

## LWF YOUTH

### INTRODUCTION

Communion is fun. This experience in the work of LWF Youth may not sound theologically very deep at first glance. But it is a profound experience in the life of churches together. Celebrating our communion is joyful: Joy about the diversity of God's people and also joy that God brings these diverse churches together and people can join hands and act. It is the theme Paul is talking about in the letter to Philippians (Phil 3:1). Joy is the consequence of the Gospel and also of the community that is built around God's word. Participants in the programs of LWF Youth realize that this experience is not limited to the local or national church. In fact, it comes to its fullest manifestation in a global community. Communion is fun. This is what young people experience in LWF programs but they also are very aware of what is missing in this communion and where the churches have to play a far bigger role in addressing issues of young people. Here are a few of the issues LWF Youth were concerned about this year:

- Youth unemployment
- Climate change
- HIV and Aids

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### ***ENGAGE: Global Training for Young Leaders***

Agnes (24) from Malawi knows several young women in her congregation who are single mothers. They struggle to provide a livelihood for themselves and their babies. Quite often they experience rejection in their own communities. How can they be supported?

Karen (19) from the Philippines is appalled by the extent the environment has already been damaged in her country. There is excessive dumping and the island state experiences first hand the effects of climate change. How can the church be part of the solution instead of being a part of the problem?



*Participants at the LWF Global Training for Young Leaders, Regional Meeting for Asia, March 2008, Bangkok, Thailand*

In Sierra Leone, after the civil war, many former child soldiers are still heavy drug users. During the war, many of them received drugs by their commanders to make them more willing to fight. Anthony (25) wants to develop a prevention strategy in the church of Sierra Leone in order to help the next generation of even younger children and youth not become addicted to drugs themselves.

During the ENGAGE: LWF Global Training for Young Leaders (Regional Meetings in Bangkok and Nairobi) young people from the member churches (12 from each region) met and discussed their issues and questions. In various bible studies and training sessions, there was not one single answer to all questions presented. The group discussed how to take some very concrete steps to address these issues. They were trained in methods of studying the bible in groups, envisioning a better future, basic project management and presentation skills. They felt encouraged that they could be active and participate more meaningfully in the life of their churches.

All are implementing a series of activities in their home contexts. Agnes from Malawi has started a group for young single mothers to support each other and to open up opportunities for vocational education. Karen trains young environmental advisers who share their knowledge with local congregations and encourage them to improve their ecological record. Anthony set up a prevention drug prevention program with other NGOs for young people in rural areas in Sierra Leone.

The next step for the young leaders will be to have more global exposure. They are going to participate as stewards in the LWF General Assembly in Stuttgart 2010.

### ***Climate Change: Pre-Council Youth Workshop***

The discussion is interrupted by the loud protest of a civil society group. The governments delayed the negotiations about effective ways to deal with the climate crisis, they claim. The time to talk is over – now it is time to act. However, the government delegations continue their ever more heated discussion while the young activists are being escorted out of the meeting room.

This did not happen in a large UN meeting room in New York or elsewhere but in a modest spiritual retreat center on the outskirts of Arusha, Tanzania. During the Pre-Council Youth Workshop stewards and young council members studied climate change and possible ways to deal with it. This included a series of



*At the Pre-Council Youth Workshop June 2008 in Arusha, Tanzania: Participants working on the message for the LWF council.*

bible studies, discussion groups, an exposure trip and the already mentioned simulation game. The participants – mostly from Africa – worked intensely at their understanding of climate change amidst global political realities. They presented their view to the LWF council in a well received message that led to a comprehensive resolution that the council adopted. In the meantime, the learnings from the youth workshop were reported and presented in a LWF-DMD resource: “Youth Toolkit on Climate Change” that helps groups of youth and young adults address the issue according to their context.

### ***Internship: New concept of accompaniment***

The DMD internship program has a long tradition. One or more interns identified and endorsed by their home churches as aspiring young leaders work in the LWF secretariat for ten months. The interns were never understood as additional workforce – even though they take on important and meaningful work. The intention was always to give them a meaningful space of learning to develop their capacities for the sake of their home churches.

2008 brought significant improvement for the learning experience of the LWF interns (Rev. Rolita Machila from Zambia and Mr Francis Chan from Hong Kong). Several international ecumenical organizations synchronized their internship programs to start at the same time. This made it possible to have a joint internship retreat for LWF, the World Council of Churches, the World YWCA, the World Alliance of YMCAs and ACT International. In a larger and diverse group, the interns could reflect on God’s call for their life and their goals for the internship. In an intercultural training, they prepared themselves for life in a new context. The interns continued to meet on a weekly basis to get a broad understanding of the ecumenical movement.

### ***Youth Blog: Experience communion***

The Lutheran World Federation has developed an attractive theology of communion and has established powerful practice in many areas. However, the experience of communion remains limited to few people among the nearly 70 million Lutherans. LWF Youth is experimenting with new forms of living communion and is utilizing new forms of media for that.

For that purpose, the LWF Youth blog has been continuously expanding with nearly 38,000 page views in 2008. Young people from all around the world contribute and discuss current issues. This way, communion across borders becomes a real experience. The same is true for a new way of connecting. The social networking site, facebook.com has been very successful, and many young adults use it to stay in touch with their friends. The page of LWF Youth is gaining a stronger following and is a good platform for people from different countries to meet – at least in cyberspace.

### ***Online Consultations: Engaging internationally***

Many churches have named youth liaisons for the LWF Youth desk. The intention is to provide constant input from young people in the member churches on the international level. In 2008, there were two online consultations among the youth liaisons. In one, the

participants discussed climate change and in the other, they provided input to their current understanding of HIV and AIDS.



*At the Pre-Council Youth Workshop June 2008 in Arusha, Tanzania: Michel Ngoy Mulanda (Democratic Republic of Congo), Fabien Robelson (Madagascar).*

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Communion is fun – but communion is also a task still to be realized. When young Lutherans meet – in person or in cyberspace – the common faith and the common will to participate is an important starting point. However, many of them are acutely aware of the limitations of full youth participation: Some limitations are imposed from outside, like the difficulties in getting a visa, others are created by the church structures themselves that make it difficult for young people to be leaders in their full potential.

The preparation for the next LWF Assembly has started and many young people active in Lutheran churches hope that it might a significant step in broader and more meaningful youth participation.



Rev. Roger Schmidt  
Secretary for LWF Youth