



# Let all you do be done in love

## New Year's greeting from the LWF General Secretary

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Another year is coming to an end and a new one is beginning. How to measure the 365 days gone by in 2023? In things achieved and accomplished, in lessons learned, in travels made, in books read? Or in something else?

The Christmas gospel shows us how our time passes by but also how God enters this time. When we read the story of Jesus' birth in Luke 2, we encounter several leaders of that time: Caesar Augustus, emperor of Rome and Quirinius, governor of Syria. Back then, in the Roman Empire, time was counted based on the year that the respective emperor had come to power. Although there are many other calendars and systems of counting time around the world, most of us in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches live in countries where the counting of years starts with what is considered to be the birth year of Jesus Christ. We don't know exactly in which year of Caesar Augustus' reign Jesus was born (and most people have long forgotten who Caesar Augustus



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even was in the first place), yet billions of people know that Anno Domini 2024 links our counting of time to the birth of this little child whose coming into the world happened almost unnoticed. God's love for the world (Jn 3:16) became embodied in Jesus, in a child through whom God entered the world with all its struggles and suffering but also with its joys and happiness.

How about assessing the past year 2023 by asking the question: How do we put into practice the double commandment of love, to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, and the neighbor as ourselves?

'Love' in this double commandment is not so much of an emotion but rather an attitude, a principle guiding how we speak and act. The Watchword for 2024 reminds us of this: "Let all you do be done in love" (1 Cor 16:14). The love that the apostle Paul speaks about is a gift, a gift from God, shaping our life. If we look at others as persons loved by God, regardless of their background or identity, it becomes much easier to interact with each other despite the differences in opinion, in character, in habits. But what is even more important: as we are liberated by God's grace, upholding human dignity becomes elementary, and raising our voices against oppression and hatred becomes inevitable. The Augsburg Confession states this quite plainly in Article VI, "faith is bound to yield good fruits."

Christ is the light that shines in the darkness and darkness cannot overcome it despite so many attempts to do so in so many places today around our planet. Throughout the world, the LWF on behalf and through its member churches continues to share Christ's light in the darkness and offer hope, which goes deeper than only optimism. And, reaching out beyond our communion of churches, we fulfil the double commandment of love: the message of God's love calls us to go out into the world and to serve all people.

As we look forward to 2024 and continue to fill our calendar, may the words "Let all you do be done in love" accompany us. May they guide our life and direct us in how a new year can be measured.

May God bless all of you and may God include in that blessing all whom you encounter.

Happy New Year!

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*"The message of God's love calls us to go out into the world and to serve all people." In the photo, LWF member church delegates take part in a joint exercise, prior to the start of the Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków,*

*Poland, last September. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert*