

Conference of Women Bishops, Presidents and Leaders with the Ministry of Oversight

June 15 – 19, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction

“Lutherans do not have or need to develop a theology of female ministry. Rather we have a theology of ordained ministry developed in relation to an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and grounded in the Reformation understanding of justification through faith.”¹ We have indeed come a long way from thinking on theological grounds, to applying it at ground level, supporting women to study theology which in some instances in the south was the only way to promote women to do theology to enriching the communion with women’s theological thinking and through ordained ministry where possible or as educators in theological seminaries and as women with the ministry of oversight.

Currently there about 25 women Bishops and Presidents in the LWF communion. Their services as resource persons have been utilized by WICAS from time to time. Those who attended the LWF 10th Assembly in Winnipeg, 2003 had a meeting among themselves arranged by WICAS during which they expressed a wish to have a conference together to be organized by WICAS. Such a program was organized from 15-19 June 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland. An Observer each was included from Central/Eastern Europe region and from Ethiopia where, as yet there are no woman bishop/presidents to augment regional representation. Since this conference is one of its kind, there had been much interest raised around the world. Their message reads as follows;

Message

As women who serve as Bishops, Presidents and Church leaders, we thank the Lutheran World Federation for making possible this consultation. We appreciate the opportunity to learn about the current work of the Lutheran World Federation as well as the work of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and of the forthcoming Assembly of the World Council of Churches. We considered aspects of leadership including the uses of power within the communion and we specifically responded to the draft statement on Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. We reminded ourselves to be mindful of justice work as fundamental to the mission of the Church. Most of all we deeply appreciate hearing the stories of each other’s ministries as Church leaders and value the opportunity to pray for and support one another.

We strongly affirm that the Lutheran Church’s theological understanding is that women and men are both created in the image of God, and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls both women and men to diverse ministries. The fullness of the Gospel is most accurately represented where both women and men are given access to leadership roles.

¹ Ministry, Women Bishops, report of an International Consultation, Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992, published by the LWF Studies, Lutheran World Federation, 1993.

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EXHIBIT 8.4

After 13 years of serving as women Bishops and Presidents in the Lutheran Church we celebrate and cite these significant **benchmarks**:

- The growth in numbers of women pursuing academic preparation for ministry.
- The growth in numbers of women serving as lay and ordained people across a spectrum of call settings: parish, specialized service, academic, and as Bishops and Presidents.
- The presence of recent generations of Church members who have always and only known the full participation of women and men in the church's ministry.
- The presence of 25 Lutheran women Bishops and Presidents around the world who bear witness with their lives to God's amazing, compelling, and sustaining call to ministry.

We also recognize these significant **challenges** to women's full leadership:

- Some Lutheran churches are yet to recognize women's call to ordained ministry and are yet to permit their ordination.
- Some women and men do not value the particular nature of women's leadership gifts.
- Some Lutheran churches speak of full participation of women and men, yet tolerate unequal compensation, and limit access to all levels of ministry.
- Some Lutheran Churches remain silent in regards to a culture of violence against women.

Nevertheless, the experience of being a Lutheran communion helps us renew our commitment as we walk together in ministry and leadership.

Recommendations/Requests for future:

- 1) We request LWF to host another meeting of Women Bishops/Presidents with mornings set aside for LWF agenda and afternoons set aside for the Women Bishops/Presidents to plan and share. It could include these purposes:
 - to encourage ordination of women in places where it is not happening;
 - to share stories of each in plenary;
 - to benefit from resources that each one brings to the table inviting individuals to indicate what they would like to share giving adequate time for preparation;
 - how do we deal with issues that confront us at home?
 - to discuss and learn about different leadership styles;
 - to consider supplemental texts to the lectionary.
- 2) Encourage women to be represented on the inter-confessional dialogues to meet the existing 40% goals.
- 3) We affirm and are grateful for the LWF support for the ordination of women in all member churches. Therefore, we agree that we will pray for and encourage corporate public prayer for the ordination of women in all LWF member churches and we invite our colleagues (Bishops and Presidents) to join in that prayer.

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In those places where churches and dioceses are twinned or in relations like the Porvoo community, we ask our fellow male bishops to ensure a fair representation of women bishops at consecrations, installations and other ecumenical gatherings. And that the consecrations of women bishops and ordinations by women bishops be respected.

- 4) As Bishops/Presidents in the Communion we ask our colleagues to call upon the leaders of the churches to join us in publicly speaking out against violence towards women.

Soli Deo Gloria.