

Embargo against delivery

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

Introduction

- (1) On behalf of the LWF Secretariat I welcome the Council members, advisors, ecumenical guests, special invitees and the press to this third Council meeting since the Tenth LWF Assembly. The Council was scheduled to meet in Jerusalem upon the invitation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land since the year 2001, but due to very difficult political circumstances the meeting was delayed until this very day.
- (2) Gathered here in the Holy Land, we are conscious of the prevailing political tensions locally and globally. We are also conscious of bringing with us from our respective settings experiences, emotions and expectations. These facts and perceptions constitute the context within which we shall try our utmost to accomplish the tasks ahead of us.
- (3) Being in Bethlehem, near the Shepherds Field, the song of the multitude of angels resonates within us: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward humankind.” We are at the cradle of our Christian faith. By grace, reconciliation is God’s gift to us. By this gift, we are called to be *a people of reconciliation*. It is my hope that we are so and we must, accordingly, be ready to give account of our commitment to the unity of the church as well as to the unity of humankind. Our collective work as a Federation, through our many different ministries and activities, should be measured by this yardstick.
- (4) As we are meeting here in the Holy Land, I would like us to clearly bear in mind our historical roots. Many Lutherans see their tradition as going back to the Reformation only. But all Christian traditions are historically connected with Christ and the early apostolic church. In these origins, there is unity. Meeting here now, reflecting on the disunity that has characterised much of the subsequent history of the church and society, we have an opportunity to return to one source of our faith, and to be voices for unity.
- (5) As a Christian world communion that sees itself totally as a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, we see ourselves also as being totally committed to the ministry of reconciliation which is Christ’s calling to all who confess his name. In this light let me report to you especially this year on the ecumenical work in which we are involved as a Federation, bilaterally and multilaterally.

Lutheran-Orthodox Relations

- (6) The ecumenical landscape in the Middle East reflects a strong presence of the Orthodox tradition. In this regard we are grateful that among our esteemed ecumenical guests this year we have with us His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, representing His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch.

- (7) In 1981 the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission was established. This means that the Commission will be celebrating its 25th anniversary next year. This dialogue has significantly increased our mutual theological understanding of core aspects of the Christian faith. Presently, the Commission is preparing to focus on the sacrament of Holy Communion, which will be the main topic when the full Commission meets next year.

Lutheran – Roman Catholic Relations

- (8) Since we were last gathered, Pope John Paul II has died. The late Pope was deeply committed to the service of reconciliation in the world. He was never afraid to enter into difficult situations if there was an opportunity to serve the cause of peace. His engagement in both ecumenical progress and interfaith dialogue clearly belonged to this commitment. For us as Lutherans John Paul II will be remembered especially for his personal support for the process that led to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)*.
- (9) The new Pope, Benedict XVI, contributed, in his earlier capacity, to resolving the difficulties which remained after the first Roman Catholic response to the *JDDJ* in 1998. Let us pray that the pontificate of Benedict XVI may bring rich fruits of reconciliation among all Christians and within the human family at large.
- (10) In September this year, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity will complete its current phase after nine years of work on “The Apostolicity of the Church”. Together with Cardinal Kasper I will attend the final sessions of this commission, to express our gratitude for the persistent, arduous work contributed by the dialogue members throughout this phase.

Methodist affirmation of the JDDJ

- (11) The ecumenical potential of the *JDDJ* is not limited only to the relationship between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Its ecumenical potential comes from the nature of the doctrine of justification itself. The *JDDJ* shows clearly the interconnectedness of faith and life in faith. This has made it possible for the World Methodist Council (WMC) to develop a Statement affirming the *JDDJ*. This Statement is included in this year’s Council agenda.
- (12) The Statement itself is a Methodist text, not a trilateral one. But it is to be officially welcomed by the LWF and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU). It was shared with our Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs last year and is presented for action by the Council this year. It has already been endorsed by the PCPCU. According to the current plan the WMC, the LWF and the PCPCU will sign the “Official Common Declaration” during the Methodist World Conference in Seoul next July 2006.
- (13) For a theological clarification in this connection of the Lutheran perspective on “simul iustus et peccator” I refer you to the comments developed at the request of the Council by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, which is also in your Agenda. For these very helpful comments I thank especially the Institute’s director, Professor Theodor Dieter.

