



LIBERATED
BY GOD'S
GRACE

TWELFTH ASSEMBLY
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
2017 - WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

“LIBERATED BY GOD’S GRACE” Assembly Report

LWF Twelfth Assembly,
Windhoek, Namibia, 10–16 May 2017

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Assembly Report



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THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
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Foreword

The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Twelfth Assembly met under the 500th Reformation anniversary theme, "Liberated by God's Grace," in May 2017, in Windhoek, Namibia.

It gave delegates from all regions of the LWF the opportunity together to experience the ongoing relevance of the message that we are liberated by God's grace and provided direction for the future work of the LWF. Delegates experienced God's powerful call into the communion that binds the 145 LWF member churches as they proclaim and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their specific contexts.

This report brings together the speeches and reports, sermons, messages and greetings that were presented at the Assembly as well as the outcome of the Assembly—its message, public statements and resolutions.

The Assembly message says, "Liberated by the Triune God, we pray for the clarity and courage to go out enlivened by God's

transformative, reconciling and empowering presence in our relationships, church and society." May the gifts offered by this Assembly inspire us to "share fully in each other's joys and sorrows ... pray for one another and share our resources, spiritual and material, wherever possible." (Assembly Message)

I would like to invite you to reflect on commitments made at the Twelfth Assembly as well as to give some further thought on the implications of this milestone event on your work in the church and for the global communion of churches at large.

As you read through this report, please join me in a profound sense of gratitude to God for God's faithfulness in nurturing and guiding the LWF's journey as a communion in Christ, that lives and works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

*Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary,
The Lutheran World Federation*





A choir lights up the worship with singing during the 14 May commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in Windhoek, Namibia. Photo: LWF/Johan Celine Valeriano

Address of the President

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I greet each of you in the name of Jesus, the one who liberates us in God's grace, from Jerusalem, the city of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection. It is a great pleasure to be with you here in Namibia, a country and a people showing us every day what it means to overcome adversity in unity, seeking God's will for all. I am especially grateful to the United Church Council of the Namibian Evangelical Lutheran churches. You are hosting us with tremendous hospitality and grace.

When we are in Namibia, we cannot help but be inspired by the smiles of this country's citizens. It is a smile of deep wisdom that knows pain but emphasizes joy. We Palestinians are known for our hospitality, but Namibians put us to shame with their smiles!

I am proud to have served for these seven years as president of our global communion. Together, we live in vibrant witness to God's work in the world, offering our hands and feet in the service of God's mission. Today, I will address some of the challenges facing our world today and highlight the distinctive ways we, as Evangelical Lutheran Christians, might respond.

The ongoing work of liberation

Throughout the world, we are seeing the ongoing work of God's liberation. Liberation is

God's will for all of humanity. This is as true here in Namibia as in any other part of the planet.

I have followed the Namibian struggle for liberation since the 1970s, when I was a young Palestinian theology student in Finland. Namibia's struggle became part of my struggle as well. When it finally came, I celebrated Namibian freedom as if it were my own liberation.

From the context of my own struggle, I am aware that political liberation alone does not achieve all that needs to be accomplished for the healing of a nation. This work of promoting healing through unity is being undertaken by the Namibian government, but also by the churches. The varied histories of Namibia have produced three distinct Lutheran churches; we deeply respect the unity they have been able to achieve in the United Church Council.

We know that this emerging unity does not forget the pain of the past and present. The struggle for liberation was a source of great suffering even as it produced so much good in the form of political freedom. We thank God that Namibia is a state seeking economic and social development in order to satisfy the needs of all its people throughout their large and beautiful territory. With the three churches hosting us here in Namibia, we have rejoiced with them about their journey of liberation and independence. The LWF



Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of the LWF.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

has often been humbled when the churches have acknowledged our global communion's contributions to this journey in accompaniment, support and solidarity. That accompaniment continues today.

We agree with our host churches that growing unity and progress in Namibia cannot be used to ignore trauma. Memories of past injustices must be acknowledged and honored before they can be healed. In Namibia, this process of acknowledging past wrongs and healing memories of trauma can be greatly helped by the much-appreciated confession of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) concerning "German colonial crimes" in Namibia. These crimes especially affected the Herero, Nama, Damara and San/Khoisan peoples. The EKD's Statement on the genocide in former German-Southwest-Africa, entitled

"Forgive us our sins," openly acknowledges that the "annihilation orders" issued in October 1904 against the Herero people and in April 1905 against the Nama people "were clearly genocidal." We deeply appreciate the clarity and depth of the EKD confession "towards the entire Namibian people and towards God"—"This is a great sin which cannot be justified."

In addition to producing a faithful approach that honors memory, the EKD apology addresses present needs within the Namibian churches and society. It is especially heartening to see how the apology points toward a process of revisiting partnership agreements since "the current partnership relations ... reflect and follow from the colonial roots of these relationships." These should "reviewed and revised in such a way as to overcome the divisions of the past."¹ Decolonizing

¹ EKD Statement on the Genocide in former German South West Africa, at https://www.ekd.de/english/texts/ekd_statement_genocide_german_south_west_africa.html.

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these structures is an essential step toward addressing imbalances of power and building right relationships.

We acknowledge that this document is a mid-point in an ongoing process. It builds on dialogue and looks forward to further engagement. Only when the truth has been told and justice sought can reconciliation over the pains of the past take place. As a global communion, we pray together and work with these churches as they find ways to facilitate similar dialogue among their respective civil governments.

The LWF has been part of many different processes of historic reconciliation. In 2010, Lutherans and Mennonites concluded a process to heal memories over a painful and violent history. The joint Roman Catholic/Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation involved a process which addressed wrongdoings of the past with ramifications to this day. We nevertheless recognize the uniqueness of this particular trauma. Namibians and Germans through their dialogue process need to identify and agree on how the history will be told, how justice can be done and how reconciliation will be promoted. Along with encouraging Namibians and Germans to further pursue their dialogue process, the LWF is committed to offer accompaniment and support. As a communion with a passion for justice, peace and reconciliation, the process among Namibians and Germans is at the heart of its vocation.

I am deeply impressed by the Namibian government's *Harambee* Prosperity Plan (HPP). As President Hage Geingob wrote in April of this year, the Kiswahili word *Harambee* means, "Pull together in the same direction."²

The development plan, therefore, is a "call for unity" encouraging "Namibians to work towards a common purpose." The plan consists of five pillars: effective governance, economic advancement, social progression, infrastructure development and international relations and cooperation.

Harambee and the work of the Namibian people can be an inspiration for the life of our global communion. We can learn from our Namibian companions to pull together in the same direction as we participate in God's mission. Today, there is no longer a big or a small church, West and East, North or South. Today, we accompany each other as churches on the way to Emmaus, walking together, confused and challenged, but pulling together in the same direction. Our communion must pull together on many issues. We are responsible for mission, including prophetic *diakonia*, in the world. We cannot be quiet. Here in Windhoek, we have an opportunity to listen to and learn from our Namibian sisters and brothers. The message I have heard so far is that it is not just about political liberation as a one-time event, but about ensuring that the fruits of liberation are manifested in the lives of all people.

Our global communion itself is a sign of God's ongoing work of liberation. We come from many different countries; some of our countries were colonized while others did the colonizing. This is true in Namibia and in many other places around our planet. In Latin America, for instance, we still see the legacy of dictatorships and colonial manipulation; churches have been and continue to be divided by political questions and ethnic distinctions. In the Middle East, the churches deal daily with the 100-year legacies of the Sykes-Picot agreement

² Harambee Prosperity Plan: Republic of Namibia Namibian Government's Action Plan towards Prosperity for All (April 2017), available online at <http://www.gov.na/documents/10181/264466/HPP+page+70-71.pdf/bc958f46-8f06-4c48-9307-773f242c9338>.

agreed to by Britain and France. In Israel and Palestine, we know that there are church groups standing against ongoing injustice while others justify occupation by Biblicist readings of Scripture. Some of these wrongs are in the past, waiting to be recognized and reconciled; some of these injustices are ongoing, with effects that impact on our relationships today. Our communion carries the painful effects of colonization. But we, the 145 churches, are part of one communion, liberated by God's grace, participating in God's mission, pulling together in the same direction to advance God's kingdom in our world.

Because we are "liberated by God's grace," our communion is a platform for the open exchange of ideas and perspectives, a place where we do not ignore the pressing questions of our age. Together, we have decided that we will live out the preferential option for the poor and oppressed. The poor will be silenced no more. This is what "liberated by God's grace" means in practice today. Before God, we are equal. Liberated, we are free to act on behalf of the world God loves. This is the energy I hope we carry with us over the next seven years of our life together as a global communion.

The ongoing reconciliation of Lund and Malmö

The historic reconciliation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Communion we celebrated last year in Sweden has had profound significance for global ecumenism. In 2010, Anglican theologian Andrew McGowan relayed the sense that we are now in the midst of an "ecumenical winter," where the movement toward visible Christian unity had reached a low point.³ McGowan suggests that "Many Christians find their most

powerful and transformative experiences of ecumenism in experience in shared prayer and mission." This sharing of prayer and mission is what we experienced in Lund and Malmö; perhaps, alongside many other movements, what we have achieved in the last decades of Lutheran–Catholic dialogue will lead to further breakthroughs of an ecumenical spring.

The big event in Malmö pointed the way toward an ecumenical spring. There, we highlighted diaconal collaboration as a fruit of ecumenical partnership. Instead of engaging in dialogue as a political activity to improve diplomatic relations or an academic exercise to please nobody but the scholars sitting in a room, the Malmö event shows how dialogue can mutually strengthen the capacity of churches to respond to the world's needs. We engage in dialogue so the world may believe and be healed.

Historic reconciliation, as important and monumental as it is, cannot be allowed to remain only an end in itself. This is the lesson of linking Malmö with Lund. Ecumenical dialogue, even at the academic level, can help us discern convergences and diversity, leading us toward our common mission. These dialogues must address our common search for responding to the needs of the world. In the arena, we discussed challenges facing human communities in Syria, India, Burundi, South Sudan and Colombia. This event showed how ecumenical engagement can propel the church into the world. The agreement between Caritas and LWF World Service demonstrated ecumenism based on mutual friendship and trust. Through this agreement and our shared work, we show that we are working together, following Christ's command, for the sake of the world.

The event in Lund with His Holiness Pope Francis filled me with great hope. Careful

³ Andrew McGowan, "Harvesting—in an 'Ecumenical Winter'?" in *Centro: News from the Anglican Centre in Rome* 16:1 (2010), 1.



Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation, Lund Cathedral, 31 October 2016: Kurt Cardinal Koch, President Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Bishop Dr Munib Younan, President of The Lutheran World Federation; Pope Francis; Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation. Photo: Magnus Aronson/Ikon

planning for this event—co-hosted by Pope Francis, myself as LWF president and Martin Junge as LWF general secretary and co-hosted locally by Archbishop Antje Jackelén and the Catholic Bishop of Stockholm, Monsignor Anders Arborelius—led to a spirit of trust and friendship. In cooperation with the Catholic Church, the prayer service in Lund has been replicated (in whole or in part) in France, Chile, Germany, Amman and in Bethlehem at the Church of St. Catherine within the Church of the Nativity.

During the service in Lund, Pope Francis and I signed a joint declaration saying that “through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us.” The declaration lamented that our division had “wounded the visible unity of the church” and rejected “all hatred and violence, past and present, especially that expressed in the name of religion.” I continue looking for the Holy Spirit to guide us through issues on which we still disagree: ecclesiology, ministry

and the Eucharist. Honest disagreement is the foundation of dialogue; I am confident that we will be able to find convergence on many issues.

No matter how difficult and long it is, I encourage the communion to continue this process because it is Christ’s call: to have one Baptism and one table for the Eucharist. It continues to be my conviction that the Eucharist is at the table of Christ, not a Lutheran, Catholic, Reformed, Anglican or Orthodox table. It is Christ’s table of generosity. God’s Word and promise makes a thing holy, not any human effort or label. In other words, the event in Lund is not yet finished. Its positive energy continues to expand, even into interreligious relations.

But I want to share with you something that caught my attention in Lund even before we had the opportunity to meet with Pope Francis. One day earlier, during the regular Reformation Day worship at Lund Cathedral following the liturgy of Holy Communion,

something very special happened. Just before the closing hymn, we suddenly saw the Dean of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Lund entering the Lutheran cathedral with the Vatican flag, an icon of the Virgin Mary and the entire Catholic congregation. Together, they processed to the front of this Lutheran cathedral and joined the Lutheran congregation in shared song and prayers.

As we gathered together around the altar, I have never seen faces so elevated and happy. It was as if we were dreaming. Many in the church were amazed; it reminded me of the day of Pentecost when the disciples and the people were amazed at what was happening in front of their eyes. Many people were in tears. Later, some observed that our ecumenical celebration the next day would have meant very little if the local people had not embraced it so fully.

This, my friends, is the positive energy emanating out of Lund. Like the work of the Holy Spirit, it has not remained in that place alone. I am confident that this energy will spread throughout our global communion. Each diocese and congregation has an opportunity to reach out to Catholic neighbors, urging them to build on this ecumenical energy.

Just a few months ago, I was invited to Florence, Italy, for a three-day symposium on the Reformation. In addition to twenty-three Catholic universities and organizations, I was happy to be there with the Lutheran Church in Italy. In this very Catholic environment, I thought I was sitting in a Lutheran gathering speaking about music and marriage and saying that the church should always be reformed. The spirit was deeply and openly ecumenical.

