

## **LIVING AS COMMUNION IN THE WORLD TODAY**

Address to the LWF Council and Church Leadership Consultation, March 2007

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*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:15-17)*

- (1) As I have prepared to come to this gathering, I have been imagining what it would have been like to come to Lund 60 years ago for the first assembly. Having read some accounts and narratives, three words best summarize my sense of the atmosphere of that historic founding event: *hesitance, urgency, joy*.
- (2) *Hesitance*. As Dr Noko has pointed out in his foreword to *From Federation to Communion*: “The launching of the LWF in 1947 with its vision for a global Lutheran movement was indeed a bold step, given the political context of those times. It was a complex exercise that brought people and communities together who, although sharing essentially the same confession and theological heritage, had obvious cultural and political differences. The delegates assembled in Lund came from nations that had been at war. It was not easy for those delegates, affected as they were by such a devastating war, to leave behind their national experiences.”<sup>1</sup> The text of the history *From Federation to Communion* sharply states the difficulty: “The wounds were deep, and healing was an immense task for the churches.”<sup>2</sup> I can picture delegates hesitating as they first approached the entrance to that assembly—could there truly be a common future for Lutherans? Did they truly belong together?
- (3) But the churches did come together, and with a strong sense of *urgency*. For there was an immediate human crisis. In the words of an early LWF staff member, Dr Kenneth Senft: “At the end of the second World War, several hundred thousand Lutheran displaced persons were among the millions of refugees in Europe... The attention of the Lutheran global community was focused on this situation of need at the same time plans were being finalized for the first Lutheran World Federation Assembly to be held in Lund, Sweden, June 30-July 6, 1947. Seeing the need and wanting to assist, the LWF embarked on this first “service” program requiring field staff: the ‘Service to Refugees.’ The Lutheran churches of the world came

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<sup>1</sup> Ishmael Noko, Foreword, *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, eds. Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari and Norman A. Hjelm (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997) p. xi.  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

with aid, gave assistance and helped families become established in new homes all over the world.”<sup>3</sup>

- (4) At a time when one out of every six refugees was a Lutheran and the roots of the LWF were forged responding to those needs, Paul Empie challenged the founding members to remember that the diaconal mission to the church was to serve all people in need and not just our own. Since that moment the LWF has done precisely that and is now recognized as a leader throughout the world in responding to human needs.
- (5) And as if the human crisis following World War II were not urgency enough, there was wide recognition that (quoting the history again), “The war had great consequences for Lutheran self understanding in relation to ecclesial identity, to ethical judgments concerning society and nation...”<sup>4</sup> It was time for a thorough rethinking of Lutheran identity, for a renewed understanding of the vocation of the Lutheran movement, for fresh theological use of the treasures of our confessional heritage. In such a situation, it was urgent that Lutherans discover ways to ponder these crucial things *together*, to do this fundamental theological work in close conversation.
- (6) Hesitance and urgency were certainly in the room in 1947, but mostly we hear from the eyewitnesses of something else again--*joy*. Joy because with the end of the terrible war both common service work and common theological efforts were at long last possible. Joy because old mission relationships were being restored and new common efforts imagined. Joy because, quoting *From Federation to Communion*, “the world had experienced a virtual seismic shift in the international ecumenical atmosphere... it was possible to see new areas of relationship with the Roman Catholic Church differing totally from the spirit of indignant confrontation that had marked the period between the two world wars... the new realities of ecumenical respect and dialogue which were to appear in subsequent decades could be foreseen.”<sup>5</sup> Joy because just as new forms of cooperation and dialogue were coming to be both among Lutheran churches and between them and long-estranged sister churches, at the same time whole new networks of governmental and non-governmental institutions of international dialogue and cooperation were being born. And so, even as a new “cold” war began, bringing new divisions and tensions to the world, this new LWF was more than a single light in the darkness; it was part of a new constellation of hope.
- (7) And now 60 years later, we have returned to our place of birth. So much has changed not only in the world around us but in the LWF itself. We have grown from predominantly Euro-American to genuinely worldwide; from federation to a communion of churches; from overwhelmingly older male in governance to the inclusion of women and youth; from Lutheran *and* ecumenical to Lutheran *and* ecumenical *and* inter-religious. Yet we come to Lund perhaps once again with some *hesitance*, for while our countries have not recently been at war with each other, they have sharp differences about current and potential military conflicts and there are very real tensions between our countries’ economies and cultures. There is the ongoing debate—political, academic, and theological—on the nature and reality