New dialogue Commissions with Anglicans and Reformed

- (14) The first ecumenical document to declare that doctrinal condemnations do not apply was the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) between Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. This Agreement remains a major ecumenical contribution, with fruits of communion relations having been reaped in various parts of the world.
- (15) Anglicans and Lutherans have never condemned each other. Their mutual closeness in the understanding of the church and its ministry has made it possible for Anglican and Lutheran churches to achieve communion relations today through different agreements of mutual recognition around the world.
- (16) New international dialogue commissions have been established with the Anglican Communion and with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. They will both begin their work next year. The two commissions will study the international significance of the regional agreements reached with Anglicans or Reformed respectively, and they will also give attention to the impact of different ecumenical methodologies.

Lutheran – Mennonite Study Commission

- (17) Church history contains painful memories of persecution, as well as of mutual condemnations. In the Sixteenth Century, anabaptists were among those who suffered torture and killing in significant numbers, a process encouraged also by Lutherans. The condemnations of anabaptists in Lutheran confessional writings lent support to these persecutions, unfortunately.
- (18) In June this year the first meeting of the new Lutheran – Mennonite International Study Commission took place in Strasbourg. This Study Commission is mandated to consider the Lutheran condemnations of anabaptists, their correspondence to the teachings of anabaptists at the time, and their applicability today. The process builds on the results of national Lutheran – Mennonite dialogues in France, Germany and the USA. When the commission has completed its work the possibility of an official statement regarding these condemnations may come on our agenda.

Lutheran – Pentecostal Conversations

- (19) One of the major tensions within and among Christian churches today has to do with differences between “mainline” and Pentecostal forms of Christianity. Tensions stem not only from the strong growth of Pentecostal churches around the world, but also from the impact of charismatic movements within many of our member churches, e.g. with regard to the practice of re-baptism.

- (20) It has been the wish of the LWF for many years to be in conversation with Pentecostals. This wish has been expressed by the Council and also by the Tenth Assembly. I am happy to draw your attention to what is also mentioned in the report from the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, namely that in December 2004 the Institute initiated international conversations with theologians representing Pentecostals. This was done in consultation with the LWF and represents a very promising beginning, focusing on issues that are central for both Lutherans and Pentecostals. The talks are to be continued later this month of September. I trust that all of us support this initiative of the Institute and join with me as I express our gratitude, especially to Professor Kenneth Appold, for the efforts undertaken in this important area.

The Ecumenical Movement in Transition

- (21) In the 20th century the modern ecumenical movement was initiated through the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. The struggle for Christian unity subsequently confronted many challenges, including those presented by the great depression and the Second World War, and was strongly promoted by the establishment of the World Council of Churches and by the Second Vatican Council.
- (22) Today we find ourselves faced with new challenges and as well as new opportunities. Ethical issues related to economic changes, biotechnology and human sexuality have come to the forefront in the life of the churches. These challenges threaten to produce new patterns of division within the church universal. But they also represent opportunities for the churches to grow. The challenges themselves are inescapable. The churches must find ways not only to live with them, but also to deepen their spiritual insight in relation to them and improve their pastoral wisdom and guidance accordingly.
- (23) Today the ecumenical movement is also experiencing a paradigm shift, both by the increasing numerical strength of churches in the South, and by the decreasing numerical and financial strength of many churches in the North. Numerous ecumenical church organisations have emerged in the areas of emergency and refugee relief (e.g. ACT), development (e.g. APRODEV), the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, advocacy (e.g. the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance) and many others at national and regional levels. It is obvious that avoidable duplication is on the increase. Funding for all these activities has become more and more difficult. There is growing dependency by churches on related agencies/organisations, which in turn are heavily dependent on Northern governmental funding. It is quite clear that we cannot go on in this way. We need to reshape the current ecumenical landscape.
- (24) In this context, the WCC has taken a praiseworthy initiative. It has arranged for a broad discussion to review the coherence of the ecumenical movement under the theme of “Reconfiguration”. This initiative is as intriguing as it is challenging. It is intriguing, because it is not always self-evident what we are actually talking about. It is challenging, because it may herald far-reaching consequences. It calls all those engaged in ecumenical work to pause and take a critical review of what they are doing and give an account of how they are contributing to the unity and mission of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

