Huovinen, a Vice President of the LWF, who visited and addressed the meeting the same evening.

Archbishop Jukka Paarma of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland also visited and greeted the meeting. In addition,

Acting Director Mr. Leo Siliamaa and Rev. Dr. Tapio Leskinen from FinnChurchAid provided information on the work of their agency.

The ILC and the LWF have members around the world. Each seeks to promote cooperation and fellowship among its member churches. Nine Lutheran churches are members of both organizations. The LWF Council and Assembly and the ILC Conference have encouraged ongoing contact between the two global Lutheran bodies.

Present from the two organizations were:

ILC participants: Rev. Dr. Paul Kofi Fynn (President, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana); Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick (President, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod); Rev. Hong-Yeol Lee (President, Lutheran Church in Korea); Rev. Dr. Ralph Mayan (President, Lutheran Church – Canada); Rev. Dr. Samuel Nafzger (Executive Secretary, ILC); Rev. Dr. Diethardt Roth (Bishop, Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church [Germany]); and Rev. Dr. Carlos Walter Winterle (President, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil). Rev. Dr. Hilbert W. Riemer (Luther University/Seminary, Korea) served as interpreter for President Lee. Rev. David Piso (Head Bishop, Gutnius Lutheran Church, Papua New Guinea) was unable to attend.

LWF participants: Rev. Dr. Risto Cantell (Executive Director, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland); Rev. Jon Enslin (Associate Director for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America); Oberkirchenrätin Rev. Käte Mahn (German National Committee of the LWF); Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko (General Secretary, LWF); Rev. Sven Oppegaard (Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, LWF); Ms. Priscilla Singh (Secretary for Women in Church and Society, LWF); Rev. Wayne Zweck (General Secretary, Lutheran Church of Australia). Archbishop Nemuel Babba (Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria) and Rev. Huberto Kirchheim (President Emeritus, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil) were unable to attend.

Throughout the meeting, the participants were mindful of the responsibility the two organizations share in the divine calling to proclaim the gospel of God's grace in Christ, to be instruments for the accomplishment of God's will for the world, and to seek the unity of the Christian church (John 17). In this, they remain committed to pray fervently for guidance and strength from the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ●

Christ's Words Will Not Pass Away

Editorial by Dr. Diethardt Roth

“Jesus Christ says: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Mark 13:31)

This Word of Holy Scripture has been chosen by German churches as a watchword for the year 2004. It gives us confidence and guidance for the time which lies ahead. We are directed to the infallible Word of Christ as the solid ground of all our work in this transitory world. It endures, it gives us certainty, it gives us security, and through the work of the Holy Spirit it shall be brought to all people in the world.

For us this means that the Word of Holy Scripture first of all has to speak to ourselves and that we have to strive for an appropriate interpretation. We will never have learned enough about the Word that leads us to the center, to Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, to the place where we find forgiveness of sins, eternal life, blessedness and guidance for our life.

In these days much is written and talked about controversial topics like homosexuality. We should hold fast to the fact that practicing homosexuality is not in accordance with Holy Scripture.

In these days much is also talked about different needs in East and West, North and South. The Word of God calls us to work for relief and healing. We do this in the knowledge that our work takes place in a transitory world. This world will not endure, neither the good nor the bad in it. This world is penultimate. Nevertheless, in it we fulfill our task with the certainty, that the lords of the world will fade, but that our Lord comes, and according to His promise, will bring a new heaven and a new earth, in which all harm and distress have been overcome.

With Christ and His Word this new era has already begun. In faith we joyfully partake in it. And filled with hope we are looking forward to its eternal completion.

My the triune God bless you in this transitory world through the richness of His Word.

Bishop Dr. Diethardt Roth



ILC Seminaries Meet in Germany

After a very successful Conference in Brazil in 2001, a second ILC "Seminaries" World Conference has been approved by the Executive Committee of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) after a grant has been secured to pay for the expenses. From each theological seminary of the churches belonging to the ILC, two persons are invited to attend the conference, to be held in Erfurt, Germany from 31 March to 4 April this year. If a church does not have a seminary, one person will represent those who are involved with pastoral training in that church.