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3 Kenneth Senft, “The Lutheran World Federation and The Displaced Person,” occasional paper published by Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Gettysburg, Penn.; 1952.

4 Jens Holger Schjørring et al., *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

of a growing global empire and how to respond to it.

- (8) We come to Lund certainly with a sense of *urgency*. For there are today over 20 *million* refugees living in camps across the globe and so our original service program is more important than ever as are our shared efforts to stand with those who struggle against poverty and HIV/AIDS. While economic globalization continues to benefit some and makes us even more interdependent, it often comes at great price for those who live in poverty and work in deplorable conditions. Our unwillingness to alter consumptive lifestyles and sacrifice economic gain now places the creation on the verge of ecocide. The simple fact that we are a more interconnected and interdependent world is not enough to make for peace—the hard work of reconciliation and justice remains and is more pressing than ever.
- (9) At this gathering, let us renew our resolve to work for a lasting and just peace between Palestinians and Israelis; an end to the genocide in Darfur; a lasting peace in Iraq, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and places of conflict throughout the world. Let us reject the use of religious convictions as justification for violence and oppression. So, even as we reject terrorism, let us challenge those who seek to enslave us to fear by making terrorism the sole defining global reality calling for response. Fear drives us to fortify borders, erect barriers, and become possessive of what we have, distrustful of others, and finally anti-neighborly. Faith frees us to confront and change economic, political, and religious structures that perpetuate power and privilege based upon race, gender, and class. Faith frees us to break our silence and stigmatization of those with HIV/AIDS and to become agents of healing, education, and advocacy.
- (10) We come to Lund with a sense of urgency regarding ecumenical and inter-religious relationships. We face an ecumenical situation in which, as Cardinal Kasper has noted, we find ourselves having made enormous strides in the past 60 years and yet still so far from the goal with new difficulties and complexities ahead of us.<sup>6</sup> The stakes involved in inter-religious understanding (and therefore the responsibility of those communities, institutions and networks that can nurture it) have perhaps never been higher. Our global environmental challenges require not only unprecedented governmental and economic cooperation but also the border-crossing relationships, conversations, and wider imagination that make such cooperation and bold action possible—the sorts of relationships, conversations, imagination, action that the LWF is so well placed to foster and nourish.
- (11) Our reasons for hesitance and urgency are both very real. But we, just as the founders, have even more reason to come to Lund with a sense of *joy*. We rejoice because now membership in the LWF means we are in altar and pulpit fellowship with one another in communion. We shout for joy when a dam is constructed or a well is dug and a village is given water for life. We have danced with one another when land mine efforts have successfully removed or eliminated the threat. Songs of praise and thanksgiving echo from village to village when weapons are laid down and peace accords are signed. As infants, children, and adults are bathed in the baptismal waters of God's grace, we sing our alleluias. Ours is a resurrection joy, but in the midst of suffering and death.

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<sup>6</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper, "Ecumenism in Transition: Prolusion of the President," given at the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 15 November 2006, p. 2.

- (12) With the writer of Hebrews we say, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”<sup>7</sup>
- (13) Joy that what was born 60 years ago has grown so vigorously and has developed so far in its self-understanding and work that now the LWF finds itself in this historical moment with a rich and compelling vocation—a vocation that can be summed up perhaps most completely and significantly in the phrase, “Living as communion in the world today.”