The energy of Lund is not limited to Christian ecumenical relations. Al-Mayadeen

television station in Lebanon interviewed me about our historic reconciliation; I was told that the interview was watched by 30 million people throughout the Muslim world. Dr Muhammad Al-Sammak, Secretary General of the Christian–Muslim Committee for Dialogue in Lebanon and Co-President of Religions for Peace, has offered several comments on Catholic–Lutheran reconciliation. Sammak, who has said that “the task of the Muslims today is to defend and purify our faith from the criminal exploitation of the jihadists,”⁴ has also suggested that Sunni and Shi’a Muslims must learn from the energy of Lund to explore reconciliation between their communities as well. The energy of Lund will create more energy and trust and not just among Lutherans and Catholics. Surely, this is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit!

Nowhere is the need for meaningful ecumenical engagement more necessary than in the Middle East. In recent years, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians have learned again that isolation is the path to destruction. Our churches—historic communities with roots reaching back to the time of Christ—urgently seek ecumenical unity. In addition to facing a shared political crisis, we experience ever-deepening levels of theological dialogue.

If Lund only remains in Lund and does not infiltrate the Catholic and Lutheran churches, its meaning will diminish day by day. The more we receive and implement it in our churches, the more energy will be created, just as we experienced in Florence and other places. While the energy continues, we must invest in it. We must build relationships with Catholics, Orthodox, Evangelical, Anglican and Reformed churches, along with others. The more we can build this energy, the more we will be reminded that we share one mission in the world. The event is not finished; it continues, just like the

⁴ Raffaele Luise, “Giubileo e dialogo interreligioso: Un’esperienza concerta” (19 November 2016), available online at <http://www.farodiroma.it/2016/11/19/giubileo-e-dialogo-interreligioso-unesperienza-concreta-di-raffaele-luise/>

ongoing Reformation of the church. The energy going out from our celebration in Lund is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, liberating us by creating trust and reconciliation in a time of fragmenting relationships. It is my sincere hope that the ecumenical winter we have been experiencing will indeed give way to an ecumenical spring.

LWF leadership in a religiously diverse world

The road from conflict to communion in relation to our commemoration of the Reformation was a journey of reconciliation and repentance. In the same way, our global communion must recognize that troubled interreligious relations are also part of our history. Just as Luther wrote against the Pope and Catholicism, he wrote against Jews and Muslims, Judaism and Islam.

As a communion, we have participated in many processes to recognize and respond to our Lutheran tradition's difficult legacy in relation to Jews and Judaism. Today, each of our churches including my own, the ELCJHL, maintains strong, open relationships with both the Jewish people and many of their institutional expressions. We must also recognize that this difficult history of interreligious relations also extends to Muslims and Islam. Just as fifty years of dialogue have produced major steps forward for historic reconciliation with Catholics and improved relationships with Jews, we must now embark on intentional processes of engagement with Muslims and Islam.

Luther never could have imagined the historic reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics. Neither could he have imagined the growing strength of our relationships with Jews and Muslims around the world. As we confessed in 1984 in our LWF assembly in Budapest, we not only disagree with but

repudiate his writings against Jews. We have taken strong steps to reverse his condemnations of the Catholic Church. We also disagree with his writings on Islam and Muslims.

We argue with Luther. We receive with gratitude his explicit and clear theology of justification by grace through faith. But we refuse any of his ideas that denounce others and affirm ourselves alone. It is worthwhile to debate his decision to side with the nobility against the peasants. How can we uncritically accept his actions when he sided with political power? We argue with Luther. And I am confident that he would encourage us to do so! Self-critique is the essence of reformation. We must always ask what we have done right and what, despite our best intentions, we have done wrong and omitted. This is an essential element of *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

This dynamic, self-critical approach to building relationships and trust beyond confessional and religious boundaries will help us confront some of the most pressing interreligious problems in our world today. The historic weight of Muslim-Christian tensions continues to inflame problems throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. Let me say a word specifically about Syria and Egypt in the context of broader global threats.

We are seeing growing tensions in diplomatic relationships and military threats throughout the world. The situation on the Korean peninsula is a worrying one for the area and for global stability. We stand with our member churches in Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia and many other countries at this moment of instability and fear. We see many leaders seeking to prove their strength through threats of armed conflict. We urge leaders instead to show their strength through restraint and their wisdom through dialogue. Our world simply does not need more conflict and war. In the last century, we had two

major wars; our world has not yet recovered from their disruption and devastation. Why should we head in this direction again?

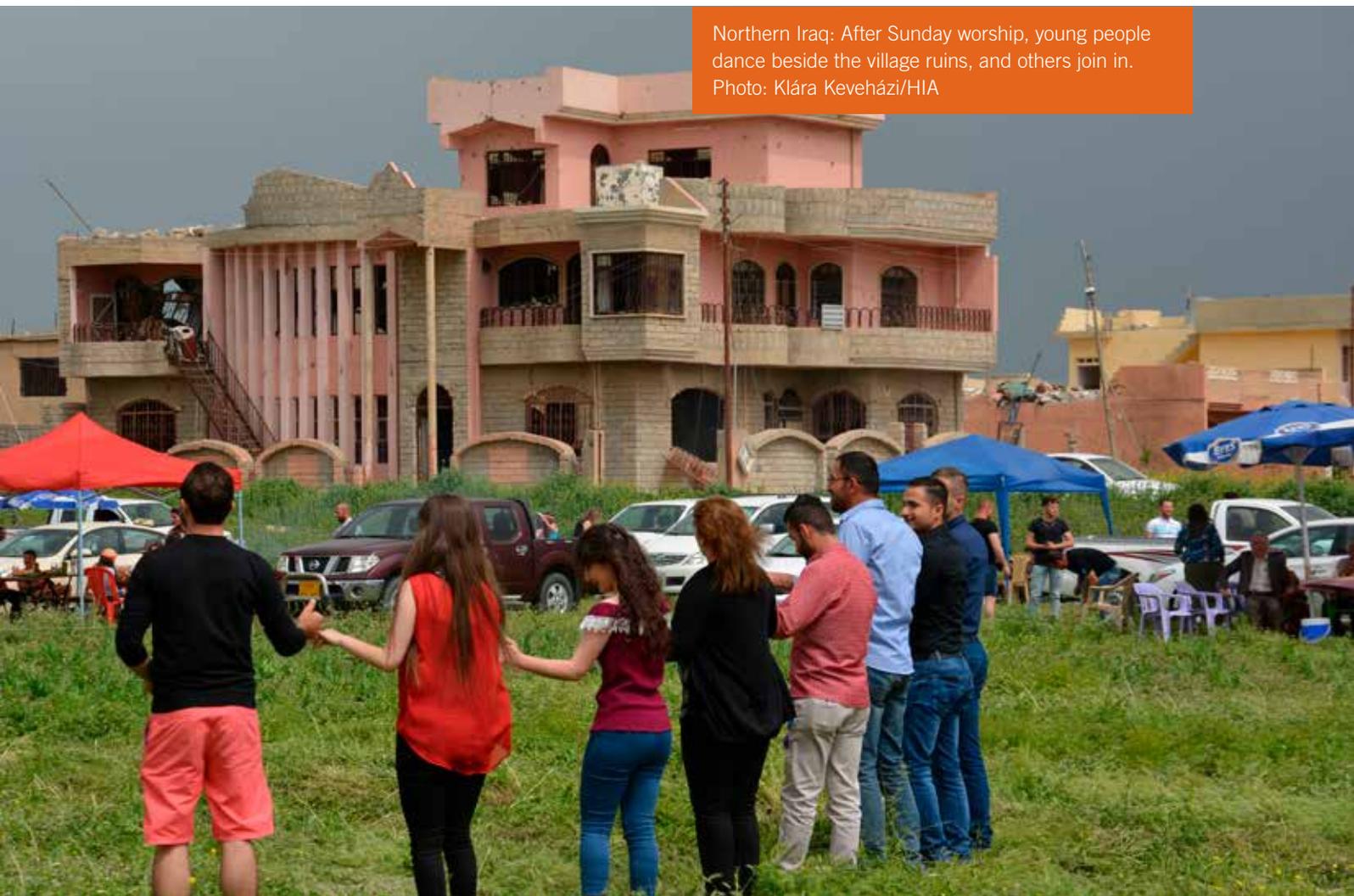
In the car from Lund to Malmö, Pope Francis and I discussed the political situation throughout the world and the lack of constructive political leadership. His insight was that “Today, it is the role of the church to be prophetic and give moral leadership in our world.” Then we shook hands and committed to working together toward that end. So today, I ask you, as leaders of the Lutheran communion, to assume your role as prophetic leaders in your countries, showing moral leadership in a broken world seeking values and guidance.

Syria, I am afraid, can spark off a new world war if common human decency does not soon overcome political, economic and military interests. Every party—locally, regionally and globally—seeks to further its own interests and dismisses the well-being of the Syrian

people themselves. These leaders—again I am speaking locally, regionally and globally—must hear the message of Jesus to Peter: “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt 26:52). Arms and interests will not resolve the problems that have engulfed Syria. Only the pursuit of human dignity—dignity that is not for sale!—can liberate the people.

The suffering of the Coptic communities in Egypt has too often drawn our attention to the continued problems of that country. Two Palm Sunday bombings at Coptic Orthodox churches in Egypt—one targeting His Holiness, Pope Tawadros II—were only the latest attacks. I know that Christians in Pakistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa can relate to such threats. In addition to these threats and fears, we also know of resilience in Christian communities. In Iraq, for instance, we know that many congregations chose this year to hold

Northern Iraq: After Sunday worship, young people dance beside the village ruins, and others join in.
Photo: Klára Keveházi/HIA



their Easter services openly, even if they did so in church buildings that had been almost destroyed by bombs. Just after an earlier bombing at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, I was invited to offer condolences as part of a joint Muslim-Christian delegation from Palestine including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. During our visit, we met both the Coptic Pope and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmad II-Tayyib.

With both religious leaders, the pressing issue was the status of Christians in the Arab and Muslim world. In response, the Grand Imam mentioned the Al-Azhar statement in December 2014, reminding Muslims that Christians are people of the book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) who have a place in all Arab and Muslim countries in the world. The Grand Mufti also suggested that Muslims could do more to change the language of sermons in the mosques. Instead of reactionary exclusivism, they should be speaking a language of equality for all citizens, not only for those who belong to the same religion.

Following this delegation's visit, the Council of Muslim Elders invited me to an Al-Azhar conference on freedom and citizenship. In that conference, the concept of equal citizenship was again promoted and the use of the word "minority" to diminish the status of smaller religious groups was denounced. My message as both ELCJHL bishop and LWF president was to say to the Muslim world that citizenship must be equal, embracing diversity; I enjoined Muslims not to use the word "minority" or *dhimmi* (minority religions under the protection of Islam) to offend us or underestimate our role in society. This conference can be considered a turning point for Islamic political theory. Christians have an opportunity to build on this achievement, especially when churches are attacked based at least partially on the sense that they are less equal than others.

As a global communion, we must build on these moments, promoting well-being for all communities throughout the world. Our Lutheran tradition has a tremendous capacity for shaping the conversation between religious and governmental leaders, for influencing policy and culture in ways that benefit the greater good rather than only the good of powerful or dominant parties. In this way, our communion can make direct contributions, not just to building better relationships for ourselves, but to combating the legitimacy of religious exclusion and extremism everywhere emerging from misguided interpretations in whatever tradition: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism included.

When I assumed the office of the presidency, I prayed that the two-state solution, including a shared Jerusalem, would be realized during these seven years. That prayer has not been clearly granted. I continue to ask you to pray and work with me, encouraging justice to roll down like waters in our Holy Land. The non-resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its dimensions continues to be the core destabilizing feature of the Middle East.

As I pondered over the church response to looming global conflict, this poem from Susan Cherwien spoke to my heart:

God is praised in justice

God is praised in lives that look beyond themselves.

There can be no praise without justice.

Our songs without justice are an annoying noise.

Our hymns without compassion, like the scraping of stones.

*For praise to be complete,
let justice flow,
let justice flow.⁵*

⁵ Susan Palo Cherwien, *Crossings: Meditations for Worship* (Fenton: MorningStar, 2003), 16.

A responsive ethic for a world turned in on itself

Liberated by God's grace, our global communion has a calling to care for communities crushed by a world turned in on itself. This calling includes responsibility to provide a witness of robust moderation, countering the many forms of extremism of our world, especially those hiding behind religious masks. Recent global trends promoting extremism, protectionism and populism instead draw us away from one another, building walls of division and threatening conflict as a way of strengthening exclusive community identity. As a global communion built on diversity and mutual relationship, we stand against these trends, promoting concern not for the "strong man" savior but for the least of these, the people of the cross.

Extremist calls for egocentric policies and violence—not limited to any one religion or geographic area alone—are the essence of sin: *in curvatus in se*. As churches and as a global communion, we have an opportunity to speak out for the dignity of all human beings in our weakness and diversity, not in our shining strength and uniformity. Inclusivity—a value of robust moderation—has become a mark of prophetic witness today. As we have learned in our decades together as a global communion, our liberation is mutual. We must be opened and liberated not by ourselves, but in relation to others.

This quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplifies for me the possibility of mutual liberation and global concern:

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot

*expect to live more than twenty-eight or thirty years, I can never be totally healthy even if I just got a good checkup at Mayo Clinic. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made. No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent.*⁶

This enduring sense of interdependence is the key to liberation. This fundamental mutuality is the mark of liberation "in God's grace." These ideas are essential as we chart the future of our global communion and our relationship to other churches and religions.

