



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES

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Office of the General Secretary

2009 New Year Message from the LWF General Secretary



Thomas O. Allam from Southern Sudan drew this picture as a student at one of the schools in the northern Kenya-based Kakuma Refugee Camp, where the LWF Department for World Service is responsible for education programs. "Our burdens, however heavy, are bearable in the community of Christ," says LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko in his 2009 New Year message.

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Each New Year is a time for reflection and recommitment. As the year 2009 dawns upon us, I greet you and invite you to that reflection and recommitment with the words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians:

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2

We all have burdens to carry—some heavier, some lighter. Some burdens are physical, while others weigh upon the soul rather than the shoulders. But no one is without a burden. In most of our societies we prize independence, in other words the “do-it-yourself” approach to life. We admire those who carry their burdens on their own without requiring help from others, without the support of government or society. We are educated for independence, for making our own living, and for self-reliance. Nations

aspire to this same independence, for security within their borders and walls. This is how the kingdom of this world functions.

But in his pastoral message to the church in Galatia, Paul raises a fundamental challenge to this way of being and of doing things. He contradicts the culture and the spirit of the kingdom of this world with that of God's. He points out that in the kingdom of God *independence* and *dependency* are brought together into *interdependence*. Indeed, he insists that interdependence is the hallmark of the church. In this context, burdens are never borne in isolation, but rather in mutuality, as we are an integral part of the one body of Christ. Paul maintains that the law of Christ makes foolish the wisdom of this world, which sees independence as a strength and dependency as a weakness.

As this New Year unfolds, we are and shall be confronted with countless situations in which the desire—or the imposed obligation—to live independently of one another is expressed with negative or even tragic consequences. There is less and less practical manifestation of the true interdependence of human society. Injustices of various forms such as slavery and human trafficking would be overcome in a society shaped by the values of the kingdom of God. Recognition of the interdependence of human beings would also imply that one cannot throw bombs at another without destroying oneself. Similarly, denying any human being access to basic rights such as food, shelter and a life in dignity would find no place in the kingdom of God.

Our burdens, however heavy, are bearable in the community of Christ. The church, family, community, nation and world in which we live should be places in which we find the strength and solidarity to bear each other's burdens. The Church—*ecclesia*—is called into being to act with justice and in service to others.

In this New Year, let us work to build bridges across the lines of division and to break down the walls of separation, whether visible or invisible. Let us work for the healing of the wounds created by all kinds of unshared burdens. Bearing one another's burdens is fulfilling the law of Christ. In this New Year, as Christ's disciples, we are called again to love our neighbors as ourselves.



Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation

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