### **Living as Communion**

- (14) We are called to live as communion because, most profoundly, living *is* communion. Christian faith and contemporary science agree that *to be* is *to be in relationship* and that *to be alive* is to be immersed in an amazing, complex, multidimensional web of relationships. The recently elected bishop of Lund, Antje Jackelén, has pointed out that in our time both scientists and theologians have taken up the social image of a “dance” to describe what is most fundamentally real.<sup>8</sup> And the revival of Trinitarian theology in the last decades has reminded us that life *par excellence* is the life of the Trinity and not of some self-identical One alone with itself; to pick up Jackelén’s image—life is first and foremost the dance of the Trinitarian relations—communion in the strongest sense of the word.
- (15) Our creaturely life is a gift of communion. Oswald Bayer has stated this boldly: “Creation means the establishing and preservation of communion... Creation as communion takes place as address to the creature by the Creator, so that the creature may answer and pass on to the fellow creatures through word and deed what he or she has heard and received.”<sup>9</sup> Monica Melancthon reflects on this in terms of the first two chapters of Genesis: “The two attributes of the breath of life and the image of God guarantee human beings a privileged place among living things and call them to the grace of full communion with God. In the calling to co-creatorship lies the gracious act of God and the definitive prophecy about the nature and vocation of human beings. It confers on all people a worth or dignity that no person or system—whether political, economic, or social—can take away. This call extends to all humanity.”<sup>10</sup> Yet with this call also comes great responsibility for our stewarding the intricate web of interdependent ecosystems of which we are a part.
- (16) Sin, of course, deeply disrupts our communion both with God, with the creation, and with each other. We become both individually and corporately, to use Luther’s language, *incurvatus in se*—curved in on ourselves. Our new life in Christ is communion restored. But not only restored. For in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ God initiates a more profound, more radical communion in which “nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). Baptized into the death and

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7 Hebrews 12:1-2.

8 Antje Jackelén, “The Power of Genes and Molecules: On the Relevance of Science for the Liturgical Language of the Church,” *The Gift of Grace*, eds. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters and Peter Widmann (Minneapolis, Minn., Fortress Press) 2005, p. 352.

9 Oswald Bayer, “Creation as History,” *Ibid.*, p. 253.

10 Monica Melancthon, “The Grace of God and the Equality of Human Persons,” *Ibid.*, p. 45.

resurrection of Christ, our relationships with God and each other are renewed *and transformed*. Such communion is not simply life but life abundant, overflowing; not only life but a life-giving dynamic, a Spirit-driven disturbance within and among us that puts us in motion, that sets us on the Way in mission. It is communion as a community that is *ecclesia*--a called-out people--every *incurvatus* turned inside out in a dance that moves to the neighbor.

- (17) Such communion is sheer *gift*, God's action, radical grace. It is also *task*--both the movement of the Spirit and our vocation, both life and a way of life. For, as Kjell Nordstokke has underlined, we have been called by one who is "among you as one who serves" into a communion that is a *koinonia* of *diakonia* of reconciliation that reaches across every border and boundary to all the world: "To be in Christ implies being in his XARIS--in his work of love."<sup>11</sup> To be caught up in the work of such love can only mean extraordinary, ceaseless activity. In addition, there is much both in ourselves and in our social structures that resists communion, that is *incurvatus*. Since we are *simul iustus et peccator*--at the same time justified and sinner--communion is *hard* work and can even seem counterintuitive, countercultural, unnatural. And in the face of the depth of human suffering, injustice and oppression, communion can appear difficult to the point of sheer impossibility.
- (18) It is here that the theology of the cross becomes most essential. As Yacob Tesfai has written, "Wherever there is suffering, there are found not only *the crucified people* but *the crucified Jesus* as well... In this understanding there is a unity and solidarity between Jesus and those who are suffering in their daily existence from unjust structures created by human beings. Their cries meld into those of Jesus. He and the suffering people are one; he is one of them."<sup>12</sup> Simon Maimela sums up this theology of the cross: "to know Christ is to know the cross and to understand God under the crucified flesh."<sup>13</sup>
- (19) And so communion in Christ in a world of brokenness, sin and injustice is necessarily a life-giving way of the cross--a solidarity in suffering, a fellowship of resistance, a community of faith that lives and acts in hope for the world that God so loves. This life-giving way of the cross opens out to endless tasks in every direction, down hard roads it would be easy to avoid. But precisely so it is radical freedom, springing from God's amazing grace. And it makes it possible for Christian community to be more than one more parochialism or imperialism, a communion of the cross rather than a communion of glory, a persistent ministry of reconciliation and healing without borders.