About 60 participants will stay in the Augustine monastery in Erfurt, once Martin Luther's monastery and now a conference centre, to discuss the main topic of the conference "Luther and the Work of the Pastor," which is related to teaching and training Lutheran pastors. The fruitful tension between historical reflection and modern church requirements will be in the foreground.

"However, it is equally important to build and deepen contacts between all those who are involved in pastoral training and theological research within the ILC churches," said the chairman of the conference, professor Dr. Jörg Salzmann, Oberursel, Germany.

Visits to Wittenberg and the Wartburg are also part of the conference program. ●

WELS, ELS Leaders Decline Talks with Missouri Synod

LCMSNews - No. 133 - The presidents of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) have declined an invitation for talks with the Missouri Synod on areas of disagreement and on ways to support each other.

"I am disappointed that both the ELS and the WELS declined to meet with us," LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick said. "But while I am disappointed, I will continue the endeavor, respectfully and patiently, to develop our relationship with both of these Lutheran bodies, as fellow members of the Body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church on earth."

In letters to WELS President Karl Gurgel and ELS President John A. Moldstad Jr., Kieschnick had asked to meet with each of them and with representatives from each respective church body.

Asked why each of the two presidents declined his invitation, Kieschnick said, "I believe it would be fair to say that, from their perspective, they see no point in meeting with our Synod because the doctrinal differences that led to the severing of fellowship with the LCMS by the ELS in 1955 and the WELS in 1961 still remain."

Kieschnick said he recognizes that there are points of doctrinal disagreement, but he added that this is "one of the primary reasons for my invitation for fraternal discussions, issued in good faith."

At the same time, Kieschnick continued, "there is much that we, as confessional Lutherans, have in common. That's another reason I issued the invitation to meet."

"There are important issues on which we agree and on which we should be able to make a common witness with respect to contemporary issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, the ordination of women to the pastoral office, sexuality, marriage and family, to name a few," he said.



LCA - Leadership Team Re-elected

The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), meeting in convention in October last year in Stanwell Tops, New South Wales (NSW), re-elected President Rev Mike Semmler and Vice-president Rev. Dr. David Stolz for second three-year terms.



The 2003 National Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia in session. L.t.r.: Vice President Dr. David Stolz, President Michael Semmler, and LCA Secretary Rev. Wayne Zweck.

Synod also decided to retain its associate membership of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) rather than seek full membership.

A proposal to apply for full membership prompted extended debate with strong views expressed for and against the proposition. The outcome was an insufficient majority to carry the motion so the status quo prevails and the LCA will continue as an associate member.

In his opening address to synod, President Semmler stressed the importance of continued education of members in the teachings of the Church and teaching faith in the home.

The role of the family in passing on the faith was reinforced by a decision to rename the LCA's Board for Youth Ministry the Board for Youth and Family Ministry.

The Convention had a strong diversity and multi-cultural flavour, developed from the theme "How are they to hear?," from Romans 10:14.

The cultural diversity of the Church was reflected in major presentations featuring the ethnic groupings represented in the Lutheran church in NSW and echoed in the launch of a Board for Mission publication "Our Church 2020 – a multicultural church in mission" designed to engage members in addressing the future of the Lutheran Church in Australia.

The multi-cultural dimension, and the LCA's geographic location in South-East Asia, was underscored by the focus on its mission partnerships with churches in Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Indonesia in particular.

And the partnership theme was reinforced by the fact that the address at the Sunday morning divine worship service was delivered by Datuk Rev. Dr. Thu En Yu, principal of the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia. Professor Dr. Halin Marpung, General Secretary of the Nommensen Foundation in Medan, Indonesia, was also a guest at the convention.