This witness stands in stark contrast to the world, which is entering another cycle of egocentric self-interest. As countries and peoples, we are closing in on ourselves, seeking our interests alone. The global rise of ethno-nationalist politics and cheap populism reinforces the natural human tendency to consider oneself and one's national interest as more important than any global concern. The discourse is a clue: France first, Netherlands first, America first. Brexit tells us that my economy is better when I am alone, not with you.

Liberation today means that we must be freed from these egocentric lies. We must create the sense that we need each other. African countries are experiencing multiple layers of internal division promoted by countries and corporations seeking to rob them of their natural resources. Motives informed by profit alone are best challenged by the mutual liberation found in the critical prophetic witness of *Ujamaa*, *Ubuntu* and now *Harambee*.

These lessons are important for our communion as well, not just the politics in our home countries and regions. The nature of

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Measure of a Man* (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1959), 52.

our communion is togetherness; our liberation is only with others, not in spite of them. While we do not strive for uniformity, we can never forget that we are not alone. As King says, “No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent.” In the same way, no church or individual Christian can stand out, boasting of being independent. We, the 145 churches of our global communion, are interdependent.

Liberation: the meaning of the Reformation today

When the general secretary and I met the president of Slovenia, he asked a very open and important question: what is special about the Reformation? My response was that through the Reformation, we have regained the freshness of the gospel. Martin suggested that the Reformation had brought a new sense of freedom into the church. My sense is that together, both of these insights help us to understand the deep meaning of the continuing, ongoing Reformation. The Reformation has inspired commitment to the freedom of every human being, respecting human rights, gender justice, freedom of conscience and this latter freedom as an integral part of our freedom by God’s grace. The freshness of the gospel helps us to grasp human freedom more deeply than we can imagine.

The phrase *ecclesia semper reformanda* was first coined by the theologian Karl Barth in the mid-1940s. Lutherans have of course taken the insight of this Reformed theologian and read it back into the core of Martin Luther’s Reformation spirit, even back to his 1517 theses on indulgences and his 1518 theses for the Heidelberg Disputation. These sparks of brilliance in Luther’s early career as a reformer point to his courageous drive to reform, to rebuild, to remake the church in a spirit of

repentance and faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today, we Lutherans are challenged both in our encounter with the gospel and in our commitment to Evangelical Lutheran interpretations of Scripture to continue this rebuilding, remaking, reforming task. In this year of commemoration, it is right to remember the past. It is right to visit Lutherstadt Wittenberg and remember the men and women who made the historic Reformation possible. But it is also essential that we seek out the spirit of freshness and freedom with which the Holy Spirit moved then and continues moving today. The Reformation continues because the Spirit is still at work in the world. So it is right that we are not just in Wittenberg, but in Windhoek, experiencing the liberation we find in God’s grace in both the church and society.

In this year of commemoration, we are tempted to put the concept of “Reformation” into a box. We can pretend to know exactly what happened and what it was all about. This time of remembrance and commemoration is not just about the great women and men through whom the Reformation was introduced 500 years ago. It is about the movement of the Spirit then, continuing today and into the future. It is about the church being liberated by God’s grace.

The Spirit calls us outward, shifting the focus from ourselves and placing it on the world God loves. We are called to participate in the movement of the Spirit, repairing and restoring ecumenical and interreligious relationships. We are called to follow the Spirit as she works on the margins of the world, proclaiming how God refuses to forget the weak and condemned, the betrayed and the occupied, those ignored by the centers of worldly power.

The Spirit blows where she will. If the phrase *ecclesia semper reformanda* is too familiar and comfortable, the Spirit takes us into a new life

of *ecclesia semper liberata*: the church always liberated, the church always released. God's church has been unleashed, released into the world to discern the movements of the Spirit and participate fully in God's mission. This is why prophetic *diakonia* is such a strong mark of our global communion. In the freshness and freedom of the gospel, we have been made free to act for the sake of the world.

This emphasis on freedom shapes our ecclesiology. Within our churches, we are called to cultivate a spirit of liberation, a freedom to ask difficult, even foundational questions. In this, we seek good order without imposing uniformity. Throughout our communion and within each church, we have the freedom to challenge teaching and practice; these challenges are distinctively Lutheran when they appeal to our core commitments of *sola gratia, sola scriptura, sola fides*. We are free to attempt to persuade others through Scripture and reason. The interdependence of our communion reminds us, however, that these challenges are not personal or individual exercises; we question and we discern within community and in communion.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, our global communion is beautifully strengthened through your courageous questioning and passionate participation. Together, we enjoy a spirituality of Reformation. This spirituality, by God's grace, is itself a sign of liberation. I pray that our entire communion will be continually renewed and remade through the power of the cross and the continued work of the Holy Spirit.

Concluding remarks

As I conclude this address, I conclude my seven years as president of the Lutheran

World Federation. These years of service have provided me, my church and my family with many remarkable experiences. Through this role, my love for this global communion has been deepened.

I appreciate the democratic structure of the LWF with its shared responsibility between governance and executive leadership. The more we encourage the roles of both the Communion Office and governance, the more we shall increase the effectiveness of our work with passion for the church and for the world. We need to continue this mutual leadership, strengthening and building synergies between the distinct roles of president and general secretary so they can together carry forward our mission more effectively.

I deeply appreciate the intentional inclusivity within the operations of our global communion. We do not only speak about inclusion but actively seek our strength in intergenerational and socioeconomic diversity while intentionally practicing gender justice. We are creating leadership within our communion that respects differences while living out our Lutheran theology of the priesthood of all believers and the radical equality of all persons before God. Day by day, we demonstrate our commitment to participating in what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls a "discipleship of equals."⁷

I would like to express my gratitude to several people and groups.

First, to the general secretary. We both took up roles that were new for us. Each of us had some information and experience related to the LWF, but we grew into these roles together. That a Chilean and Palestinian could work together with such synergy and mutual support is a sign

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993). This concept was featured in several of my addresses to the LWF Council during my time as president of the LWF.

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that our faith breaks all borders, that we are called to a common mission. Two of us from small churches in the global South leading this communion is surely a sign of the Holy Spirit! Thank you, Martin.

I also want to thank the vice presidents and the Meeting of Officers, who have been wonderful coworkers. Together, we have created a leadership based on trust. Through this, we have become a good set of friends, establishing a friendship that will never end. This gratitude extends to the Council and our advisers along with all of the guests from churches and related organizations. I appreciate the trust I have received from you.

In these seven years, I have visited every region of our global communion. Wherever I visited, I was blessed to see the specificity of each expression of Lutheran Christian faith. Each distinct community makes a thread in the tapestry of our global diversity, shaping the nature of our global communion. I am thankful for all who received me, even as I regret that I was unable to accept every invitation. Thank you for allowing me to lead our communion.

It is important for me to offer special thanks to those who have served as my advisers. I deeply appreciate the support of the Church of Norway, which allowed the Rev. Sven Oppegaard, who recently received the 2017 ecumenical prize of the Norwegian Council of Churches, to assist me in the first

year of my presidency. I also deeply appreciate that the ELCA generously offered the time of Rev. Dr Robert Smith to serve as my special adviser, providing help in writing speeches and sermons while offering theological reflection and guidance. After leaving the ELCA for an academic career, he has continued this work on a voluntary basis. Without his help, I could not have managed all that I have done. From Namibia, I send him my love and appreciation.

I also thank my family and my church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. They allowed me fully to engage in my work as LWF president. They understood that this calling to serve our global communion in this way was a call from Christ. They also understand my Christ-called mission to be a servant of the servants. Only with this understanding could my wife, Suad, and the members of our church allow for my many absences as I traveled to different parts of the world, often for long periods of time. They also understand the significance of the diaconal, ecumenical and interreligious work we do together in the LWF. They have blessed us with their support.

Finally, I thank the Lord, who has given me health, strength and (some) good wisdom to serve as president for this global communion. Liberated by God's grace, may God's name be always praised in my life and in the life of our churches and Communion. *Soli Deo gloria.*



Opening session of the Assembly, 10 May 2017.
Photo: LWF/Brenda Platero

Report of the General Secretary

Rev. Dr Martin Junge

Introduction

It is with great joy and a thankful heart that I present this report to the Twelfth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation. This is such a special moment. Gathered from all over the world, we embody in tangible ways a global communion of churches, rooted in worship, grounded in our theological tradition and actively witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Liberated by God's grace, we are a communion in Christ that lives and works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

We are a privileged generation, living at the time of this 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We are blessed as we meet here in Namibia, embraced by the love, hospitality and warm welcome of our three hosting churches. I am deeply grateful for all their commitment and care. I wholeheartedly thank the local assembly planning committee and the local assembly coordinators for their work. You have accepted a huge responsibility and you have carried it for three years now. Your joint work as three churches is a big gift and a strong encouragement to all of us who have come to Namibia. Thank you!

It is the second assembly of the LWF in Africa. Forty years ago, when we met in Tanzania, independence was still fragile in many parts of Africa, if even no more than a vision and a longing, for instance for Namibians. Apartheid was still a painful reality. Many churches were transitioning to become established and guided

by their own leaders. Today, we admire the vibrancy of our member churches in this region and praise God for it. We are grateful for the African ownership of this assembly.

The Reformation is a global citizen. This is what we see when we come together as a worldwide communion in Namibia. What a journey we have travelled during this last year! From Wittenberg, the cradle of Reformation, where the LWF Council met in June 2016, we moved to Lund and Malmö, Sweden, jointly to commemorate the Reformation anniversary with the Roman Catholic Church. And now we are in Namibia. In one year, we have followed some of the journeys that the Reformation charted over centuries. Indeed, the Reformation is a global citizen today!

And the Reformation is ongoing! We haven't come here only to look back. We have come to look ahead. God is alive, God wants all people to find life in abundance and hence, God's mission is ongoing. Looking into the future, we embrace what God is calling us to be and do as a global communion of churches. The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is a milestone, not the endpoint of our journey. Indeed, the Reformation is ongoing!

While this assembly brings us together as Lutherans from all over the world, we know that we are part of the one body of Christ. We yearn for God's gift of unity. We are blessed by the presence of ecumenical guests at our assembly.



Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the LWF.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

They encourage us to uphold our pledge for a Reformation anniversary with ecumenical accountability. Indeed, to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical!

My report today builds on the report “From Stuttgart to Windhoek,” which has been shared with you in advance. On this basis, I intend to offer some highlights, analysis and perspectives of the LWF’s journey and witness since the last assembly, and glimpses of where this journey may lead us as we continue to respond to God’s call in this world.

Living as a communion of churches

What does it mean to be a communion of churches? Often, during these last years, we have pondered this question.

Last year, while visiting the church festival of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia in the city

of Békéscsaba, Hungary, I found myself in a church, listening to one of their Lutheran schools’ bell choirs. I suddenly understood: this is it! What a wonderful analogy to our shared life as a communion of churches. Like bells, the LWF brings together churches of different sizes, ages and profiles. These churches have all been touched by the gospel message and in listening to God’s voice, they have all found their own distinctive voice to witness to the living God in their midst.

They have also heard God’s call into communion. And that is what moves them to bring their own voices together to compose an impressive tune, the tune of the communion—a symphony of 145 bells! This melody can only be produced with others; only thus can it be heard by the world at large. That is the LWF. It expresses God’s call into communion heard by its member churches. It is their global ecclesial presence and witness. It is both their claim and affirmation of their global citizenship.

No church should think itself too small while holding the one single bell that God has given it; no church should doubt that it can make a difference in a large communion like ours or in a big and complex world like the one in which we live. Conversely, no church should think itself too big, as if it holds the single bell that can play the tune of a large communion like ours on its own. It takes all of us to play the communion's tune of faith that praises the Triune God and offers its witness of justice, peace and reconciliation in our world.

The context in which we have been singing the communion's tune

We seem to be living at an historical juncture when the human family is having a hard time living and working together. There is a strong trend towards polarization, fragmentation and corrosive discourse, if not communication breakdown. This affects local neighborhoods and communities, countries, regional and global structures. The trend affects religious communities too, including churches. It fragments them internally and strains their cooperation with one another and with people of other faiths.

Often, this trend towards polarization is clothed in religious language. Religion easily becomes the target and hostage of identity politics. Since the last Assembly, an increasing number of LWF member churches have experienced this polarization. Communities have been targeted by oppression or violence because of their religious identity. This has also affected Christian communities, for instance in the Middle East, most recently in Egypt, but also in specific contexts in Asia and Africa where LWF member churches witness. Their suffering received expressions of solidarity from the LWF.

Religious connotations of conflict have fueled a negative perception of religion.

Unfortunately, it is not the relentless efforts of ongoing peace-building among religions but the action of religious extremism that often makes it into the news.

With the new awareness of the presence of religion in the public space however, there are also high expectations that faith communities become part of the solution to the conflicts and challenges facing humankind. There is a desperate search for constructive engagement with faith communities acting as bridge-builders.

Platforms and forums for such cooperation are multiplying. This is a marked change from the past, when many organizations, including the United Nations (UN), regarded the LWF's faith-based identity as problematic or irrelevant. Today, aware of its vocation stemming from faith, the LWF is sought after for its particular gifts, recognized as a faith-based organization with a passion for peace, justice and reconciliation in this world.

Increased humanitarian challenges

This has been particularly true for the role of faith-based organizations in the protection of refugees and forcibly displaced persons. Their ever-growing numbers, reaching the unprecedented level of 65.3 million today, has represented a huge challenge over the last years.