### **Living as Communion: as Lutherans**

- (20) The dynamic of communion is inherently border-crossing, reconciling, universal; so one could easily wonder how there could be any justification for a specifically *Lutheran* communion of churches. Isn't it a problematic distraction from or even barrier to the goal of full ecumenical communion? That would be true if our communion as the LWF were about rest and not motion, if we were simply "Lutheran-centric." But if our communion is life

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11 Kjell Nordstokke, "The Theology of Diakonia," a paper presented at the installation of Anders Wejryd as Archbishop of Uppsala, 2 September 2006, p. 8.

12 Yacob Tesfai, "The Crucified People," *The Scandal of a Crucified World*, ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, New York; Orbis Books) 1994, pp. 10-11.

13 Simon S. Maimela, "The Suffering of Human Divisions and the Cross," *Ibid.*, p. 40.

overflowing—not only life but a life-giving dynamic, a Spirit-driven disturbance that sets us on the Way in mission, if it is *ecclesia* (a called-out people), every *incurvatus* turned inside out in a dance that moves to the neighbor—then a Lutheran communion can exercise a profound ecumenical vocation. And in such a communion, the particular ecumenical charisms of our member churches can themselves better come to light and be put to work.

### **Evangelical/Missional**

- (21) The double concerns of being evangelical and missional, confessional and ecumenical will mark our living together as communion. Consider the central, driving Lutheran concern—indeed, passion—for the free course of the gospel, for the unimpeded flow of God’s self-communication as promise. On the one hand, this is an *evangelical* vocation requiring close attention to whether it is truly the *evangel* (the pure gospel) that is proclaimed. Because there are so many ways to distort or obscure the gospel—or simply to substitute another gospel—being evangelical means being careful and critical, it requires unending questioning and serious debate about what we teach and preach along with ongoing scrutiny and reform of worship and all our structures and practices.
- (22) At the same time it is evangelical, our vocation is *missional*: it is not enough that the gospel is pure, it needs to be heard, it wants to *move*. Being missional means taking courage from the fact that, as Lamin Sanneh has put it, “Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language... a translated and translating religion”<sup>14</sup> and so stepping out and taking risks, being curious and inventive, removing barriers, crossing borders, and discovering new channels so that the gospel can have free course to move in every direction, so that this creative Word can do its work in accomplishing God’s mission in every place and dimension of human existence, so that God’s will might be done even among us. This missional imperative drives most obviously as Sanneh suggests to activities of translation and contextual proclamation; it also calls us to face squarely whatever political, social, economic and cultural divides and injustices contradict the gospel and make it inaudible, to seek to dismantle them where necessary and to transform them where possible.
- (23) To be genuinely Lutheran, to serve the free course of the gospel, requires both evangelical rigor *and* missional daring. A Lutheran global communion is a natural expression and instrument of this double concern. For a fellowship of churches proclaiming the gospel in different vernaculars in widely different cultures and contexts makes possible a rich and urgent conversation of affirmation and admonition. Quoting the message from our Tenth Assembly: “we are called to share our resources and perspectives with each other, as well as to challenge and provoke one another to new horizons of faithfulness that go beyond what we can see or do as individual member churches.”<sup>15</sup>
- (24) In other words, living as communion means walking together shoulder-to-shoulder in relationships of accompaniment. Such walking together in God’s mission implies mutuality and interdependence. The accompaniment model holds the potential to create a radical shift in power in today’s global relationships. The mutuality of walking side-by-side means equal

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14 Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans) 2003, p. 97.

