

**President's Address**  
ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

**1. GROWING TOGETHER, GROWING APART**

- (1) “Growing Together, Growing Apart” is an appropriate theme for my first presidential report to the Lutheran World Federation Council. That tension is reflective not only of life within the Communion, but also is descriptive of the ecumenical movement, interreligious relationships, global tensions, and the environmental crisis.
- (2) For us as Lutherans, however, the dynamic of growing together and growing apart must be set in the context of the unity given to us in Christ. If we fail to confess and remember that we are joined in a unity that precedes, transcends, and undergirds the constant fluctuations and frequent tensions in our relationships, we risk denying the core of our identity. The Church endeavors to recognize and manifest the gifts of unity already given to us by God as we are joined through the waters of Baptism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4). We are made one with Christ, as Paul confesses in the Letter to Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:19-20).
- (3) The quest to grow together begins with the recognition of who and what we already are: the children of our heavenly Father, redeemed by the death and resurrection of God’s only begotten Son, infused with new life by the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. This communion with the persons of the Blessed Trinity similarly creates a communion among all the baptized. Paul insightfully compares the communion of the Church to the functions of the human body. The parts are not interchangeable; all are necessary if the body is to function as God intends (I Corinthians 12:14 ff). To state it another way, before we grow together or grow apart, we are together. The communion we share in Christ implies that we see each other in the same way that God sees each of us, linked to each other through the communion we share with Jesus—“one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).
- (4) This same concern for the unity of Christ’s church permeated the work of the Lutheran reformers, particularly as their witness to the gospel is expressed in the Lutheran Confessional writings. The Reformers insisted that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic because it is the divinely established vehicle for proclaiming the saving truth of God’s justifying grace through faith in Christ. The Lutheran commitment to search for the visible unity of the church (i.e., to grow together) is grounded in the belief that “only those things that convey salvation, justification by grace through faith, are allowed to be signs and constitutive elements of the church” (“Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” [ELCA, 1991], p. 4). The liberating Gospel of God’s freely given love in Jesus Christ is made available whenever and wherever the people gather around the Word proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered (Augsburg Confession, Article VII.).

- (5) Before we seek to grow together or fear growing apart, we are bold to confess who and whose we are. We are the Body of Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ is not a goal to be attained, but a fact to be recognized. According to this image, the mission of the Church is not to achieve unity, but to act as the unified body it is. We do so not only for the sake of unity, but so the world might believe (John 17). By the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to become (i.e., grow together) the community we already are in Christ for the sake of God's mission in the world.
- (6) Dr. Mark Powell, professor of New Testament at the ELCA's Trinity Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, argues that the image of "Body of Christ" implies an ecclesiology defined more by being than by doing: "The mission of the church is, first, to be the people *in whom* Christ's mission is fulfilled and, then, to be the people *through whom* Christ's mission is fulfilled for others. . . . The church embodies Christ's continuing presence in the world and so acts *as Christ* in the world. The Church serves and suffers for the world as Christ served and suffered for the world . . . . Theologically, however, the Church does not just imitate Jesus or follow his example. Rather, the risen Lord Jesus Christ is continuing to do what the earthy Jesus did. But the risen Lord Jesus Christ *acts* and *speaks* through the Church. . . . To 'be church' is to abide in Christ and the mission of the Church is to bear the fruit that Christ produces in us" (Mark Powell, "What Does it Mean to Be 'Church?'" [unpublished manuscript, 2003]).
- (7) Why begin with this rather extensive reminder of what is so familiar to all of us? Because without these claims constantly before us, beneath us, and ahead of us, the questions and forces that cause us to grow apart may prevail. Given the Scriptural and Confessional witness to our unity, I am confident they will not.
- (8) Claiming our unity in Christ, let us reflect on four arenas of our life and work, asking whether we are growing together or apart: (1) relationships within the Communion; (2) relationships within the church catholic; (3) interfaith and interreligious relationships; and (4) global relationships.