- (25) We must realise that creating a more appropriate ecumenical landscape is not only a matter of structures but of theology as well. Regarding reconfiguration we must therefore engage with others in *common, theologically purposeful* reflection.
- (26) The WCC remains the most comprehensive expression of and reference for the ecumenical movement. As such, it has a significant leadership role in this process. It must be a catalyst for the right changes. I gather that WCC is open towards reconfiguring itself and its structures. Therefore, a reconfigured WCC should accommodate the Christian world communions (CWCs) in new, creative ways and accept them as significant contributors to the ecumenical agenda.

WCC Assembly and Central Committee

- (27) The coherence of the one ecumenical movement is currently in need of concrete common expressions. The Assemblies and Central Committee meetings of the WCC can be re-designed to become the *fora* that could in themselves bring us closer to a re-configured ecumenical movement.
- (28) During the WCC Assemblies and Central Committee meetings space is provided for the CWCs to hold their meetings. From my own experience this space has been important and helpful. However, the full potential offered by this space has gone unrecognised because there are no formal ways of reporting to either the plenary of the Assembly or to the Central Committee.
- (29) I am very conscious of the fact that I cannot speak on behalf of other CWCs. For that reason I will limit my arguments and perspectives to LWF's relationship with WCC. With this in mind, I would like to suggest the following for your consideration:
- (30) WCC Assembly and Central Committee procedures should provide recognised space for CWCs to meet in representative patterns of their own, for purposes that are in line with their self-understanding and specific needs. For some CWCs, formal decision-making could take place in such spaces. In addition to this, provision should be made for an institutional connection between reconfigured governance structures of CWCs and a reconfigured WCC governance structure. Concretely, I would envisage members of the LWF governing bodies being formally affiliated with the WCC governance structures such as the Central Committee. If this model were adopted, future meetings of CWC governing bodies could then be held within the schedule of the WCC Central Committee. This would certainly be more efficient in terms of time and money. But more importantly, it would promote a deeper and better understanding within the wider ecumenical movement and help forward our ecumenical goals. Maybe in the long run we might have a new WCC that is based on churches and communions.

LWF: An Instrument of the Ecumenical Movement

- (31) Lutheran churches have been key participants in a number of ecumenical agreements and

processes in recent church history. We have also, however, a shared responsibility for the crowded and complicated ecumenical landscape that lies before us today. It is our obligation, therefore, to contribute to the re-ordering of this landscape, by reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement.

- (32) The Lutheran World Federation, as instrument of Lutheran churches around the world, was formed by men and women who had a passion for ecumenical relations. This passion is clearly expressed in the LWF Constitution. Therefore, at the formation of the LWF side by side with the WCC no contradiction was seen between ecumenical and confessional loyalty. Confessional families such as the LWF carry out tasks, which would otherwise remain unattended to. Some of these tasks require the mutual confidence that follow from shared traditions. By being such an instrument, the LWF has never understood itself as being in rivalry or competition with the WCC or any other ecumenical organisation. It has understood its task as involving the calling and gathering of Lutheran churches that are scattered and isolated into a communion of churches and thus being their ecumenical instrument.
- (33) Because the LWF understands itself as both an instrument for Lutheran unity and an instrument of the wider ecumenical movement, participation in the reconfiguration discussion is not an option but an obligation. The LWF must itself be renewed in order to be of better service in fulfilling its ecumenical task.
- (34) In this regard I want to refer to the consultation on “The Future of the LWF in the Context of Ecumenical Reconfiguration” which was held at the beginning of June this year at Chavannes-de-Bogis. It was a very successful meeting, partly because we succeeded in drawing on the above-mentioned network of resources. The report from this event is part of the Council agenda.
- (35) As we look into the future and imagine the constructive role(s) that the LWF, among others, could play in the reconfigured ecumenical space, *I would strongly propose that the Council consider putting in place a new LWF by the year 2010*. To achieve this it would be important for the current Council to set into motion an inclusive consultative process among the member churches, national committees, mission organisations and related agencies and others seeking to envision a renewed LWF.
- (36) By the time of the next Assembly in 2010, twenty years will have passed since the LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, established the current LWF structure. This structure, I think we agree has served the member churches and the ecumenical movement well. The times in which we live are very ambiguous, and for that reason self-definition becomes necessary. The changes that have occurred since 1990 require a *new* LWF. The Council could authorise the Executive Committee to appoint at its next meeting a *Renewal Committee* of 10 persons; 4 from the Council, 4 from the member churches, and 2 persons representing mission organisations and related agencies. The Committee should consist of persons who have a good knowledge of both the LWF and the ecumenical movement.
- (37) As I said earlier, the reconfiguration process is not a matter of structures only, but it is also a matter of theology and self-understanding. The LWF is based on member *churches*. This has direct consequences also for its renewal. The organising theme around which a renewal process takes place should be the self-understanding of the LWF as a Communion of

Churches (with an emphasis on *koinonia*).

The Renewal Committee should focus amongst other topics on:

- Constitution and Bylaws
- Review of the governing bodies: size and composition of the Council, Executive Committee, Program and Standing Committees model of working
- Location and size of the Secretariat
- How the new LWF could incorporate in a formal way the regional heads of churches consultations; how process could strengthen in Lutheran unity for the sake of ecumenical engagement
- The role of regional and sub-regional offices
- Assemblies: time rhythm, size and relation to those of WCC, WARC, etc.
- Financial sustainability of the Lutheran World Federation in the years to come
- The future relationship between the Institute for Ecumenical Research (Strasbourg) and the LWF.

- (38) Let me underline once again the importance of ensuring an inclusive process in the renewal of the LWF. Some of the agencies have expressed a concern to me that they feel kept at an arm's length when it comes to making core decisions in the Federation, except when finances are needed for the organisation. I am sure the Council will agree with me that the LWF will stay successful by being inclusive. Maybe we should task the Renewal Committee that I have proposed to suggest an affiliation status for related agencies and mission organisations in the future constitution.
- (39) Let me now turn to some other issues that deserve the attention of the Council at this stage.

LWF's 60th Birthday

- (40) The year 2007 will be the 60th Birthday of the Lutheran World Federation. Birthdays are important landmarks in the life of human beings, and of institutions as well. I hope that the Council will support the idea that its meeting in 2007 be combined with a celebration. The city of Lund, the founding place of the LWF, would be an appropriate location in which to gather. On this occasion, leaders of LWF member churches could be invited not only for the celebration, but also for a joint encounter with the Council. And, as usual for our Council meetings, we would invite representatives of our ecumenical partners. Such a gathering could, among other things, provide an important platform for discussion of significant ideas regarding the future of our Communion. In preparing to place this idea before the Council, I have contacted our member church, the Church of Sweden, and hope to hear from them in this regard.

Excommunication

- (41) I have recently come across a practice that worries me - the use of excommunication in ways that raise serious theological and pastoral questions.
- (42) Excommunication is a form of church discipline, which can only be used as the last resort to

preserve the integrity of the church, its witness, and the faith of its members.

Excommunication pronounced by the church through its leaders, on the basis of a grave and consistent violation of God's will, does not separate from God's grace, but it excludes, usually for a certain time, from full participation in the life of the church and its sacraments. Its purpose is to lead the excommunicated person to repentance and renewed faith.

Ultimately, therefore, excommunication is an instrument of the gospel within the church.

- (43) In light of this, I am concerned about instances in which excommunication has been used by church leadership in power struggles, in order to marginalize persons who criticise or oppose them. This is a grave misuse of a pastoral form of discipline, turning it into a weapon of self-preservation by those in power. Such practice not only flouts the very core of the gospel and breaks up the spiritual communion of the church; it also diminishes the credibility of the church in the eyes of others. In short, this is a pattern of conduct to which we as a communion of churches cannot turn a blind eye. The gospel always needs to be maintained and proclaimed, not least in cases of tension and conflict in our churches.

