

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CONGO - ELCCO

Year Started and Brief History

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo (ELCCo), formerly called Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zaïre, was founded in 1969 on the initiative of lay people who were following Bible Studies in Manono, which were broadcast by a Radio called "Voice of the Gospel" in Arusha, Tanzania. Later on some congregations were opened, committees established. In the following period, pastoral and evangelical trainings were offered to a little group of people by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) in Makumira and Mwika, and almost at the same time some Tanzanian pastors were sent to Zaïre to take care of the new members. Finally, the church structure was progressively shaped out. The church was officially recognized by the Government as an independent church in April 1980 and registered as a non-profit making association. It became a member of the LWF in 1986. In 1990 the church head office was transferred from Kalemie to Lubumbashi and in 1992 the first Bishop was consecrated. In 1994, a Theological Institute (IAFTA) was founded in Lubumbashi.

From 1996 – 2002, the church went through a restructuring process and decentralized into five dioceses (each with a bishop). The aim of the reform was to bring the leaders closer to the people and enhance effective communication.

In January 2003, the church elected another Legal Representative holding also the position of Presiding Bishop. This election resulted into internal conflict because the former and unique Bishop fell and refused to recognize the results. The situation became more complicated when, in November 2003; the Minister of Justice annulled the earlier decree that recognized the church's reforms and elections in favor of the former Bishop.

Several court cases were then instituted and with the support of partners, the new Minister of Justice finally issued on 31 October 2007 another decree that reinstated the church forms. To these days, the conflict is not yet over. However, partners continue to plead for reconciliation between the church and the dissidents.

Church Leader

Rt. Rev. René Mwamba Sumaili
Presiding Bishop and Legal Representative

Membership

At present, the church has 41 968 members, 80 pastors, 21 districts and five dioceses.

Organisational Structure

The General Assembly also called National Synod is ELCCo's highest ruling and decision making board. Next to it is the National Executive Committee which is in charge of the follow-up of the National Synod decisions implemented by the Head Office (National Bureau) and in the dioceses. The two boards are presided by the Presiding Bishop and Legal Representative. The latter is assisted by the General Secretary who is also the Vice Legal Representative. He is the responsible for administrative and financial issues.

At present, the Head Office is structured as follows:

- The Cabinet of Presiding Bishop and Legal Representative,
- The General Secretary and Vice Legal Representative Desk,
- The Mission, Evangelism and Christian Education Department,
- The Finances Department,
- The Planning and Projects Department,
- The Partnerships Desk,
- The Women Desk,
- The liaison service (in Kinshasa),
- IAFTA, the theological institute,

Below the Head Office come the five dioceses. There are:

- The Diocese of Malemba-Kamina - Malemba-Nkulu;
- The Diocese of Lac Tanganyika - Kalemie;
- The Diocese of Kivu-Maniema - Bukavu;
- The Diocese of Congo-Ouest - Kinshasa;
- The Diocese of Haut-Katanga Lwalaba - Likasi.

Each diocese is administratively independent and is constituted of two main decision making boards: the Synod and the Executive Committee. The diocesan office comprises three positions: the Bishop, the Executive Secretary and the Treasurer.

Main Areas of Work

The Church activities are mainly focused on evangelism outreach. Evangelism is accompanied by social actions in several domains such as education (primary and secondary schools in the dioceses), health (medical centres), diaconal services in prisons, fight against HIV-AIDS, etc. Concerning priorities, the following are to indicated:

- Having a transformative leadership and reinforcement of capacity building among the members and the personnel;
- Theological formation and training in handcraft activities;
- Evangelism and construction of church infrastructures;
- Fight against HIV/AIDS and malaria;
- Taking care of venerable populations,
- Consolidating women and young girl integration in church decision making boards.

Activities regarding overcoming of violence

In order to fight and contribute to overcome violence among the populations, ELCCo often organize seminars (and workshops) on topics like:

- Respect of human rights,
- Civil law,
- Good citizenship,
- Protection of women and young girls rights in the society,
- Etc.

The church also integrates the issue preaching programmes and evangelism.

Special Challenges

At the present, ELCCo faces many challenges, among which armed conflicts and their collateral consequences in the East of the country, poverty and the internal leadership conflict.

Involvement in Networks or International Operations

ELCCo is a member of:

- the Lutheran World Federation (LWF),
- the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA),
- the World Council of Churches (WCC),
- the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC),
- the Action by Churches Together (ACT).

She also has tight bilateral relationships with other churches and missionary societies as:

- the Evangelical Church in Tanzania,
- Mission EineWelt of Bavaria (Germany),
- the Northelbian Evangelical Lutheran Church-NMZ (Germany),
- the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM).