

Embargo against delivery

Living in Communion in the World Today

Report of the General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

1. INTRODUCTION

- (1) Let me start by expressing our gratitude to the host church through Archbishop Anders Wejryd and Bishop Christina Odenberg of the Diocese in Lund. Thank you for the economic and human resources which you have so generously put at our disposal. Thanks are also due to the Dean of the Cathedral, Rev. Hakan E. Wilhelmsson, for his leading role in the worship preparation, as well as Rev. Ragnar Svenserud and his coworkers, without whose excellent logistical support we would not be assembled here today in such a comfortable way. We thank the government of Sweden for facilitating entry requirements for those who needed visas, the Mayor of the city of Lund, Annika Annerby-Janson, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lund, Göran Bexell, Spar Banken in Lund and the young stewards for welcoming participants at the Copenhagen airport and the railway station.
- (2) It is with the same sense of gratitude that I welcome all of you, council members, advisors, church leaders, national committee representatives, representatives of mission organizations and related agencies, staff, ecumenical guests, guests and visitors of different categories, stewards, accompanying persons and others, to this meeting of the Council and the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation. It is my prayer and hope that our time together will be inspiring and fruitful. The program before us is a packed one, but I hope that we may nonetheless count on your engagement, patience and understanding to see it through.
- (3) Let me take this opportunity to mention and thank in advance Mr Martti Ahtisaari, former President of the Republic of Finland, who will speak on “The House of Europe”. As UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the future status process for Kosovo, Mr Ahtisaari has a very busy schedule and I am therefore extremely grateful that he has accepted to address this gathering.

2. LUND 1947

- (4) President Mark Hanson has given us a sense of the mood at the time of the inception of the LWF in this historic city of Lund. What an anxious, solemn and dignified occasion it was, with 184 delegates from North America, Europe and Asia (India, China, Japan and Australia) committed to forming an international instrument for joint action in mission, diakonia and ecumenical engagement. Their determination and commitment were tested in more than one way. Europe was in ruins, with millions of people internally displaced. Except for Sweden and the USA, the European delegates came from countries and nations whose economies had been destroyed. For participants from Eastern Europe, coming to Lund meant crossing

military frontiers/zones controlled by Russian, American, British and French forces. Crossing such military check-points involved discouragingly long hours of waiting.

- (5) Despite these difficulties, delegates departed from Lund imbued with a shared sense of purpose, courage and hope amid the realities of brokenness and fragmentation.
- (6) While I am on the subject of brokenness and the fragmentation of society, I am reminded that this year we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of KALME. KALME is the Communication Committee of European Minority Churches founded at a time when the Iron Curtain divided Europe in two. Much like other organizations, KALME served as an important means of maintaining unity and communication across walls of separation, thus providing a sign of hope and solidarity in communion. Over the years these, minority churches in Europe have gained pastoral experience and theological depth nurtured in their specific contexts. In this regard I am reminded of my recent visit to Kazakhstan where I visited congregations scattered throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan. These congregations have retained their faith under extreme circumstances. When I left Kazakhstan and asked them what message I should communicate to the entire communion, they said, "Let them know we have survived". They have survived on the basis of their faith, which gave them hope and withstood the test of hardships. The durability of their faith is, in my view, a spiritual gift for the whole church.

3. PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF BEING IN COMMUNION TODAY

- (7) In his address, President Mark Hanson has reflected on what it means to live *as a* communion. I shall not repeat the important aspects he lifted up, but rather focus on a few issues that I consider as requiring our common deliberation. Since it is impossible to report on everything that the Secretariat has undertaken since the Council meeting in 2005, this report should be seen in the context of the extensive reports that you received ahead of time.
- (8) Throughout the sixty years of the LWF's existence, its assemblies have maintained a fundamental understanding of the life of the church in terms of proclamation, mission and diakonia. The Lutheran churches have expressed this self-understanding collectively through the actions of the Council and Executive Committee, as well as the various programs and activities of the Secretariat.
- (9) The Strategic Plan (SP) which is before you has been submitted to the Program Committees for consideration. It is an administrative tool based on policy decisions built around the four priorities areas identified by the Council on the basis of the actions and resolutions of the Tenth Assembly. In the Strategic Plan, we have identified many areas that require improvement, among them the future financing of the LWF. In the Treasurer's Report (Exhibit 9) and the SP you will have read that the Geneva coordination budget projects a deficit for the years ahead. There are a number of reasons for the projected deficits. One of them has to do with the fact that some member churches have simply not paid their membership fees as expected. If all churches pay their fair share of membership fees beginning 2008, it will be possible to balance the budget assuming that the present income remains the same. During the regional meetings, the area secretaries will distribute a list showing which member churches paid membership fees during the year 2006. Let me draw

your attention to the LWF Endowment Fund. This Fund was initiated upon the proposal by the General Secretary to the Council meeting in Namibia twelve years ago (1995). At that time, the idea was to secure an amount of USD 50 million (now changed to CHF 50 million) to be held in perpetuity, but using the interest to support the central work of the LWF. I am glad that today the Fund stands a little more than CHF 10 million. I want to recognize the presence of the Endowment Fund Board members who are holding their annual meeting here in Lund in the context of this Council meeting. While on the subject of finances, I would like to thank all churches, agencies, mission organizations, the Endowment Fund Board and others for supporting the administration and program budgets of the LWF.

- (10) In addition to the financial challenges, the SP identified the need to improve internal communication within the LWF and the Secretariat. This means that we cannot be an effective communion without prioritizing communication. In this regard a number of initiatives have been undertaken among them was to spiral the fourth area of priority throughout the three other priorities that were identified by the Council. Through the Office for Communication Services, DMD and DWS we have embarked on a joint program to empower member churches and field offices to face new media realities and respond adequately to challenges as they evolve. The three-year communication training program for youth leadership, “Towards a Communicating Communion – A Youth Vision,” began in April 2005 with an international consultation in Lyon, France, followed in 2006 by five regional workshops in Cambodia, Costa Rica, Rwanda, the USA and Norway. All regional training sessions are linked to LWF and member churches related events, and are designed to equip the participants not only with an understanding of communication tools, but with broader LWF-related issues.
- (11) It has come to my attention that some of the participants received their documents too late in order adequately to prepare for this meeting. The delay is regrettable and for reasons beyond the control of the Secretariat. I nonetheless welcome the concern, because it shows that participants wish to be well prepared for the deliberations of the Council. But this is a wider issue. It has to do with how we organize the administrative work schedules of the Secretariat and the Council on the one hand, and the schedules of the member churches, especially the National Committees, on the other. This requires that the meeting schedules and minutes of the National Committees be shared with the Secretariat. I therefore suggest that the Renewal Committee put this matter on its agenda for discussion at the next meeting for the sake of improving communion within the entire LWF.

3.1 *An Inclusive Communion*

- (12) The struggle to be an inclusive church, and therefore an inclusive communion, has been with the church from time immemorial. We are familiar with the story of Peter in the book of Acts (chapter 10) who, while in the city of Joppa, had a vision in which he saw a large piece of cloth lowered from heaven. Contained in the cloth was an *à la carte menu* of an assortment of creatures, which Peter was asked to banquet upon. In keeping with Jewish dietary laws, Peter found the offer unacceptable and said, “ ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.’ The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane’” (Acts 10:14-15). God’s criteria for inclusion is so much different from ours.

- (13) While on the subject of an inclusive communion, let me draw your attention to the usage of pronouns in the Prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. In that prayer, the usage of collective pronouns is communal: *our* Father, not *my* Father; give *us* this day *our* daily bread, not give *me* this day *my* daily bread; forgive *us our* sins, not forgive *me my* sins. These collective pronouns signify the nature of God's grace. Although God's grace is for each one of us, we cannot properly ask for it, if in doing so we do not identify ourselves with others. The church as the body of Christ is inclusive, therefore segregation or exclusion of others is contrary to its nature, or should I say, its DNA.
- (14) In this regard, I want to recall that despite significant progress, women continue to be subjected to exclusion both in the church and society. Member churches around the world know full well that the LWF is committed to supporting the ordination of women and men, and has encouraged those churches in which this is not yet the case to dialogue with their sister churches. I was delighted recently to receive the news of the first ordained women pastors in the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (India). There are about twenty women bishops in the LWF constituency, something no one would have thought of 60 years ago.
- (15) Although we committed ourselves to ensuring a minimum 40 percent participation of women, many church meetings and consultations take place without serious thought being given to this commitment. Unless and until we attend to gender mainstreaming in the life and work of our churches, we cannot truly witness to gender justice in our societies.
- (16) I am greatly encouraged by our member churches in India who have made the Dalit issue a central one on their agenda. According to the caste system, Dalits are classified as "untouchable", and relegated to an inhuman status in society. The LWF, the member churches in India and the World Council of Churches are planning a global ecumenical gathering on Dalit liberation in the near future.
- (17) It is worth noting that the Indian delegation at the first LWF Assembly 60 years ago, included Indians of low caste. I am grateful that from the beginning, the LWF did not practice exclusion on the basis of descent, ethnicity, gender, or race.
- (18) Since the Tenth Assembly, the LWF has begun to increase its response to the concerns of Indigenous Peoples. A consultation on this issue was held in Karasjok, northern Norway in September 2006, and will be followed in the course of this year by an Asian regional consultation.
- (19) The key issues are centred around:
- Ownership of traditional lands and natural resources; i.e., the use of forests, pastoral land, fisheries and mineral resources;
 - control of traditional spiritual centers and areas;
 - cultural self-determination;
 - the unabated exploitation of indigenous and traditional knowledge by commercial enterprises;
- (20) The question before us is how the cultural identities and gifts of Indigenous Peoples can be protected and sustained as living identities within our wider societies and the church. As a

family of churches in which different Indigenous Peoples are represented, and as a communion committed to diversity and inclusiveness, the LWF has a role to play and a voice to raise in respect of such issues. The challenge before us is to mainstream the concerns of the Indigenous Peoples, ensuring that their spirituality becomes a shared spiritual property of the church for the edification of all the saints.

3.2 *Poverty and Hunger*

- (21) By now it is somewhat of a platitude to suggest that globalization made the world smaller, while at the same time producing deeper divisions than ever before between the rich and the poor. The issues of poverty and hunger are part of the discussion with regard of globalization of the world.
- (22) The LWF/DMD/DTS sponsored consultation, “Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa,” in Arusha, Tanzania, in September 2006, clearly pointed to the seriousness and determination of the member churches in Africa to deal with this issue. Prophetically they warned that it is no longer acceptable that anyone should die from hunger on such a rich continent. They implied that hunger can be eradicated in Africa if there is a political will. Bishop Zaphania Kameeta, supported by the churches, civil society and senior parliamentarians in Namibia, called for the introduction of the “basic income grant.” This scheme would secure the basic needs of even the poorest citizens in Namibia. I believe that we all concur that it is a primary responsibility of any government to commit the resources of a country to ensure the basic welfare of all its citizens.
- (23) In this context, I cannot help but think of my home country, Zimbabwe, where a man-made disaster is currently looming. This is a country richly endowed with human and natural resources. Avoidable political mistakes have led to the total collapse of its economy and social institutions resulting in internal displacement and border crossing asylum seekers into neighboring countries. On March 11th the state authorities responded to calls for change and reform with unprecedented brutality attacking, wounding and killing participants during a peaceful prayer meeting. In a country, controlled by culture of intimidation, where there is no freedom of speech, the churches have bravely taken some initiatives and launched, at the end of last year, a vision for a possible future.

3.3 *Advocacy against Illegitimate Debt*

- (24) Economic injustice affects not only individuals but entire nations. Small steps have recently been taken to reflect and act upon the ethical imperatives arising from this unjust situation. The decision of the Norwegian government to cancel the alleged debts of several developing countries has set an example for others to follow. So have the Liberian government’s efforts to impress upon creditor countries and institutions the dreadful human suffering and deprivation caused by debt. The LWF has repeatedly called on the international community to define the criteria and procedures whereby international lending can never again become an instrument of oppression.
- (25) The LWF-sponsored program on illegitimate debt is one model, which although conducted in Argentina is inspired by the experiences of the Latin American region. In our view this is a

ministry for justice on behalf of the whole communion. On behalf of the LWF, let me thank Rev. Furlan and Rev. Schaad, who are the leading persons, and the member churches in Latin America for their leadership in this matter.

3.4 *Contributing to Peace*

3.4.1 In the Middle East

- (26) As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the LWF, we are reminded that this year also marks the fortieth anniversary of the occupation of Palestinian territories. On this occasion, we stand in solidarity with the churches in the Holy Land and the region in demanding an end to the occupation that has been identified as the main root cause of violence and suffering for both Palestinians and Israelis. For as long as this issue is not genuinely addressed, all peace initiatives, including the Road Map, Mecca Accord etc., will not lead to a just and sustainable peace. In this connection, we remind both communities that the two states solution is the only way to peace. This will be enhanced by a public acknowledgement of the right to exist of each of the communities.
- (27) Through its field program in Jerusalem, the LWF continues to contribute to peace by addressing the urgent material needs of the Palestinian community, particularly in the field of health care. The Augusta Victoria Hospital provides health care services in a number of areas, and it is essential that such humanitarian services be maintained and enhanced so as to avoid further deterioration of the already desperate humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. On the basis of the decision of the Council and the Board of Trustees, I led the LWF team that met with the Israeli government authorities to negotiate for a satisfactory arrangement on the matter of the Jerusalem program's tax status. I believe that things are moving, albeit slowly, toward an outcome that will protect and perhaps enhance the LWF's capacity to continue to provide the much needed humanitarian services in the region.
- (28) In this connection I want to lift up the pastoral work that the ELCJHL and other churches are providing in the Holy Land at this critical time in the history of the Middle East. They need our undivided support both in prayers and in material assistance. They represent the Christian witness in this tense environment where Christian numbers are rapidly decreasing due to forced immigration.

3.4.2 In Ethiopia and Eritrea

- (29) The binding decision of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission on the delimitation of the common border between the two countries was delivered four and a half years ago. The Ethiopian government's refusal to honor the Boundary Commission's decision continues to be a source of tension, which also complicates the search for peace in Somalia. Unless the African Union, the international community and especially the USA provide the necessary political leadership on this matter as soon as possible, confidence and trust between the two neighbors will be permanently eroded. Therefore, I call on the international community, especially the USA, to provide the necessary guidance and leadership for the effective implementation of the Boundary Commission's findings, as a starting point for securing peace in the region.

3.4.3 In Colombia

- (30) The conflict in Colombia is a major source of suffering for the people. After Sudan, Colombia is the country with the highest number of internally displaced people (2 million). The complexity of the conflict between the various armed factions makes the situation very difficult for the civilian population as they become deliberately instrumentalized by the various actors in the conflict. Targeted killings of grassroots leaders denouncing violence or helping to organize communities are common, and human rights defenders are depicted as terrorists. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia (IELCO) has taken a position in solidarity with the internally displaced people, and is ecumenically engaged in various processes aiming at the enforcement of international humanitarian law. Over the last years, the DWS has assisted the church in its response to internal displacement. Moreover, it has recently started a program to support the self-organization of communities, protect community leaders, and advocate internationally for the rights of the people in the country.

3.4.4 In Central America

- (31) Reports from El Salvador indicate that on average twelve killings occur per day, many of which are perpetrated with unprecedented brutality. At the end of last year, two Lutheran pastors (husband and wife) were murdered. To this day, nobody has been held accountable. Eyewitnesses are not willing to testify for fear of the consequences. The attorney general admitted to an international delegation visiting the Lutheran Church in El Salvador in the aftermath of these killings that they cannot cope with the number of killings, and that many cases simply cannot be taken up. In the midst of such a culture of intimidation and fear, the Lutheran Church in El Salvador has embarked on a courageous ecumenical and interreligious campaign against impunity and for the respect of life and human dignity.