There are several causes of this significant increase: conflict, often protracted and fueled by larger geopolitical interests and/or its grip on resources in countries such as Syria, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); growing levels of unbearable inequality within and among countries that add to the number of people looking for better opportunities; and the reality of climate change that has begun to take its toll as it forces many to leave their places of origin.

In response to these developments, international structures are stretched to the limits, but responsive and able to cope if resourced to do so. However, binding instruments enshrined in international humanitarian law to protect refugees are increasingly being undermined by decisions that ignore and circumvent some of its basic principles. Accountability is eroding. The LWF Council expressed its deep concern about these revisionist tendencies: “Refugees lose many things when they flee, but never their human rights.” The human rights framework can no longer be taken for granted. Yet, a world without human rights will inevitably turn into a nightmare.

Forgotten seems the rarely met commitment to devote a 0.7 percent of national budgets to official development aid (ODA). Instead, wealthy countries are committing to spend 2 percent of their budgets on military expenses. We should know better. The painful conflict in Syria illustrates how arms production and trade actually fuel conflict. Moreover, increased military spending fails to address inequality and climate change. The world needs more ploughshares, not more swords!

There have been signs of hope

Two landmark commitments secured by the world’s nations require special mention: the Paris Agreement on Climate in 2015 and the UN Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016. These two agreements speak the language of hope. The human family has not given up the vision of a sustainable life within the one world that is given to us, nor of human development that leaves no one behind. The Paris Agreement has the potential to leverage political action and financial resources that should halt global warming while supporting vulnerable populations. Equally, the adoption of the SDGs gives continuation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched in 2010, although with a much more integrated approach

that requires the participation and action of all countries.

The MDGs achieved a lot during the period of their implementation. Here in Namibia, for instance, a powerful story unfolded where mother-to-child transmission of HIV and AIDS was substantially reduced and access to retroviral treatment significantly boosted.

Growing inequality excluding entire sections of society

However, the MDGs didn’t manage to address the growing gap in wealth distribution that undermines the already vulnerable. Women, children, disabled and elderly people see their rights, positions and possibilities curtailed. Minorities such as indigenous peoples continue to lose control over their lives and resources.

The overall situation of young people is getting worse. The International Labor Organization has warned of a “scarred” generation of young workers facing high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work in “developed” countries. If the present situation of youth does not allow them much of a future, what future could our common household have?

The complexity of the challenges that humankind faces often leads to simplistic responses. Fears and anxiety increase and these in turn make people vulnerable to reassuring answers that often do not deliver and to populism, manipulation and xenophobia. Mistrust in the political system, its structures and its representatives are on the rise.

What will be our tune in the midst of these realities?

Maybe the old orders that have shaped our world during the last few decades are coming to an end. This entails the risk that important

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achievements over the last decades may be reversed, particularly if isolationist and non-cooperative approaches prevail.

Maybe there is also an opportunity here because these old orders still include so much disorder. As a global communion of churches, we know of the in-built injustices in the current global political and economic orders. We know of the ecological precipice towards which humankind is heading. Maybe there is a chance to let go in order that positive change can be brought forth.

Ambivalent times call for clear positions by our Lutheran communion. What side are we on? What values do we hold? What witness do we offer? Or, if I might put it in other words, what tune will we sing in the midst of these realities?

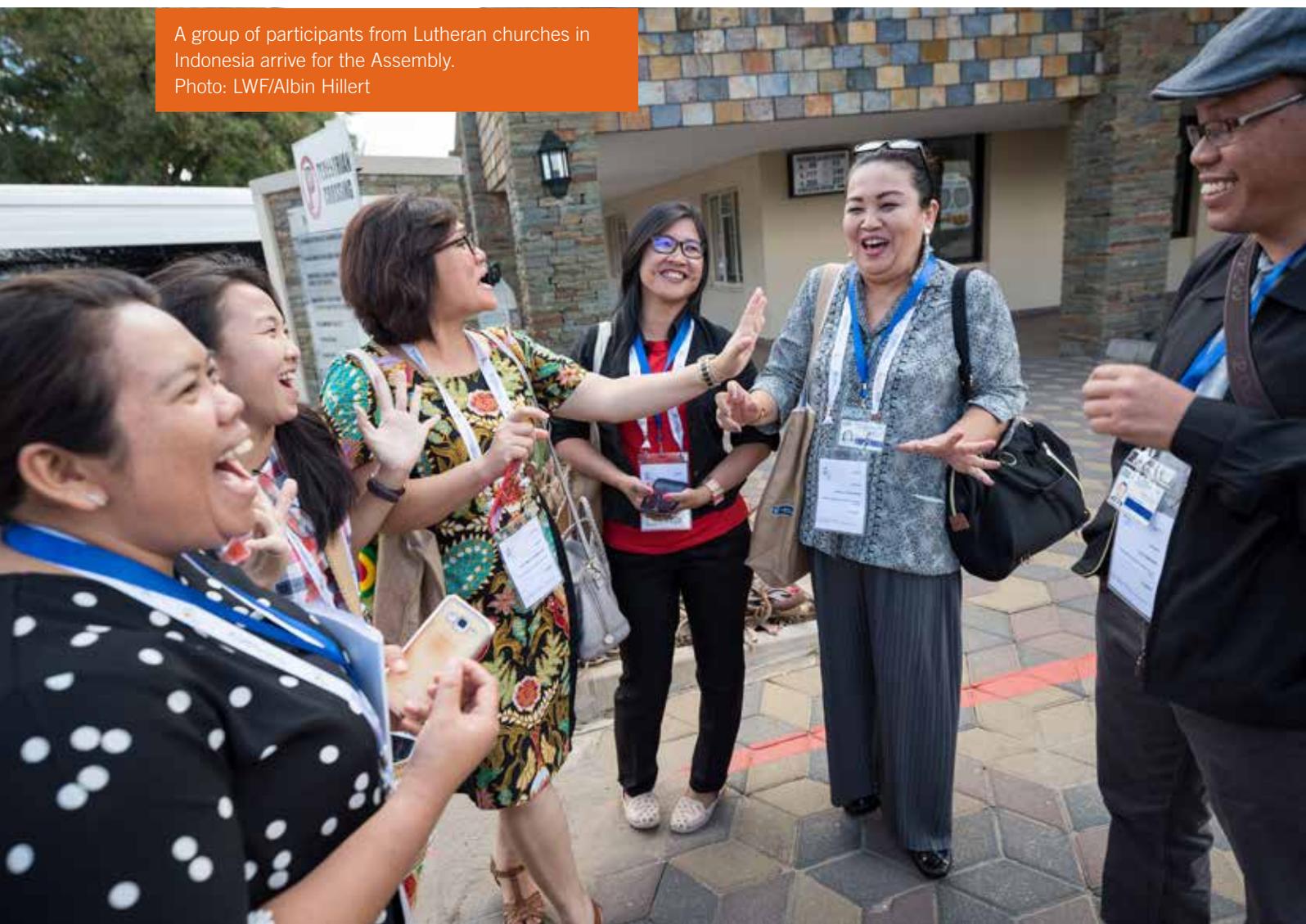
There is no reason to give up hope; no reason to be derailed by forces pulling

communities apart. There is, however, one, very strong reason to stick to the tune of justice, peace and reconciliation: Jesus Christ, the one who came to free us. Even in times confusing as ours, we know who to look to. It is Christ, who “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

The tune we have sung over these seven years

It was a major achievement when the LWF Council adopted the LWF strategy “With passion for the church and for the world” in 2011. Developed in a participatory and iterative process, the strategy describes clearly who we are and what we do as a communion of churches. It offers guidance to us, the staff in the Communion Office to develop programs and to the LWF Council to govern and oversee the work.

A group of participants from Lutheran churches in Indonesia arrive for the Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



The strategy provided a shared articulation and understanding of the tune that LWF member churches wanted to sing in response to their call into communion. It has provided the score for the tune. This is why worship, theological discernment, ecumenical dialogue and interfaith collaboration were so central during these years. This is why the mutual support to grow in capacity for holistic mission was so essential, and why the deepening of communion relations among LWF member churches became a pivotal priority too. This is why effective and empowering *diakonia* to challenge human suffering, injustice and emergencies continued to be part of our priorities over these last seven years.

We have sung the tune of service

When the LWF was founded in 1947, the first resolution of its freshly established Executive Committee dealt with the question of refugees, forcibly displaced people and the massive migration resulting from the aftermath of the Second World War. The LWF embraced *diakonia* as a foundational pillar, identifying what LWF member churches have wanted to be in the world until today: a serving communion, active in love, expressing their deep faith in Christ. LWF's World Service is the eloquent expression of the belief that we are freed by the grace of God and bound into loving service to our neighbor (Martin Luther, "On Christian Freedom," 1520).

Growth in service to the suffering neighbor

In 1947, it was about people from the Baltic countries, the former Soviet Union, Germany and Hungary requiring support. Today, refugees come from other countries. Yet, the call to protect refugees and to welcome strangers remains the same because it is still about human beings, all created in the image of God, possessing an inalienable dignity.

Since the last assembly, the communion's service has grown significantly. With a presence in twenty-four countries through twenty different country programs and operations, the LWF is currently supporting some 2.5 million people. The LWF is responding to the current high-level emergencies in northern Iraq, Syria and Yemen through its operations in Jordan and Djibouti. It is also active through established country programs in places like the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Myanmar, South Sudan and Uganda.

It is disturbing that the numbers of people seeking protection and being forcibly displaced continues to grow. However, I trust you will share a sense of deep gratitude because the LWF has been able to keep pace with these increased demands. This witness speaks both to the power of faith and the vitality of the communion.

It is fitting to highlight how our global service corresponds so powerfully to the witness LWF member churches provide in their contexts. I want to express gratitude to all member churches who have stuck to the tune of the gospel by welcoming the stranger and serving the poor. At times, their singing was quite lonesome, facing criticisms and objections because their melody countered the song of prevailing majorities. Joined by the voices of other LWF member churches, the communion's choir of service and love has touched, transformed and even saved many lives, thanks be to God!

Firmly connected, cooperating with others

Indeed, such a serving presence cannot be sustained on its own. We remain blessed by the strong commitment of related agencies that see in the LWF World Service an instrument matching their vocation. We are strengthened

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by the wider ecumenical context within which we serve. As one of its founding members, the LWF is active at all levels of the ACT Alliance. The LWF's commitment stands for an ACT Alliance that is ecumenically rooted, globally established and inclusive of the diaconal ministry of churches.

Other relationships have developed too. A new strategic partnership with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed in 2014 conveys the importance of the LWF as its largest faith-based implementing partner. The LWF is trusted and valued for its commitment and reliability. "You go to places where nobody goes!"; this is how the LWF communion is known.

A letter of intent was signed between the LWF and the Catholic relief agency Caritas Internationalis during the joint commemoration of the Reformation anniversary held in Lund and Malmö, Sweden, last year. This formalizes the commitment to intentionally seek cooperation while serving people and seeking to receive unity as a gift of God.

In 2013, the LWF World Service signed a memorandum of understanding with Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), a humanitarian relief agency adhering, as the LWF does, to international standards while dealing with vulnerable populations. Our joint program implementation in Nepal and Jordan represented strong encouragement to people and communities seeking to work together. The call to serve one's neighbor is a core belief of most religions. This is underscored in the interfaith statement "Welcoming the Stranger" developed by the UNHCR with significant input and support from the LWF.

The Augusta Victoria Hospital—a beacon of hope

A special ministry of the LWF relates to the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) located on

the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Today, a specialized center for cancer treatment for patients referred to the hospital by the Palestinian Authority, the AVH has consolidated its presence in the midst of a very challenging context. Its quality services have enabled the AVH to prevail in a very volatile political and economic environment and to envisage expansion by an Elderly Care Palliative Medicine Institute (ECPMI), something that will further strengthen its service.

As we in the Communion Office aim to continue serving, we are mindful of the fact that growth requires careful approaches in order to avoid risks. We know that shrinking humanitarian space and structures increasingly targeted by violence require heightened security plans. The foundational commitment to *diakonia* needs to allow the expression of the other LWF commitments: to mission, unity, theology. Finally, the new strategy will also have to take up the complex question of holding emergency and development work together, something to which the LWF has been committed historically and remains committed today.

Adding indispensable voices to the communion's tune: women and youth

I firmly believe that when people and churches meet, there is always the promise of additional wisdom as a gift of God. Maybe it is because faith is at its best when it is in dialogue. Faith is relational, calling people into a new community, linking them invisibly yet powerfully into relationships which are in God's hands. That was the story of the first apostles as they reached out, met, prayed, worshiped and encouraged each other.

That's our story today too. Coming together in Namibia, we follow the apostolic pattern that knows of the invisible yet powerful links that bind the church together. "For where two

or three are gathered in my name ...” (Mt 18:20) was never meant to become a word of consolation over low worship attendance; instead it is a reminder of the promise of Christ’s presence whenever we meet as people of faith.

I believe such wisdom visited earlier LWF assemblies when they realized that they were missing a pivotal section of the church when they gathered—women and youth—and that without a policy to address this absence, they would continue to miss it.

The implementation of the quota policy of at least 40 percent women and 40 percent men and 20 percent youth requires continuing dedication. It does not yet come naturally for LWF member churches to always include women and youth as participants in the life of the communion. As long as this is the case, the quotas are still needed.

Youth participation

Important steps in the ongoing journey from representation to participation were taken at the LWF Council (inter-generational discussion in 2013; the first LWF Council session entirely prepared and led by youth in 2014) and by the establishment of the global young reformers’ network, which has added life and substance to the LWF’s Reformation anniversary through its 54 projects involving some 5,000 youth and reaching out to around 25,000 individuals.