## 2. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNION

The rather subjective reflections that follow are born out of fewer years of engagement with the LWF than many of you have shared. Therefore, I recognize they may be more impressions than conclusions, more questions than answers.

### 2.1 *Growing Together*

- (9) The biblical, confessional, and ecclesiological premises outlined in the introduction continue to awaken a deepening realization that we are, and we share, a growing commitment to deepen our ties as a Communion. The theological as well as relational implications for this growing awareness must continue to be addressed, with dissenting perspectives included.
- (10) Moving toward an accompaniment model of global mission helps us address power

imbalances between member churches. We increasingly see each other as companions, working and walking together, side by side, for the sake of the gospel. We will continue growing together as churches take the lead in setting priorities for ministry and mission in their areas, rather than having those priorities established by funding bodies.

- (11) The emerging consensus and commitment to an understanding of “prophetic diakonia” is a sign that we are growing together. “An Epistle from the LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia” (7 Nov. 2002) remains foundational for this deepening perspective.
- (12) The maturing of the LWF, and its true nature as a Communion in which churches share their gifts with one another, is reflected in the fact that the rapidly growing Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, and South and Central America are becoming teachers and evangelists for Northern Hemisphere churches. (For example, in the North American Region several ELCA synods have evangelists from global companion churches teaching evangelism, seminaries have faculty from Southern Hemisphere churches, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada had a missionary from Cameroon serving on the national staff for two years.)
- (13) The increasing possibilities of global communication enhance our interrelatedness.
- (14) We are claiming the gifts of the ongoing Lutheran Reformation that we offer to the Church catholic rather than finding our identity over against the rest of the Body of Christ. In an e-mail to ELCA rostered leaders in November 2003, I suggested the following list of rich treasures of the ongoing Lutheran Reformation. They include, but are not limited to:
  - Justification by grace through faith
  - The theology of the cross
  - Law and gospel
  - *Simul justus et peccator*
  - Vocation and the priesthood of all believers
  - The freedom of the Christian
  - *Simul* and *sola*.
- (15) I want to say a little more about the final item in the list I have suggested. In the e-mail noted above, I said, “Maintaining a Lutheran identity in our culture is challenging. We do not live in a time when many people value dialectics or are drawn into the mystery of paradox. Yet as Lutherans, we hold onto *simul* and *sola*.”
- (16) We speak of:
  - The creation as good and fallen
  - Ourselves as saint and sinner
  - Jesus as human and divine, crucified and risen
  - The Word of God as incarnate, recorded, and proclaimed
  - The Word as law and gospel
  - God as hidden and yet revealed under the form of contraries
  - God reigning through law and reason for the sake of order and justice and God reigning through the gospel for the sake of faith and salvation, and
  - Holding faith and reason in healthy tension.”

- (17) Yet we also proclaim “Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia.” *Simul* and *sola* are not in contradiction but lively conversation.
- (18) A strong commitment to lay and clergy leadership development incorporating theological education by extension and seminary education will strengthen our interrelatedness.
- (19) We will grow together and be strengthened as we hold in healthy tension and lively conversation ortho-praxis and orthodoxy, contextual and confessional theology. If we do not, the Communion may be weakened.
- (20) We will grow together as we engage in priority setting for the work of the LWF that incorporates the Assembly message and the ongoing LWF commitments with an honest assessment of available resources.
- (21) We will continue to grow together if we do together that which we cannot do as effectively separately.
- (22) Our work to build consensus in the LWF on “The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of Church” will help us grow together and aid our ecumenical conversations.

