



DIAKONIA

News

Newsletter
of
FOUNDATION DIAKONIA
WORLD FEDERATION
of
DIACONAL
ASSOCIATIONS
and
DIACONAL COMMUNITIES

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Editors:

Jane Martin
16 Wentworth Road
DUNDEE DD2 3SD
SCOTLAND, UK
Phone/Fax: ++44-1382-813 786
english.editor@diakonia-
world.org

Ulrike Kellner
Pressburger Str. 85
81377 München
GERMANY
Phone: ++49-89-7105 6814
deutsch.editor@diakonia-
world.org

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FROM YOUR EDITORS

Every year we think maybe we can produce two Newsletters and get a proper timetable of when this will happen, but every year this fails. It fails for a variety of reasons, lack of articles, constriction on time of the Editors, and sometimes computer problems.

Although we may fail in the hopes for our achievements we are still grateful for the opportunity of hearing from others. Stories from Associations and Communities, news about work situations, conferences people have attended, are always welcome and make interesting reading and a great ex-

ample of God's continuing faithfulness in the work of His Church.

If you have never sent your Newsletter or written an article for DIAKONIA News please think about it as others would like to share in your life and witness and how God is working in your part of the world.

We look forward to Atlanta and meeting some of the people we have only ever read about, bring your stories with you and share them with us.

Jane Martin
English editor

Everything in the world becomes more expensive – and so the need to cut down costs is becoming urgent. Especially an organisation as DIAKONIA has to be aware of using as little money as possible for administration. The internet is providing a good possibility to cut down costs but keep up – or even improve – communication with each other. Therefore we started to publish DIAKONIA News and DIAKONIA Nachrichten on our website. Please feel free to download it and distribute it widely. As this service is free, we stop mailing paper copies to each member. **This issue already will be distributed only via email to our members in America (North and South), Australia and Europe. All members in Africa and Asia will receive a paper this time. If**

you want to continue having a paper copy, please inform the Editors.

All private subscribers of the DIAKONIA News will receive now a paper copy for the last time – if they do not give notice that they want to receive a paper copy in future too. So, everybody who wants to receive their DIAKONIA News issue in paper in future will get it. But if you are not telling us otherwise, we stop mailing a paper copy to you.

Sometimes we cannot say thank you for gifts and donations because we simply do not know who is the sender! Please add your full name when you fill out your transaction file. Thank you very much!

Ulrike Kellner
German editor

Important Internet and E-mail Addresses

WEBSITES

DIAKONIA World Federation
DAP
DRAE
DOTAC

<http://www.diakonia-world.org>
<http://www.dap.info>
<http://www.drae.info>
<http://www.dotac.info>

WORLD "OFFICERS"

president@diakonia-world.org
secretary@diakonia-world.org
treasurer@diakonia-world.org
deutsch.editor@diakonia-world.org
english.editor@diakonia-world.org
webmaster@diakonia-world.org

REGIONAL

dap.president@diakonia-world.org
dotac.president@diakonia-world.org
drae.president@diakonia-world.org
drae.secretary@diakonia-world.org
drae.treasurer@diakonia-world.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends in DIAKONIA,

This Lent along with some of my sister deaconesses, I have been reflecting on "The Cry of the Prophet," a little booklet by Joan Chittister. In Hosea, Chittister writes, we see how judgment and compassion go together for the prophet. My colleagues who know the Hebrew language have taught me that compassion and womb come from the same root in Hebrew. This means that the prophet always begins with "womb love" or compassion which sees the other person as being born of the same womb and thus a sister or brother. Or compassion may be described as "mother love" which desires fullness of life for her children or who cannot rest until every straying child has returned home. This means that the prophet agonizes over every judgment and prophesies only to bring restoration to a person, a church, a nation, a world that is much loved.

In recent years in DIAKONIA, we have been talking about and exploring the prophetic role of the diaconate. We have a vision of God's intention for wholeness for the entire creation, and still we minister every day in the midst of brokenness. Our compassion moves us not only to provide the hands-on care that individuals need so badly but also to be prophetic and call into questions all that works against peace and justice in our world.

Such prophetic *diakonia* can be hard and lonely. That is one of the reasons that DIAKONIA World Federation is so important. Through our sharing together, we know we are not alone in this endeavor, we support and encourage one another, and we learn from each other about the needs of the world. Through our connections in DIAKONIA our hope and our vision are revived. We go on with our *diakonia* refreshed and renewed.

In July, we will once again have an opportunity to gather representatives from all our diaconal communities and associations for the 20th World Assembly of DIAKONIA. I look forward to seeing many of you at Georgia Technological Institute, Atlanta, Georgia, USA July 20-27. The local planning committee has been working hard on many details including a cultural evening and visits to ministry sites and places of interest around Atlanta. The program committee is providing for excellent speakers, bible studies, workshops, worship and opportunities for conversation among assembly participants.

Those of us who gather this summer will commit ourselves to bring what we learn and experience back home to those who cannot attend. In that way, our entire diaconal communities and associations can benefit.

At the Assembly, the voting delegates will choose a new president. We have four well-qualified and experienced candidates. Whoever is elected, I am confident that I will pass the leadership into good hands. Before I do that, however, I express my deep gratitude for the opportunities I have had as president these past eight years. I have been able to visit many parts of the world, to attend several regional conferences and to meet so many wonderful people. I am grateful for all that I have learned and experienced as I served as DIAKONIA president. I continue to thank God for the thousands of deaconesses, deacons, sisters and diaconal workers in DIAKONIA — people who everyday seek to make the world more whole. May God continue to bless you and the on-going work of DIAKONIA World Federation.

Louise Williams
DIAKONIA World President

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DIAKONIA WORLDWIDE

DIAKONIA's main web address: www.diakonia-world.org

DIAKONIA Executive Committee Meeting, Bethanien Guesthouse, Amerongen, Netherlands May 27 – June 2, 2008

This was a very peaceful place set in lovely surroundings in a rural part of the Netherlands. During our time there we were able to share a worship service with the Deaconesses of the Motherhouse Amerongen together with the members of the VDW (Verenigingen van Diaconate Werkers) who were having their annual meeting in Amerongen.

Deaconess Anke Slagmolen, who works in Rwanda, was on holiday in her own Motherhouse at Amerongen and gave us a report on the work in Rwanda. The work there is expanding but there are still tensions in the country. The Sisters run a Kindergarten and have started a primary school. It was good to hear first hand of what they are doing.

NEW MEMBER GROUPS

Again this year there are no new member groups but there was an enquiry from a new Church which has been founded in Zambia. As there are still many questions to be asked and answered this enquiry/application will be ongoing for some time.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Due to a number of unfortunate circumstances the Accounts were not entirely up to date. A *report for 2006* was presented and accepted. A *draft report for 2007* was also presented and after this has been agreed by the auditors it will be circulated to all members of the Executive Committee to be signed as a true record.

Membership fees: It was noted that the letter requesting membership fees for 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 had been late in going out and therefore not everyone had paid their fees. By the time you receive this Newsletter all member groups should have received a note of all fees due and the date they should be paid by.

A *Draft Budget* for 2009 was presented and accepted by the Executive Committee. It was also agreed that as there would be a World Assembly in 2009 and our expenses would be higher than usual no allocation of funds would be given to the Regions



DIAKONIA World President Louise Williams and the three Regional Presidents Linda Ervin, Sala Nauca-balavu, Doris Horn

All requests for travel expenses for the next Assembly should be made to DRAE Regional President Sr. Doris Horn or to the Secretary, Sr. Ulrike Kellner. One delegate from each member group that asks for assistance and meets the criteria is funded by the Travelfund. All member groups are asked to seek ways and possibilities of sponsoring regions or individuals to enable them to attend the World Assembly.

DIAKAID

There were no new DIAKAID requests for this year but there are a number of **on-going projects** which are still receiving funding.

Namalira motherhouse in Bukoba/Tanzania will receive their final payment of 5,000 euro for their deaconess education programme.

Belem/Brazil – On receipt of their report this project "kids at risk" will receive their final funding of 2,500 euro

Wesley Diaconal Community of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean will also receive their funding of 5,000 Euro on receipt of their report. This is a programme to help unemployed youth to be trained in basic survival skills.

Completed projects were **Deaconess School of the HKBP** in Indonesia who received 4,000 euro to help fund a new student mini bus. Report was received

Malawi – two sisters received help with the education of two sisters in South Africa – Report received.

Sisters of St. Mary in Egypt received 2,000 to buy Montessori materials for music lessons. Report received.

