

# LUTHERAN CHURCH IN COSTA RICA – ILCO

## Brief history

The Iglesia Luterana Costarricense [Costa Rican Lutheran Church] is a church of Lutheran tradition with 25 years presence in Costa Rica. It begins through Lutheran members of the first mission of the Lutheran Church in the United States in 1963, which, united with resident Lutherans who were working in other institutions in Costa Rica, coming from Germany, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Brazil and Argentina, just like other Evangelicals and Catholics, joined together. The national church was founded on August 22nd, 1988. It begins with a faith congregation with diaconal services in indigenous, small farmer, migrant communities which soon grew to become faith congregations and missions.

## Church Leader

Bishop: Melvin Jimenez

Presence in 30 communities in 7 faith congregations (COFE), 7 missions and 16 service points.

The Faith Congregations, COFE, are organized faith congregations with weekly liturgical and pastoral activities and with systematic pastoral and diaconal projects accompanied by a pastor and led by a Pastoral Team made up of members of said congregation.

The Missions are communities where the church carries out monthly pastoral and diaconal activities accompanied by a pastor.

The Service Points are communities where the church carries out some service at least three times a year, be it pastoral or diaconal.

We count on 14 pastors (10 nationals and 4 missionaries) 5 presbyters and 5 in the process of becoming presbyters.

12 international volunteers (Germany and Sweden, etc.)

10 specialists in law, environment, education and social work

10 general services, finances and administration

50 community leaders: Christian education and social projects, etc.

## Organizational Structure

The instances of the leadership of the church are:

The General Assembly (which gathers ordinarily once a year)

And the Church Council (which meets ordinarily once a month).

The Bishop and a coordination team of the coordinators of the diakonia, DECOFE (congregational), organization and Bishop areas.

The church counts on a Faith Congregations Team, a Coordinators of Diaconal Programs Team, Permanent Commissions on Gender, Sustainability and Ethics and Eventual committees which respond to multiple, relevant and timely themes from statutes to indigenous advocacy, sexuality, environment among others.

The most important areas of the church are the Faith Congregation Development (DECOFE) Area and the Area of Diakonia (Social Programs and Projects and Human Rights).

The church also has an Administrative Area, an Accounting and Finances Area, an Area of Communications and Relations – within which is the office of the Bishop – and an Area of PME and Sustainability.

## Activities regarding overcoming of violence

A prevention of intra-family violence program supported by the European Union is implemented with the following contents and activities.

General Goal

- of the domestic violence in Costa Rica.
- Contribute to gender equality of the domestic violence in Costa Rica

Specific goals

•Contribute to the reduction of and create awareness about intra-family violence in families through ecclesial leaders, social organizations and public institutions in communities where the church is present to commit them to develop prevention actions in Costa Rica.

Population to be benefitted:

- Approximately 2000 families of communities where the church is present
- Leaders of approximately 200 of the churches, social organizations and public institutions present in the aforementioned communities.

Action strategies

I. Formation-Capacity building for multiplier leaders on 5 key themes for the prevention of intra-family violence.

## Special challenges

Strategies regarding the challenges of the next 6 years – 2014-2019.

Development of Faith Communities

- 1.Promotion of leadership of women, youth and indigenous in all the structures of the church.
- 2.Development of innovative and creative pastoral proposals.
- 3.Development of capacities within the ecclesial leadership in biblical-theological reading, analysis of the reality, the tools for pastoral accompaniment and administration, social promotion and Popular Education.
- 4.Active and conscious participation of the COFE in the political advocacy processes and activities of the church.
- 5.Affirm our Lutheran identity, enriching it with the world perspectives and contributions of women, indigenous people, migrants, youth, diversity, rural and urban communities.

Diakonia

- 1.Consolidate diaconal programs which focus on the Human Rights of the excluded sectors, communal interaction and education for peace and environmental management and productiveness.
- 2.Optimize the system of the PME orientated toward the direct effects and impacts (OECDI) of the diaconal work of the church.
- 3.Strengthen the Strategic Alliances with the excluded sectors, institutions, social organizations and movements and the accompaniment of the processes demanding Human Rights.
- 4.Strengthen the political advocacy on themes related with the diaconal foci of the church.