An Advisory Doctrinal Commission for the LWF

- (44) You will recall my earlier proposal that a doctrinal commission be established for the LWF. Let me here reiterate and concretise this proposal.
- (45) First of all, let it be entirely clear that such a commission cannot, and should not, in any way infringe on the authority that each LWF member church holds in matters of church teaching and discipline. The commission I am calling for should have an advisory function within the LWF. It should therefore specifically be called an *Advisory Doctrinal Commission (ADC)*.
- (46) To whom and when should an ADC provide advice? It should, first of all, assist the governing bodies of the Federation in preparation for deliberations and actions that have doctrinal aspects. The governing bodies of the LWF will not themselves, on the basis of advice from the ADC, begin to take decisions binding the churches. But many issues that the Council, in particular, is required to handle often have doctrinal aspects. Some Council items are specifically of a doctrinal nature. Examples include decision relating to the *JDDJ* and the Methodist Statement on the *JDDJ*. Economic globalisation and human sexuality are other issues with significant doctrinal implications. So there have been, and will be in the future, many issues where processing of doctrinal aspects belongs naturally within the preparatory process for the Council.
- (47) How should the ADC be composed and administered? My vision is for a commission that would have an independent role, and should therefore consist, for the main part, of persons who are not Council members. But one or two Council members should be part of it, to provide for liaison with the Council. It should not be lodged in any particular department of the Secretariat. Its staffing and administration should be worked out in ways that resemble the current Task Force on Human Sexuality.
- (48) Who should appoint it and decide on the mandate? The establishment of an ADC would be a matter for the Council. I will be ready to develop a proposal in the course of the fall of this year, which could be discussed by the Executive Committee early next year. The proposal

could then come before the next Council meeting with a recommendation from the Executive Committee.

Illegitimate Debt

- (49) Foreign debt has been an important issue in the Lutheran World Federation's advocacy since the 1970s. It was a core issue in the program addressing the root causes of social and economic injustice and was at the time referred to as "unpayable debt". Many member churches were part of the global Jubilee 200/Jubilee South campaigns for the cancellation of unsustainable debt. More recently, the focus on this question has turned to the *legitimacy* of the debt.
- (50) The Tenth Assembly of the LWF issued a Public Statement on Illegitimate Debt which expressed the concern over the continuing debt problem calling it a "major barrier against eradication of poverty and fulfilment of basic human rights for all". It furthermore points to the fact that substantial parts of the external debts of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean are illegal in view of the fact that they result from loans granted to illegitimate and undemocratic governments. In many cases, the money was misused or diverted and only a minor part used for social development. The Assembly called the member churches to promote a more direct involvement of society in working for justice-oriented debt management.
- (51) On June 30, 2005, I wrote to UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, to express appreciation for the initiatives he had promoted for the cancellation of the debts of some of the world's poorest countries. I called, however, for an even more comprehensive resolution of the debt crisis, and for steps to be taken to ensure that future debts will be tested according to standards of legitimacy as well as economic sustainability.
- (52) The LWF has launched a program that supports and builds on what the member churches in Latin America, among others, are doing on this issue. Later this month (September 2005), LWF will convene a consultation in Buenos Aires to promote a move beyond denunciation to political advocacy on the question of illegitimate debt. I hope and expect that this consultation will establish a new foundation for action on this question by the LWF as a whole.

Conflict Resolution

- (53) *In member churches:* An excessive amount of energy in our churches, as well as LWF staff time, has to be spent on attempting to resolve conflicts within member churches. Problems associated with power relationships, ethnic tensions, theological disputes and ethical issues lie behind these conflicts. I thank God that in recent months a decade-long conflict in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria has been resolved. Pastoral delegations have also been sent to the churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Croatia, and elsewhere, where conflicts still persist. It is evident that these conflicts undermine the integrity of both the church and its witness. In the course of this meeting, the Program Committee for Mission and Development will address this concern and propose appropriate action.