There was a clear focus on Lutheran theology and teachings, which President Semmler described as "the Church's gift," with the Convention built around a worship core featuring addresses on the means of grace, the church and the office of the ministry based on the Augsburg Confession.

The LCA is in on-going dialogue with the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia and Synod adopted a statement on "Covenanting for mutual recognition and reconciliation" arising from the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue.

It also approved regional agreements for pastoral care in areas unable to be served by one or the other church, including eucharistic

hospitality and recognition of ministry between the Lutheran and Anglican churches, subject to approval by the College of Presidents in agreement with the local diocese of the Anglican Church.

The issue of the ordination of women is set down for consideration by Synod in 2006, and several proposals relating to that issue were referred to the LCA's College of Presidents for consideration in developing the debate scheduled to run over the next three years.

The Synod asked the General Church Council to explore specific ministry opportunities in the schools of the LCA for women with theological training and resolved to allow women to serve as lay readers.

It also changed the name of the LCA's tertiary training institution from "Luther Seminary" to "Australian Lutheran College," on the basis that the new name better describes its role, which extends far beyond pastoral training, and clearly differentiates it from establishments dedicated entirely to training theologians for pastoral service. ●

Western European LCMS Partners Share Perspectives on Church Planting

LCMS World Mission - Europe is often considered one of the more difficult places to share the Gospel and to begin new missions. But the partner churches of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) are active in this work, having started a number of new congregations.

According to former LCMS World Mission area director for Europe, Richard Blythe, "Church planting is an important part of our mutual goal to reach 100 million people across the globe with the Gospel by 2017."

In November, Dr. Robert Scudieri, LCMS World Mission associate executive director for the national mission team, visited with partner church representatives from Germany, France and Denmark to discuss and reflect on church planting efforts in Europe. Scudieri provided a forum for these LCMS partners to further develop their own strategies and practices for starting new congregations in Europe. The group met in Bleckmar, Germany, where the German LCMS partner church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) has its mission headquarters.

To further their ongoing learning in church planting, LCMS World Mission has invited church planters from Germany to come to the Mission Planters Institute to be held near Orlando, Florida, USA, in February 2004. At the Institute, two pastors will be exposed to more North American church planting methods.

"My time in Germany was eye opening," said Scudieri. "I learned a great deal about how a church in an unchurched culture can minister."

"I was more than happy that we met with fellow mission-minded pastors from Denmark and France," said Rev. Markus Nietzke, director of SELK's mission operations. "It created an international atmosphere, something we are missing out on sometimes. I am very thankful for the start of this church planters seminar by LCMS World Mission and for sharing their vision with us."

In the future, LCMS World Mission plans to continue to support the mission initiatives of LCMS partners, such as SELK, as they take leadership for planting new confessional churches in Europe. ●

ELFC: Leipzig Seminary Celebrates 50th Anniversary

Leipzig, Germany - selk-news - On 27 September 2003, when the new academic year was opened at the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFC), its 50th anniversary of existence was celebrated as well.

At present there are nine students at the seminary. Five of them are from the ELFC, one is a member of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK), one student comes from Russia and two from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in the USA.

The essay of the day was delivered by professor Gaylin Schmeling from Mankato, USA from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) about "The Holy Baptism - Source of Life". During the first week Schmeling lectured about the Lutheran Theologian Johann Gerhard.

Among the about 100 guests at the festive occasion were the president of the ELFC, Rolf Borszik, and the president of the Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden and Norway, Egil Edvardson and his wife, as well as five students from the newly founded seminary in Ljungby, Sweden.

The ELFC is a member of the Confessional Lutheran Conference (CELC), an association of Lutheran Churches in fellowship with the WELS. ●

POBLO and Partners Open Lutheran Seminary in Pakistan

LCMSNews - No. 130 - Paula Schlueter Ross - Fifteen Pakistani students are studying to become Lutheran pastors at a home-based seminary in Lahore, Pakistan, according to an Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor who visited western Asia in August last year.

That first group of students is expected to graduate and be ordained in about three years time, according to Rev. Gary Rohwer, who works with People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO), a U.S.-based organization that works with Muslims in the United States and overseas.

Rohwer traveled to Pakistan to lead a three day seminar on Lutheran doctrine for Pakistani Christians and church leaders. Christians represent only about 3 percent of the country's 145 million people, he said, and most live in extreme poverty.

"So many of the Christians I met are really just trying to survive," he said.

Some 25 people attended the seminar and "wholeheartedly embraced" Lutheran teachings.

"What impressed them the most was that we are a Bible-based church, and they were looking for that," Rohwer said. One man asked, "Why hasn't the Lutheran church come to Pakistan before now?"

POBLO is spearheading work in Pakistan, Afghanistan, northern India and Bangladesh with the help of 10 U.S. partners, including LCMS World Mission and Wheat Ridge Ministries. A formal partnership agreement was approved by the entities during a 30 September meeting at POBLO headquarters in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, USA.

Outcomes of the meeting include agreements such as:

- Orphan Grain Train, Norfolk, Nebraska, USA, will coordinate shipments of materials, medical services and educational resources.
- Hope Seeds, Palmetto, Florida, USA, will provide vegetable seeds and other materials.

- Children's Christian Concern Society, Topeka, Kansas, USA, will provide Christian education scholarships and assistance.

The new alliance is an "excellent model" for future ventures, according to Rev. Steve Hughey, director for mission response and involvement with LCMS World Mission and organizer of the meeting. The agreement allows partners to coordinate their efforts in a strategic way.

Other work in Pakistan includes the establishment of a health clinic near Shantinager, a predominantly Christian village. The clinic's doctor is Muslim and its staff is Christian, and the clinic provides basic health care to residents of about a dozen villages, both Christian and Muslim, according to Rohwer.

A Lutheran congregation in Lahore, established this summer for Pakistani Christians, has about 500 weekly worshipers, according to POBLO staff.

Future plans call for establishing schools and offering job-skills training.

"Our hope is that, through education and job training ... we can help the people out of a cycle of poverty," Rohwer said.

Health care and education will also be supported by the POBLO-led partnership in Afghanistan.

The Lutheran Heritage Foundation, Macomb, Michigan, USA, has agreed to translate and print 50 000 copies of Luther's Small Catechism in various west Asian languages, including Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali.

Work in western Asia is being funded by members of the POBLO partnership and LCMS World Relief. ●

LCMS World Mission Announces Further Administrative Streamlining

LCMS World Mission - LCMS World Mission has announced that it will minimize the geographical divisions among 12 overseas administrative mission "areas" by consolidating them into four "regions." The decision is part of the ongoing reorganization of the Synod's mission agency to structure staffing along the lines of LCMS World Mission's new strategic plan.

On 30 November 2003, the terms of service of five full-time and three part-time

area directors came to an end. (Four area director positions were vacant.) LCMS World Mission will reassign the men who held these positions or will assist them in transitioning into new ministries.

Four new regional directors will be called to serve as deployed members of the St. Louis administrative staff, coordinating the strategy and work in Africa, Asia, Eurasia and Latin America.

David Birner, associate executive director for the international mission team, said, "We need to streamline the Synod's worldwide mission program for effective management that can meet the new challenges of 21st century missions.

Each region will also have missionaries serving as area facilitators who will assist regional directors in coordinating work in local areas.

Mission leaders say the initiative reflects a tighter and more economical administration based on the realistic changes that have been taking place in LCMS World Mission staffing and strategy during the last year. ●

Seminary Program for Immigrants Enrolls 66

LCMS e-News - Paula Schlueter Ross - Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, USA, this fall welcomed 43 new students to its Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), a distance-education, pastor-training program for immigrants.