3.4.5 Interfaith Diapraxis

- (32) The Federation is committed to the challenge of interfaith diapraxis. As a communion of churches, many of which exist in multireligious contexts, and as an organization with field programs and staff drawn from many different religious traditions and contexts, we have profound experience of practical diapraxis, as well as of the difficulties resulting from interreligious tensions. One of the lessons that we learnt over the years is that interfaith collaboration and action are among the most effective ways of promoting peace and community building.
- (33) This lesson is undergirded by the most recent deliberations at a seminar organized by DMD in Indonesia and bringing together Muslims and Christians after the catastrophe of the Tsunami. Representatives came from India, Thailand, Malaysia including Aceh and Nias. The main objectives of the seminar were to deepen dialogue and strengthen cooperation between Muslims and Christians, and to develop alternative models for and approaches to living together in harmony. Participants in this seminar came to realize that a dialogue in life is essential for living together in a religiously pluralistic context, because it entails overcoming economic, ethical, political, social and religious injustice through common action. In other parts of the world, there are similar initiatives bringing together leaders of different religious communities. Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) is one among those that are involved in peacemaking through action. Towards this goal, an Inter-religious

Commission has been inaugurated in June 2006 in Rwanda.

- (34) The Department for Theology and Studies continues to build on the experiences and reflections of member churches engaged in interfaith dialogue and diapraxis. Thus, for example, the Breklum consultation, “Beyond Toleration: Toward Deeper Relationships with Muslims,” emphasized the urgent need for churches to speak up against negative stereotypes and misuses of religion.

4. THE LUTHERAN COMMUNION AND THE ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

- (35) Our engagement in bilateral dialogues has led us to new avenues of reflection and practice with our partners. This justifies why we keep establishing new phases of dialogues, even with traditional partners. New dialogue commissions were established with the Anglican Communion and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and new stages are explored in these relationships.
- (36) During its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations in Bratislava last fall, the Lutheran-Orthodox Commission adopted a statement on the Eucharist. This statement shows substantial agreement regarding the nature and meaning of Holy Communion. Eucharistic theology is no longer an area of deep division, neither with the Orthodox nor the Roman Catholic Church. We have clearly moved beyond the traditional disputes around transubstantiation and come to a deeper, shared understanding of Christ’s real body and blood in this sacred meal.
- (37) The 200-page report produced by the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church on “The Apostolicity of the Church,” shows considerable theological agreement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics regarding what has constituted continuity in the life and teaching of the church since the time of the apostles. This text will now be sent to the member churches for careful study and comment. With the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity we are also engaging in a study commission of exegetes, which will consider the broader basis for the doctrine of justification in the Bible.
- (38) The study commission with the Mennonite World Conference is carefully considering the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Lutheran Confessional Writings, which gave strength to persecution and killings in the sixteenth century. We must recognize that Luther and Melancthon were directly involved in encouraging the persecution and expulsion of Anabaptists. As Lutherans we must face up to this tragic part of our history. The international study commission which has been set up builds on regional studies that have been completed in France, Germany and the USA. It is my hope that a formal statement, developed jointly with the Mennonite World Conference, can be adopted on this important subject by the Eleventh Assembly, Stuttgart, 2010. The possibility of adopting such a statement in the land of the Reformation, the home land of both Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon, will give a significant message adding credibility to our intention to build bridges of healing.
- (39) Building bridges of healing is an urgent task between and among Lutheran churches in the world that have no fellowship among themselves. Our credibility as Lutheran churches is constantly undermined by the fact that we are not in pulpit and altar fellowship with each

other in spite of the common confessional writings. This persistent division gives the impression that there are other reasons that divide us rather than confessional stands. The dialogue between the LWF and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) will hopefully lead towards such a reconciliation.

