

2nd Partner's Consultation
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria
São Paulo, Brazil, September 6-12, 2013

Never give up!

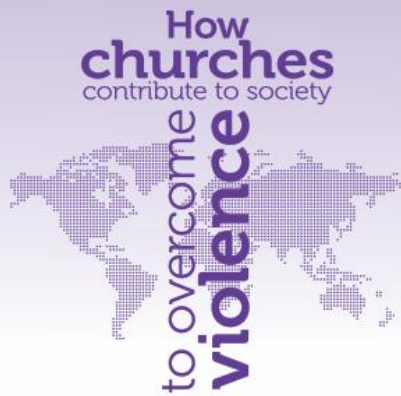
At the invitation of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria, the 2nd Consultation with Lutheran Churches from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and Australia gathered in São Paulo, Brazil from September 6th to 12th, 2013. The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil hosted us. The theme of the meeting was "How churches contribute to society to overcome violence". This statement contains a summary of our deliberations and personal impressions formed during the consultation through prayer and bible studies, lectures, presentations, discussions and site visits to local diaconal and social projects.

The participants represented churches from various backgrounds. We shared experiences, concerns and visions of our churches. We understood that our situations were very different and could not always be generalized. Some of our churches operate mainly in high-density urban surroundings, while others have their focus in rural areas. All of our churches deal with the question of individual and family violence and also live with the consequences of structural violence to different degrees. Most of our churches live in a minority situation, many of them in a context of poverty. During the consultation we heard the cry of God's people, children, women and men throughout the world.

*We listened to the **Word of God** which promises love and justice (John 10:10) and grappled with the causes of violence and the churches' response to that violence. Violence has Always been the experience of humanity as reflected in the Bible beginning with the story of the fall in Genesis 3. Although there is much we do not know or understand about violence in the Bible, we see in the death of Jesus on the cross a consequence of human violence. But in His resurrection, we see victory over sin and death – which also means a triumph over violence.*

This inaugurates a new beginning for the world and its people (1 Cor. 1:28; cf. 5:18). From the perspective of the resurrection we unfold the history of the Bible as a testimony of God not having power through violence but power through love and grace.

*We discussed the **Causes and Expressions of Violence**. There is a great diversity of views, even among scholars, as to what constitutes violence. Using the WHO definition that violence is "any act, threatened or actual that results in or has a likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation", we identified from our observations and experiences the following causes and expressions of violence:*



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- *The gap between poor and rich. It has been discovered by scholars that the more equal the society, the higher the degree of happiness for both rich and poor.*

- *Lack of good governance and infrastructure in communities leading to corruption and the breakdown of social cohesion.*

- *Misuse of power by the authorities, such as the police.*

- *Lack of education or health care or a system which is not accessible for everyone.*

- *Abuse and exploitation of natural resources.*

- *Land grabbing.*

- *Hostility or disharmony between denominations, religions and other groups of civil society.*

We learned that even tensions between religions in one part of the world can affect the peaceful coexistence in other parts.

- *Gender discrimination and all other forms of denying human rights.*

- *Domestic violence, mostly against women, children and the elderly, as one of the most common forms of violence.*

- *Abuse of alcohol and drugs.*

- *Aggressive and irresponsible behavior in road traffic.*

- *Violence as a result of unhealed trauma. We heard that victims of severe violence who do not get socio-psychological and spiritual help are likely to become the offenders of tomorrow.*

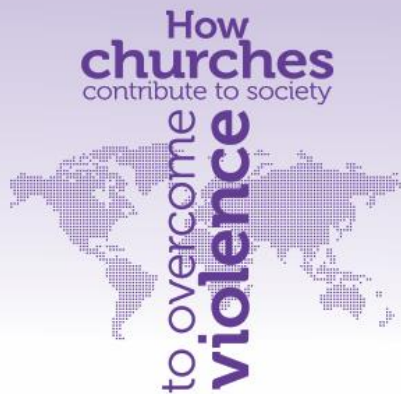
*We discussed points of **Motivation and Encouragement** for our work.*

- *Lutheran theology is a great resource for peace making. It encourages us to understand law as an instrument for peace which protects the weak and the poor from injustice.*

Lutheran theology also provides an anthropology, which helps us to understand the corruptibility of human nature. Luther's understanding of economic ethics is a way to critique the misuse of economic power.

- *We learned from our sisters and brothers in Latin America, that the church must raise its voice to reach those who have political and economic power for the sake of the people who are excluded and affected by injustice.*

- *Sharing of resources, both spiritual and material, is an essential dimension of our communion and our involvement in the world. Therefore we commit ourselves to develop effective ways of sharing resources.*



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- As part of the one body, our churches have different roles, according to our prophetic vocation. Some churches can be the “eyes” and “ears” to see and hear people’s suffering, while other churches can be the “mouth” to bring the situation to the ears of those in power.

- We learn to rely on the theology of the cross, not a “gospel of prosperity”, which promises material wealth as a direct consequence of faith.

*In our consultation we heard many **Stories of Hope** in the face of violence. We are thankful for all the engagement against violence in our churches, even if the steps seem to be fairly small sometimes. We are convinced that many small steps can change difficult living conditions for the better. It is impressive for us to see that there are many people acting in positive ways to overcome violence even if the challenges seem to be overwhelming. It is God's way of changing the world from the bottom up. God was able to bring life out of death when Jesus rose from the grave. As hope is planted in the life of people it can change their lives and influence the whole society. Working together to overcome violence and bringing peace and justice we live out Christ's vision for us to be the light and salt of the world.*