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Guyanese Church Secretary Goolsarran Reflects on the Reformation, Challenges Facing the ELCG



ELCG Secretary Samuel Jerry Goolsarran plants a tree at the Luther Garden in Wittenberg, Germany, on 10 June. Photo: LWF Center in Wittenberg/Annette Glaubig

Planting Trees as a Living Memorial to the Beginning of the Reformation

(LWI) – During a recent visit to Geneva, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG) Secretary Samuel Jerry Goolsarran spoke about the importance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, planting a tree in commemoration, and the challenges his small church faces today in training enough pastors and being relevant in society.

The ELCG Secretary also planted a tree at the Luther Garden in Wittenberg, Germany on 10 June, joining other church representatives who planted trees in the park, leading up to the celebrations in 2017.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has set a goal of planting 500 trees in the park and around the town to commemorate the anniversary of the Reformation, when on 31 October 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses on the church door in Lutherstadt, Wittenberg. Churches of all denominations from all over the world are also invited to become "godparents" to one of the trees in Wittenberg and to plant a second tree in the area of their home Church.

"We want to identify with other Churches in this project as a long-standing member of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and we are happy to be connected with this great historical event in solidarity with the Lutheran world communion," Goolsarran said. "We are only instruments in planting the seed and the Holy Spirit does the rest." The Guyanese Lutheran Church was initiated in 1743, when a group of Dutch colonists assembled at the home of Lodewyk Abbensetts to start a church at Fort Nassau. Nine years later it received its first pastor, Johan Henrik Faerkenius, and constructed a sanctuary. A Guyanese pastor represented the church at the 1947 founding Assembly of the LWF. In 1950 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in then British Guiana was received into LWF membership.

Goolsarran said challenges the ELCG faces in proclaiming the gospel in the Guyana today include a shortage of pastors in full-time ministry and keeping young people engaged in the church.

With 16,000 to 17,000 baptised members, "in terms of resources—dedicated pastors in full-time ministry—we are really stretched out in keeping the services and Sunday activities going," he said. "We really need about 20 full-time pastors and we only have nine, and 13 deacons. We have embarked on training them locally as we do not have the resources to send them to Seminary abroad." Migration has also had an impact on the number of pastors as "several of our clergy are working in North America," he added. Our Lutheran Diaspora is large in North America.

"We have a strong and developing lay leadership within our Church. On any Sunday, you will find about half the congregations are served by lay people and that has been the case for many years," Goolsarran said.

The ELCG is one of the Christian denominations in Guyana to embark on local training for its members to become pastors and deacons. It is promoting a model of ministry in church by including in the pastoral ministry, ordained pastors and deacons along with lay assistants. The ELCG Lutheran Lay Academy (LLA), launched in 2005, offers a two-year program with pastors serving as lecturers and resource persons for biblical studies,

church history, homiletics, worship and liturgy. External experts in theology provide additional support.

In Guyana, “evangelism needs to be revitalized to reach out to the communities, children and young people and to keep them in Sunday school and youth ministries,” Goolsarran said. “There is a lot of competition for the time of young people these days from studies, TV to the internet and all modern electronic gadgets that are easily available, and the attraction of modern society life.”

“The main challenge for us is to get the gospel out, to reach out to the people –inactive and un-churched - to plant the seeds of the Gospel so that the Holy Spirit can work to bring them into God’s Church,” he added.



