

Communiqué from the Meeting between Representatives of The International Lutheran Council and The Lutheran World Federation

Johannesburg, South Africa, 25-26 February 2008

Representatives of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) met in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 25-26 February 2008, as proposed by the “Memorandum of Understanding” approved by both organizations in March 2005. These meetings are held on an annual basis, with a view to increased mutual understanding between the two Lutheran world bodies and their member churches. When relevant, the meetings receive and discuss reports on issues of tension perceived to result from activities, statements or policies of member churches of either of the two organizations or agencies related to them.

The meeting was co-chaired by Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko (General Secretary, LWF) and Rev. Dr Samuel H. Nafzger (Executive Secretary, ILC). Other participants from the ILC were Bishop Effiong E. Ekanem (Nigeria) and Bishop Dr David P. Tswaedi (South Africa). Other participants from the LWF were Rev. Dr Risto Cantell (Finland), Bishop Susan C. Johnson (Canada), Rev. Donald McCoid (USA), Rt Rev. Dr Ambrose Moyo (South Africa), Bishop Dr Joe M. Ramashapa (South Africa), Dean Annah Nguvauva (Botswana), and Dr Kathryn Johnson (Switzerland).

Reports were presented on current developments pertaining to the life and the relations of the two organizations and their member churches.

Dr Nafzger presented a report on the ILC, which began by tracing its development from the International Lutheran Theological Conference of the 1950’s. He described the decisions at the Biennial Conference in Accra in September 2007 to reaffirm the identity of the ILC as a “worldwide association of confessional Lutheran church bodies” who pledge to treat one another with mutual respect and consideration.” Membership in the ILC does not require church fellowship among its members, but it seeks to “foster, strengthen, and preserve confessional agreement which manifests itself at the altar and in the pulpit.” The conference also clarified the meaning of “established church.” The question of its members’ holding membership in the LWF is a matter left to the consciences and circumstances of member churches. In Accra the ILC also adopted a three-year cycle of international, regional, and seminary conferences, with the most recent conference of seminaries from ILC churches held in Pretoria in March 2007. Its next international conference will be held in Korea in 2009.

Dr Noko’s report described the 60th anniversary celebration of the LWF, which recognized the deepened communion among member churches. He provided two documents from the March 2007 Council meeting at Lund: “Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church,” which was adopted, and “Marriage, Family and Sexuality,” whose guidelines were “received.” He clarified that “reception” of a document did not require full agreement with all its paragraphs; it is forwarded to the churches as a resource. He called attention to the 2008 Council meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, and plans for the 2010 Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany: this Assembly will be the first time African churches (represented by missionaries at the first LWF Assemblies) will

themselves attend an assembly in “Lutherland”; will involve new levels of ecumenical participation; and will act on recommendations for the renewal of the LWF structure. Dr Noko also provided an update on the range of ecumenical relationships in which the LWF participates.

There was substantial discussion on plans to observe the 500th anniversary of 1517. The LWF is concerned that this date be commemorated for its importance for the whole church and has initiated discussion with Roman Catholic and other ecumenical partners. While the ILC has not yet had this formally on its agenda, its churches also will be celebrating the anniversary. There was discussion of the importance of ongoing dialogue as the organizations move forward; all Lutherans share in a desire to make this occasion one which bears witness to the renewing power of the Gospel.

There was extensive discussion of a number of theological topics: the goal and hopes of relations with other Christian bodies, the differing meanings of “membership” in the two organizations, the significance of baptism and the relation of ecclesial bodies to the one body of Christ.

There were reports from regions, with special attention to Africa where the meeting was held. Bishop Dieter Lilje from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Natal-Transvaal) was welcomed. Participants from Southern Africa described the diversity of churches in the region and the structure and aims of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), which includes 17 churches in 10 countries and embraces both ILC and LWF members. Initiatives toward the formation of a united Lutheran church council in South Africa give hope for overcoming the legacies of painful church and societal divisions. In West Africa the Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa (LUCCWA) also includes members of both bodies.

There was discussion of a number of local situations in which tensions have occurred, including Zambia, the Mission Province in Sweden, and Madagascar, on which Dr. Nafzger reported on follow-up inquiries from last year’s meeting. All participants expressed the importance of attitudes of mutual respect, good will, and shared hope that both bodies will have strong churches with healthy leadership. These attitudes will help to encourage the open communication, premised on the assumption of good faith, which will allow worrisome reports about the other’s activities to be checked out and discussed directly with the partner.

A number of positive developments among our families were mentioned: for example, reconciliation in a long-standing division in the church in the Philippines facilitated by representatives of the ILC and the LWF, and a recent visit of area secretaries from an ILC-member church, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), to the LWF offices in Geneva.

There was discussion on the possibility of ILC participation with the LWF in bilateral dialogues. A number of potential benefits were identified, as well as some challenges. Further discussion will be required

The “Memorandum of Understanding” was reviewed. No changes were made, but there was discussion on the possibility of future documents to express agreements about practice.

The Philippines was identified as a desirable site for the 2009 meeting, for which February dates may be sought. The value for these meetings of contact with local leaders and their churches was agreed.