Organizational Strengthening

1. Promote the increase of the participation and of the power of decision of the various sectors which make up the church following criteria of gender equity and through delegation and decentralization of roles and the development of capacities for management and for strengthening the organizational and Human Resources management.
- 2.Promote the sustainability of the church through management and strategic use of the human, material, technical and financial resources.
- 3.Innovation and strengthening of internal and external communication and information mechanisms.
- 4.Participation of the finance-administration in the management of the basic technical criteria and in the budget preparations within the institutional process of formulation of Projects.
- 5.Implementation of policies, norms and administrative procedures which generate efficiency, sustainability, accountability and transparency in the use of the resources both for the internal life as well as with regard to the outside relations.
- 6.Clarity the relations between the units, formal responsibilities of communication and regimen of reinforcements and sanctions of policies, norms and administrative procedures.

## Main areas of work

The Diaconal Area is composed of diaconal programs and emphasizes three fundamental themes:

- Human Rights of vulnerable sectors: indigenous, women, migrants, children, youth, small farmers, LGBTI persons, people with HIV);
- Environmental Management and
- Education for Peace.

The Area of DECOFE develops programs:

- Development of the Life of the Faith Congregations emphasizing leadership of indigenous, women, migrants, children, youth, small farmers, LGBTI persons and persons with HIV ministries;
- Lutheran Theological Education and Christian Education.

Some of our most important activities

- Worship services, special liturgical celebrations
- Biblical-theological and pastoral formation which is ecumenical, inclusive and sensitive to the defense and promotion of Human Rights and justice in general
- Political advocacy on current themes
- Consultancies and support actions and accompaniment for social organizations
- Educational, interactive and experiential actions directed at the formation of agents to multiply an ecumenical, inclusive, critical and liberating vision
- Exchange spaces where educational and recreational activities are carried out. Youth exchange programs with sister churches, basically The Lutheran Church in Sweden, Germany, and the United States.
- Strategic alliances with social organizations, Human Rights movements and humanitarian networks
- Coordination relations for strengthening the local networks, organizations and movements
- Support for indigenous, small farmer, migrant, LGBTI and union leaders through different services.

1. Plan for capacity building for community leaders and representatives of social organizations and public institutions on the 5 key themes of the project:

- a. Human, sexual and reproductive rights,
- b. Violence and gender,
- c. Costa Rican legal framework and access to justice,
- d. Alternative techniques of conflict resolution and prevention of violence,
- e. Methodology of popular education for prevention of violence

Fulfillment of 20 workshops for multipliers of the themes indicated above.

II. Sensitization of families, social organizations and public institutions in the participating communities mainly through community interactive theater.

Two interactive popular theater works with the theme of intra-family violence (8 sessions for assembling and practicing the theater pieces)

Presentations of the theater pieces in the communities of the project, at churches and others who are participating with regard to the problem of intra-family violence and how to confront it.

III. Articulation of social organizations and coordination with Public Institutions in the participating communities, to support, strengthen and promote the work of intra-family violence prevention.

1. Elaborate map of the social organizations and public institutions which have services for the prevention of violence.
2. Elaboration and distribution of calendar with the causes of violence, prevention measures and institutions which can be called upon to help "Every day against Violence".

## Involvement in networks or international cooperation

The church is a member of the Lutheran World Federation, of ACT Alliance and of the Latin American Council of Churches and participates in multiple networks and alliances on current national and international themes.

Communion networks

- CILCA: (Comuni3n de Iglesias Luteranas Centroamericanas) [Communion of Central American Lutheran Churches].
- CLAI (Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias) [ Latin American Council of Churches]
- Lutheran World Federation
- Consejo Evang3lico Costarricense de Iglesias , CECI [Costa Rican Evangelical Council of Churches]

Of full cooperation:

- Mission of the Swedish Church,
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA),
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria
- Bread for the World of Germany
- Lutheran World Federation

Of fraternal relations:

- Parish
- Stanberg Parish, Germany
- Safe Assembly of parishes, Sweden
- Deanship of Aschaffenburg, Bavaria, Germany
- Southwest Synod of Texas, ELCA
- North Carolina Synod
- Diocese of Vaxjo,Sweden

Advocacy Relations

- Migrants' Forum
- Indigenous Table: Union of indigenous organizations
- National Table Against HIV/AIDS, MCP
- CLAI National Coordination Table of churches and ecumenical organizations

## Membership

The membership is more than 1364 baptized members. Its programs benefit around 5000 persons.