



# 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

*The LWF member churches in Latin America met in March 2003 to study and contextualize the LWF action plan "Compassion, Conversion, Care: Responding as Churches to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic." The present statement was brought to the LWF Latin America and the Caribbean Pre-Assembly Consultation in May 2003, where it was received as a lens through which to view perspectives of the region in the global LWF discussion on HIV and AIDS.*

## **Justice, Conversion and Integration**

***There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)***

In Latin America, the word compassion needs to be translated using the word justice. This conviction is born from listening to the testimony of our sisters and brothers living with HIV/AIDS, who repeatedly made it clear that they want neither compassion nor pity from the Church. Rather, they want us to accompany them in the defense of their Human Rights and their wounded dignity. They also ask that we assume the responsibility of being a prophetic voice which denounces all stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion, prejudices of which they are the object, and all the economic, social, cultural and religious factors which facilitate the expansion of the pandemic. This call to be a prophetic voice obligates us to break the silence.

In Latin America, the word conversion demands daily action. This conversion causes us to discover the importance of that Church which is always being reformed, and to reestablish the theological order so that the putting into practice of the reality of the moment becomes more adequate. This revelation was imposed upon us in open, honest and unconditional dialogue with persons living with HIV/AIDS, who shared their reality and their ministry with us. Listening to these sisters and brothers, the need to journey from the announcement of repentance imposed on others as law, to a Church which looks at itself, examining its theological concepts and pastoral practices, was made flesh among us. The Church which is always being reformed begins making changes within itself. It examines its fears, its apathies, its silences, its discourses and messages. This conversion causes us to relate Lutheran identity closely with HIV/AIDS: an identity profoundly evangelical, because we understand that our mission is that of announcing the Good News of unconditional acceptance by God and by the Church.

In Latin America the word care needs to be translated using the word integration. During this Consultation we have learned to draw closer to the mystery of life from an integral perspective. Our actions cannot be fragmented or isolated, a reflection of a broken world, but rather centered on the person, in order to thus be able to construct inclusive responses. These responses are part of our theology of the cross, which seeks to locate in the centre of the life of the Church that which is outside, and push it to be in the heart of those happenings which still continue to be cross. In order to fulfill this mission, the Church must go beyond its walls and borders and go out to encounter those persons and communities who are excluded, marginalized and stigmatized. After two decades during which this pandemic has been with us, we cannot ask more time and patience of persons living with HIV/AIDS and of society. The times have been fulfilled. The Church must respond now!

Based on these convictions and motivated to construct truly inclusive communities, a reflection of the same pastoral mission of Jesus, the participants in this Latin American Regional Consultation present the following challenges.

#### In the local setting (community):

- To reproduce encounters with a methodology similar to that lived these days in this Consultation, where other Christian confessions, other organizations from civil society, NGO's and government representatives were integrated. The presence of persons of homosexual orientation, persons employed as sex workers and drug users enriched our life and reflection together. Dialogue with persons living with HIV-AIDS, who shared their stories and lives, also enriched our experience.
- To spread the LWF Action Plan "Compassion, Conversion and Care" in the setting of local Churches with the objective of beginning to construct actions of education, prevention and accompaniment of their own.
- To put the infrastructure of the Congregations at the disposition of civil society organizations which work with HIV-AIDS in order to facilitate encounters and activities and to transform these Congregations into safe, hospitable and welcoming spaces.
- To encourage an attitude of openness in the Congregations which leads them to encountering persons and groups living with HIV-AIDS in their own life contexts.
- To promote liturgical activities throughout the year which make the theme of HIV-AIDS present in the communities, since intercession is also a ministry.
- To form multipliers and accompaniers who embody the orientations of this Action Plan with a spirit of service, without intentions of proselytizing.

#### In the national setting (Churches):

- To reinforce and, where they don't exist, create spaces in the Churches to support initiatives and persons who are involved in actions of prevention, accompaniment and advocacy in the area of HIV-AIDS.
- To formulate a plan of action of their own to face the pandemic of HIV-AIDS which takes into account the context and the needs of each country and Church.
- To incorporate the theme of HIV-AIDS as a transversal axis in the curriculum of the diverse educational institutions which belong to the Church.
- To make present the theme of HIV-AIDS in the Church media.
- To articulate a liberating and alternative voice about HIV-AIDS in the mass media.
- To design strategies to include the youth in actions of prevention and accompaniment.
- To carry out a reading of the pandemic from the perspective of Human Rights and Gender.
- To train national Churches in the follow-up and control of the fulfillment of the commitment assumed by governments in UNGASS (26th Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations about HIV-AIDS in the year 2001).
- To impel the participation of the Churches in joint and cooperative work with non-governmental and governmental organizations, and with civil society in general.
- To raise and channel resources which facilitate the implementation of these local proposals and initiatives.

#### In the regional setting (Latin America):

- To create an awareness of the information available on resources and undertakings at the national level of the Churches or organisations linked to those which offer services in the work of HIV-AIDS.
- To design a program of formation based on optimal practices which favour a greater commitment and a greater capacity of the local Churches to respond to HIV-AIDS. We propose that the experience accumulated in Acción EcuMénica (Venezuela), EPES (Chile) and the Pastoral EcuMénica VIH-SIDA (Argentina) be considered so that they might provide support to the Churches regarding putting their action plan into practice.

- To create a Health and Human Rights Network of the Lutheran Churches in Latin America which gives incentive, facilitates and supports the forces launched by the Churches in the area of HIV-AIDS.
- To participate in the diverse efforts which have as their objective assuring access to the best levels of medication and treatment at the lowest cost for persons living with HIV-AIDS (generic medications).

We formulate the petition that, upon making decisions regarding these challenges, timeframes and responsibilities be established in accordance with the urgency and seriousness of the pandemic, in order to give them adequate follow-up. In the same way, we ask that these recommendations be submitted to the respective national authorities for their approval in the shortest timeframe possible.

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