

Message from the Pre-Council Youth Workshop

August 26 to 31, 2004, Geneva, Switzerland

From August 26 to 31, 2004, young people of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) met in Geneva, Switzerland for the Pre-Council Youth Workshop to explore the theme ***“Unplugging Unemployment: Youth Perspective”***. The unemployment¹ situation of youth in the world demands critical attention and specific action within our communion.

Why are we concerned about unemployment?

We discussed in light of the LWF Council theme, ***“Growing Together, Growing Apart,”*** and identified unemployment as contributing to people's growing apart. Differences in education, lifestyle, income or wealth resulting from unemployment lead to widening the gap between us. As Christians, we are called to point to the in-breaking of God's reign in the world. Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-6) illustrates this point. All were given an opportunity to work, and although they worked for different amounts of time, they were all paid a wage sufficient to meet their basic needs.

Today, many struggle to find work or enough work to ensure their basic needs are met. Unemployment affects people of all religions, ages, races and classes, but it places a disproportionately heavy load on many young people. According to the International Labour Organization, 47% of the unemployed globally are between the ages of 15 and 24.² As young Council members and stewards, we have had personal experiences with unemployment and seen its devastating impact on our lives and communities, irrespective of region. We highlight the relevance of this issue for carrying out priority work dealing with, for example, globalization, human dignity and other specific related priority areas of the LWF through member churches.

What is the reality?

Unemployment among youth is an unrelenting problem everywhere. It contributes to political instability, higher crime rates, low self-esteem, psychological distress, and lack of food, shelter, health care and education.

The purpose of employment is reflected in two important and distinct dimensions:

1. the fundamental need to have basic necessities met (most often through fair wages for workers), and
2. the need to fulfil one's vocation or calling, which is not necessarily linked to paid employment.

Lack of work and low wages often have a spiralling effect, beginning with an individual's psycho-social trauma and finally resulting in the suffering of a whole community. It is a complex problem with significant financial and socio-economic

¹ Unemployment is defined as those currently looking for work. It does not include those who are students or those who have opted out of the labor force.

² *Global Employment Trend for Youth 2004*. International Labour Organization. Released 11 August 2004.

LWF PROGRAM COMMITTEE FOR MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT

September 2 to 4, 2004, Geneva, Switzerland

AGENDA

EXHIBIT 8.2

implications. It is also the effect of economic globalization and strong corporate influence.

As a communion of churches, we are called to preach the gospel while advocating care and support for those who are suffering. Therefore, unemployment demands our consideration and actions.

Unemployment has many faces and its impact varies from country to country, but it has damaging effects everywhere. Therefore, we advocate attending to these differences by developing solutions and approaches appropriate to each context to manage and resolve this issue.

How should the church be involved?

We live in communion and are called to respond to the needs and suffering of our brothers and sisters. As Christians, we are called to preach the gospel. We encourage our churches to preach the often forgotten biblical texts that offer alternative models and view points of work, labour and employment.³

The churches are also called to preach the Word that all of us are God's children, loved and created by God, and the recipients of God's grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all people are precious, regardless of their employment, financial or any other status. On such biblical and theological bases, the youth ask the churches to incorporate the following as part of their ministry:

- Becoming informed about the different situations members of the LWF communion are facing. This includes making room for the voices of the voiceless, specifically the voices of the unemployed, within our congregations and communities.
- Helping all people, *especially young people*, to recognize their call or life vocation, and encouraging them to live out that call through voluntary work, as well as formal employment, as much as possible.
- Identifying and supporting the unemployed, accompanying them on their journey and connecting them to the necessary resources.

With these steps, we hope to witness by word and deed to the in-breaking of God's reign in the world.

³ Examples include: Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James and John as disciples, Mk 1:16-20; Responsibilities of servanthood, Luke 17:7-10; Parable of the Buried Talents, Mt 25:14-30; Choosing of the Seven, Acts 6:1-7.