Although there are no new projects it is hoped that there will be some next year and ongoing funding is necessary, so please continue to give donations towards DIAKAID.

DIAKONIA NEWS

Although it has always been our hope to produce more than one copy per year this

just seems impossible with the little information we are given and also the workload of people who would like to contribute but who don't have a great deal of time.

You may like to have your DIAKONIA NEWS by email or you may still wish to receive it by post but whatever way could you please inform Ulrike Kellner. To do it by email is more cost effective for DIAKONIA.

It should also appear on our web page www.diakonia-world.org and so if you want to wait for it that way it would be also useful to tell that to Ulrike and then she won't post it out to you.

If you wish to receive it by post remember it costs £2 or 6 Euro to print and post and so donations are welcome.

Other work of the Executive Committee included the on going Theological reflection, Justice and Peace issues, ideas for our web page, new DIAKONIA Leaflet, a new History of DIAKONIA book, the possibility of a DIAKONIA World Exchange Programme, our vision for DIAKONIA for the next 10 years. Some of this work will be made more clear when we meet for our Assembly in Atlanta.

NEWS AROUND THE WORLD

News from DIAKONIA OF ASIA PACIFIC REGION (DAP)

In her **report to the Executive of World DIAKONIA**, Sala Naucabalavu, President of DAP writes; In the aftermath of the earthquake in **China** 5 million people have been left homeless and countless have died that led the country to go into mourning for three days. The Campus Crusade for Christ has endeavoured to serve the victims with physical and spiritual needs and is working closely with their team members who understand the culture and geography of the place. We thank God for their lives and service.

In **Thailand** the President refused to allow foreign aids to enter its shores as a recent typhoon hit the country leaving 2.5 million needing assistance and thousands dead.

But praise be to God for a change of mind that allowed the UN foreign minister to visit and plan for the necessary assistance to those in need.



DAP Regional President Sala Naucabalavu

The above are part of the issues that the Asia Pacific region is challenged with for its service to neighbouring countries and also in identifying organisations especially, Christian groups present in such areas, for assistance.

Australia

Australian Anglican Deacons Association (AADA) – held an Ecumenical study day on the Diaconate on 5-6th October 2007. The main speaker was John N. Collins who has written extensively on the Diaconate.

Diakonia of the Uniting Church of Australia (DUCA) – held their national conference 1-3 February followed by their Continuing Education Programme from 4-8th February. The conference allows them to share issues of concern, plan for the future, reflect on the latest developments in diaconal ministry and elect their Executive. Their new National conveners are Rev. Peter Batten and Judy McLeod. Rev. Bill Harris remains the liaison officer with Diakonia until the Atlanta Assembly.

FIJI

On May 20th 2008 Divine intervention in the political arena of our country became visible. The head of the military coup and the deposed Prime Minister had a meeting for the first time in 1 1/2 years of the coup through the chairmanship of the President of the Methodist Church in Fiji and the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. We praised God for intervening in His own good time when the cost of living rises every month and the wage earners pay packets remain stagnant. Some students have left school through non payment of fees and people are beginning to return to their villages as businessmen begin to wind up their businesses to move to other Pacific countries. Church congregations and Deaconesses during their monthly

fellowship meetings prayed for such a time as this.

Indonesia: The HKBP hospital at Balige, which is run by the deaconess community IKADIWA, could celebrate its 90th birthday. From this hospital three young nurses started their trip to Germany 56 years ago, to receive an education as a deaconess. After returning to Indonesia in 1961 those sisters founded the deaconess community and afterwards a deaconess school. Since 1995 they have a new motherhouse at Lumban Pisang-Siborongborong.



Founding Sisters of IKADIWA: Deaconess Nuria Gultom and Deaconess Bonaria Hutabarat

Japan: The Bethel Sisters in Kobe are struggling with renovations that have to be done at their motherhouse. They sold an appartement in Tokushima to finance reparations. During their annual celebration in May they could welcome two sisters from Ländli/Switzerland. They enjoyed and were comforted by the international community.

New Zealand: New Zealands Association Aotearoa DANZA held their annual membership meeting. DIAKONIA World President Louise Williams attended. (see report below)

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DAP REGIONAL CONFERENCE

“The Cross and The Towel” – 7. – 12. July, 2008

I recently attended Diakonia Asia Pacific (DAP) which this year was held in Fiji. Delegates from various denominations in New Zealand, Australia and Korea attended and the President of World DIAKONIA Federation, Deaconess Louise Williams presided. This was the first time Fiji has hosted a cross-cultural ecumenical meeting, and 100 Deaconesses from various islands in Fiji attended the Conference.

We were welcomed in a traditional Fijian ceremony, where Louise – as our Leader – was presented with gifts including a traditional cape and kava was drunk. Finally, the women told, through dance, the story of the arrival of the early missionaries in the 19th century.

The guest of the conference was the President of the Methodist Church in Fiji, The Reverend Laisiasa Ratabacaca, who welcomed us on behalf of his Church, and introduced the theme of the Conference, The Cross and the Towel, taken from John 13:1-11 (especially verses 4-5). Reverend Laisiasa expanded on the role of servant ministry; in Fiji there is no word for servant. The closest words are ‘tamata cakacaka’ – literally ‘a workman or a working person’ which are indicative of Diaconal ministry. A bible study later in the day gave us the opportunity to reflect on this address.

In her address, World President Louise focused on – and expounded – the five images of Diakonia:

- Washing Feet
- Waiting Tables
- Telling the Story
- Tending the Door
- Bearing the Light (This last image encouraged us to ‘Get up off our knees, and reach for the Light!’)

During this session, a guided meditation evoked powerful emotions for many of us.

An interesting interpretation of the theme ‘Cross and the Towel’ was given by Reverend Tuikilakila K. Waqairatu, Deputy General Secretary of the Methodist

Church in Fiji, in a Bible Study. From being ‘At the Door’ in the Study, we were taken ‘Inside the House’ relating to John 13:1-17. Reverend Waqairatu posed the question; as we are ‘inside the house’, we need to ask ourselves what are the moral/spiritual impediments which we carry that require washing/cleansing?



*DIAKONIA World President Louise Williams
with deaconess from Fiji*

Bible studies and devotions, sharing of ministry issues in our small groups and in our large group was also part of the programme and we came to know one another well during these sessions.

However, there were plenty of opportunities for us to have some fun! A ‘lovo’, meal prepared and cooked in a traditional way, picnic to Mosquito Island, entertainment from each community, and a tour of the local museum was also part of the itinerary.

A boat ride took us to Bau Island, an important island for Christianity in Fiji. It was here that Missionaries, accompanied by Tongan Christians, first took Christianity to Fiji in 1853; it was received – first by Fijian women, who later converted their menfolk! (We were told that previous missionaries had met with an unfortunate end by being eaten!) The island was a focal point of Fiji, its Chief – Ratu Seru Cakobau – had been the most warlike and feared and Missionaries could not proceed in Fiji until they had paid respects to him. We were treated to a traditional welcome in the community house, welcomed by the Chief’s great-grandson, and all drank kava together and

shared hospitality, followed by a delicious afternoon tea.

A final worship service of communion, on the last day, evoked powerful emotions for many, during the foot-washing ceremony, and proved to be a wonderful opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Throughout the whole week, we were treated to wonderful Fijian hospitality and welcome. Nothing was too much trouble for the Deaconesses in an effort to cater for our every need. They live and work in difficult – and often dangerous – environments, with little or no pay or comforts which we take so much for granted. Yet they were gracious and generous, and displayed a great sense of fun and good humour.



Visit to Bau Island

Below is a Tribute I gave to our hosts, on the final day of the Conference:

Nis Bula (Greeting); Our focus this week has been on feet and on shoes, the covering for our feet. Our feet brought us here from overseas, to attend this Conference. Our feet were often tired and sore; our shoes pinched our feet, we had corns and bunions and blisters from tight shoes.

Here in Fiji, at this Conference, we have been encouraged to take off our shoes, to

cool our feet, and to feel the ground beneath our feet.

Here we have had the opportunity to walk in another person's shoes, to hear other people's stories, and to walk alongside another; we have walked behind one another in a line on our visit to Bau Island on our visit to meet with the Chief.



And here, in this place, our dear Fijian sisters, you have washed our feet, refreshed us and shared your hospitality. For these gifts we give you our thanks.

When our feet are washed, they become wet, and need to be dried with a towel. A towel – a symbol of softness, gentleness – qualities which you have shown to us, as weary travelers, in your ministry of Deaconess in Fiji. Your gentleness has refreshed us, your smiles and songs have recharged our batteries; your sharing and fellowship have energized and renewed us to return to our homes.

So thank you, Fijian Deaconesses, - for your gifts, gifts of food and drink, of hospitality, friendship and song, and for being true examples of discipleship in your service to God. Thank you for washing our feet with the water of kindness and drying them with the towel of gentleness and love.

*Jean Mayers
Melbourne/Victoria, Australia*

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Diaconia Convocation New Zealand

The theme for this year's Deacons meeting was 'cutting edges'. I was privileged to be part of this event, which ran from Sunday 13 - Thursday 17. Around 20 people came from around the country (and a couple from overseas), from Anglican and Methodist churches, from a wide variety of ministries.

I was only there for a full day and a couple of bits on either side, but what I saw gave me a glimpse of diaconal ministry that has huge potential for our church. Here are some of my reflections from that short time with them.

Louise Williams, President of the Diaconia World Federation spoke warmly about the work of deacons around the world from Catholic, Coptic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and many other churches (with all their range of liturgies and emphases). She spoke of the difficulties of being a deacon in places where politics cannot be challenged prophetically without directly risking one's life. She also talked about the World Assembly in Atlanta in July 2009.



Deaconess Shirley Joy Barrow

Peter Pocock, an Anglican deacon from Australia, engaged us in thinking theologically about how Diaconal ministry fits with the wider ministry of the church. Peter challenged us to think of deacons 'expressing the diaconia of the church'. Deacons are first a symbol of the serving ministry of the church. They stand among us to remind us of Christ's call to serve in the world. Their ordination and presence among us are firstly 'ontological' and secondly functional. What a deacon does follows their 'being and calling'. As a consequence of this (as one example) worship should express in some way the diaconal calling of the church to serve the commu-

nity in Christ's name. This could be done in intercessions, or in the call to "go into the world" at the end of the service which may be done by a deacon.



Diaconia Convocation New Zealand 2008

As Peter led us in a discussion on candidates for Diaconal ministry, it was interesting to hear he and Louise represent different emphases in Candidating. Is a person called to a 'general diaconal ministry' or should they be engaged in that ministry first, out of which their calling emerges? Should they be stationed or not? Are deacons 'recruited' or is a call discerned? How does a 'general' recruitment strategy take seriously the journey of an individual?

Of course other questions emerged, including how a church asks where diaconal ministries are / or should be located? Whether we should build diaconal ministry growing parishes' strategies? Should we be strategically placing deacons for ministry – specific missional situations or even in parish leadership settings where the parish has a primary missional function?

Diaconal ministry connects directly with community facing, mission shaped churches. They act both as symbol – reminding us of our call to service – and in specific ministries for which we (and they) need to be held accountable.

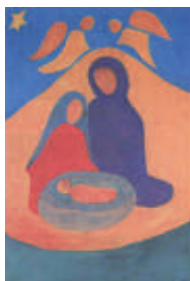
Nigel Hanscamp

Resource: <http://missionresourcingcentre.blogspot.com/2008/08/cutting-edges-deacons-convocation-2008.html>

The Word Became Flesh

2009, Newsletter of the Sisters from the Sisters in Korean Diakonia

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and



truth.' (John 1:14) 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made

in human likeness.' (Philippians 2:6-7)

God coming in our midst, becoming one of us! This is the birth of Christ. God loved the world so much that he took the form of a man and came to the world to live as a man: the heaven becoming the earth; Love that gives itself out – emptying itself and becoming like the loved ones.

God becoming a man – this is an event that challenges all our human discrimination, alienation and judgements from their foundations. Before, God and men were separated by distance as great as heaven and earth. Before, we could not see God; we could not even mention his name. Yet, through Jesus we now can see God and call out his name. Through Jesus we see the glory of God.

This love continues. As salt loses its form and becomes one with water, when we empty ourselves and become one with others, the miracle of Love continues. In this we continue to witness the birth of Jesus among us.

Through the year 2008, Sisters in Korean Diakonia continued to reach out to our neighbours:

At the Mother Centre in Cheon-An, we invited Christians from neighbouring churches for the Good Friday service and held a dramatised service along the 'Christ's Road to the Cross'. About 70 people participated in the meditative service. We also had many visitors from outside Korea: in April, Rev. H. Albruschat from Lazarus, visited us from Germany; in May, Presi-

dent N. Sala of DAP stayed with us; in September Rev. D. Schweizer of German EMS visited us sharing the joy of fellowship.

On the 1st of May, we held an anniversary service. We invited Rev. Lee and Rev. Chung of Diakonia Family Community celebrating 28 years of Korean Diakonia Sisterhood.

Rev. Roh, represented us at the DAP Conference (7th - 11th July) which was held in Fiji under the theme of 'the Cross and Towel'.

On the 21st January, we held a general meeting and elected Sister Young-Sook Rhee as a new Director. Our former director, Sister Jeong-Ran Kim had been in the post for the past 16 years, giving herself to serve us and the Sisterhood. We are very grateful for all the hard-work she had done for us and look forward to a further growth in our service of our Lord and our neighbours with Sister Rhee.

At the House of Spirituality and Peace, we continued to hold prayer sessions twice a month. Those who came were encouraged to seek the Lord within themselves and we rejoiced and thanked as we experienced the Grace of God renewing inner strength and peace.



We provide comfortable and prayerful environment to individuals and groups that use the facilities of the House of Spirituality and Peace. 'Christ's Road to the Cross', on the nearby hills, provides a place to meditate on the coming of Jesus. With the help of a benefactor we refurbished the entire facilities, applied new paint and waterproof, in the second half of the year.

In the Social Welfare Corporation of Diakonia Sisterhood Korea, located in Mokpo, the construction of the Diakonia Residential Home for the Elderly, which had started in November 2007, was completed in July 2008. The facility can provide medical and spiritual as well as normal residential services to up to 50 individuals. The official opening service will be held in spring 2009 but we already have more than 40 residents staying.

Under the Household Support Project, our sisters have been visiting impoverished households in five villages around Sam-



Hyang for the past three years, providing counselling and various medical services – including acupuncture and pressure point massage. Around 1,094 people received this service. We continued Rural Household Rehabilitation programme from the last year, and helped about 20 households

to insulate and repair roofs and windows, and to install new boilers. We also continue to visit elderly people living alone, children without parents, and those who cannot work due to disability around the district of Mu-An and help them with living-cost, medical expenses and school fees.

There are about 30 students who receive full scholarship through us this year. This includes food and study materials as well as private tuitions and counselling services. They not only receive but also participate in our services towards the elderly or the disabled. Through this we hope to let them learn the joy of serving our neighbours. In the spring 2008, these students staged a musical performance using drums as part of fund-raising event. This got them invited to a theatre on Mount Yudal to perform.

At the end of another year, we remember of all the supporters and co-workers who helped us with material, prayer and time. We are deeply thankful for all who are with us in our efforts to continue the life of service. In their faces, we see the face of our Lord who is with us in all our activities. We wish you had a blessed Christmas and may renewed strength and peace fill up your lives in the New Year.

Your sisters in Korea

News from the region DIAKONIA AFRICA EUROPE (DRAE)

Egypt – Sr. Agape writes that she has received the DIAKAID gift and expresses her appreciation

Nigeria – Sr. Doris Horn visited Nigeria in January/February 2008 (see separate report)

The deaconesses, supported by some of the archbishops, have a desire for a diaconal training curriculum and are in contact with the Methodist Diaconal Order of the Methodist Church in England.

Cameroon – Sr. Doris also visited Cameroon in February (see separate report)

Kenya – After the elections earlier in the year there were many riots which affected the churches and the sisters too. Emer-

gency funds have been sent to help them in their work.

Madagascar – The Sisters had a visit from Sr. Siong which is always a source of encouragement, training and renewal.

They also had their annual retreat based on the three fundamentals of religious life: The Word of God, Prayer, and Work. The retreat ended with the sisters making a renewed commitment.

They continue to feed the children at the school canteen for lunch on school days and this year they had 96 each day. At Christmas they usually have a concert with the children to which parents and friends are invited and this is very much enjoyed by everyone.

Malawi – Two of the Malawi Sisters attending the Conference in Basel met up with Sr. Kathy Marsden from the Methodist Church in South Africa and through that contact have been able to get into a training programme by extension for diaconal training. They also were able to attend the Methodist Convocation in Durban, SA where they received further help and information.

Tanzania –

Bukoba Namalira – The training programme is progressing well and is on the last year of DIAKAID Funding.