LWF youth lead the communion in addressing climate change. Their participation at the Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was remarkable and included joining the campaign “Fast for the climate” that involved many LWF leaders. With their help, we have all understood that climate justice is an issue of intergenerational justice. Climate injustice is just another expression of

unsustainable ways of living, using resources that belong to tomorrow. This, in turn, is foremost a spiritual and ethical challenge, which churches are well equipped to take up. As I often say: LWF youth have converted us! We are understanding anew what “Liberated by God’s grace” means in view of the gift of creation and ecological devastation.

Women’s participation

Women’s journey from representation to active participation has been a demanding one. The commitment to women’s ordination, reiterated at each assembly since 1984, has proven pivotal. A survey released in 2016 indicated that LWF member churches continue to move forward in their commitment towards the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry. The Latin America and the Caribbean region is the fourth of the LWF’s seven regions where all member churches now ordain women. Today, 119 (82 percent) LWF member churches ordain women. Discussions are ongoing in several churches not yet ordaining women and decisions are scheduled to be taken in some of them.

Yet, there have also been setbacks. A few churches have reversed earlier decisions and are again restricting the access to the ordained ministry to men, which prompted the LWF Council in 2016 to reaffirm the LWF’s commitment. It is my hope that this assembly will reiterate the goal of equal access of women and men to the ordained ministry and also encourage proactive accompaniment in the theological discussions and decision making on this issue.

Nobody in the church refers anymore to Joshua 10:13 to argue the view held for centuries that the earth is the center of the universe. On the brink of a new century of reformation, the time is right to stop referring to isolated Bible verses to uphold male exclusivism

in the ordained ministry. Let the communion's bell choir become the joyful announcement of what God has brought to this world and to the church through Jesus Christ. Our tune shall be one of inclusion, never of exclusion, a tune reminding us of the tune of midwives who stand by in anticipation as they receive the new world that God has revealed and brought in Christ.

Another significant milestone during the period under review was the adoption in 2013 of the Gender Justice Policy (GJP) for which the Eleventh Assembly had called. Taking its point of departure in biblical-theological language, the GJP addresses one of the most entrenched power asymmetries, so often and so pervasively fueled by religious language. Written as a document for the global communion of churches, it is open to contextualization and adaptation according to local discourse, yet never to putting aside the strong focus on justice. I am grateful to all the churches that have made the GJP one of the most translated LWF documents during this period. Twenty-three translations, among them Arabic, Japanese, Portuguese, Tamil, Korean and Kiswahili tell the story of a heartfelt need among churches of the communion to take up the discussion on gender identities.

The tonality of our song: a witness grounded in theology

The witness and work of the LWF communion of churches has always been deeply grounded in our shared theological understanding. Martin Luther proposed a theological grammar that begins with God and centers in Christ. This grammar helps our churches to stay true to their foundations and identity, relevant in their messages, but also critical of injustice in society and of a prevailing *zeitgeist*. A prophetic church, called to be salt and light, can prescind from many things, but never from solid theology. This also goes for the LWF as a communion of churches: it is

our theological identity that sets up the tonality of our presence in our world, helping us to recognize each other as we link up for common witness.

Biblical hermeneutics and the church in the public space

A five-year process on biblical hermeneutics has built on the love and respect of LWF member churches for the Bible and analyzed how the Bible is approached, read and understood. The study underscores that when a principle of *sola scriptura* doesn't relate to the *solus Christus*, it easily slides into eclectic fundamentalism; conversely, it highlights that when a *solus Christus* does not relate to *sola scriptura*, it ends up developing the Christ that best accommodates our needs and thinking. In both cases, *sola fide* ends up becoming an ideology, rarely relying on God's power. The three *sola* are interrelated!

The study process affirms the contextual reading of the Bible yet connecting it to how our theological identity—our Lutheran confession—provides for the grammar that order the words we read into a coherent whole that points at or brings Christ forth. I am grateful for this study, which claims both our rootedness in the Bible and our confessional identity as a communion of Lutheran churches.

Another process of great significance relates to the study on "The Church in the Public Space." It discusses the presence of religions in the public space and offers theological coordinates that help churches responsibly to use that space. This is a timely study in view of the wide confusion, ranging from total refusal of churches to take up their public role to theocratic tendencies imposing religious beliefs on entire societies. The study recommends five principles for the churches' engagement in the public space. "The Church in the Public Space" is a



Church model in the Omatala.
Photo: LWF/Brenda Platero

meaningful actualization of one of the strong gifts of Lutheran theology: the doctrine of the two realms in which God is active (the two kingdoms).

Self-understanding and communion-building in the regions

The study document “The Self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion” was another important impulse offered by the LWF Communion Office during the period under review. It takes up an old question of the LWF (and of Lutheran ecclesiology): the autonomy of LWF member churches and their accountability to the LWF communion.

The study process was necessary in view of the continued growth and commitment of LWF member churches to their shared journey as a communion of churches. They needed to articulate anew their vision about how to live out the call into communion.

There is, in fact, amazing dedication on the part of member church leadership to live in communion. Evidence is found not only in what they have done together, but also in the enormous support given to their sub-regional and regional processes and structures. Regional leadership meetings have led to beautiful joint ventures: Lutheran identity in Asia or the Mekong Mission Forum; sustainability in Latin America as well as theological education; the doctrinal commission and the program “Poverty in Africa” with its strong local impact; as well as the study on conviviality in Europe.

In all these activities and programs, LWF member churches continue to learn to value the gifts of the other and develop a sense for the tune that God invites them to offer to brokenness and pain in this world. There is vitality, a strong and steady pulse running through the veins of the communion, calling churches together and inviting them to cooperate and witness together.

Perfecting our tune: addressing dissonances in our common witness

This commitment has been strong enough to help navigate some challenges during this period. Among them were questions around family, marriage and sexuality. They have been with the LWF since 1995 and have continued to generate tensions within and among member churches. In some cases, this led to alienation and fracture. The study document on “Self-understanding” also addresses this situation as it deals with the question of unity and diversity.

This discussion process, conducted during the period under review, was called the “Emmaus conversation,” which provided for its theological framework. Like the disciples who discussed the challenging realities confronting them yet who remained open to each other and above all to the presence of Christ, the LWF communion engaged in further important discussions through its Council. At its meeting in Bogotá (Colombia) in 2012, the Council offered five guiding principles that provide a strong basis for the LWF’s ongoing journey as a communion while relating to differences in its midst.

The Council underlined that the Emmaus conversation was not concluded and that there was and is no timeline to do so. It encouraged more discussions, deeper dialogue and more discernment. This is why decisions are not foreseen at this assembly. Rather, it is hoped that in the spirit of the Emmaus process, the assembly will encourage LWF member churches to remain in dialogue within their churches and with each other.

I am personally grateful to the outgoing Council which, while encompassing the whole spectrum of existing positions within the LWF, offered amazing leadership to the whole communion.

Churches in holistic mission: the sounds that compose the communion’s tune

As the content of my report shows, commitment to mission and love for the church have been other foundational pillars of the LWF. Since its inception, LWF member churches have desired to stand together, supporting each other to participate in God’s mission. This desire became a powerful force that not only questioned power asymmetries and injustices resulting from the economic and political powers that prevail in the world; it also drove LWF member churches into communion relations, understanding that their togetherness in mission bound them together in unity.

Although challenged by rapidly changing contexts of cooperation, multilateral partnership and funding for holistic mission, the LWF has been able to uphold its foundational call through project support, scholarships, accompaniment, leadership formation and theological resources. A new initiative bringing together newly elected leaders, ordained and lay, has focused on a key function of the LWF and its Communion Office: to be a convener for reflection and cooperation, allowing communion relationships to be nurtured and furthered and identifying common issues to be addressed collectively.

LWF member churches continue to look to the LWF when facing challenges or struggling with conflict, calling for accompaniment, mediation, prayers and solidarity. The Communion Office’s role in offering this accompaniment remains vital to member churches while at times stretching its capacities to the limits.

Churches facing rapid changes

Many things are changing rapidly for LWF member churches and this in turn has

changed the face of the LWF. Over the last seven years, the number of members has remained stable (with new admissions into membership being offset by mergers of existing member churches). The communion has grown significantly, including more than 74 million members today as compared to 70.3 million in 2010.

For the first time, the home of the largest LWF member churches is not the North-Atlantic region. Today, they are to be found in Africa, with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) being the largest LWF member churches. We praise God for their strength and passion for mission as well as for the many lay and ordained members who have committed themselves to witness the gospel of Jesus Christ. This growth brings significant challenges, including that of sustaining leadership formation and theological education.

For other LWF member churches, challenges are caused by the opposite trend. Several of them are losing members. We suffer with them because, while their call to mission remains unbroken, their ability to engage in mission is challenged. Secularism grows in several regions. In many contexts, churches are aging dramatically, lacking children, youth and young families in their worship and activities. Other churches struggle to become as multicultural and diverse as their societies have been for decades already.

The status of churches is changing in many places, at times with new legislation to which they are obliged conform. This challenges their self-understanding and their role in society. Once a given, the place, the contribution and the relevance of churches have become elusive. Parents used to bring their children for Baptism to conform to social conventions; now, churches need to develop the ability to reach out and to invite.

Other churches stagnate because of internal conflicts, with members searching for greener pastures to live out their faith (if not losing it). In times of “multiple belonging,” it is becoming more common for individuals to participate in more than one church at one time, eventually deciding where to stay (for a while).

Joint reflection and support about being the church today

I could continue to mention challenges and changes. A mission consultation held in 2016 began to map out the variety of issues that churches participating in God’s mission face today. I foresee that the years ahead will bring a strong focus on these important changes in the overall context of churches and on how to address them.

I believe this to be a highly pertinent and necessary focus, for the sake of the church and the communion. The tune the LWF as a communion of churches will be able to play as a whole will directly depend on the ability of each member church to continue to hold its own, distinctive bell in its hands, articulating the message of God’s liberating grace in their own contexts. The LWF as a global communion of churches doesn’t replace the witness of its member churches. It builds on it.

I believe that the LWF is the platform for mutual reflection to take up this discussion, a space of encouragement and inspiration, a space to give and to take, to learn from others and teach others while churches address change in their midst.

In order to provide that space, the LWF has a great opportunity to further its journey as a communion: once regarded as a gift “from the North to the South,” the LWF should become ready to develop mission platforms and processes that are true to its current polycentric nature. There is no future in a one-directional LWF. The future is in relationships and processes of

mutuality and solidarity, of mutual accountability that put churches on an equal level, thereby becoming givers and receivers at the same time.

Never self-centered and inward-looking: the opportunity of the SDGs

That reflection should not be driven by self-concern and self-preservation. Following the paths of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, it should focus on what God wants the church to be in this world. It will be driven by God's compassion and love for all humankind, and will therefore suffer with God whenever humankind is neglected. It will journey with people as they long for hope, seek justice and do not resign themselves to injustice and oppression. It is about a church ready to be bruised instead of watching from the fence, thereby doing as God did in Jesus Christ, because neither salvation nor human beings nor creation are for sale. Because God got so deeply involved with humankind through Jesus Christ, the church in God's mission will always be involved.

I see a great opportunity for churches to engage in such journey of hope and service by linking up with what they have done since times immemorial—serve people—with the UN's Strategic Development Goals. I am grateful for the joint work between the LWF, the WCC and the ACT Alliance assisting churches to connect with this important initiative. This is the time to pull together with other civil society actors and with governmental structures to reclaim the message for which Jesus went to the cross: no one should be left behind.

For the sake of the church and the world: ecumenical dialogues and relations

The period under review has been remarkable in terms of the LWF's ecumenical commitment. Like our diaconal vocation and our commitment to cooperation in mission and theological work, our ecumenical engagement

is at the core of our identity as a communion. For LWF member churches, unity matters, as truth matters. This is why the LWF member churches hold truth and unity together. In a world fragmented by division, at a time when faith is perceived as complicating the task of people wanting to live together, our ecumenical processes speak powerfully to the beauty of faith that brings people together, overcomes differences and generates future perspectives. Ecumenical engagement is in fact a prophetic witness today, given the times in which we live.

Longstanding dialogues with ongoing significance

Two developments deserve special mention. First, the marked tendency to connect dialogue with practical engagement. The Mennonite action at the Eleventh Assembly in 2010 broke new ground in this area. Since then, our dialogue with the Anglican Communion has looked into practical cooperation. The letter of intent between Caritas Internationalis and LWF World Service is another example of our ongoing dialogues that find practical expression in joint witness. This is a development that an ecumenical strategy for the period ahead will have to take into account.

The other important development relates to the ongoing ecumenical potential that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) holds almost twenty years after its signing in 1999. Initially a document resulting from the bilateral dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF, the JDDJ was joined in 2006 by the World Methodist Council. In 2016, the Anglican Communion through its Anglican Consultative Council affirmed the substance of the JDDJ. In July 2017, as part of its general assembly, the World Communion of Reformed Churches will also sign the JDDJ.

Slowly, the JDDJ seems to be becoming a significant hinge in ecumenical relations. The exploration of the implications of this development

exceeds the mandate of the LWF. It could however be a rewarding discussion in the context of the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order.

I have come to understand that the results of dialogues, their findings and breakthroughs cannot be fully grasped if one applies a uniquely short-term perspective. Assessing the results of the dialogues and, therefore, their contribution to unity in the body of Christ, requires medium- and long-term approaches. This does not exclude a healthy portion of impatience. For us in the LWF, unity remains a core calling that we intend to pursue, both with long-term vision and with what I would like to call “prophetic impatience.”