15 The Lutheran World Federation, “Message from Tenth Assembly,” (Geneva, Switzerland, LWF), p. 3.

sharing of decision making and resources. It insists that old assumptions be challenged and that we listen to companions' interpretation of mission in their context.<sup>16</sup>

- (25) Through our common theological studies, through our common diakonal work, and through a whole range of conversations and opportunities to "overhear" each other's proclamation, worship and teaching and to see each other's work, we become accountable to others with different angles of vision, with different insights, blind spots, strengths and temptations.
- (26) Together we can discover how to speak the Gospel more truly. Together we can challenge each other to engage in God's mission more courageously. Together through the eyes of others we will begin to see ourselves more clearly, even critically.
- (27) Yet in this difficult and often very uncomfortable work, differences and tensions within the LWF will be exposed. Living as a communion means a willingness to be challenged on issues such as scriptural interpretation, transparency in decision making, and patterns of leadership that are exclusive of women and youth. It means respectfully listening to one another describe our deeply-held convictions about marriage, family, and human sexuality. It is tempting to ignore these tensions or to take them as a reason for loosening or even severing ties. But, as Manas Buthelezi has written, "The test of the authenticity of a communion is when it is able to manifest itself under circumstances of diversity, including those leading to real tensions. We often experience the reality of this during meetings.."<sup>17</sup> In a time of growing accelerating interconnection through migration, trade and communication, it is likely that occasions and reasons for tension will increase. And our willingness and ability to address those tensions and disagreements openly, humbly and faithfully will become more and more important not only for the future of the LWF as a communion but for the future of our member churches themselves as peoples and ideas move and mingle everywhere. If our communion deepens rather than weakens in this time, we can serve the life not only of the church but of the world as we open new global public space that is not simply more marketplace, but a space where we can ask together—what serves the neighbor? the creation? the Gospel?

### **Confessional/Ecumenical**

- (28) Our challenges within the LWF could keep our attention focused simply on our evangelical and missional life together as Lutherans in all its richness, complexity, difficulty and promise. But the Lutheran movement has always had a wider vocation.
- (29) Our communion is *confessional*. For concern for the free course of the gospel requires not only proclamation but confession: bold, clear broadly public witness that dares to say what the gospel is and what it is not. In the life of the LWF, the close connection between communion and confession is highlighted by the fact that the conversation about understanding our relationship in terms of *communion* became urgent precisely as we wrestled with the question of declaring *status confessionis* concerning apartheid. And the rich

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<sup>16</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Global Mission, "Global Mission in the Twenty-first Century," (Chicago, Ill., ELCA), pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Manas Buthelezi, "God's Healing Gift of Communion," *For the Healing of the World Assembly Study Book* used for the Lutheran World Federation Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada, 2003 (Geneva, Switzerland, LWF) 2002, p. 145.

deliberations around what it means to practice *prophetic diakonia* in the world today demonstrate the continued vitality of confession.