Karagwe Tumshibire – Sr. Florence Gatege is now the leading sister. They held a retreat towards the end of 2007 and in January 2008 three new sisters were ordained.

Moshi Ushirika Wa Neema – have extended an invitation to hold the next DRAE Conference at their Motherhouse in 2011. They have been asked by another diocese to help start a new community and so two sisters have been commissioned to work and live in the South. The new motherhouse will be known as Ushirika Wa Uendo – Community of Love. In December 2007 a new leading sister was elected – Sr. Joyce B. Lema – and she will be in the position for 5 years.

Ethiopia – there has been regular contact with the church there and progress is being made in establishing diaconal work.

Zambia – UDZ -The Church has now combined the work of the deaconesses and youth workers under the same administration in order that it can be more effective. A retreat for all diaconal workers was held in Lusaka in April 2008.

South Africa – Methodist Diaconal Order – The Order seems to be growing in strength and confidence and receiving greater recognition within the church as a whole.

Finland – There are about 1300 diaconal workers in the Church. A workshop was held for about 600 of them in Lahti in the autumn of 2008. Lahti has a new director – Dr. Tiom Pokki.

France – The Reuilly sisters now have their new Chapel. Since September 2008 the Community of Reuilly is contributing to

the catholic daily newspaper “La Croix” (100,000 issues per day) on a regular basis. For the first time a protestant community is joining the staff for daily devotions on the bible verse of the day.

Germany – Kaiserswerther Verband are establishing strong links between three of the diaconal associations: KWV, VEDD, Zehlendorfer Verband. This is leading to more interaction and activities between many of the associations and communities.

In 2008 it was 200 years since Wilhelm Löhe (1808-1872) was born. Like Theodor Fliedner in Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth, Wilhelm Löhe in Neuendettelsau was leading the movement of the motherhouse diakonia. Beside that the German diaconal institutions are honoring Hinrich Wichern. They set up a website for both of them: www.wilhelm-loehe.de and www.wichernjahr2008.de

In Germany the education of nurses is changing. At the Evangelical College in Berlin (EFB) the first class graduated as “Bachelor of Nursing (BoN)”. Two sisters of the Diakonieverein were among them.

Hannover, Henriettenstift: A new community named Diakoniegemeinschaft Henriettenstift was founded this spring. In a festive Easter worship 5 women and 1 man joined the new community. During their preparation time of 12-18 months they collected knowledge about the German evangelical diakonia and joined a programme on diaconal theology. The sign of the community is a brooch. The first consecration of 5 women and 1 man took place on Easter 2008.

Ireland – The Deaconesses of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland celebrated 100 years of Service in 2008. There were various celebrations throughout the year and a special service of Thanksgiving was held on 24th September 2008 to mark their Centenary. There are strong links between the deaconesses of PCI and the diaconate of the Church of Scotland and some of their deacons were able to attend this service.

Netherlands – The VDW has a new leading person Adri Slob and of course the Executive of World DIAKONIA was happy to share time with them at the Motherhouse in Amerongen.

Norway – The three member communities are still going strong.

Poland: During a trip to the Kaliningrad region (11.-14. July 2008) Dr. Christine-Ruth Müller, Chief Executive Officer of the Kaiserswerth Foundation and Kaiserswerth General Conference and Mr. Winfried Gayko, responsible for ecumenical contacts at the Paul Gerhard Stift, Berlin, met with representatives of the Polish church and local diaconal institutions. The participants agree unanimously to put forward the foundation of a diaconal sister- and brotherhood through combined efforts. In its diaconal and spiritual mission, it shall draw on the traditions of the community diaconia (Barmherzigkeit Königsberg,

Motherhouse St. Petersburg) and find for it an appropriate form which is up to the present-time situations and needs. The community shall be integrated into the international diaconia.

Sweden – Ersta Institute – has withdrawn its membership of DIAKONIA and Samariterhemmet is still active and providing good diaconal education.

Switzerland – The Foundation Deaconess House Bern has gone through a structural review at the management level. The new structure gets into work on October, 1 2008 and strengthens the exchange between communities and institutions of the foundation. (www.dhbern.ch)

DRAE President Doris Horn visited Nigeria and Cameroon

In her Report to the Executive Committee Doris Horn gave an account of her visit to Nigeria and Cameroon during 25th January – 11th February 2008.

She expressed her thanks to the DRAE Executive for their support of this visit but also expressed her disappointment at not being able to visit all member groups in the African continent due to the restriction of time. She stressed that these visits build stronger links and understanding and brings about good opportunities to relate to the church leaders as well as helping members in their standing within their churches and would encourage such visits in the future.

Doris had previously worked in Nigeria but had not been back for 13 years. She reports – Would I recognize buildings, and customs; would I be able to understand and use the Hausa language? I did not forget and a lot came back to me, just being in the right environment. Many other things came to mind, the terrible traffic, the many languages and very hot spicy food.

With two deaconesses from the Order of Deaconesses of the Methodist Church Nigeria, Ronke Owuru and Anietie Akpan she visited several dioceses of the church and met many of the 360 deaconesses, women's groups, prelate, archbishops and bishops.

An itinerary had been prepared which she did not think they could manage but they did.

Friday 25th January: On arrival at Lagos airport I am taken to a small guesthouse – surrounded with high walls, barbwire and security lights – security has to be high and it would be very dangerous to leave the house after dark.



Conference Secretary, Women Leaders in Lagos

The next day I meet with the General Secretary of the Conference, Bishop Rev. Dr. C. R. Opoko. He was in a diocese which was oil producing and where there were situations of corruption, kidnapping, murder and anarchy and had been brutally attacked and nearly lost his life. He had been instrumental in bringing the Deaconess Order into the church constitution and is advocating women's ordination. I was able to give a presentation about DIAKONIA/DRAE to other church leaders.

On Sunday I attend the service in one of the largest cathedrals in Lagos and I am honoured to be reading the Old Testament reading.

We leave Lagos and fly to Kaduna. The flight has been delayed and we arrive in the dark and cold (20 degrees C). We stay at a small hotel opposite the Church Centre.

On the Monday I meet some of the deaconesses. Most have no proper training, some of them are called 'tentmakers' as they have a profession and volunteer time as deaconesses. Most of them are working in a congregation with women and children and assist in the services. They are interested to hear about DIAKONIA and how to strengthen and broaden their ministry to the church. Here and at all other places it becomes clear that the Order needs a specific training programme and its own constitution.

We leave by taxi in the afternoon for the airport to fly to Calabar. The journey is great – the countryside as I remember – vegetable stands at the roadside, mud huts, dust and dirt everywhere. The flight is delayed and we arrive in Calabar late and tired.

Tuesday – Calabar is a clean city. We visit a church school. I am so happy to be in Calabar, the city that I first heard of as a child! I think reading the biography of Mary Slessor, "The White Queen" as a young girl was instrumental for my life in many ways. During the 11 years I was in Nigeria I had never gotten the chance to travel to Calabar to visit the grave of this great woman – and now I am there! A lady explains that up until today, descendants of Mary Slessor, of her adopted children, are still coming and caring for the grave! She left so much love behind.



Grave of Mary Slessor

We then drive to Ikot Ekpene and arrive at the Cathedral where the archbishop and deaconesses from four different diocese have gathered to meet us. The deaconesses are urging the archbishop to have a diaconia forum where they can exchange, share and support each other. Hopefully this will be heard and put into practice.

Wednesday 30th January Umaihi – Owerri. At Umaihi there is a big welcome. There is singing, greeting, introduction and presentation of DIAKONIA. As everywhere the women are very interested in knowing more about service and diaconal ministry. They all emphasise that they would be willing to do more training to be of better service to the church.



Women's Fellowship Owerri

We then move to Owerri where we are met by the Bishop's wife who is a teacher and head of the Christian Women's Fellowship. Visit the newly started Susana Wesley Day Care Centre which cares for 27 children.

Thursday 31st. We leave and fly to Lagos where Anietie picks us up and drives to Ibadan. We are 2 hours late and many of the deaconesses have left, but we still managed to do a DIAKONIA presentation to a small group of sisters and the Bishop's wife. The Bishop is very supportive of the sisters.

On Friday we go back to Lagos to the Cathedral. Again a presentation of DIAKONIA and there is opportunity for questions and discussion. Questions about the difference between the diaconate and social work, church related and tentmaking deaconesses are asked. Again there is the strong opinion that the Order needs directions and a vision for service for continuity. I also visit the office in Wesley House which is the department of women's work in the Methodist Church.

Saturday 2nd February – Free day to visit the market and buy curios for taking home.

