

Announcing a new program:

## **Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches: Revisiting Its Critical Role (2005-2009)**

To encourage and develop theological work that can more persuasively engage major contextual challenges that the global communion of Lutheran churches face.

The points of departure for this theological work are the pervasive challenges that churches throughout the world are facing, but which have particular urgency for churches in the global South or East. These challenges include:

Struggles for basic survival, dignity and justice

The influence of other faiths

Pentecostal and charismatic influences

Are moral differences church dividing?

The intent of this program is to address these challenges theologically. It will be an opportunity for theologians from around the world, with their different contexts and approaches, to interact, mutually challenge and support one another, so that the theological work they do through this program can help to deepen the self-understanding, life and practices of churches of the Lutheran communion.

### ***You are invited to participate***

The invitation is open to any Lutheran-affiliated theologian (whether in systematic, biblical, historical, ethical or practical fields) and related institutions/organizations. “Theologians” here include not only those in universities, colleges or seminaries, but also those teaching theology in other settings, including in local congregations and special centers, whether lay or ordained. ***The participation of theologians who are female and/or from the global South or East is especially being encouraged and supported.***

This work will be pursued along four thematic tracks:

### ***Track 1: Life and hope in the face of death and injustice:***

How do we understand, proclaim and live out resurrection life and eschatological hope in the face of pervasive death and overwhelming injustices? How is this proclaimed and embodied in worship and other activities of the church? How can the pain of death and injustice be expressed through lamentation? How can we tell the truth about the realities of those who have been excluded, and speak with integrity about suffering, death and hope? How do we interpret the cross as a saving event for the world? What is the politically subversive vocation of the church as an anticipation of God’s future, especially in the face of dominant political and economic power? How can we resist both ecclesial complacency and triumphalism?

## ***Track 2: The Triune God and the divine reality in other faiths***

How does the God of Israel, disclosed decisively in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, relate to the divine reality espoused by other faiths? How is this expressed or hindered through our worship? How is the creating, redeeming, sanctifying work of the Triune God similar to and different from how other religions view divine activity? What problems do traditional formulations and names for the Triune God pose (e.g., from gender perspectives), and how are they being creatively addressed? How are absolute claims to truth and salvation related to religious pluralism, or to the secular “gods” (e.g., ideologies of neoliberalism or consumerism)? How do different perceptions of “God” play out in the ways different communities of faith relate to each other? In how we might pray for and with one another? For Lutherans, what is the relation between interfaith dialogue and mission, especially in how we bear witness to the gospel in our particular contexts? What should be key aspects of a Lutheran theology of other religions?

## ***Track 3: The Holy Spirit in the life and renewal of the church***

All churches live by and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lutherans have long upheld this and have often called for renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit in our churches. Still, the work of the Spirit tends to be associated more with Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Are these movements compatible with Lutheran theology and practice, including in worship? How is our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit different, including in ways that are critical of these movements? What might we learn from them? How can we prevent such developments from dividing the Lutheran communion?

How can the work of the Holy Spirit in the church be discerned, especially in ways that may challenge those in position of power? What is the relation of the Holy Spirit to other spirits? How is the Spirit involved in healing, in reconciliation, in pursuing justice? How is the Holy Spirit active beyond the churches, including in the rest of creation?

## ***Track 4: Church unity amid moral diversity***

What is the basis of the unity of the church? What is the relation between theology, ethics and church order? How can moral diversity that is part of the catholicity of the church be distinguished from diversity that endangers its unity? How might postmodern biblical interpretations help address this? Why are matters of body, gender and sexuality so potentially church-dividing? How do cultural differences shape how ecclesial and ethical matters are viewed? If in practical reality doctrine is no longer what unites churches, but working together on common commitments to ethical challenges (e.g., for peace and justice), what are the implications for how church unity should be pursued? How can increasing divisions between Christians with divergent ethical positions best be addressed?

### ***How can we participate?***

If you are interested in participating in this program, please write and submit a brief paper (up to 500 words) related to one or more of the above themes indicating,

How this theme relates to your particular context

How you would develop this theologically (e.g., what resources, emphases, approaches you would draw upon)

Possible critical perspectives or tensions this poses for your church

How you might pursue this with others in your setting, and your interest in doing so in interaction with those in other contexts

Other relevant factors about who you are and what you have done (name, address, email, educational background, positions, writing)

***Please submit this as soon as possible, but no later than December 31, 2005, to the address below.***

### ***What will happen after that?***

A special Web site discussion forum will be set up for participants, where initial papers will be posted, and discussion occur throughout the program.

On the basis of the initial papers received, a small number will be invited to prepare more extensive papers to be considered at a seminar focused on each of the thematic tracks (2007). Each seminar will take place in a context in the world where this theme is especially urgent. Here the theological substance will be further developed and tested out in interaction with others, in preparation for publication in an LWF book, one on each of these themes.

A global symposium (2009) will reflect on and assess what has occurred and make specific recommendations regarding how the critical role of theology in the life of Lutheran churches is to be encouraged and pursued further in diverse global contexts.

*Churches, theological faculties, institutes, etc. are also encouraged to give attention to “the role of theology in the life of churches” in other ways—such as through writing, continuing education events, specially organized events or other initiatives, including in collaboration with those in a different global setting. Keep us informed!*

***For further information, or to send your paper indicating your interest:***

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