About two-thirds of the first EIIT class are African, and all but three in the new class are from African countries, Rev. Yohannes Mengsteab, director of the program, said. Mengsteab also serves as facilitator for new African-immigrant and urban missions with Lutheran Church-Missouri Synode (LCMS) World Mission. Others in the program are Asian, Hispanic and Native American. Two women - an Asian and an African - are taking EIIT courses to prepare them for service as deaconesses.

Mengsteab, who is from Eritrea, East Africa, helped start the EIIT program, which was originally conceived for African immigrants because of the need for theological training among them. While the LCMS has more than 70 African-immigrant ministries, the vast majority of them are led by laymen - fewer than a dozen African-immigrant leaders are ordained, according to Mengsteab.

Most of those enrolled in the program are working full time in secular jobs while they

serve as pastors to groups of immigrants like themselves. They preach sermons, lead Bible studies and perform baptisms, among other duties.

Most of the students have financial sponsors, such as congregations or districts, but some don't.

Ascension Lutheran Church in Landover Hills, Maryland, USA, is helping pay tuition for five Liberians enrolled in the program. All are serving as pastors and church planters in the Washington, D.C., area, where Africans are considered the "fastest-growing population segment," according to Ascension Pastor Fred Hedt.

Hedt, who also serves as a "mentor-coach" to the EIIT students, says about 50 of Ascension's 500 members are African, and about 40 of the 170 students at its day school are from Africa.

Referring to "Ablaze!," the Synod's initiative to reach 100 million people with the Gospel by 2017, Hedt joked that the Africans are such enthusiastic evangelizers they "are likely to reach 100 million all by themselves."

EIIT student Suah Deddeh works full time at an exotic plant company and helps lead the 100 member African congregation that worships at Ascension. EIIT "is a good program that will empower us to do more on the mission field," he said.

The first class of EIIT students is expected to graduate in 2005, and Mengsteab believes the innovative training program will serve a valuable niche for many years to come. ●

Sweden: Confession-Bound "Mission Province" Founded

Confession-Bound Lutherans Reorganize

selk news – On 7 September 2003, confession-bound Lutherans founded a "Mission Province" in Göteborg, whereby the Swedish Church acquired a fourteenth non-territorial diocese, against its will. The founding meeting in Göteborg was attended by several hundred delegates from parishes and parish groups throughout Sweden, including 25 ministers from the Swedish Church. Until such time as a bishop is elected, the new diocese will be lead by a "Mission Board" comprising six ministers and an equal number of lay members. Only parishes can become members of the Mission Province. Individuals can support the work through a benefit society.

Opponents of this movement accuse the participants of splitting the Swedish Church. However, those responsible for founding the Mission Province do not, according to their own information, intend forming a new church. "We remain within the Swedish Church and will continue their evangelical Lutheran tradition. We intend offering a structure and a network for relationships between those diverse communities and other confession-bound groups, whose church and mission activities are not covered by the present church regulations."

"On the contrary, this should overcome church splitting, which arises from the fact that the power of the church is in the hands of those who distanced themselves from the original teachings of the Swedish Church, for example with respect to bible interpretation, perception of God, doctrine of ministry, views on marriage, mission theology and so on. It is no longer acceptable, for example, that theological students who consider the ordination of women to offices of the church to be incompatible with the Holy Bible, are not admitted for ordination after final exams, while there is a shortage of pastors in the Swedish Church."

The involved ministers are aware of the fact that with the founding of the new diocese, they run the risk of being dismissed from office, thus their spokesman Pastor Bengt Birgersson. "However, in this situation one must obey God more than man," he declared. ●

Call for Reference to God in the EU Draft Convention

Stade/Geneva (LWI) - The Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), held 11 to 14 October 2003 in Stade, Germany, called on the European Union to acknowledge its religious roots and to include a reference to God in the preamble to its draft constitution.

In a resolution the synod noted with gratitude that the status of churches is given recognition in Part I, Article 51 of the Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, and that appreciation for their particular mission is expressed therein.

