

# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES  
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

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## *2005 Christmas Message from the LWF President*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the worldwide Lutheran communion,

“Do not be afraid.” So began the angel’s announcement of Jesus’ birth. It was also Gabriel’s greeting to a bewildered Mary, “Do not be afraid.” To the grieving women at Jesus’ tomb, angels again declared, “Do not be afraid.” To exiles in Babylon who felt forsaken by God comes the announcement, “Be strong, do not fear!” (Isaiah 35:4)



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To be human is to have fears. Fear has permeated life in this past year and haunting images will remain with us. Children fear abandonment as their parents die from HIV/AIDS. Parents clutch their children, terrified there will not be food enough to keep



death and disease away. People struggle for survival in the midst of natural disasters. Others seek safety from violence. All know the reality of fear.

We know the reality of fear, but fear must not become our defining reality. When fear becomes our orientation to the world, we either withdraw in isolation or lash out in acts of aggression. Fear hardens lives, dares not acknowledge failures, and closes borders. Fear leaves us cynical, immobilized, and turned in upon ourselves.

The angel says, "Do not be afraid. For see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

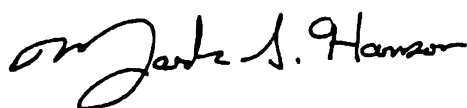
God sends messengers to hold back the walls of fear. We can then hear the good news of God's love in Christ Jesus for the whole creation. We entrust our lives to God's promise. Faith rather than fear defines us.

Faith frees us to confess our bondage to sin and to accept God's gift of forgiveness. Faith calls us to take up our cross and follow Jesus into our suffering world. Faith compels us to bear witness to the signs of God's reign of justice, mercy, and peace. As one writer said, "Faith quells our fears, but never our courage." We receive the future, trusting in the power and promise of Christ's death and resurrection.

May our voices in the communion of the Lutheran World Federation be joined with the chorus of every time and every place as we joyfully sing:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace  
among those whom [God] favors.

In God's grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
President, The Lutheran World Federation

November 2005

*\* This year's Christmas card, titled "Hope", was designed by fifteen-year-old Ramez Odeh from Bethlehem. Ramez attends the Lutheran Dar Al-Kalima School in Bethlehem, West Bank.*