It is in holding this dialectic of patience and prophetic impatience that the LWF intends to remain a reliable ecumenical dialogue partner in the years to come and will engage in the one ecumenical movement of which the World Council of Churches is the expression and with all our bilateral dialogue partners.

I am grateful for the completion of an important stage in our dialogues with the Eastern Orthodox Churches and for the new dialogues with Pentecostals—a long overdue “must” in the context of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

God has not done it all yet: the joint commemoration of the Reformation

The JDDJ was also the theological cornerstone of the report “From Conflict to Communion” received by the LWF Council in 2013. This report, strongly supported by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg and its ongoing participation in all LWF dialogues, represents the first-ever attempt by Catholics and Lutherans at the global level jointly to tell the history of the Reformation.

“From Conflict to Communion” became the foundation on which the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the

LWF were able to develop “Together in Hope” and the joint Catholic-Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation, which took place in Lund and Malmö, Sweden, on 31 October 2016.

No doubt this was an historic event of which not many would have even dreamed only a few years ago. The joint commemoration represents the visible turning point, a deliberate step to move us away from the conflict that marked so much of our past, to open us up to the common future into which God calls us. There is more that unites than what divides us.

“Together in Hope” has not yet achieved unity. Important theological discussions need to take place in view of our understanding of church, ministry and the Eucharist. The LWF is preparing this next step, taking on board important resources that have been developed at national levels.

While preparing this step, the joint statement signed by Pope Francis and the LWF President, Bishop M. Younan, invites churches to respond pastorally to those unable to gather around the eucharistic table though they share everything else in their lives—mixed Catholic–Lutheran families. I want to encourage LWF member churches to work locally with their Catholic counterparts to provide for theologically grounded answers to this pastoral challenge. The Lord's table should not keep people separate. It runs counter to the gift of reconciliation God offered in and with Jesus Christ. After “Together in Hope,” we can make a start, overcoming the separation suffered by those otherwise united by love.

Imagining the tune we shall sing in future

What will be the tune that the LWF will offer to this world as it continues to offer its song that praises God's presence and action in this world?

I don't see this communion needing to look for a new score, for another melody that would emphasize fundamentally different topics or commitments. We should stick to the tune that the LWF has been playing in this world for seven decades now. A tune grounded in faith, centered in Christ, deeply committed to justice, peace and reconciliation in our world.

Upholding that tune, however, does not preclude the need for innovation and change. Let me point towards some aspects here.

Youth and women's participation—taking it a step further

The LWF communion has progressed on its journey of inclusion and participation. Yet, we seem to be getting close to the ceiling of what will be possible because there is a difference in how member churches understand this issue locally and globally. Global participation of youth and women needs to be rooted in their local participation.

Their participation should not be seen as the fulfillment of a given quota required by outsiders but as a matter of fully being the church. Given the challenges mentioned above, there is a great opportunity for churches to root the gift of participation as it is being developed globally deeper in their own life—and this for their own sake! Earlier in my report, I wrote: “If the present situation of youth does not give them much future, what future could our common household have?” That sentence applies to the church and its future as well.

Similarly, I do not see churches enhancing their sustainability in the medium term if the largest section of their constituency, women, is structurally excluded from the tables where issues of the church are discussed and church decisions are being made.

Towards new approaches to communion building

The study document “The Self-understanding of the Communion” has outlined accurately how LWF member churches understand theologically their call into communion as well as the issues they need to continue addressing and learning about.

What comes next is joint discernment on the practical implementation of what that theology tells us. There seems to be a need to develop basic agreements and protocols, a choreography to which we commit to be accountable that spells out how LWF member churches intend to relate to each other as they continue growing into communion. There are unspoken and often conflicting expectations relating to visits and visitation, dealing with difference, expressing disagreement and relating to each other as constituted churches.

With this in mind, the Council has agreed to look more closely at the LWF's communion-building strategies. Regional platforms have served the LWF very well. Yet, in these times of brokenness, there is a risk that these regional expressions may add to fragmentation unless deliberate steps are taken to connect regions and foster exchanges across contexts. The way networks have developed needs to be reassessed. That way, as platforms for women, youth and interest groups are created, they will not end up acting in isolation from their respective churches or of their churches' and the LWF's governance.

Theological education and formation

The call of LWF member churches to support their efforts to cope with a rapidly changing context for theological education has become increasingly louder. It is challenging for many churches financially to sustain structures, models and institutions



The Young Reformers corner at the Omatala.
 Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

for theological education. But the question of the appropriateness of curricula or targeted populations is also becoming an increasingly important one.

We know, however, that without proper theological education, confusion around identity and unity of the church grows exponentially. The LWF Communion Office is attempting a new approach to this complex issue.

As a part of the need for the continued theological articulation of our shared theological identity, I have proposed a global dialogue about what it means to be the church in churches' respective settings. This process would help develop a global narrative on being the Lutheran church engaged in holistic mission. At this time, such a narrative can only be developed with the participation of churches from all regions, acknowledging that there is no longer one, but many centers in the communion.

Sustainability: preparing for the next century of reformation

As this report has shown, the LWF is tremendously sustainable as it continues drawing its existence from God's call into communion. As long as this call is heard, there should be no worry about the LWF's sustainability as a communion of churches.

Yet, as is the case with the challenges that many churches face, attention needs to be given to structures, processes and forms to express the LWF member churches' call into communion and how this will be sustained.

I hold a deep debt of gratitude to the LWF member churches for their strong support in human and financial resources for our shared journey as a communion. The report of the chairperson of the finance committee will reveal that never have more LWF member churches

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committed more resources to the life of the communion. This is great encouragement indeed!

Yet changes in the demographics of the LWF and its member churches will affect their ability to sustain the structures.

The outgoing LWF Council has started to deal with this question and has taken some decisions. I will invite the new Council to think of the LWF in the year 2030—a significant milestone for Lutheran churches when we will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession—and to begin taking the needed decisions today so that tomorrow, LWF member churches may continue to express their gift of communion.

Conclusion

I want to express my gratitude to LWF member churches for their costly engagement in and their commitment to the LWF communion as well as to the LWF Council for its strong commitment to our communion and their generous support. I have deeply appreciated their trust and cooperation throughout these seven years. I want to thank the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton, for her expertise and contributions and the LWF President, Bishop Dr Munib Younan, for his outstanding support. My gratitude also goes to the vice-presidents, who have taken many responsibilities in their regions.

I would like to thank my staff colleagues in both the Communion Office and the country programs for their devoted work and their generosity in serving the LWF. I am deeply indebted to the Communion Office leadership team for their support, advice, critique and encouragement, creativity and commitment to the tasks that are entrusted to us.

In all humility, I remain deeply grateful to God for having granted me the unique privilege of serving the LWF as its general secretary for the past seven years. I am still fully convinced that if it did not exist, the LWF would need to be founded immediately because of what it is and what it does for the church and in the world.

Here we stand then, or should we rather say, here we journey at the close of a rich and meaningful chapter in the history of 500 years of Reformation and of almost 2,000 years of being the church. Here, we continue the journey, ready to step into the next century, singing the tune that God enables this communion to sing, the tune for which we have become known.

I believe LWF member churches can turn to God with thanks and praise for the tune God has allowed them to sing together. God's power has become manifest to many, Christ has shone upon many as we worked for justice, peace and reconciliation. With eagerness and joy, we shall continue being churches in communion, announcing boldly and joyfully: it is not because of who we are, not because of what we do, but because of who God is and what God does that we are justified. In Christ, we are freed to sing the new songs of healing, justice, peace and reconciliation in our world.

THE HERAN WORLD RATION

ommunion
Churches



A candle sets the tone for the Assembly hall.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

Report of the Chairperson of the Finance Committee

Ms Christina Jackson-Skelton

Introduction and overview

This report provides an overview of the financial performance, challenges and accomplishments of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) during the seven-year period from 2010 to 2016. It is important to begin with a word of gratitude. The LWF is only able to deliver on its mission because of the faithful support of member churches, their related organizations and ecumenical partners. Together, we are more than funding partners. We share a purpose and vision, work together to shape and achieve common goals, support program plans and respond to crisis situations across the globe. Together, we are a communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

After the 2010 Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, the LWF Council restructured the LWF Communion Office with the aim of creating a more robust and well-governed organization that might be increasingly professional, effective and accountable. At that time, the LWF finance office became part of the new department for planning and operations. The goals of the reorganization included:

- The LWF achieves a growing and diversified funding base that supports the sustainability of the Communion Office into

the future, including sustained and steady membership fee contributions by member churches

- A strong culture of stewardship that emphasizes responsible investments, calculated risk-taking, cost consciousness, spending within estimated income and making effective use of the resources entrusted to us
- Strong partnership and collaboration maintained with funding partners and
- The Communion Office and country programs demonstrate excellence in financial management and accountability.

During the period 2010 to 2017, the LWF finance committee provided oversight in accordance with the objectives listed above and with attention to good accounting practices and financial management.

The LWF Finance Office administers the assets of the LWF in accordance with high professional and ethical standards and the practices of Christian stewardship and in compliance with financial and accounting regulations. The finance office is also responsible for managing the Communion Office's financial resources efficiently and effectively spearheading



Christina Jackson-Skelton, Chairperson of the Finance Committee. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

efforts toward future financial sustainability. During this seven-year period, the LWF initiated many changes to strengthen its systems, processes and results. These included

- Improved and unified financial systems, created new funding applications and modernized and automated LWF enterprise resource planning systems;
- Amended policies and guidelines
- Strengthened internal control systems
- Reduced costs of operations
- Oversaw timely and prudent planning in response to cost increases stemming from a 15 percent appreciation of the Swiss Franc after the unexpected decision of the Swiss National Bank to unpeg the fixed exchange rate with the Euro

- Improved coordination and collaboration of finance functions across LWF departments
- Introduced a decentralized finance office site to achieve efficiencies and lower costs.

The LWF financial reports are prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), which are widely accepted by funding agencies. The following pages of this report will highlight the financial results for the seven-year period.

LWF income

LWF income for seven years from 2010 to 2016

At a time when many churches and church-related organizations faced financial challenges, we can look back with gratitude for the growth in

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the LWF's resources. Despite declining income from some traditional donors and heavy currency exchange fluctuations, the total income of the LWF almost doubled over the past seven years. During the period 2010 to 2016, income grew from EUR 76 million in 2010 to EUR 151 million in 2016, an increase of EUR 74 million or 98% in six years, as shown below.

This growth has been driven mainly by increased funding designated for the LWF's humanitarian response, revenue from expanded patient services provided by the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem and additional funding for theological work. The following table shows the income received from 2010 to 2016 for each of the LWF departments.

The total income from 2010 to 2016 was EUR 779 million and it was distributed in the following ways:

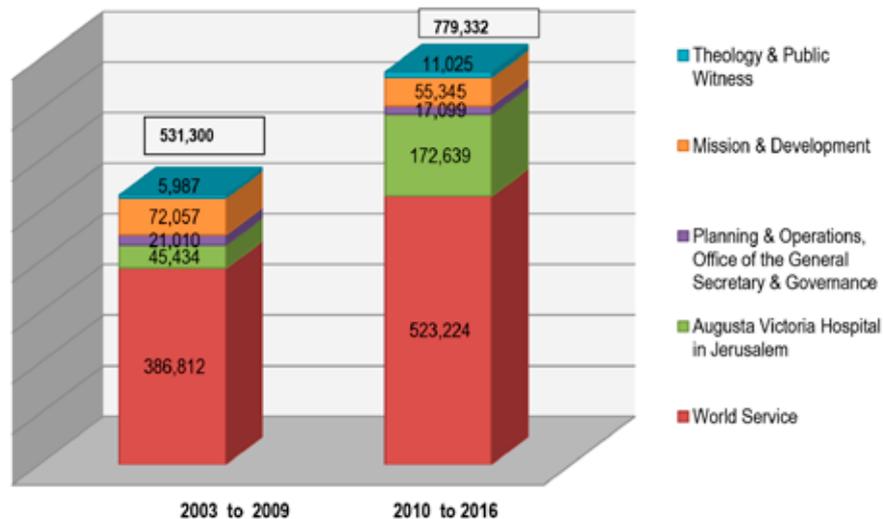
- EUR 11 million (1.4%) went to the communion's theological, ecumenical, interfaith and global advocacy work through

the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) with an increase of EUR 1.623 million (243%) over six years

- EUR 55 million (7.1%) was earmarked for strengthening the member churches' capacity for holistic mission- and communion-building through the Department for Mission and Development (DMD)
- EUR 523 million (67.1%) was designated for our humanitarian response work carried out by World Service (WS)
- EUR 173 million (22.2%) was received for patient services at AVH
- EUR 17 million (2.2%) was allocated for governance, the General Secretary's Office and the Department for Planning and Operations (DPO).



LWF Income 2003-2009 and 2010-2016 (Euros in 000s)



LWF income for assembly period 2010–2016 as compared with assembly period 2003–2009

During the seven-year period from 2010 to 2016, total income to the LWF from member churches, individual donors, church-related agencies, the United Nations (UN), European Union and United States government funding sources and other partners increased from EUR 531 million to EUR 779 million, a gain of 47%. This growth has contributed to the stability of the organization.

The chart above shows the growth in income from the beginning to the end of this Assembly period, as well as shifts in individual income designations between years.