The VELKD is a union of eight German Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Bavaria, Brunswick, Thuringia, Hanover, Mecklenburg, Saxony, Schaumburg-Lippe and the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, representing about 11 million people. ●

From Asmara to Winnipeg via Hong Kong

The contacts and partnerships established through the ILC can come to light in unprecedented ways. The following story from Dr. J. Rimbach illustrates this "world-wide-linkage".

In November of 2002, while entertaining some guests from the U.S., Rimbach showed them some of the work of Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) World Mission in Macau. Waiting for the elevator to take them to the Mission's English Language Center, Rimbach saw a vaguely familiar face. It turned out to be a former Seminary classmate of his, Dr. Leonard Harms, now director of Overseas Missions for the Lutheran Church Canada (LCC), on a visit to see a Canadian worker at the mission.

"I take it that I owe it to Dr. Harms that a few weeks later I received a call from the pastor of the church he attends in Winnipeg, Canada," Rimbach explained. Pastor James Frische told him of a family of refugees from Eritrea, whom his congregation wished to "sponsor," and which might need some help.

Rimbach first met Mr. Bereketab Yohannes and his wife Eden and their two years-plus young son, Senai. The first job was to find some reasonable accommodation for the family. A daunting task in a city where property is terribly expensive. For a short time the family could stay in the guest house of the LCMS Mission in Hong Kong, but this had previously been promised to others and soon the hunt was on again. Finally it was learned of a vacant flat that belonged to Lutheran Theological Seminary, where Rimbach is professor of Old Testament.

As this account was written in August, 2003, the Yohannes family was still in Hong Kong, but with the long awaited departure for Canada to happen soon.

But "why" from Eritrea, and "why" to Hong Kong, and "why" to Canada? As the month went by, Rimbach learned the answers to these questions. Eritrea has a communist military government, and, if one is not "of that party" it is not possible to engage in your work. To Canada for various reasons, one of them being that a sister, Senait, was already there, not as a refugee, but as an immigrant from Italy, and a member of Rev. Fritsche's congregation!

And Hong Kong? Because Mr. Yohannes knew that if you have an Eritrean passport, you

can enter Hong Kong without first obtaining a visa. Then, learning of the collusion between the United Nations, the Sudan and Eritrea for the "forced repatriation" of all Eritrean refugees from Sudan, he jumped on the first plane for Hong Kong (Yohannes had left Eritrea for Sudan in September of 2000, and his family had joined him there, in Khartoum, in June of 2002).

Yohannes was also aware that there was in Hong Kong an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "As things moved slowly, or should I say "dragged on," I gained some insight into the ever-so-slow and seemingly uncaring processes of the UNHCR. It was always -'this is not a good time' - 'maybe somewhat later' - 'would you like to go to Sweden?' and so forth, tells Rimbach. Happily he was able to muster some funds in support of this effort from President Allan Yung of the Lutheran Church, Hong Kong Synod.

The happy outcome of all this time is that the Yohannes family did gain the UN status of "political refugees" and have been granted entry to Canada.

Rimbach concludes this story, "if a "special" situation arises, contact your friends in the ILC - they will try to make the most of it. When I have to say "fare-well" to the Yohannes family, I will miss them, and I begin to think of how I might arrange a trip to Winnipeg!" ●



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Editor: Peter H. F. Ahlers, 331 Eastwood Str., P.O. Box 13789, 0028 Hatfield-Pretoria, Republic of South Africa; phone +27-12-3442889 and +27-82-4137334; fax +27-12-3442889; e-mail: felsisa@pixie.co.za. Executive Secretary: Dr Samuel H. Nafzger, 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, Missouri 63122-7295, USA; phone 314-965-9000, Ext. 1433; fax 314-996-1116; e-mail: samuel.nafzger@lcms.org. ILC News is also available via the internet from the Council's web site <http://www.ilc-online.org>.

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