## 2.2 *Growing Apart*

- (23) The effects of economic globalization threaten to fragment the whole creation, the human family, and the unity of the LWF.
- (24) We run the risk of making declarations and decisions about human sexuality without being in conversation with each other. It would be tragic if that which we all share by virtue of our humanity—that we are sexual beings—becomes the cause for division rather than the source of respectful and admittedly difficult dialogue. Through our emerging conversations, I believe we will discover that our understanding of the doctrine of the Word of God, the authority of Scripture, and hermeneutics are shared, even though our conclusions about various issues may differ. I further believe we will be helped if we concentrate our prayerful reflection and conversation on the basic issues of what unites us, what is essential for a person to be called a Christian. Our discoveries will help us grow together rather than cause us to grow apart.
- (25) The financial health and viability of the LWF remains a growing concern. If member churches make decisions to significantly decrease support or if resources simply are not available, we will inevitably grow apart. Together, we must set priorities, and we must commit to greater mutual accountability in decision-making about financial support for LWF. If not, we may grow apart under the weight of unmet expectations and resentment.
- (26) Will the instrumentality of the LWF as it convenes us in conversation and enables us to work together multilaterally be weakened if we revert to former modalities of relationships that were marked by strong bilateralism?
- (27) The LWF in assembly, the LWF Council, and the International Lutheran Council have made

strong commitments to be in conversation with one another to strengthen the mission of the Church. How can this shared commitment continue to bring us together? How will LWF and ILC encourage member churches to grow together rather than apart?

- (28) Will we boldly and honestly continue to confront the power and privilege that come to some by virtue of gender, race, class, and nationality?

### **3. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH CATHOLIC**

#### *3.1 Growing Together*

- (29) There are many reasons to celebrate the experience of deepening unity within the Body of Christ: the growing number of full-communion agreements, international and national bilateral conversations, the exploration of ecumenical tables and organizations with broader participation (e.g., Global Forum, Christian Churches Together-U.S.A.), continued strong regional and national councils of churches, and increased ecumenical cooperative efforts in addressing issues of poverty, injustice, and victimization.
- (30) We also celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Without minimizing the significant theological issues that remain on the path to full communion, we continue to deepen our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Let us move toward planning for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017 in a manner that is respectful of our growing together, recognizes our commitment to Eucharistic sharing, and continues to explore concepts such as “spiritual ecumenism” for our life together.
- (31) Great appreciation for Lutheran-Orthodox relationships was expressed by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and members of the ecumenical commission of the Phanar during our ecumenical visit in January 2004. Let us continue to deepen these relationships.
- (32) Is it possible for Lutherans—out of our Confessional theology and ecumenical commitment—to expand our calling to be a ligament in the Body of Christ, joining parts of the body together for the sake of the gospel and God’s mission in the world? Commitment to the LWF as a Communion will contribute to the unity of the whole Church of Jesus Christ, for as one part of Body is renewed and strengthened it contributes to the health of the whole.
- (33) Seminaries throughout the world are increasingly becoming places of lively ecumenical theological discourse, deepening unity with increasing respect for diversity.
- (34) Expansion of our understanding of “differentiated consensus” and “reconciled diversity” as theological tools for deepening conversation will help us to grow in unity without demanding uniformity.

#### *3.2 Growing Apart*

- (35) Discussions and decisions about sexuality risk having divisive impact on the global Church,

including the LWF. We can only watch with concern the growing tensions within the Anglican Communion over issues of human sexuality. The LWF is certain to follow if we do not respect one another as baptized members of the Body of Christ and through our conversation demonstrate to the world “how much they love one another.” May our tensions and disagreements not weaken our deepening relationships with Anglicans.

- (36) Will charismatic renewal movements and Pentecostal churches divide rather than renew the church?
- (37) Can we agree on a shared understanding of evangelization that does not become proselytization? If we do not respect and acknowledge one Baptism, can we in fact grow together as the Body of Christ?
- (38) Unless we learn the art of moral deliberation in ecumenical, global, and cross-cultural contexts, issues of morality seem to have a greater potential to divide rather than unite us.