- (40) All these achievements would not be possible had it not been for the meticulous work of church theologians who have managed to reconcile the century old theological differences between the church families. We are grateful to all theologians in the member churches, the Geneva Secretariat and the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasburg for bringing us this far. The staff of the Institute carried additional responsibility for which we are grateful. I pay special tribute to Rev. Sven Oppegaard, former Assistant General Secretary, now back in the Church of Norway, for his contribution in this area.
- (41) What do we understand the goal of these global dialogues to be? A superficial answer would be what we are moving toward is a communion of communions. But how does this really work? Are we like larger and smaller circles moving closer together, sometimes intersecting? In a certain sense yes, but we must never lose sight of the fact that our life as Christian world communions/church families unfolds within the wider context of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which we confess in our creed. This is the setting within which all ecumenical endeavors have their shared foundation and ultimate meaning. The churches must allow the Holy Spirit to move them increasingly from isolation to koinonia. Bilateral dialogues are an essential instrument for the envisioned ecumenical goal.
- (42) When the Anglican Communion held its Lambeth Conference in 1998, the Lutheran bishops of the Porvoo churches were invited to take part as “bishops in communion.” The Anglicans saw their communion as “expanding” through ecumenical agreements with other churches. But this expanding through ecumenical agreements does not mean that Lutheran churches by signing agreements with Anglicans became Anglican, any more than the Anglican churches became Lutheran by signing Porvoo. But I appreciate the perspective that in a certain sense our communions expand through ecumenical agreements. This does not mean that we increase our areas of ecclesial jurisdiction, but that through ecumenical agreements we achieve greater theological consensus and increase our shared family life. We do this in the full realization that our confessional families are not really “ours” at all, but parts of the worldwide family of churches, the universal church of Christ.
- (43) We are aware that our communions are not permanent, but *transient*. It should be our common wish that in decades to come our confessional traditions grow more and more in mutual understanding and reconciliation, and manifest themselves ultimately as the full visible unity of the universal Church, although its shape and structure are not yet disclosed for us to see.
- (44) How does our ecumenical work influence our self-understanding? How do we move away from notions of ownership and self-determination toward notions of mutuality and participation? Historically, synods were developed to safeguard the gospel from false claims by groups and individuals. With time, they became instruments of church sovereignty and autonomy, which can be an impediment to the broader understanding of participation in the universal Church. It is easy for us to speak of our independence as churches, but no church can be fully independent in matters that are common to the whole church.

- (45) The Ninth Assembly of the WCC recommended a statement to the churches, “Called to be the One Church. An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue.” The time frame for responding to this statement coincides with the time for LWF Eleventh Assembly, i.e., the year 2010. Together with other Christian World Communions we should carefully study this text, along with the more comprehensive study document, “The Nature and Mission of the Church,” and consider using the occasion of our next Assembly to adopt an ecumenically oriented statement on the topic of the *Church*.

5. RENEWAL OF THE LWF

- (46) You have received the preliminary report of the Renewal Committee, which met during the month of January at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. This broadly composed committee took a first step in exploring how the LWF can be renewed more substantially through actions to be proposed to the Eleventh Assembly. Twenty years will have passed since the last renewal, or restructuring as it was called then, was decided on in Curitiba 1990.
- (47) The aging head librarian of a prominent European university is reported to have remarked, “I hate changes, even when they are for the better.” Changes are a chore, disrupting familiar patterns of doing things, often dear to us, even if we know they could be improved.
- (48) Similarly, changes in the organization of the Federation will be accompanied by experiences of loss and frustration. But this is the price we have to pay in order to avoid having to pay a higher price in the years to come. The 1990 restructuring was hotly contested, but it saved the Federation in terms of finances and global representativity on our governing boards.
- (49) Renewal requires accepting a certain degree of vulnerability and to let go of what is *wanted* and retain what is *needed*. In this exercise of renewal we need genuinely and openly to listen to the voices of the churches. The churches are central because it is first and foremost the renewal of relationships between and among churches. This is not a bureaucratic exercise. It is a process that is to be marked by mutuality and consultation. This time around, mission organizations and related agencies are represented on the renewal committee. Their inclusion is a recognition that they are an essential network built around the “marks” of the church – *mission and diakonia*. Since mission and diakonia cannot be outsourced, we need to design a qualitatively different LWF that will enable the member churches and the church agencies/organizations effectively to undertake the mandate of the LWF together, without a sense of competition, tension and alienation. We need to design structures that will promote participation, mutuality and accountability. This would mean that member churches, mission organizations, related agencies, associate programs and ecumenical institutes become part of what we define as the strength of what it means to be a communion in a reconfigured ecumenical landscape.
- (50) A new LWF would serve as a forum for consultation on those common issues that no one can do alone; it will be a safe space where, hopefully, all will participate as equals irrespective of numerical size or economic power. For this to happen the renewal should not only be a renewal of the LWF, but also a renewal of all the related instruments of mission, diakonia and ecumenism. As a Federation we support the WCC-initiated search for reconfiguration in