- (54) *In society*: The LWF constituency has been kept informed through *Lutheran World Information* about a number of conflict resolution initiatives. Our recent initiatives in this area have focused primarily on the African continent, and have particularly emphasised inter-faith approaches to conflict resolution. Here I wish to highlight especially to the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) process and the Second Inter-Faith Peace Summit in Africa that was convened in South Africa in April 2005. Under the auspices of IFAPA, inter-faith peace promotion initiatives have been undertaken in the Sudan, Liberia, Togo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A number of important things have happened in this context:
- a) African religious communities have accepted to work together for peace promotion in a way that has never happened before.
 - b) For the first time, women of different communities and professions have been gathered in one place, representing the major seven religions of Africa. These women launched a campaign under the title “A Mother’s Cry for a Healthy Africa”. This event is a strong sign that women in Africa are determined to take a lead in the search for peace on this continent.
 - c) We in the LWF have ourselves grown in our understanding of other faith communities and in our commitment to inter-faith cooperation for peace.
- (55) The role taken by the LWF in launching and facilitating this process has been an important contribution to promoting African ownership of inter-faith efforts for peace in the continent, and to the establishment of a continent-wide constituency for inter-faith action for peace.

Churches Applying for Membership

- (56) There are two churches applying for membership. Amongst them is also the Free Lutheran Church of Norway that has been an LWF Associate Member since the year 1997. Within the framework of the National Committee of the Church of Norway they have taken a keen interest in the life and work of the LWF and their representative has always attended Council meetings. I recommend these applications for consideration by the Standing Committee for Membership.

LWF and the HIV/AIDS Campaign

- (57) The HIV/AIDS pandemic is such that there is a need to intensify also the work on a new theological understanding, in order to respond more adequately to the many challenges in the area of ethics, theology and human sexuality. Arriving at the core elements of such an understanding will be an objective of the third year of the LWF HIV/AIDS campaign. It is foreseen that in May 2006, four years after the launch of the AIDS campaign, most of the people who gathered in Nairobi in May 2002 and other regional representatives will meet again to evaluate the work accomplished so far and develop future plans. The agenda will include consideration of a draft document on “Lutheran Theology in the face of HIV/AIDS”. It is the LWF’s intention to include this document, together with other documents on the same issue, in a manual that will be made available to all member churches and will thus provide a resource book for church workers (pastors, catechists, evangelists, youth workers,

etc) in the difficult task of combating HIV/AIDS.

- (58) The LWF's Department for Mission and Development and Department for World Service already support 30-35 AIDS projects, amounting to approximately 3 million USD per year. In view of the devastating nature of this pandemic, however, the Council will agree with me that we have no other option than to scale up our efforts. Accordingly, the Secretariat has prepared a second phase of the LWF HIV/AIDS campaign for a duration of 5 years (July 2006 until June 2011). We have again approached the United Nations Global Fund for support amounting to 6.7 million USD, to be complemented with 2 million USD (400,000 USD per year) that we seek from our regular partner network.
- (59) In the next phase of our work on HIV/AIDS, we will especially concentrate on inter-religious cooperation, on engaging the membership of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) as partners in the campaign, on supporting the health programs and facilities of LWF and WARC member churches, and on increasing human resources in the regions. We will also increase our advocacy against stigmatisation of people living with HIV/AIDS and for equitable access to medications and treatment (in line with the LWF's commitment to the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance's HIV/AIDS campaign).

Studies

- (60) The Council approved at its last meeting a major new theological study program under the heading "Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches," whose foci and plans have now been further developed, along four main tracks:
- Life and Hope in the Face of Death and Injustice
 - The Triune God and the Divine Reality in Other Faiths
 - The Holy Spirit in the Life and Renewal of the Church
 - Church Unity amid Moral Diversity
- (61) An invitation has been sent to a number of theologians and theological institutions requesting them to provide – in writing – fresh theological thinking in response to crucial contemporary challenges facing the churches and the Lutheran communion as a whole. I kindly ask you as representatives of the member churches to encourage theologians from your own settings to participate in this effort.
- (62) The study program on "Spiritualism as a Global Challenge to the Church", which is entering its final stages, has been accompanied by the member churches with deep interest. A book based on consultations last year in Asia and Africa has recently been published under the title, "Ancestors, Spirits and Healing in Africa and Asia: A Challenge to the Church." The responses to this publication will contribute to the final global consultation in early 2006.

