

Greeting to the LWF Council Meeting 2013 in Geneva

By Dr. J.D. Plüss, representing Pentecostal Churches

Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you for welcoming me at your Council Meeting. By inviting ecumenical guest, you are making an important and visible statement of fellowship in the Body of Christ.

As I read through your various documents I came across two phrases that express this fundamental truth of our Christian calling.

President Younan you spoke to us under the heading, **“Called to be disciples in today’s world.”**

You express the conviction that discipleship is at the core of the church. Otherwise, the communion of the saints would be shallow, mission would be without vision and good deeds would be optional. Being a Christian is not just about information (knowing the right things) or association (being in the right group). Being Christian is about transformation (change) by the grace of God. It is a calling to discipleship.

We understand that being a disciple of Jesus Christ has its price. We have to be ready to pay a price with regard to us living in this world. And there is a price to our communion within the Household of God. As General Secretary Martin Junge has clearly expressed it, God’s Church is not just a communion of likeminded people.

As a Pentecostal guest I would like to encourage you. The first Pentecost of the Church marks a point of change. Prior to that event, the disciples were the limited number of people that had known and followed Jesus. After Pentecost the age of discipleship has begun, it is open to all those who are willing to be attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to those who are attentive to the lives of people we meet. May the Gift of the Spirit guide you wisely and joyfully in your deliberations during this council meeting.

The second phrase that caught my attention is: ***“Welcoming the stranger”***

What a powerful command guides us through the Scriptures. To welcome and love the stranger because God loves the stranger and we have been strangers ourselves. If not as migrants or refugees, we have been strangers to God’s grace and are strangers to one another.

Over the course of time our languages change. Today the word “stranger” has received connotations that were foreign to the translators of the King James Bible. Today the word “strange” can refer to that which is aberrant, abnormal, weird or simply ignorant. I myself made that experience when I was referred to as a stranger. What the speaker really meant was that I was in certain ways strange, not just from a foreign country. Fortunately, Jesus places the emphasis of God’s command in a more immediate way. He reminds us to “love our neighbor”.

It is my prayer that we all can learn not only to welcome the stranger, but to love him or her as our neighbor.

For God’s sake, let us, as Christians, tackle today’s challenges together.

Let it be our hope that we can share the gifts we have received from God.

Let us make it a common prayer, that indeed we all move beyond the communion of like-mindedness, because we are partakers of God’s grace and we want to take the call to discipleship seriously.

Martin Luther has put it well when he wrote, “A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor.” (in *Freedom of the Christian*)

May God bless you.