the ecumenical movement, “Ecumenism in the Twenty-first Century.” But there is no point in attempting to renew the ecumenical movement if we ourselves as Christian World Communions, mission organizations, related agencies and associate programs are not also renewed. It should be a simultaneous process. We are, as LWF, one of the global instruments embodying the ecumenical movement, and must assume our responsibility in support of the WCC initiative.

6. THE ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY-STUTTGART 2010 - A POTENTIAL LANDMARK

- (51) Upon the decision of the Council in 2005, the Assembly Planning Committee has been appointed by the Executive Committee. It met for the first time in January, and their report is before you for your consideration. You are requested to take action on specific recommendations. During the course of this consultation the host church will make a formal advance welcome to the Eleventh Assembly. We are grateful that both, Bishop Johannes Friedrich, chairperson of the LWF German National Committee, and Bishop July, of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg, are here to greet you.
- (52) Earlier in my report I made reference to some important event that should be linked to the Assembly in Stuttgart. Such event could be the possibility and the hope for:
- the nullification of the anathemas in the Lutheran confessions directed to the Anabaptists
 - the adoption of the statement on the Church
 - the adoption of a renewed LWF and a conclusion of current stand alone styles of LWF Assemblies
 - designing the Assembly in Stuttgart to be the most ecumenically shaped assembly in the history of the LWF, and point the way to a new stage in the ecumenical history and participation of Christian World Communions? If we can accomplish this on our part the 11th Assembly in Stuttgart will be nothing less than a LANDMARK in the history of the ecumenical movement

7. FUTURE ASSEMBLIES

- (53) The way in which churches and agencies have recently cooperated ecumenically, both globally and regionally, in areas such as HIV and AIDS, ACT International, ACT Development and around serious problems related to environment and climate change, has positively influenced reconfiguration. The bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues have brought the churches to significantly higher levels of mutual understanding and agreement than some decades ago. We must recognize this, and understand that the need for reconfiguration follows naturally from these developments. We know one another well, and when we come together in an Ecumenical Assembly, we will be looking at our partners as friends, instead of shunning them, as we might have done in years gone by. This represents a decisive difference from earlier, pre-ecumenical times. The time has come for us to live in the positive energy of this important development.
- (54) Some fear that such a development is a form of re-confessionalizing of the ecumenical

movement and the WCC itself. But the exact opposite must be the case. The confessional bonds, which exist within the Christian world communions can, when rooted in the same Christ, be a strong theological and spiritual strength in the search for unity also among the families of different traditions. An Ecumenical Assembly would be much more than a social event. It would have theological and ecclesiological dimensions. Because of the different traditions, there is a need to carefully define what “Ecumenical” Assemblies means; who has the authority to convene an Ecumenical Assembly? I hope that the new Joint Consultative Commission between the WCC and the CWCs, which will meet for the first time in May this year, will begin to explore this matter, including the important question of how such an event might possibly be convened.

