



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

To LWF member churches
and National Committees

24 September 2001

Dear friends,

On the day after the tragic events of 11 September 2001, President Christian Krause and I sent a letter on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation to Bishop H. George Anderson and Bishop Hans Dumpys, the presiding bishops of the LWF member churches in the United States of America. In that letter, we expressed our profound sympathy for the families of the victims and to all the people of the United States. We also assured both church leaders of our prayers and support for them in fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities during this difficult time. We continue to pray for the bereaved, the injured and traumatized, and for the pastors who minister to them. We are grateful that so many others within the LWF family have sent letters, prayed for those affected, and in other ways expressed what it truly means to be a communion, where “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor. 12:26), as part of the one body of Christ.

Now, more than one week later, there has been time to reflect on these events in this world in which violence of so many kinds continues to rage in so many places. What occurred in the United States on September 11 was a highly visible symptom of a wider malaise of hatred and violence affecting many different communities around the world. The response to those events must therefore be part of a wider response to hatred and violence.

Many proposals have been made as to appropriate response to the tragedy. As churches, it is crucial that we react in ways that are shaped by the convictions of our faith. What is central for us is that the hidden God is revealed on the Cross in the midst of profound insult, suffering and death. Rather than through might and triumph, it is in times of utter vulnerability that God’s compassionate love is experienced.

Last week, symbols of global financial and military might were destroyed in a moment, and along with them thousands of men, women and children, by attackers armed with an implacable hatred. In this moment, the reality of evil, the depth of human sin and the inherent vulnerability of human life were terribly revealed. These symbols of power were unable to protect human life. Confronted with these realities, as people of faith we must reflect on where our security and hope really lie. We are challenged to focus on the relationships of trust that are basic to all life in community, and on the faith in which our true security lies.

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In the ashes of human-made destruction, God continues to act through human beings who reach out across many divides to help and to comfort one another. This love for one's neighbour, which flowers anew in the midst of crisis and chaos, is the Spirit of God at work in our broken world. It gives witness to a response that truly has the power to quell the hatred that leads to such terrible acts of violence.

We are still wrestling with many questions. What was the purpose and meaning of these acts? What could have bred such rage and fanaticism? What sort of response is meaningful and constructive in the face of such hatred? Our churches should be places in which the questions raised by events of this kind can be addressed. We are called to counter tendencies to exclude or demonize others because of their religion, race, ethnicity or nationality. We need to speak with one another across such divisions, in genuine dialogue. In seeking to listen, to understand, and possibly to revise our own positions, together we can arrive at constructive responses. In such a dialogue, we may begin to understand the conditions of desperation in many parts of the world that help to fuel hatred and violence. I pray that, through this dialogue, we will find renewed strength and commitment to alleviate the poverty, economic disparities, human rights violations, abusive power relationships and other underlying injustices that deepen that desperation.

As the language of war surrounds us, I pray that the leaders of the world will refrain from responding out of a desire for revenge, which can only compound and perpetuate the violence. As churches bearing the message of peace, we should urge that careful consultation among the nations of the world take place to promote responses that avoid spreading violence, division and desperation.

In joining the global struggle against violence, let our instruments above all be compassion, dialogue, justice and love. May God give us strength in our vulnerability, and compassion in our suffering.

Yours in Christ,

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary

cc: President Christian Krause
Council members/advisers
Cabinet