Sunday 3rd February – Service at the “Chapel of the Healing Cross”, a protestant ecumenical church of the Lagos University Hospital.

Monday 4th – Leave Lagos and Nigeria behind and fly to Douala Cameroon

Cameroon: Sisterhood of Emmanuel, Bafut, Presbyterian Church

History: The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon became independent in 1957. It grew out of the Basel Mission and has roots in the Reformed Churches in the USA. The Church is led by a Moderator and a Synod Clerk. There are 6 Synods, about 1.8 million church members. The church operates hospitals, nurseries, schools and skill training centres.

Sisterhood of Emmanuel: The Sisterhood grew out of the Sisterhood of Reuilly, Versailles, France. Here the founding sister of the monastery, Rev. Sister M. Madeleine Handy was trained, took her vows and left in the late 1960 to start a community in her native country, Cameroon. In 1971 the chief of Bafut gave her a large plot of land and the first motherhouse, a mud hut, was built. Today the sisterhood has grown to about 36 sisters, many ministries are delivered to the church and community around. Since the death of Sister M. Madeleine in 1999 Sister Judith is prioress of the sisterhood.



Sister Judith with wheelchair from Durham

Monday 4th February. A different country – French Speaking. Douala seems quiet and slow moving after the noise and heavy traffic of Lagos. I am taken to the Presbyterian Cathedral which has guest rooms.

We meet the minister who speaks some German.

Tuesday 5th February. After breakfast, I leave with Sr. Mary Joelle, who had met me at the airport the previous day and travel by car to the motherhouse. Beautiful countryside, large plantations of bananas, pineapples, papaya and gum trees. We feed on water, bananas and peanuts on the way. We reach the sisters hop at Bamenda around 3.30pm. “Magda Store” where beside daily commodities they sell their yogurt, bread and cheese. We move on to Bafut and arrive at the convent of Bafut and a warm welcome is given by Sr. Judith and others. After supper we meet in the common lounge/library for introductions, sharing and greetings. I am so pleased to see Sr Judith’s wheelchair – it is the one she was presented with in Durham. There is lively discussion and many questions about my sisterhood and vocation,



Magda Store

Wednesday 6th February – The day is structured around the daily prayer times, that start at 5am. As much as possible I take part in these prayer times feeling refreshed by reciting Psalms, beautiful singing and prayers. As it is Ash Wednesday the pastor will lead the afternoon service. Breakfast is simple and taken in silence. Many of the sisters are fasting today. After breakfast I am given a tour of the convent: kitchen and outer kitchen, much of the cooking is done on wood fire – the making of paper and the beautiful cards – a new project raising Cam rats that is supposed to be very sweet and delicious – other animals are chickens, pigs and cows – more agriculture (vegetable gardens,

sugar cane, pineapple, banana, papaya, maize and elephant grass)

- production of washing powder and communion wafers – bakery – dairy production; milk yogurt and cheese – guesthouse for groups, studies, retreats, counseling – house of Silence for sisters, and the Hermitage for personal retreat and seclusion – sewing of clerical robes and other dresses as well as altar cloths. The chapel, the centre of the convent, is well set up and I am glad I am able to just sit there in silence or share with the sisters in prayers, meditation and song. What a wonderful place of dedication, love and many vocations. A short visit to the Pastor who serves the sisters completes the tour.



After lunch a car takes Sr. Judith, Sr. Hapyness and myself to see a plot of land some 50Km outside Bamenda that the sisters now own. They have started to build a house which will be a centre for handicapped people. With two handicapped sisters the desire to care for more is obvious. "People do not care for handicaps, it still seems they are ashamed of us" is how Sr. Judith puts it.

Thursday 7th House of the Good Shepherd. A former sister of Bafut, Sr. Jane, had a vision for this orphanage after she had joined and Episcopal/Anglican Church in the USA. With the help of friends and supporters in the USA there are now several houses for orphans, a guesthouse, school building, farms. After three years there are now 26 children from a few days old to teenage. How wonderful for this area to have two groups that are caring for

the marginalized. Bafut for the handicapped, Good Shepherd for the orphans.

Friday 8th. Time to myself – I walk around and visit the bakery. A new large mixing bowl has been bought with DIAKAID money. Now they are awaiting a powerline to be installed to use it. I meet men who had no job, no hope, no future when the sisters employed them. Now they are well trained and their wives are also part of the bakery team. Here I see DIAKAID money used wisely and well.

Saturday 9th St. Joseph Comprehensive School. We visit Sr. Magdalene on this open day at school. She is finishing her education. Sr. Magdalene lives with the Catholic Sisters in their convent and is happy that we visit with her on this day. I then visit Sr. Steve, who is in a school in Bafut concentrating on her studies in nutrition. In the evening there is a farewell dinner with speeches, traditional dance, picture taking and gift presentations. I am finally able to show the DIAKONIA presentation.



Bakery at Bafut

Sunday 10th – Bafut-Douala-Paris-Home What a great trip this has been! To see two very different ways of putting love into action; of working as deaconesses in the church. To know we are connected by Christ who in serving the disciples taught us how to serve, how to love, how to reach out to the marginalized.

*Sr. Doris Horn
DRAE Regional Preside*

Levy Mwanawasa

President of the diaconal workers of the United Church of Zambia

Levy Mwanawasa died on the 19th of August 2008 and his burial was on September 3, 2008. Please pray for his family and the entire diaconal workers of the United Church of Zambia.

Report from the Mamre Sisters, Madagascar

The Mamre Sisters from Madagascar in their Christmas letter share some aspects of their life

Community Life: The closing service for the Celebration year for their 20th Anniversary was held in the FJKM Church in Ambohinahorina Sabosty Namehana on 19th October. This was attended by many friends and colleagues. From 20-25th October they held an exhibition of the different stages of their history and displayed the work they do, making clerical robes, baby clothes and various jams and cakes among other things. Much of their work was sold and they also received orders.

The event was broadcast on Television and Radio and interviews took place. Two sisters have completed their course in dressmaking and meat and pastry cooking.

A further sister went to Nairobi in Kenya to take part in a Taize Youth event in December.

A number of the sisters have taken part in retreats and the Community annual retreat was 22-24th December.

Three young women are spending six months in the community exploring their vocation.

Some construction and repair work has been done to the house.

They have completed the work of their three rules into one book: Constitution, Rule of Life and their (coutumier) which is a guide book about their life.

Work in the Church: The Sisters were invited to speak about their community at the regional Synod meeting in July last year.

The Children's Mission in the parish organized an event for children and this was led by two of the Sisters.

Sisters have been involved in a number of ecumenical and Synod meetings, speaking and leading prayer groups.

Social Work: Two of the Sisters continue the prison work every Saturday morning where they share the gospel message.

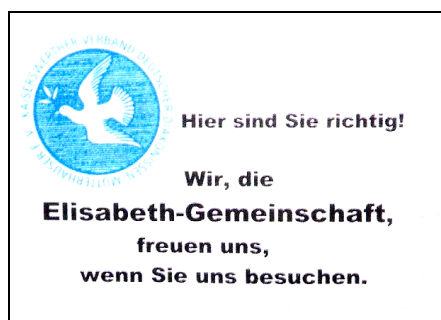
They also continue their daily canteen feeding and educating approximately 86 children, aged between 3 and 16 years each lunchtime.

The Sisters thank everyone for their prayers and support.

Edited from their Newsletter

We experienced many wonders

At present, communities in Germany suffer big changes – not all of them voluntarily. After transforming the diaconal institute into a company the Elisabeth-Community in Darmstadt, which belonged to that diaconal institute, found themselves suddenly without a place in the motherhouse. Sr. Sabine Langenfaß, leading sister of that community, describes the new start



Welcome poster at the new room

At that moment when we learned that our community had no longer room in the motherhouse and that we had to move

out, a small shop not far away was announced to be hired. And we could do so without any problems. Then we tried to collect money to pay the rent with overwhelming success. And after many sorrows, and even more experiences of help, professional and just in time, many, many volunteers and surprising financial help August 17, 2008 was the day. With a reception and a flea market we could open our new rooms of the Elisabeth-Community. Several actions are already planned, but we will continue to lay our main interest on the work with women coming out of involuntary prostitution and with women coming from other countries. Very soon the Elisabeth-Community will no longer belong to the Elisabethen-Stift out of which she developed 150 years ago. We will continue as an association. We pray that the Lord might show us, where he wants us to be.