LWF income 2010–2016 by source

Here is how our income has broken down by source over the past seven years:

- Since 2010, member churches and related organizations generously supported the work of the LWF, contributing EUR 366 million, which was 47% of the LWF's income in that period
- UN and government agencies funding amounted to EUR 340 million (44%), which included EUR 172 million for AVH
- International non-governmental organizations funding amounted to EUR 16 million (2%) and EUR 9 million (1%) came from the LWF's ecumenical partners

INCOME IN EUR 000s	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL	%
Theology & Public Witness	668	1,006	1,308	1,613	1,876	2,265	2,289	11,025	1.4%
Mission & Development	8,592	8,673	8,656	8,511	7,514	7,500	5,899	55,345	7.1%
World Service	52,496	56,183	71,372	70,372	79,552	98,227	95,022	523,224	67.1%
Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem	12,406	16,126	16,447	22,794	25,055	34,007	45,804	172,639	22.2%
Planning & Operations, Office of General Secretary & Governance	2,373	2,696	2,356	2,396	2,225	2,565	2,488	17,099	2.2%
Total Income	76,535	84,684	100,139	105,686	116,222	144,564	151,502	779,332	100%

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- Income from local sources and administration fees amounted to EUR 19 million (3%), and EUR 26 million (3%) came from non-project activities.

The chart below shows the income by source.

Membership fees

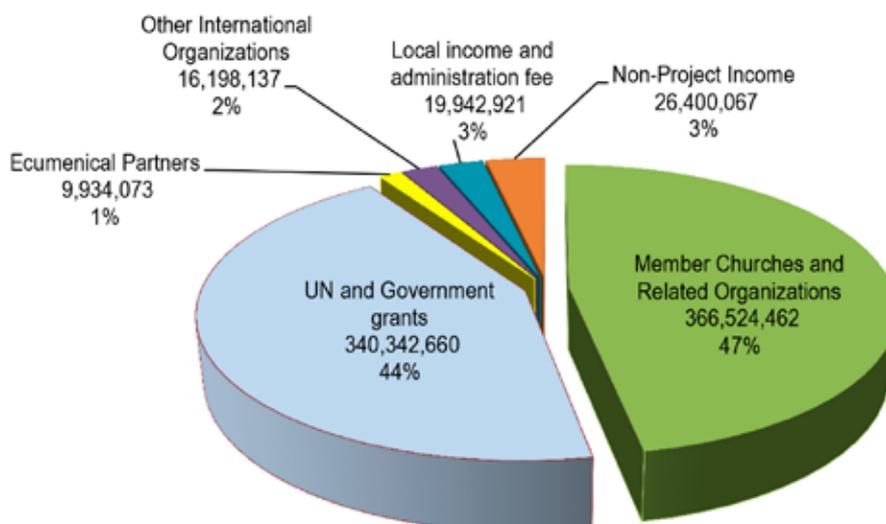
Yearly membership fee contributions from LWF member churches are a critical component of our financial stability, especially as they give flexibility in budget planning and strategic allocations. The amount contributed by each church is calculated on a fair membership principle, which considers the church's wealth relative to other member churches based on its size and the country's wealth index. In recent years, regular engagement with member churches has resulted in more churches paying their membership fees. The LWF Council and leadership continue to look for ways of bringing contributions up to the full fair fee levels. Growth in this income would help to provide support for areas such as theological and ecumenical work, which have been identified as high priorities in the strategic planning process.

For the 2010–2016 period, membership fee contributions totaled EUR 16.8 million. The graph below analyzes the yearly church contributions from 2010 to 2016, which vary between EUR 2.3 million to EUR 2.6 million. The number of churches that paid their annual fair membership fluctuated between 85 and 115.

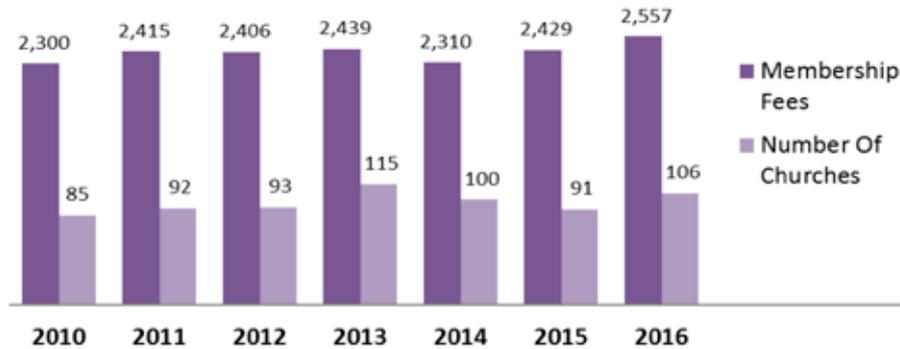
In 2013, the LWF established a resource mobilization office to solicit funding for the areas of work that are traditionally difficult to finance—and to foster member church contributions. The fair membership fee policy makes it possible for all member churches, big or small and in every part of the world, to be full stakeholders in the life and work of the LWF communion. The number of member churches taking financial ownership of the LWF in this way has increased from 85 churches in 2010 to 106 churches in 2016, an increase of 25%. The income variance between the two years was a positive—EUR 0.2 million.

Achieving this increase in membership fee income would not have been possible without the dedication of our member churches and the advocacy of the LWF Council, particularly

LWF Income by Source – 2010 to 2016 EUR 779,332,000



Membership Fees - 2010 to 2016
(in 000 Euros)



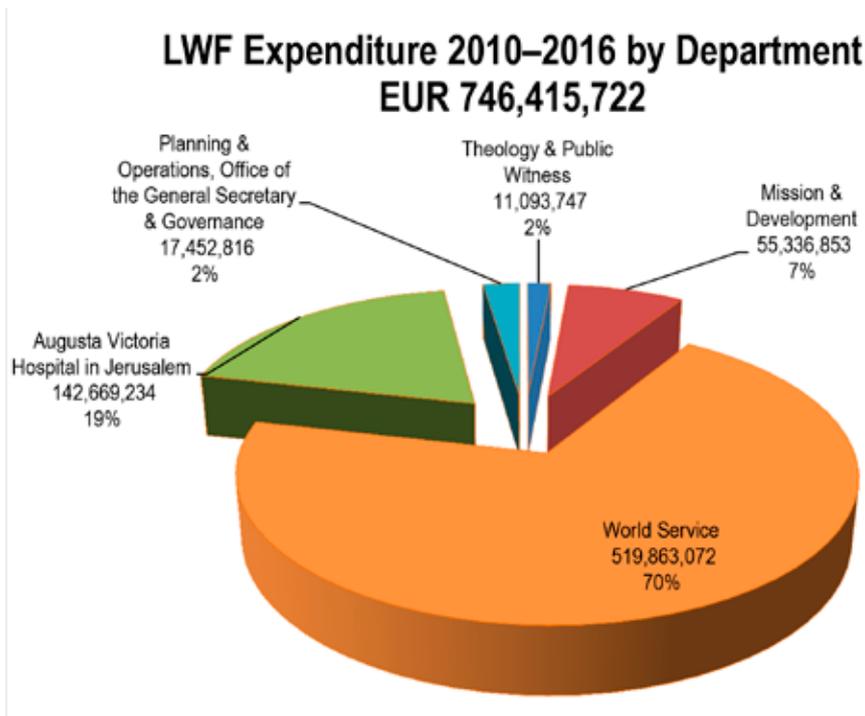
the regional vice-presidents. Thank you for your commitment to this aspect of our life together. Your support and faithful stewardship is deeply appreciated.

- 2% or EUR 11 million went to DTPW
- 7% or EUR 55 million went to DMD
- 70% or EUR 520 million went to WS
- 19% or EUR 143 million was spent on AVH
- 2% or EUR 17 million went to DPO.

LWF expenditures

From 2010 to 2016, the LWF spent EUR 746 million to implement its strategic priorities. The overall annual expenditure grew from EUR 75 million in 2010 to EUR 140 million in 2016, representing an increase of 86%. Of the total EUR 746 expenditure:

The chart below shows the total expenditures and percentages by LWF departments for the seven-year period.



LWF reserves

The LWF’s size and complex work as well as the volatile nature of its operations and related unpredictable factors and financial uncertainties make it prudent and best practice to maintain reserves adequate for managing associated financial risks. The LWF’s general reserves are net assets available to support the LWF’s operations without restrictions. LWF’s reserves policy guides the way these funds are used.

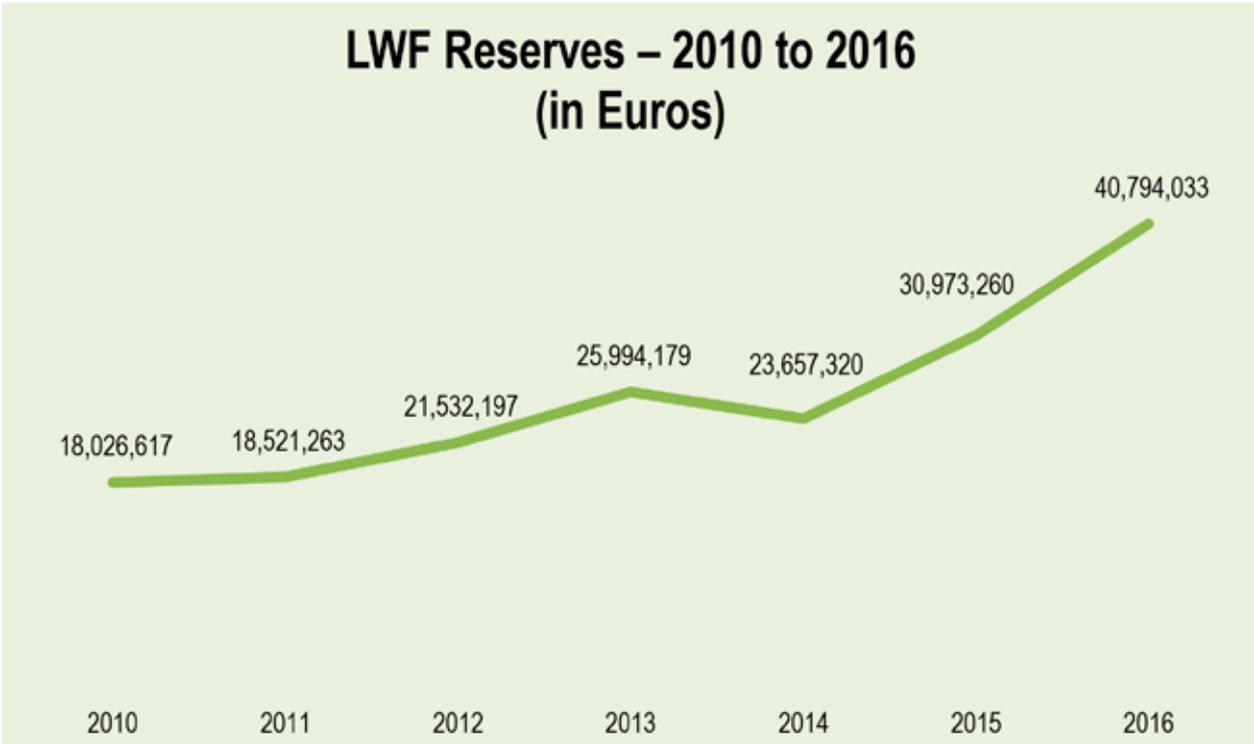
LWF reserve balances are shown as a net of the provisions made to comply with the revised standards for the valuation of pension liabilities (IAS19) in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and International Accounting Standards (IAS).

LWF reserves more than doubled from EUR 18 million in 2010 to EUR 41 million in 2016 although this growth is mainly attributable to the AVH operational surpluses. In 2016, AVH reported an income of EUR 45 million

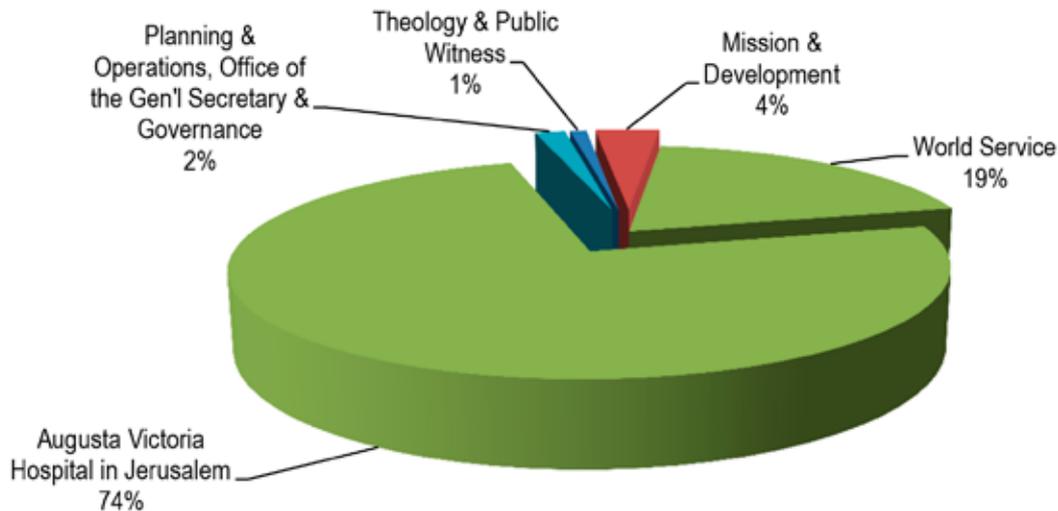
through accrual of income and receivables. The less stable nature of AVH operations as a result of cash flow challenges stemming from unpaid receivables results in a need for higher reserves for WS. In order to protect the general operations and programs of the LWF from a significant cash shortage for the AVH, in 2015, the LWF finance committee and Board of Trustees set financial benchmarks for mitigating the liability risk for the LWF. The risk continues to be closely monitored by the finance committee and trustees.