#### **4. INTERFAITH AND INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS**

##### *4.1 Growing Together*

- (39) The growth of fundamentalism in various faith traditions, with its possible political manifestations and violent actions, is cause for concern. Our commitment to dialogue between, and greater understanding of, other religions should not be deterred by militant fundamentalists. We must avoid identifying a particular religion by the divisive expressions of fundamentalism within it.
- (40) Interreligious dialogues are not only to increase understanding and engage in genuine mutual hospitality, but to deepen our resolve to work together to build a world of peace with justice.
- (41) Professor and Bishop Krister Stendahl invites us as Lutherans to ponder what “holy envy” might mean in our interreligious world. By this he means that, without diminishing our devotion to Christ, can we be open to the possibility that God is involved in the faith of others in ways that we cannot imagine?
- (42) We need to have greater clarity about how we as Christians hold in tension conversion and conversation with persons of other faiths. We proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, testifying to the saving power of Christ in our lives, believing the Holy Spirit is at work bringing people to faith. At the same time, we listen to the faith of our neighbor so that we might also deepen our understanding of, and appreciation for, that person. Our dialogue may lead to conversion, but it may not. Either way, a more respectful and peaceful world may be the result.

##### *4.2 Growing Apart*

- (43) It is important that as Lutheran Christians we remain committed to Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian dialogue even as we expand interreligious conversations with others. However, we should not mute constructive criticism of the Israeli government for fear of being labeled anti-Semitic or criticism of Arab government or authorities for fear of being

called anti-Islamic, just as we would not want Jewish or Arab criticism of Western governments to be equated with their being anti-Christian.

- (44) Can we more openly and honestly confront within our personal lives, churches, and societies the resistance and even hostility toward the stranger who comes from other cultures and religions?
- (45) Have we accepted tolerance as the highest value in a pluralistic world, so that we refrain from condemning acts of injustice, violence, and intolerance?

## **5. GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS**

- (46) In no other arena of relationships does it seem as clear that the factors bringing us together in one world also are those driving us apart. The list that follows is not exhaustive, nor does it adequately address the implications of each dynamic. Your own acute awareness of them is critical to our conversation and work.
- (47) HIV/AIDS: The pandemic destroys families, communities, cultures, nations. If any crisis should cause us to set aside differences, generate resources, and find solutions, it is HIV/AIDS. Yet denial, arrogance, economic gain, personal morality, and control often seem to be stronger divisive forces than our shared resolve to inform, treat, and console. HIV/AIDS is not the only disease that should cause us to grow together for the sake of the healing of the world, but it is where we must begin.
- (48) Economic Globalization: It is a reality of our world. The LWF must continue to give priority to addressing how economic globalization causes us to grow together as a global society, yet also drives us apart as the chasm widens between those with wealth and those who live in poverty. This is a scandal that calls for our persistent prophetic words of judgment. This is a crisis that calls for our creativity as we seek to transform this reality into a better life for all rather than for a few.
- (49) War and Violence: In a disturbing book, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Chris Hedges argues that “the enduring attraction of war is this: even with its destruction and carnage, it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. . . . War is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble” (p. 3). He also says, “Every society, ethnic group, or religion nurtures certain myths, often centered around the creation of the nation or the movement itself. These myths lie unseen beneath the surface, waiting for the moment to rise ascendant to define and glorify followers as members in times of crisis” (p.46). Finally, he says, “It is this fear of the other, perhaps more than anything else, that triggers war” (p. 71). In our violent and war-torn world, let us as the LWF deepen our resolve to demythologize these myths, quell these fears, and together develop principles for a just peace that become as defining of us as have been the principles of just war.
- (50) Let us not forget that Christians and persons of other religions are experiencing persecution and discrimination. Our failure to speak out for an end to such actions will cause us to grow

apart. We must reject violence in all its forms even as we work for peace with justice.