The Mission Document

- (63) The document "Mission in Context", which was officially received by the Council last year, is being translated into several languages, providing the possibility for a world-wide

distribution in the member churches. The reception of the document in the member churches, and the communication amongst them, will be accompanied by DMD. One interesting matter that is emerging is how the concept of "missional church" is being received and developed, especially when it relates to Lutheran ecclesiology and the different traditions of missionary engagement within LWF member churches. Another interesting issue is how holistic mission is understood and practised, and in which ways it will affect church structures. Last but not least, the process of reception will show whether "Mission in Context" can provide the impetus necessary for the member churches to engage in new forms of sharing visions, tasks and resources. The insights gained from this process will, of course, be collected and made available.

Communication

- (64) Enhancing of partnership and sharing of resources in communication – with member churches, partner organisations and ecumenical bodies – is of primary importance in the Federation.
- (65) Various cooperation agreements have been entered into with WCC and other partners at the Ecumenical Center, as well as with publishing houses.
- (66) Special communication tasks so far this year have been the planning of the media and communication operation for the Second Inter-Faith Peace Summit in Africa, which involved collaboration across LWF units, DWS field programs and the Nairobi Inter-Faith office. This task culminated in a workshop for journalists on inter-faith related issues in Mauritania and extensive reporting in LWI (May issue).
- (67) The changing realities in communication and information technology require new communication strategies and a comprehensive approach within the communion. Media literacy within the communion is essential with regard to access to the global media market. Three LWF departments (OCS, DMD and DWS) have embarked on joint programs to empower member churches and field offices to face the new media realities and to respond adequately to the new challenges.

To prepare the way for future leadership of youth, an international consultation was held in Lyon (France) launching the three-year-training program *Towards a Communicating Communion - A Youth Vision*. In July the first in a series of five communication workshops for DWS field offices took place in Uganda, focusing on the issue of "Media and Conflict".

Concern about Staff Reduction

- (68) I look with constant concern at the steady decrease in the number of staff employed at headquarters and in the field. On 1 July 2005, the number of staff employed in the LWF Secretariat amounted to 70 persons with permanent contracts and 7 interns. If we compare with the number of persons employed at the end of 2001 - 94 - this represents a reduction of 30%.
- (69) This figure gives reason for deep concern. Our commitment to keep within the approved

budgetary provisions accounts for this staff reduction, which has a clear negative impact on the work of the Federation.

- (70) I have brought my concern for a healthy balance between the number of staff, the work to be accomplished and the funds available before the previous Council a number of times, and I am bringing it before you today. At this meeting we shall discuss the strategic planning for the Secretariat. Regardless of the direction we will decide to follow, the size of the Secretariat is now approaching a critical level. I am therefore asking you, the Council, in view of your responsibility for the work of the LWF, to do all that is within your ability to review, and improve, the financial contributions from the member churches to enable the Federation to overcome the present constraints.

Conclusion

- (71) In conclusion I want thank the host church, its Bishop Munib Younan, the staff of the church, of the congregation and of this conference centre as well as the field program for their outstanding work under these difficult conditions. I thank President Bishop Mark Hanson for his leadership, the Council members, advisors, national committees and agencies for their support during the year under review, and also my colleagues from the Secretariat, the co-opted staff and the interpreters for a job well done.
- (72) As we gather in this place we are reminded again and again that we live between uncertainty and hope. It is in the light of this reality that I want to pay tribute to the mothers, and youth, and ordinary Israeli and Palestinian people who have kept peace alive in their hearts and in actions of good will towards others. I salute all those from both communities who have refused to allow walls to be erected in their hearts, shutting out the other. Their simple determination to coexist in friendship is the most powerful possible witness for peace in a troubled Holy Land. It is my prayer and hope that a new day is not far off when the children of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar (i.e. Isaac and Ishmael respectively) will find a way of sharing the fruits of God's promise in peace, that violence will cease and the physical walls that have been erected in this land will give way to corridors of communication and peace. May the persistent few - both Palestinians and Israelis communities - who refuse to be divided from each other, be the oasis of peace. May God give them strength and courage for the sake of the children in the Holy Land. For unless there is peace in the Holy Land there will be no peace in our global village.

I thank you.