Sabine Langenfaß (edited)

Retrospective on 50 years being a deaconess

Deaconess Hanna Lachenmann, former editor of DIAKONIA Nachrichten and DIAKONIA World Secretary, could celebrate her 50th anniversary on October 2008. She used this opportunity to write a personal report and to reflect her life as a deaconess. Since early childhood she had contact to various deaconesses at both motherhouses in Stuttgart, to nursing sisters of Großheppach and to the Frankfurt motherhouse. It was during an internship at the Elisabethenhof In Marburg that she approached the idea of becoming a deaconess. When her mentor, Sr. Emma Wolff, died, the idea became reality. "I inherited from sister Emma Wolff her owner number for my clothes, her concordance and her bible verse for consecration". From now on Sister Hanna spent all her life at the Frankfurt motherhouse.



Sister Hanna Lachenmann

She attended the diaconal education, received a high school diploma and graduated as teacher for home economics and German. She worked at schools owned by the motherhouse since 1957, even before

her consecration in 1958. During the years the school landscape changed several times and Sister Hanna had to keep up learning new subjects and new school structures. She writes about this time: "The training regulations changed on a regular basis. I had to adjust to new subjects all the time. That meant that I had to keep up with permanent learning. I took lessons at schools and universities. I learned a lot during this years and I hope my students did too." Sr. Hanna describes her aim as follows: "I thought it important that young people open themselves to the richness of the world and learn that knowledge makes life wide and interesting, but on the other hand learn about coherencies and reflect especially on their own opinions and experiences". Since 1970 through 1990 Sister Hanna was second leading sister of her community. During this time a lot of changes had to be dealt with. During the end of her term she started to work in ecumenical boards, first in the Women's Work of her own church, as member of the all German Church parliament and finally in the DIAKONIA World Federation. One of the most important events during that last task was the World Assembly at Friedrichroda in 1996. Sr. Hanna says today: "DIAKONIA has made my life wide and rich".

Excerpt of a report given for the 50th anniversary on October 5, 2008 by Sr. Hanna Lachenmann

Anke Slagmolen

Deaconess of the Community of Zending-Diaconessen in Amerongen/Netherlands
Leading Sister of the Community "Abaja ba Kristo" in Rubengera/Rwanda

Sr. Anke Slagmolen was born on Februar 8, 1951 and died on December 3, 2008 after beeing seriously ill for some weeks. Her death is a great and unexpected loss for the sisterhood in Rwanda and for the Mission-Deaconesses in Amerongen.

"Dear Father and Lord. We pray for all those who mourn over the death of Sr. Anke. Strengthen them during the days of the last farewell. And dear Lord please take Sr. Anke under your guidance".

Pieter van Rijssel



Anke Slagmolen and Louise Williams at the DIAKONIA Executive meeting in Amerongen 2008

NEWS from the Region of DIAKONIA of the Americas and Caribbean (DOTAC)

Meeting of the DOTAC Central Committee

At their September 2007 meeting in New York the Central Committee had a very full programme of discussion and visits.

Questions for Discussion for DOTAC members:

- How do we raise the diaconate within our denominations?
- How is the diaconate being supported within our denominations?
- How do we build peace in our communities?
- How do we recruit new members into our denominations?
- What does it mean to be a member of the organisation?

The critical targets of DOTAC which come out of the Mission Statement were identified:

- Spirituality and Worship.
- Being the Prophetic Voice of the Church together.
- Encourage and support Diaconal workers, member groups and new developments.
- Prophetic voice for social justice.

At each DOTAC conference/event one piece of the Critical Targets will be focused.

Potential DOTAC new members – Trinidad; Honduras; Uruguay; Brazil Methodists.

Planning is well underway for the DIAKONIA World Assembly to be held in Atlanta, Georgia. A number of small groups are working on different parts of the programme and organisation.

News from the members

Brasil: The sisters of the Motherhouse Sao Leopoldo have elected a new leading sister: Gisela Beulke. She will start her service in May.

USA: The Deaconess Community **ELCA** has a new executive director. Barbara Ahnstedt Swartling started her new assignment in December 2008. She has experience in Budget development, personnel management and knowledge of pension and health benefit administration.

LDA: In 2008 another four women found their way into the community, went through education and formation programme and were consecrated during the year.

Global and Cross-Cultural Connections through Diaconia

Visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil

During the summer of 2008 I was on a three month sabbatical. One of my goals for this time was to travel to Brazil to connect with the Diaconal Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil (Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil – IECLB). I met Vera Walber who is the coordinator of the Office of Diaconia for the IECLB at the DOTAC conference in Trinidad, 2006. As I considered my sabbatical plans I contacted her and proposed my trip with the purpose of learning about Brasil, diaconal ministry there, and building global connections between our congregation of Sunset United Church in Regina, Saskatchewan (Canada) and their community, particularly youth and young

adults. I approached it with a commitment that whatever develops would need to be mutually beneficial. They were open to this so we proceeded to plan together and I began to learn Portuguese.



Vera Walber and Translator Werner

I was away to Brazil from June 12- 30 and arrived in Porto Alegre in the early morning of June 14. Porto Alegre is in the southern most part of Brazil, and it was there winter, with temperatures between 4 and 22° C. That first day I rested from the three day flight and got oriented to Casa Matriz, the diaconal motherhouse where I was staying in Sao Leopoldo, about 30 km north of Porto Alegre. The next day was an easy day of sightseeing in the mountains. Then I began a schedule of fairly full, rich days of visiting various agencies and ministries of the diaconal community and IECLB in general. I quickly learned that diaconal ministry in Brasil focuses solely on service, with ministers working out of a congregation often doing community development in the neighbourhood to address needs that are identified. The first two agencies I visited, a nursery day program for young children and after school program for children and youth were the result of the diaconal ministry community development work of Leila Schwingel who was also at DOTAC 2006. She worked with the community to get funding from the government for sewage, better housing, and a nursery program, as well as the after school program. She showed me one of the most recent accomplishments was reclaiming a space beside the nursery that was previously used by drug dealers.

I learned about a ministry in the periphery of the city, working with youth at risk to give them skills in a bakery program that also taught life skills. The pastor took us on a tour of the neighbourhood and showed us occupied land (people who came into the city landless and found somewhere to build a house), and two house churches he established when he learned that it was too far and too costly for people there to come to the church to worship. I met a class of theology students, including diaconal students, and later went to the diaconal volunteer placement working with children and youth in a poor area of Sao Leopoldo. They used sports and games to build community and talk with the young people about the issues and needs in their lives, and basically provided a safe place for them to be and play and learn. I also spent a day with the pastor of Matriz Congregation in Porto Alegre, out of

which Leila did her ministry (She is now employed with the nursery program). This included meeting their youth group, and sharing some information together about my church, their church and their experience as youth in Brazil. Many are keen to connect with youth from Sunset through the internet. This is only sample of all the things I did and learned.



At the Lupicinio Nursery

In my time there, I learned that our diaconal ministries have much in common. We both struggle with recognition and understanding from the national church body. We both find that many people in the congregation do not understand diaconal ministry and that there are a lack of employment opportunities for us as a result. I found that there were also some significant differences. While the IECLB has a full time staff person working with diaconal ministries, The United Church of Canada no longer has any staff person working with us. Another difference is that the diaconal ministry of the IECLB focuses solely on service ministry and community development and I think that we can learn from this in the United Church. I am challenging myself as I come back, to explore if I can do some of this within my present ministry with Sunset. The IECLB has recently shifted it's ministry training program so that all ministers train together while in the United Church Diaconal Ministers train separately.

It was a very rich, cross cultural experience and I am very appreciative of all the work that Vera and her colleagues put into planning such a wonderful experience and opportunity for me. I look forward to building the relationship with Matriz Congregation. I am already connecting with some of their youth online and look forward to connecting our youth with them also. Hope-

fully down the road, we both groups will be able to plan to visit our ministries in each of our countries. The experience has continued to deepen my appreciation for the richness of diaconal ministry around the world and the value of global network we have. If you have opportunities or a vision

to connect with another diaconal ministry in another country, I encourage you to do so. The rewards are great!

*By Russell Walker, Diaconal Minister,
Diakonia of The United Church of Canada
(DUCC)*

News from the WCC

Following the longstanding tradition of past WCC assemblies, the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre adopted a **text on ecclesiology: „Called to be the One Church“**. By setting forth a challenge to the churches, the 9th Assembly gave a different kind of life to its statement on the Church. The statement requests us all to engage in the difficult task of the faith and ordering of other churches. Towards the goal of full visible unity, the assembly poses ten questions to the churches to guide their reflections I this task of sharing commonalities, divergences, and differences. The WCC would be grateful to receive results of reflections on this text, which will enrich the process and help us all to advance towards unity. The text is available on the internet and can be downloaded from the WCC website: oikoumene.org/lovetoshare.

The transforming power of the light of Christ: **The Third European Ecumenical Assembly**, held in Sibiu/Romania issues message and 10 recommendations. They said: "In Sibiu we again felt the painful wound of division between our Churches. This even concerns our understanding of the Church and its unity. The distinct historical and cultural developments in Eastern and Western Christianity have contributed to these differences, and understanding them requires our urgent attention and ongoing dialogue. We are convinced that the wider Christian family has to deal with doctrinal questions, and it must also seek a broad consensus about moral values

derived from the Gospel and a credible Christian lifestyle that joyfully witnesses to the light of Christ I our challenging modern secular world, in private as well as in public life."

See full text at www.eea3.org

International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2008, Pacific Focus:

Atua, allow us to drink from the tanoa of
Your peace

Right the course of our canoes to overcome

The currents of violence, hatred, war, abuse

Give us peace of being at rest, so that
peace prevails

Over any wind that gusts through our islands

Tattoo in our hearts Your righteousness
and purity

Through all cultures and walks of life, we
pray as instruments

Of Peace and as the people of Pasifika

*Prayer by M. Aunoa
International Ecumenical Peace Convocation:
www.overcomingviolence.org-iepc*

As **General Secretary Samuel Kobia** is retiring from his post in 2009 there will be an election during the coming summer. Please accompany this process with your prayer.

LEARNING TO EXPLORE LOVE TOGETHER

Suggestions from the WCC to the Churches for Responding to "A Common Word"

Preamble: On 13 October 2007 a group of 138 Muslim scholars addressed an open letter to Christian leaders. Among those addressed was the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. Based on initial responses from member churches, the WCC initiated a process of responding to the letter. Since November 2007 the WCC commenced consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. This was followed by a meeting of scholars and church experts engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. Their deliberations produced the following commentary on the letter entitled "Learning to Explore Love Together". The commentary is intended to assist the churches in reading and responding to the letter "A Common Word". The document includes suggestions to encourage member churches and ecumenical partners in their reflection on the Letter and in its invitation to explore together with Muslim fellows the love of God and the love of neighbour in their respective contexts. Churches and ecumenical partners are then invited to share their reflections with the WCC as a contribution to a common understanding of and a common response to this initiative. The ongoing process of reflection and the desire to create a common response to the letter through an initiative of dialogue is described below.

A Letter from 138 Muslim Scholars: The Letter, entitled A Common Word between Us and You (drawing upon an invitation to conversation in common between Christians and Muslims that appears in the Qur'an), sets out key dimensions of belief and action that in its authors' understanding followers of the two faiths hold in common. They sum these up in the two-fold commandments of love expressed in the Bible: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself. To this end, by citing verses from the Bible, the Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), the letter briefly shows how Christians and Muslims share similar teachings about love for God and love for neighbour. On the basis of these shared

teachings, the authors then issue an invitation to Christians to join together with them 'on the common essentials of our two religions'. They also make clear that there are differences between Christianity and Islam, and counsel that 'there is no minimizing some of our formal differences'. But they recall that since 55% of the world's population belongs to these two religions, "making the relationship between these two religious communities [is] the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace."

This invitation marks an encouraging new stage in Muslim thinking about relations between Muslims and Christians. Throughout their shared history, followers of the two faiths have too often misunderstood one another. In recent times, a new way of thinking about the other took place; the churches have begun to think afresh about the relationship between Christianity and other faiths, including Islam - prominent among the outcomes of this thinking are the Roman Catholic Church's Declaration on Relations between the Church and non-Christian Religions, 1965, and the World Council of Churches' Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, 1979. Here, in A Common Word is a clear indication that leading Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders are committed to fresh thinking about the relationship between Islam and Christianity. The courage of their action must be applauded — and since then around one hundred more scholars have signed the Letter - and the sincerity of their gesture must be welcomed in the warmest terms.

Ways towards a Response

After consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, and with the advice of specialists, the World Council of Churches proposes to initiate a process that, with patient reflection and mutual exploration between the people of the churches and the people of the mosques, can lead to fresh awareness one of the other, abandonment of stubborn prejudices, and new ways forward in respect and cooperation.

The following steps summarize the process: The World Council of Churches encourages its member churches and ecumenical partners, to recognize and welcome the serious intent of A Common Word and prayerfully consider its invitation to dialogue and cooperation. It also invites them to reflect ecumenically on the content of the Letter in their own unique contexts. While acknowledging that some churches have already begun this journey, the present document is aimed at facilitating and deepening such endeavours.

The Council will call on its Muslim partners — especially the signatories to the Letter — to create a joint planning group to prepare steps towards common action, and seek joint Muslim and Christian initiatives of dialogue and cooperation at both the regional and global levels.

The Council will propose to this group, the organizing a series of consultations between Muslim and Christian leaders, scholars and practitioners which, based on this new opportunity, will reflect on points of mutual understanding, work on a theological and ethical framework for future joint initiatives and establish new means of exploring further in both matters of faith and life.

These steps are taken on the understanding that the invitation in the Letter is issued by its signatories in full awareness of the difficulties that have accompanied past efforts, and that it signals a new and vigorously energized desire for a fresh start.

Exploring Together the Love for God and Love for Neighbour

The Letter eloquently underlines similarities on the key points of love for God and love for neighbour which both Christians and Muslims respect. However, the differences between the ways in which they each understand these imperatives and put them into practice cannot be ignored. The testimony of past and present writings by Muslims and Christians about and against the other serves as a clear reminder that misunderstanding can easily arise when followers of each faith try to explore the other's beliefs without proper care and attention. Therefore, it must be stated unequivocally that Christians should be ready to learn about Islam by listening closely to what Muslims themselves teach,

and that Muslims should be ready to learn about Christianity by listening closely to what Christians themselves teach. Pre-suppositions are to be put aside, and followers of both faiths must be ready to seek the learning and wisdom of the other as the other imparts it according to their own unique insights.

Exploration of love for God together will undoubtedly yield startlingly instructive insights for both Christians and Muslims. In the same way, exploration of love for neighbour together will reveal many points at which Muslims and Christians will recognize commonly held principles and actions. But these signs of similarity must be held in tension with real divergences and hard to reconcile differences.

Thus, for example, while both Christians and Muslims say they perceive God as one, what is actually meant in Islam by the doctrine of Tawhid (Unity of God), and what is actually meant in Christianity by the doctrine of the Trinity? Are these contradictory doctrines, as the history of engagement between the two faiths attests, or is there a way in which they can be seen as complementary insights into the mystery of God?

Similarly, while both Muslims and Christians claim to receive revelation from God, what is meant when Muslims claim to perceive the will of God revealed in the Qur'an - what has been called the Word of God become book-, and what is meant when Christians claim to perceive God's self revealed in Jesus Christ - who is called the Word of God become flesh?

In the same way, the love of neighbor is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God in both religions. Both Christians and Muslims obey God by seeking to respond to need in society. In Islam loving one's own neighbor is expressed in acting with responsibility and generosity towards the needy within the community. In Christianity the love of neighbour is seen as a reflection of God's love to humanity through Jesus Christ. This love transcends geographical and religious boundaries and thus embraces humanity in all its components without exception as it is expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The concept of love of God and love of neighbour is but one bridge and point of dialogue for action, at the same time Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation should explore a common ground in the search for justice and peace.

Agreeing and Disagreeing in Respect and Love

While Christians and Muslims may often be surprised to recognize in the utterances and explanations of the other what can appear to be reflections of their own beliefs, they will also see stark divergences in emphasis and some clear differences that resist all resolution by mutual efforts. Not the least of these will be the Christian difficulty of appreciating Muhammad as a prophet, and the Muslim difficulty of appreciating Jesus as God incarnate. These spring from sincerely held views that have been keenly defended for centuries, and as keenly questioned and rejected.

It is therefore a pressing necessity that while Christians and Muslims must find ways of enhancing what they hold in common, they must also find ways of acknowledging and respecting the differences between them, of attempting to understand these, and of not allowing them to fuel hostility. The degeneration into mutual recrimination and condemnation is a pattern that has been repeated in the past to the sorrow of people of good will, who would also acknowledge with regret the ways in which religion has been

misused. This may easily continue in the future unless careful steps are taken to prevent it.

With understanding the plurality and complexity of their shared history, both Christians and Muslims must work hard to develop respect where understanding is difficult and trust where differences do not yield to inquiry. In full recognition of the Jong history they hold in common, while recalling examples of humane mutual respect, they must recognize the need to work actively to heal hurts both local and global, and to change attitudes and stereotypes. Member churches are encouraged to recall and learn from each other's experiences, and examine how these might inform and challenge their future actions.