- (51) The compelling crisis in Sudan/Darfur calls for global emergency relief and a political solution to end the genocide. It is yet another place in the world where the magnitudes of human suffering demand a global response.
- (52) The Power of the United States: As a religious leader in the United States, I feel compelled to speak about our nation. I recognize the importance of each of us addressing our own governments, yet I am also mindful of the global economic and military domination today of the United States.
- (53) I believe most citizens of the United States want to be known in the world as people who are generous, lovers of freedom, committed to democracy, and peacemakers. Yet, that is not how we are seen through the eyes of people throughout the world. Like the observers at Pentecost who thought the Spirit-filled people were drunk with new wine, so the United States is viewed as a nation intoxicated with power. We are seen as preoccupied with the expansion of our globalized economy rather than as standing in solidarity with those in poverty. We are seen as mesmerized by our military might and domination rather than as committed to international cooperation. We are judged as acting not with humility but with arrogance by refusing to sign the Kyoto Accords, disregarding the Geneva Conventions, and resisting being part of United Nations coordinated HIV/IDS program. As United States leaders justify actions using the language of faith, we may be seen as equating self-righteousness with the righteousness of God.
- (54) Let us as the LWF join with those in the United States and throughout the world who call for repentance and transformation where the United States fails, and let us also acknowledge with gratitude the work it does when and where it serves all of humanity.
- (55) The Future of Creation: We live in a remarkable paradox: the possibilities of the exponential growth in knowledge and technology and the reality that we may be standing on the precipice of ecocide as we consume the earth's resources at an alarming rate. May our commitment to neighbor-love and earth-care cause us to grow together as stewards of all that God has made and continues to create.

#### 5.1 *Faithful People of the Cross*

- (56) In *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*, Douglas John Hall reminds us of what we bring as theologians of the cross to this fragile world. He says, "The theology of the cross is bound to this world in all of its materiality, ambiguity, and incompleteness. It will not—cannot—opt for a doctrine of redemption, however theologically or spiritually appealing, that in effect bypasses or contradicts the biblical affirmation of creation. What God loves and is determined to save is not an abstraction and not a 'savable' part of the whole, but the real world in its inseparableness and interrelatedness. God is as firmly committed to the life of this world as that cross was planted in the ground at Golgotha, that is (symbolically) at the very center of death's apparent sovereignty" (p. 36).
- (57) Although we cannot know with certainty what God is doing in the world, yet paradoxically, through prayerful discernment, we will seek to act in accord with God's mission. Our

Lutheran theology reminds us that the work and ways and will of God are revealed most fully in Jesus Christ and known most deeply in brokenness and suffering. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, in her book *Public Church: For the Life of the World*, says, "Thus, we will glimpse what God is doing, to the extent that we allow ourselves to be present in profound solidarity and compassion where people and creation suffer most" (p. 64).

- (58) In the midst of all that divides us, as people of the cross we will be engaged in acts of evangelical defiance for the sake of the gospel, the common good of humanity, and the whole creation.
- (59) We will grow together rather than apart as we are defined by our faith, not our fears. Fear hardens lives and closes borders. Faith calls us to see the world through the eyes of God's vision for the world—a vision of the goodness of creation, humanity created in God's image, interdependent, praising God, and pursuing justice and peace.
- (60) Faith frees us to confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves, but also to claim God's promise that in Christ we are bound to be free and free to be bound. We are bound to God's promises in faith, to each other in love, to the world witnessing to the inbreaking of God's reign of mercy, justice, and peace. Fear causes us to flee the world, becoming immobilized, cynical, and turned-in upon ourselves. Faith gives us courage to go out into the world. Faith gives us hope in God from whom the future comes. So together, not apart, we expectantly wait, joyfully worship, persistently work for justice and peace, passionately proclaim the gospel, and pray, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus."
- (61) As I complete my first year as Lutheran World Federation president, it is with profound gratitude for the member churches. In varied contexts with often seemingly overwhelming challenges, we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for God's creation, and strive for justice and peace. In the face of injustice, exploitation, and violence, we speak words of prophetic judgment. In response to God's grace and mercy, we rejoice, giving thanks and praise.
- (62) The Lutheran World Federation is blessed with a gifted staff, a strong Council, and a wise General Secretary. As we humbly and honestly address the factors and forces that might cause us to grow apart, we do so trusting in the unity given to us by virtue of our baptism into Christ and the unity we share with all humanity as stewards of God's creation. The power of the Holy Spirit to unite is greater than all that might divide. Thanks be to God!
- (63) "Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:23\*24)".