



Living in Communion

The Lutheran World Federation at 60

LWF Sunday 2006

Geneva, August 2006

I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and bring you best wishes from the Lutheran World Federation—A Communion of Churches!

In commemorating the LWF Sunday this year, it is significant that I invite you to focus on the Lutheran communion. It is my hope and prayer that we will be able to contemplate together our shared faith and life in the communion, and recommit ourselves to experiencing it in its different dimensions of faith and spirituality. This focus becomes particularly important on the eve of the celebrations to mark 60 years of the LWF as a living and a growing communion, constantly envisioning and rediscovering itself in light of many emerging challenges.

As a communion of churches, *communio* is at the core of our common life. By grace, God calls us into the communion of divine life. This implies that we take courageous strides toward building and sustaining relationships among the members in the communion and throughout the world. There are no longer member churches on the one hand and the LWF on the other. The LWF Assemblies from Budapest to Curitiba and Hong Kong to Winnipeg have reiterated this.

An underlying relationship exists between the foundations of communion and the forms of life in which this is realized and pursued in local, regional, and global contexts. This understanding stems from the deep theological affirmation of unity in the gospel and the sacraments, which are the essential sources of all church life. The forms of our communion therefore affirm unity in diversity, the sharing of spiritual and material resources (*koinonia*), interrelations among the various gifts, universality and particularity.

We are called upon to experience our communion through our liturgical worship and diaconal life. One of the benchmarks of the Lutheran communion is an unwavering commitment to promote justice, community, the concepts and practices of inclusiveness, and mutual accompaniment through the sharing of resources. We look beyond ourselves, acting together not only for those within the communion, but also for others beyond the churches, and the world as a whole.

One gift of the communion is the rainbow it represents of women and men, young and old, and people with disabilities, who

all participate equally in its life and work. Our challenge is to continually redefine the role of the communion in alleviating suffering and transforming our churches and societies. We know that this communion is experienced in the congregations and communities.

To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical. As churches around the world discuss a reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement, we are called to affirm our ecumenical profile and share in the tasks and challenges of faith communities worldwide. Let us express this gift of *communio* through our prayers, participation and mutual support.



Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
© LWF/H. Putsman

Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
LWF General Secretary



A Home Away from Home

On Pentecost Sunday, a Lutheran World Federation delegation led by the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko worshipped in a Warsaw parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.

After the service, the visitors, who had assisted with the liturgy, assembled in the sacristy. The Indonesian representative reflected on the Sunday morning worship. "I prayed with all my heart for the church here in Poland and at home in Indonesia. As I prayed in Indonesian, nobody else could understand me, and that's a pity. But surely, God understood." His thoughts were suddenly interrupted as the door opened and an elderly man walked in. He went up to him, visibly happy, and greeted him in his mother tongue. He had come to Poland as a student some 50 years ago, but could not return home for political reasons. Half a cen-

tury later, this was to become a real Pentecost for him—he would hear the prayer from the altar in his own language!

With tears in their eyes, the two Indonesians continued their animated conversation. They were soon to find out that they were not only from the same region but also in fact from the very same village!

Initially, the LWF delegation member had not been enthusiastic about having to stay longer in Warsaw before catching his return flight. But all that had changed now, and he looked forward to meeting a group of Christian families from Indonesia in the Polish capital that afternoon.

What did I experience as a witness to this encounter? The Lutheran communion does not only unite continents but also provides a home away from home. And at times Pentecost can serve to help us connect.

(Rev. Dr. Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato, LWF Area Secretary for Europe contributed this reflection from her June 2006 visit to Poland with an LWF delegation.)

Unexpected Flowers in an Exceptional Land

The Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church has a strong presence in small, remote communities in the Andean highlands. In a remote village in the Warata region, above Lake Titicaca, the church is working with community members to build greenhouses, where families can grow vegetables to improve their diet and generate income.

I was therefore surprised to see small greenhouse sections devoted to flowers. "How could they waste such valuable space?" I thought. "The aim is to improve nutrition!"

At the end of my visit, one of the women—as if answering my unspoken questions—explained, "These flowers bring beauty and joy into our homes and life. Their miraculous blooming encourages us to think of the blossoming of our own lives. If the flowers can flourish in the midst of this barren land, shouldn't we be able to as well?"

I had learned one major lesson: In this community of the Lutheran communion, vegetables have the potential to improve the families' nutrition. But the flowers have grown to embody the powerful and empowering anticipation of a transformation envisaged by the people. They have become a strong symbol of God's reign as it flourishes, visible to the world in Jesus Christ.

(Reflections from a field visit by Rev. Martin Junge, LWF Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean.)

Above: The signing of the first Constitution of the LWF at the 1947 Lund Assembly. © LWF archives

Below: Community members benefit from a variety of greenhouse-grown vegetables and flowers. © Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church



Vision

Communion – A Gift and a Challenge



From a faith perspective, being in communion is a gift brought to us by God's grace. We experience it as individual members of a local congregation and as a worldwide communion of Lutheran churches. While in itself a gift, communion also provides the opportunity of sharing a rich variety of other gifts with which we are blessed. This enables us to see communion not as a finished reality, but as a task that continuously challenges our ways of thinking and acting, motivating us toward the mutual sharing of one another's burdens and solidarity.

The vision of being in communion has accompanied the LWF since its very beginning. Envisioning the future of the present Lutheran communion would be inconceivable without looking back at its history and basic foundation.

[The] launching of the LWF in 1947 with its vision for a global Lutheran movement, was "more than a human act." It was a prophetic response to the kairos of God, and as such, this early prophetic act, rooted in faith and hope, set the tone for a Lutheran communion, whose mission, was to provide visible expressions of Christian unity, justice, peace, and reconciliation in the face of seemingly insurmountable forces of division.¹

The LWF Assemblies held every six to seven years have clearly affirmed the shared need to grow together as a communion. The 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada met under the theme "For the Healing of the World." The official message from this last major gathering of the Lutheran communion affirmed the source of our strength together:

As the justified people of God, we are a communion in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, 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.

Emphasis should be made
on the constant need for renewal:

To move from a federation to a communion requires that we assume more accountability from and with each other as churches in the communion. A jubilee celebration must send us forth to explore the depth and breadth of the question of how to address assumptions of superiority and inferiority which have been historically implanted in our attitudes towards one another and which have hindered the participation of all.²

One special challenge is to nurture our diversity and acknowledge the differences without generating tensions that can undermine the communion:

The need for reconciliation among human beings requires first of all the acknowledgment that there are conflicts, diverging interests and broken relationships. Most often we tend to overlook the conflict, or at best, seek tolerance toward difference. Reconciliation, however, also involves naming the conflict and then working on it in order to overcome it.³

As stated in the LWF Tenth Assembly Message:

Communion can make us uncomfortable as assumptions and practices that we take for granted are challenged, and we are pushed to consider questions that that we would not, as separate churches, on our own. These tensions, which can at times be threatening, are also a sign of vitality; they can deepen the realization of what it means to be a communion. We give thanks to God that our communion is blessed with diversity.

¹ Ishmael Noko, in *Envisioning a Lutheran Communion: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*, Kirk House Publishers, 2002.

² Musimbi Kanyoro, *ibid.*

³ Wanda Deifelt, *ibid.*

Worship

The Bible texts below are suggested for use during worship on Christian communion:

- 1 Jn 1:1-4:The foundation of communion
1 Cor 12:12-27; 2 Cor 5:17-20; Rom 12:9-18:Living communion
1 Chr 29:13; Acts 2:42-47; 2 Cor 8:7-15:Sharing communion
Ps 133; Heb 13:20-21:The blessings of communion

Prayer

Our Creator in heaven,

you have created everyone—those dear to us and also our enemies. You are our creator and you love us all, unconditionally.

Hallowed be your name

in our lives so that your love may change our hearts and fill our lives with what really matters.

Your kingdom come

through us now—so that the abundance of mercy will give a new perspective to what we do and say, and to the faith we live.

Your will be done on earth

as it is in heaven,

for your thoughts are not ours, neither are our ways your ways. You know your plans for us – plans to prosper and not to harm us, plans for hope and future.

Give us today our daily bread

for body and soul. Many needy people are seeking justice, truth and freedom. Encourage us by your Word.

Forgive us our sins

when our hearts are filled with anger, sadness and hopelessness. Teach us how to

Forgive those who sin against us.

Give us love and heal our wounded memories.

Lead us not into temptation

of being deaf, blind and mute. Give us courage to denounce what is wrong. Make us ambassadors of truth who stand beside the suffering.

Deliver us from evil

You are holy, God. You lead us and love us above all, for

Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(Adapted from a prayer by Slavka Danielova, 2005 LWF Youth Pre-Council Workshop, Jerusalem.)

Intercessions

Tell Them They Have Suffered Long Enough

Comfort the people who cried for so long, says our God.

Encourage them to rejoice in the rising sun; their bondage now is over.

Prepare in the wilderness of division and hatred a road of unity and reconciliation!

Clear the desert of poverty and death the way for our God who is giving new life!

Fill the valleys of separation; level the mountains of animosity.

Peace will reign.

This is the promise of the Lord himself.”

(Adapted from Zephania Kameeta, Contextual Meditation on Isaiah 40, 1-11, in: Towards Liberation, Windhoek, Namibia, 2006.)

The Church: Called to a Ministry of Reconciliation

God of peace, through the cross, you yourself reconciled sinful humans to yourself.

We walk in daily prayerful hope that the ministry of reconciliation will bring down all dividing walls and that it will build bridges that can unite us in a common humanity.

Support us as we strive to raise up a new generation who will seek to see you in other religions and cultures and will urge all to seek common values of respect for all human life.

Inspire us that we together compose a symphony of justice and reconciliation and sing it to the world.

(Excerpts from a sermon by Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, 2005 LWF Council Meeting, Jerusalem.)

The LWF Department for Mission and Development provided material for this year's publication.

The Lutheran World Federation ▪ Office for Communication Services ▪ 150, route de Ferney ▪ P.O. Box 2100 ▪ CH-1211 Geneva 2 – Switzerland ▪ Tel.: +41/22-791 61 11 ▪ Fax: +41/22-791 66 30 ▪ E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org ▪ Web: www.lutheranworld.org