- (30) As the Epistle from the 2002 LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia clearly states: “Diakonia is central to what it means to be church. As a core component of the Gospel, diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons who are created in God’s image. While diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms, and transforms.”<sup>18</sup>
- (31) Yet, though we must confess boldly, the ultimate concern of such confession cannot be our own rightness. We answer to a Word made flesh that exceeds even our most faithful confession in speech and action. And for a movement that teaches *simul iustus et peccator*, there can be no confession of faith that doesn’t include confession of sin (both known and unknown, both things done and things left undone). As finite and fallible children of God, we confess our faith boldly and at the same time humbly.
- (32) Since the dynamic of communion is the undoing of every *incurvatus*, our confession can live in the movement of the Spirit only in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and diapraxis—to use the rich Brazilian term, in *convivência* (coexistence). In addressing the Lutheran-Muslim dialogue in Indonesia, Ingo Wulffhorst said, “*Diapraxis* focuses on the life and space we share in multifaith contexts and demands that people of different religious convictions develop a common vision of solidarity, respect, justice, and compassion. In *diapraxis* the other is no longer the “other,” the alien, but becomes a friend, a companion struggling for peace and justice in *convivência* (coexistence).”<sup>19</sup>
- (33) In our Lutheran communion, our churches’ different situations, priorities, involvements, and approaches and worries about ecumenical and inter-religious engagement and how it relates to confession create tremendous opportunities for mutual affirmation and admonition.
- (34) The questions are complex and are often engaged differently in our varied contexts. Yet, the responses of LWF member churches have impact on our life together as communion. These questions include:
- How might the statement on “Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church” being considered at this meeting strengthen us as a communion and contribute to our ecumenical conversations?
  - How do our various regional ecumenical agreements shape our global ecumenical relationships?
  - What is the role of Christian World Communions in the developing Global Christian Forum?
  - How do we respond to the rising influence of Pentecostals and conservative Evangelicals around the world in a way that invites dialogue yet rejects proselytizing?

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18 The Lutheran World Federation, “An Epistle from the LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia,” presented 7 November 2002, p. 1.

19 Ingo Wulffhorst, “The Lutheran World Federation’s study programs on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,” occasional paper presented at the Lutheran-Muslim dialogue in Indonesia (Geneva, Switzerland) April 2002, p. 7.

- What are the implications of LWF member churches finding agreement on ethical issues with other churches with whom we share little theological or ecclesiological commonality?
  - How will we hold ourselves accountable to our commitment to the full inclusion of women and youth in the LWF? How will this commitment inform our ecumenical and inter-religious relationships?
  - How shall we model transparency and honesty in our relationships with members of the International Lutheran Council? What is the role and responsibility of churches who are members of both the LWF and the ILC?
  - How can we make a clear commitment to the Millennium Development Goals a focus for our ecumenical and inter-religious diapraxis?
  - How do we challenge the policies of governments often closely identified with Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and other religions without being anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic?
- (35) These differences and tensions both in our communion and in our member churches could be taken as evidence that in the end the Lutheran story will be just one more instance of some general Protestant tendency to fragmentation. But the Lutheran charism of the freedom of the gospel points to a different future—a *reconciling* diversity in service to the living Word, a connective communion both within and without—if we can truly live out that charism in the world today.
- (36) What ecumenical agenda does this suggest? Necessarily a *complex* one with both local and communion-wide initiatives, including both dialogue with other Christian Communion, the WCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and new regional and global networks on the one hand and with single churches on the other. But also a very *fundamental* agenda—with a focus on what is truly core. I welcome Cardinal Kasper’s recent call for a “fundamental ecumenism” in which we work for “a new elementary vocabulary” that makes the Christian message accessible in our time; in which, to quote Pope Benedict XVI, we work to “rediscover in a new way the living God present in our lives, in our time, and in our society.”<sup>20</sup>
- (37) I believe that central to this fundamental ecumenism will be renewed and new practices of hearing, reading, and studying Scripture together, both within our communion and with our companion churches. Could the decade leading up to 2017 have this as a primary and very public focus? In our multicultural communion can we commit to becoming fluent in the first language of faith—the language of Scripture? It is very important that we build upon the results of the LWF study published in *Witnessing to God’s Faithfulness: Issues of Biblical Authority*.
- (38) In our inter-religious relations, a similar sort of fundamental dialogue is also essential. For example, the message from the December 2006 LWF consultation on Christian-Muslim relations speaks compellingly: “... the increasing presence and witness of Muslims in our midst is exposing a serious void: many Christians lack a basic understanding of their own faith and religious traditions, how to interpret Scripture and how to reflect theologically on

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20 *Op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

realities they face today. There is an urgent need for continuing to educate Christians about the Christian faith—basic catechesis—and its meaning in their lives, as well as the need for basic education about what Muslims believe.”