More than this, even when Christians and Muslims continue to disagree on matters of belief, they should strive to reach the point at which they can recognize and endorse what they hold in common with sufficient integrity to allow them to work together in the world. Thus, they should make it a priority to understand how the precious heritages they each hold can direct and even impel them to work together for justice and peace, recognizing their joint goals and responding to the call of the One they worship and obey to come together not only in a common word but also in common action for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of all.

KAIRE

Kaire only meets every two years and is predominately European, although from time to time some of the participants have come from other parts of the world. It met this year in Erfurt, Germany, where Martin Luther studied for the priesthood. This is one participant's impression of the experience.

"This was my second visit to Kaire (the last one was 2 years ago in Italy) and once again I thoroughly enjoyed it. I'd like to describe some of my most vivid memories of the 5 days spent there with 40 other women from all over Europe. During our

time together we listened to God's Word, listened to each other and we learnt about the local church and people.

We stayed in excellent accommodation in the Augustiner Kloster which is adjacent to the church where we attended morning prayers and vespers each day. The Worship was led by a community of celibate German Sisters who belonged to the Lutheran Church. They were the prayerful presence at the heart of this busy, busy place where hundred of pilgrims come to visit each day. They offered a wonderful

ministry of hospitality including a 7 week residential course for 'burnt out' clergy!

Erfurt is situated in what used to be East Germany. In the days following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Sisters at the Kloster opened a café to offer a friendly, neutral place for people to come and chat and drink coffee. Then gradually as time went on and trust grew, they would invite folk to join them at worship across the street in the church.

I'll never forget the Sunday Eucharist led by a lovely warm Lutheran woman pastor. She stood behind the stone altar where Martin Luther would have celebrated his first Mass when he was ordained in 1507. At the communion we were invited to stand in a huge circle right round the church and the pastor offered bread to each one of us. It was a very profound experience.

Another highlight of Kaire was the Bible Study. This year it was led by a Belgian Catholic Benedictine nun, Sister Marie-Therese, a woman with a lovely sense of humour and lots of funny stories to tell us. Our text was Revelation 3:20 – 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock...' She emphasised that there is no one way to interpret God's Word. She said, 'There are as many meanings as there are people, and in His Word God has hidden so many treasures for each of us to find.'

On the Tuesday we were taken by coach to the woods at the edge of Buchenwald Concentration Camp and we walked in silence up the old track to the stations where thousands of Jews and other 'unwanted' folk would have been transported to the camp. It was a vast empty place with only a few buildings remaining. We passed the kennels where the guard dogs were kept and were shown round the 'arrest cells' where rebellious prisoners were held and tortured. Among them was an

amazing pastor, Paul Schneider, who was detained there for 15 months because he refused to salute the flag with a swastika emblazoned on it. He kept shouting Bible quotes through the window of his cell to the camp inmates gathered outside for the Roll Call. On his cell was written '2 Cor.5v20'(look it up!). He was killed there in 1939. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was also held there for 3 months in 1945 just before being executed in the camp at Flossenbürg. Such bravery in the face of brutality and violence leaves one humbled and without a word to say.

There were many great times of sharing during the week – in our discussion groups: over a beer or ice cream in the evening and at meal times. Our last evening began with a concert when we were entertained by a choir who sang, mostly in German, some well known songs – including 'Abide with Me' and 'The Day Thou Gavest Lord is Ended'. That was followed by a party when we ate and drank some of specialities of the countries represented at Kaire.

I'd like to end with one of Marie Therese's little stories – for your edification.

Once upon a time there was a little green frog who wanted to climb to the top of a very steep cliff. He started climbing but it was very wet and slippery and dangerous. A crowd gathered below and they kept on shouting to the frog, 'Stop now, it's too dangerous! You'll fall off! You'll never get to the top! However, the frog didn't heed the voices below – he kept going and slowly and surely he climbed up the slippery surface and arrived at the summit. How on earth did he do it. Well, the answer is simple – the frog was deaf!

Lesson: don't listen to negative voices either inside or outside! You can do it.

Written by Muriel Wilson, Scotland

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PROPHET OF FIRE

Read 1 Kings 18

I awakened very early and already all around me there was the sound of people emerging from their homes and taking to the road. I made haste to join them. It was a heartbreaking spectacle for we were all weakened beyond belief. The whole nation was being strangled by the terrible triple plague of drought, famine and starvation.

The ground was rock hard. Nearly all the vegetations had died, along with the animals, the babies, the old people. No rainfall for many months and still the relentless sun glared down from a cloudless sky.

Today we were on the move because in our hearts there throbbed a hope that things would change. Today might be the day when our great God, Baal, would reach out and save us. We all worshipped Baal, revering and adoring him and fearing him also for he was not always kind. Today, however, we would implore him to help us and surely he would not refuse.

But first he had his own challenge to face. This strange and extraordinary man, Elijah the Tishbite, declared that he worshipped another God who was powerful and above all others. Some time ago there had been those who also believed this but our Queen, the dreaded Jezebel, had murdered them all. Elijah had escaped.

Now he had faced up to King Ahab and demanded that the power of the Gods be put to the test. Ahab agreed. This was why all of us were on the road, heading for the assembly point on the great plain at the foot of Mount Carmel.

The terms of the contest were agreed. Each side would choose a bullock for sacrifice and would construct a pile of wood on which the slaughtered beast would be laid. No fire would be set to the piles which would await fire from the Gods.

The King and Elijah faced one another, a fair distance apart. With a courteous gesture, Elijah indicated that the priests of Baal, 400 in number, should begin.

They were an impressive array and they began their prayers to Baal in style, the hearts of all of us warm in their support. They chanted melodiously with solo voices rising now and again, lauding Baal to the skies, promising him their devotion and many offerings.

Then they moved to their beseeching, in piercing, high pitched cries "Baal, send us your fire!" We were expectant. They repeated their performance, waited a while and then began again and again. Nothing happened and again, nothing. We were all chilled with the repeated disappointments and did not know what to think or believe.

Ahab was enraged. "Try harder!" he said. The poor pathetic creatures grew frenzied. Dancing round the alters, gashing themselves, crying continuously and more and more feebly: "Baal, Baal, answer us!"

Elijah answered them in mockery: "Perhaps he is asleep? Or on a journey? Where is your God?" They hung their heads. We were all dumbfounded and appalled, Where could we turn?

The answer came immediately. "Gather round me" Elijah called.

He went about the business of the sacrifice with assurance, taking his time, absorbed and reverent. It was a mesmerising sight. Preparations were now almost complete. Then all of us gasped. He had water brought, in quantity and poured it over the whole sacrifice once, twice and thrice. All was now saturated.

Elijah stood for some time still as a statue while we held our breath. Then he called out to heaven.

"Answer me, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Let the people know that you are their God". The silence deepened over all.

Then there came a tiny flicker of new brilliance in the sky rapidly growing into a great flame which flashed like lightning

down on the soaking sacrifice, exploding it into a triumphant blaze.

My own heart seemed to burst. I knew certainty – with all around me I cried out: The Lord, he is God! The Lord is God indeed!"

Then suddenly someone shouted: "Look there!" A small dark cloud had become visible. It grew. Now great masses of

heavy cloud were advancing towards us, slowly, majestically. Heavy spots of rain began to fall, then it fell in sheets. Crazy, joyfully we danced and sang, our hearts filled with thanksgiving to the Lord God. Elijah himself seemed to have vanished. But we knew, beyond all doubt, that his God was good and bountiful and to be eternally trusted and adored.

Kay Ramsay, Scotland

Memory of Touch

Poem held at the Lutheran Deaconess Conference

Three morning splashes,
cold water in my face—
a baptismal way
to start my day in the name of God:
Earth- Maker
Pain-Bearer
Life-Giver.

Then a touch of lotion, smooth on my face—
fingertips linger on my forehead,
recalling a similar touch
from a different time.

When? I close my eyes and soon remember:
after Eucharist,
the touch of prayer ministers
anointing me with oil—
with prayers for healing for myself and others,
prayers of thanksgiving when my heart sings
prayers because of fear that blocks my path,
prayers to discern God's perfect plan for me,
prayers for courage to live another day...

That familiar touch
has found its way to my forehead again,
reminding me of the prayers of our whole community of faith
reassuring me, touching and warming my heart,
filling my day with hope and promise.

Sandra Millikan Eacret

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