8. 2017: 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARTIN LUTHER’S NINETY-FIVE THESES

- (55) For many, especially in Germany, the year 2017 is a preoccupation. It must be commemorated ecumenically and the LWF will no doubt play a central role in the preparatory process. Our ecumenical partners expect this of us. We have agreed with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to undertake a joint, bilateral study process on the Reformation. Towards this goal we intend to ask the next Catholic-Lutheran dialogue commission, yet to be appointed, to implement this project. Obviously, such a study would not only be an historical and scholarly enterprise, but a way for us further to clarify and strengthen our ecumenical relationship.
- (56) Through the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, we have encouraged Faith and Order to consider a multilateral study on the Reformation. Since for many historical and ecclesial reasons the Reformation unintentionally split the Western church, there are good reasons why the diverse traditions which see themselves as either rooted in, or impacted by, the Reformation should attempt together to explore what was at stake in the sixteenth century. This could be a good sequel to the Faith and Order ecclesiology study, to which responses are expected by the year 2010.
- (57) While there will obviously be many celebrations, the LWF should take responsibility for one major commemorative event. What city would have a stronger symbolic meaning for this than Jerusalem? What would be a more significant setting than Jerusalem in order for the Reformation faith to be examined for its ecumenical and interfaith meaning and potential? A well prepared commemorative gathering could open new vistas. What does it mean for us as Christians to be the spiritual descendants of Abraham together with Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land? What does it mean in this land, that we are saved by God’s grace alone, without works? And how can we see the role of good works in a new light, where they do not merit grace, but inseparably belong to our faith?

9. FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

- (58) The report of the task force considers how, as churches and as a communion, we can best handle issues of family, marriage and sexuality. An important reason for focusing on this broad topic is the recent discussion on sex relations involving partners of the same sex. As more and more societies have established legal frameworks for same-sex partnerships, the

churches, which for centuries have been instrumental in the blessing of marriages, have been challenged to consider their practices.

- (59) In response to the request of the Tenth Assembly, the Council called for a task force whose report is now before you. The document is not meant to settle the controversial issues as such, but to recommend certain guidelines.
- (60) In many cases, we prefer to resolve differences of opinion by agreeing that they are compatible and complementary. In this area, the positions we adopt are to some extent incompatible. So the question is how do we live together in the church with incompatible differences regarding a sensitive ethical matter? How do we live together in the communion with the diversities that exist within the global communion and within our member churches? How does our Christian faith and confessional basis impact the way in which we handle our different positions? This is the main issue that the report has struggled with, and I recommend it to you for your deliberation.

10. EPISCOPAL MINISTRY WITHIN THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

- (61) The draft statement on “Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church” is the result of a study process that began in 2000. The background was the strongly felt need, to clarify the basic commonalities in understanding and practice within our communion regarding the ministry of supervision, as we relate ecumenically to different traditions.
- (62) In some Lutheran churches, the ministry of oversight is carried out by bishops, in others by ordained persons with other positions and titles, such as President, Ephorus, etc. They exercise this responsibility in ways that are personal, collegial and communal. And in all matters of church governance and formal decisions they act jointly with synodical structures, in which also lay persons take part, often as a majority. In Lutheran churches, synods also exercise supervision, *episkopé*, according to varying patterns.
- (63) The diversity in this area should not overshadow the substantial basic unity among the Lutheran churches in this area. This is important for our clarity and accountability in our relations with one another and our ecumenical partners. This is why this “Lund” statement has been developed. In this regard I would hope that you officially receive this text at this meeting. Thereafter, it can be sent to the member churches for their careful study and use in their contexts.

11. CONCLUSION

- (64) In the sixty years of its existence, the LWF has traveled a road that could not have been foreseen by its founders. On this journey we believe to have been guided by Christ, who walked ahead on a road unknown to us. When we now look back, we recognize the grace and compassion with which we have been guided to the point where we find ourselves at present, to the spot of our foundation, for the celebration of our anniversary. We recognize that more important than the places we visited along the way, and more important than the things we did on the journey, are those with whom we traveled and, above all, the guide we followed,

Jesus Christ.

- (65) May Christ in his love and compassion continue to guide us into the future on the path that he has marked for us.

Thank you.