- (39) In both fundamental ecumenism and fundamental inter-religious dialogue, we and our partners face the challenge of confronting a world increasingly dominated by a fundamentalist reading of sacred texts and we face a postmodern world that would reject the authority of Scripture. I believe we, as Lutherans, have much to offer in our understanding of the Word of God as God’s living speech incarnate in Jesus Christ, proclaimed as Law and Gospel and recorded in Scripture. We also have much to gain.
- (40) As Guillermo Hansen has written about possibilities posed by engagement with the rapidly growing “new” Spirit-focused churches (especially in the South): “Perhaps Lutheran churches will discover that many of their theological treasures and gifts acquire a new vitality as they participate in the new roads that the Spirit is opening in the world.” In any case, both fundamental ecumenism and fundamental inter-religious dialogue open for our churches and our communion both extraordinary gifts and an extraordinary vocation.

### **Concluding Reflections**

- (41) There are other double concerns that we must continue to address. One is the tension between bilateral and multilateral means of being engaged in mission. It seems we are moving toward a preference for bilateral relationships. Such a trend calls for searching and honest assessment as to the reasons and implications of such a move. We should not lose the Lutheran distinctiveness of serving the neighbor through the Department for World Service and through the work of member churches which a vibrant Department for Mission and Development make possible. Nor should we diminish our participation in ecumenical and inter-religious relief and development efforts. We must renew our strong commitment to being a global partner in responding to the HIV/AIDS problem.
- (42) We face other pressing questions that will impact our life together as communion and our capacity to be engaged in God’s mission for the life of the world. They include, but are not limited to:
- What and who establishes priorities for the LWF—the assembly message? Is it the Council? The Secretariat? The Constitution? The regions? Member churches? We must rethink how each of these contributes to clarity and focus for the LWF’s work. That focus must then shape staffing, budget, governance, and structure.
  - The financial future of the LWF. How will we generate new sources of income while holding each other accountable for membership fees? We must increase the contributions towards the Endowment Fund and also work on financial resource development for the LWF.
  - How do we help one another establish processes for speaking the truth for the sake of reconciliation? How member churches give such opportunity whether it is after the end of apartheid, following the fall of communism, or the end of a violent civil war will be critical to the healing necessary for our life together and our effectiveness in witness and service.
  - How do we decide together what decisions and work is most effectively done locally,

regionally, and globally by member churches. How can our ecumenical and inter-religious work be done most effectively?

- (43) Although the tendency will be to take these challenges as occasion to look inward, the church is most alive when it looks outward. This is the rich 60-year history of the LWF.
- (44) The question for the next 60 years is the same question which brought our forebears together 60 years ago. Where is God leading us now? How do we love and serve our neighbor today? I believe when the mission is clear and compelling the organizational, institutional, and financial issues will be resolved.
- (45) In the afterword to *From Federation to Communion*, former LWF President Gottfried Brakemeier shares what I believe still describes our life in communion as the LWF. He writes, “The four pillars—*rescue for the needy, common initiatives in mission, joint efforts in theology, and a common response to the ecumenical challenge*—still determine its work. Today, these tasks are set in another framework and have taken on new dimensions, but they have essentially remained the same. The existential question the Lutheran World Federation faces is how in different situations it can reach a common language and common action on the basis of common confession. This is the red thread that runs through its history. Incontestably, more communion is necessary between Lutheran churches, and the only question that remains to be discussed is how.”<sup>21</sup>
- (46) Today we give thanks to God for all who have served and led the LWF the past 60 years. We look to the future with expectant hopefulness for our future comes from God. May our everchanging life together as communion bear witness to God’s reign of justice, mercy, and peace for the sake of the Gospel and the life of the world.
- (47) “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.’”<sup>22</sup>

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21 *Op. cit.*, p. 522.

22 Revelation 21:5-7