During the period from 2010 to 2016, the LWF departments’ general reserves, excluding AVH, changed as below:

- DTPW reserves grew by 22% from EUR 434,000 to EUR 532,000
- DMD reserves grew by 28% from 1,298,000 to EUR 1,662,000
- DWS reserves grew by 14% from 6,077,000 to 6,936,000



LWF Reserves by Department as of 31 December 2016



- Planning and operations, office of the general secretary and governance were reduced by 18% from EUR 957,000 to EUR 781,000.

The chart opposite shows the development of LWF reserves over the seven years.

The chart above shows LWF reserves balances as per the policy designations.

Twelfth Assembly budget

The approved budget for the LWF Twelfth Assembly is EUR 2,994,900. Against this budget, we have received pledges for financial support of EUR 2,938,000 (98% coverage), a well-supported assembly financing plan by the member churches. The Eleventh Assembly held in Stuttgart, Germany, had total expenditures of EUR 2,268,240. The location of the Twelfth Assembly along with other factors increased the cost as compared to the 2010 assembly.

The LWF assembly is an important event in deepening relationships and connectivity

and sharing leadership across our communion of churches; we are grateful for the additional financial support that makes it possible to gather in this way.

Staff welfare plan—LWF pension fund

During this seven-year period, an important change was achieved regarding the LWF staff welfare plan. Under an agreement signed by the LWF and the Abendrot Foundation, effective 1 January 2012, the LWF staff welfare plan—pension fund has been affiliated to the Stiftung Abendrot Pension Fund and all assets and liabilities were taken over by the Stiftung Abendrot Pension Fund, effective on the same date. Under this agreement, the LWF is only liable to pay the monthly employer contributions to the fund. The LWF is no longer liable for managing the pension funds or for any under-coverage in pension funds.

At the end of fiscal year 2011, the pension fund assets coverage level was 95.8%. This increased to 108% by 2016, with the total value

of assets at CHF 40 million. The transfer of pension funds and increase in coverage level has reduced the LWF legal obligations for the pension scheme. The deficit in the pension scheme had been a significant burden on LWF financial resources and the staff and pension board are to be commended for their careful work in accomplishing this end.

A staff pension plan committee (SPPC) was constituted with employer and employee representatives to govern the affairs of the pension fund. The employer's representatives on the new SPPC have been appointed by the LWF Meeting of Officers while the employees' representatives were elected by the employees. SPPC members have the right to attend the Stiftung Abendrot annual meeting.

As of 2013, in accordance with the IFRS-IAS 19 revised standard on accounting for employee benefits, the LWF evaluated the pension liabilities and made the required changes in its financial reports to reinstate its pension liabilities for 2014 and prior years.

LWF Endowment Fund

The LWF Endowment Fund was established in April 1999 with the aim of increasing financial stability to meet LWF operational needs in carrying out its programs in fulfillment of its mission. Tax exemption has been received from the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities. Its main purpose is to provide a regular stream of steady income from a diversified portfolio that manages the risk, reward and strategic asset allocation in compliance with LWF investment principles.

The endowment fund investment guidelines follow the LWF socially responsible investment principles and select the investments screened with minimum standards defined by various institutions such as the World Bank, UN

and organizations committed to clean water, green technology and reducing carbon emissions. The LWF has moved towards fossil fuel-free investments with portfolios of sustainable investments focused on social and environmental impact, creating long-term value to society.

The total contributions to the LWF endowment fund through 2016 were CHF 14.58 million against the stated goal of CHF 20 million. Of this total, CHF 2.4 million or 17% are contributions received in the United States that are credited to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Endowment Fund Pooled Trust and pay an annual income distribution as support to the LWF. We are grateful for all of the very generous contributions received from LWF member churches to the endowment fund.

Since its inception, the LWF endowment fund has distributed a total of CHF 3.5 million. Between 2010 and 2016, earnings from the fund supported LWF programs and projects with EUR 1,049,216 of distributed earnings. The revised distribution policy developed by the LWF endowment fund board is already serving to safeguard its ambition to distribute funds to support LWF programs every year.

Steps taken to address financial challenges

Over the last six years, the LWF has taken steps to improve its financial management standards as a response to global economic challenges. With this in mind, the following key changes were made:

- A new LWF funding strategy was developed and implemented in addition to a specific fundraising strategy for humanitarian aid that includes agreements with key partners

- A new and improved financial system was introduced to ensure timely and accurate reporting and access to financial data
- A new staff pension plan was achieved in 2012 that has led to increased coverage and significant financial liability mitigated
- A resource mobilization office was established in 2013 to ensure funding for the areas of work that are traditionally difficult to finance and to foster member church contributions
- A comprehensive, long-term sustainability project was initiated in 2015 to respond to challenges related to currency fluctuations
- As part of the LWF's long-term financial sustainability, the policy on unrestricted reserves was changed to support growth with stability
- An LWF risk management framework was developed to provide reasonable assurance that significant risks are identified and addressed.

Concluding remarks

I end my report with thanksgiving that over the past seven years, the LWF Council, committees and staff leadership have maintained a strong commitment to financial stability, a balanced budget and adequate

cash reserves to ensure ongoing operations. Their commitment to transparency, consistent application of policies, compliance with regulations and ethical conduct are consistent with the vision and values of the LWF.

With a systematic, disciplined and proactive approach by the Communion Office leadership team, the LWF has successfully managed key risks, including heavy losses in exchange rates, income fluctuations and high costs of operations. Their attention to critical issues was timely and their communication on financial matters was always thoughtful and strategic. As is the case for most organizations, there will continue to be challenges before us as a communion, perhaps none so pressing as the work that has been initiated around sustainability, but the LWF has positioned itself well to address these challenges in a forthright and comprehensive manner.

I am grateful for the outstanding staff leadership and collegiality over these years, and the commitment and participation of our member churches. They have demonstrated care for the financial resources, prudence in spending and management and attention to the social, environmental and justice issues around money. It has been a privilege to work with the staff and to serve the LWF Council as chair of the finance committee. May God continue to abundantly bless this communion of churches and our efforts toward a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

Liberated by God's Grace – Keynote Address

Dr Denis Mukwege

President of the Lutheran World Federation,
Pastors,
Your excellencies,
Sisters and brothers in Christ,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to give this address on the occasion of your Twelfth Assembly. I am very grateful for this invitation which I feel far from deserving, but that is a result of God's grace given to me. That grace is only effective when we release it to contribute to regarding and treating human beings as being in the image and likeness of God—in short, when we give their dignity to human beings, to women.

I feel at home among you. In fact, we share many things together. There are among you pastors, the sons and daughters of pastors, laypeople and humanitarian workers. I am a bit of all that at once.

The history of my commitment to those who have no voice begins with my family history. As a pastor's son, I used to go with my father on his visits to the sick and one day I asked him, "Papa, you pray with the sick, but why don't you give them medicines?"

My father replied, "Because I am not a doctor."

That day my vocation was born. I thus studied pediatric medicine so as to play a part in the eradication of infant mortality. During my first year of medical practice, I was dismayed to discover the very high death rate among mothers.

So I moved over to gynecology with the aim of fighting this terrible problem. After studying in France, I returned to the Congo and some years later, in 1996, the war broke out there.

That first war produced a new form of pathology in the Democratic Republic of Congo: rape in an extremely violent form.

When I treated my first patient, she had had her vagina totally destroyed by a firearm being fired point blank at her genitalia.

What were initially thought of as acts by single madmen acting alone turned out some months later to be a planned systematic campaign of rape.

All the women in whole villages were raped in a single night.

Tribal chiefs and church leaders were raped in public.

Elderly people and babies were raped.



Dr Denis Mukwege.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

It thus became clear that these planned systematic acts of rape were being used as a weapon of war, with the following aims:

- Humiliating the enemy
- Destroying the social fabric
- Occupying abandoned land
- Mining raw materials and especially coltan.

Those facts have been documented in several reports from reliable sources.

Ladies and gentlemen, the war that is raging in my country and has produced such great disorder is a war motivated by the desire to control the Congolese sub-soil. This war, which at the beginning involved seven African states and was thus called the first great African war is neither ethical nor waged by religious fanatics. It is an economic war and it has already claimed five million dead and thousands upon thousands of women raped.

My initial response to this barbarity was to care physically and psychologically for the women who had been victims of sexual violence. But when I went on to operate on children born because of rape, themselves also rape victims, I realized that I had no choice but to speak out and condemn this unspeakable barbarity. That is why I am here with you this morning. That is why I have chosen from time to time to leave my operating theater to tell the world of the indescribable suffering of our fellow human beings, our equals, our sisters, our mothers and our daughters.

The second response was to provide victims of sexual violence with economic self-sufficiency by means of income-producing work and microcredits.

The third response was legal: fighting against impunity and, above all, giving moral and psychological support. Some women, who have been able to identify their tormenters



Plenary session from the visitors' gallery.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Velariano

are being assisted by our lawyers in the legal procedures to obtain justice.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are many reasons for my joy at being with you. Let me mention some of them...

First of all, you represent tens of millions of Christians worldwide. I am sure that you will have attentive ears and faithful voices to make sure that the cries of these women who are the victims of sexual violence are heard so that never again will a woman be the victim of sexual violence in times of peace or war or the perpetrators go unpunished.

How is it possible for us to accept such barbarity in the twenty-first century?

It goes without saying that this diabolical phenomenon aims to wipe out the Christian faith and destroy life in the war areas. This phenomenon is particularly destructive in

Africa, where women are the mainstay of their families. In a town such as Bukavu, my native town, more than ninety percent out of a population of one million are unemployed, but through their smallholdings or small businesses, with a minute budget of less than fifty dollars, the women feed their whole families.

Women who are victims of sexual violence throughout the world need you. Whether in Yemen or Iraq or Syria or Burundi, the church must be the voice of the voiceless, the voice of these women who are the precious resource for the survival of humankind.

As ministers of the Word, you will not be ignorant of the impact that you can have on your parishioners through your preaching and catechism. For the root of sexual violence is to be found above all in the teaching in our churches that despises women. Misogyny, the belief in women's inferiority, is not unique to Africa. Certain theologies have reduced women

to the role of “reproducers” in the service of men. It is clear that there is a link between this misogyny, this teaching that despises women, supported by false theologies, and the sexual violence to which women are subjected whether in times of peace or times of war.

What are we to say about women’s rights in the world and in the church? We cannot ignore the great debate on the place of women in society and in the priesthood. It is a debate that is far from crystallizing enthusiasm in the church. But when the Lutheran church honors committed women in the priesthood, then it once again also honors Luther. Today, his fight for women’s rights still meets immense resistance to the prime place of women in the church and the brutal expression of men’s inhumanity towards women.

When he said, “We are all priests, as many Christians as we are,” Luther was fighting for women to be heard.

And yet the oppression of women and the still-existing inequality between men and women is a disgrace to the whole of humankind.

How can we be silent in face of this disfigurement of the face of Eve, the mother of humankind?

Lutheran theology, especially as regards women’s place in society, is a message of hope for all the women in the world who are victims of violence, whether moral, physical or sexual.

It is incumbent on us, the heirs of Martin Luther, by the Word of God to exorcise all the misogynist demons holding the world in their thrall, so that these victims of male barbarity may experience the kingdom of God in their lives.

The full and complete equality of the sexes remains a great victory yet to be won, for there

is still a long road ahead of us to give women the respect they deserve as free individuals with equal rights.

As I wrote in *Le Monde* on 6 November 2016: “The more I travel the world, the more I am saddened to see to what extent women are being instrumentalized, rejected and dehumanized and how social customs continue to keep them in a category of sub-humans.” This is unacceptable. By contrast, wherever they are trusted, wherever they are given their due place, families, communities and whole countries manage so much better. Getting by without them is like cutting off our potential for development. What a waste that is!

Brandishing aloft a key-ring, Desmond Tutu one day said that it was high time to hand over the keys of the world to women. He was right! Managing without them has resulted in failure. They have a high sense of respect for life whereas men respect power. Let us open up our decision-making centers to women! If we wish to have women in power, it is precisely because they contribute what men lack. So, I say, “Ladies, lead as women, react as women, be yourselves. That is your strength.” And that will be our opportunity.

We are in a time of paradox, indeed of conflict, between the Christian faith and the many challenges of time and space. Throughout the world, the forces of history seem to be surpassing all the messages of the gospel. The Christian faith seems more and more to be outmoded, incapable of responding to the needs of men and women, of rising to the challenges of our time.

As long as our faith is defined by theory and not connected with practical realities, we shall not be able to fulfil the mission entrusted to us by Christ.

ASSEMBLY REPORT

We are not here to rewrite the Bible and fit it to the present-day world but to believe in the credibility of the gospel in the twenty-first century, to release the grace given us by making the church a beacon that is still shining in this world of darkness, by fighting for justice, truth, right, freedom—in short, the dignity of men and women.

That is why misogynist theologies that support disrespect and abuse and, consequently, violence against women, must be corrected and replaced by a theology of respect for women. That work should begin with the catechizing of our children.

The mission of the church on earth is a prophetic mission to expose and also condemn evil. We have the duty to work at all levels in our society to foster legislation and procedures that rehabilitate women and enable them to flourish.

The other reason for my joy is the fact that Africa has been chosen to welcome this assembly in this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. What a privilege that is!

May this commemoration be the occasion for Africa once again to base its teaching and liturgy on the foundational Reformation beliefs, namely;

- *Sola scriptura* (the Word alone)
- *Sola fide* (by faith alone)
- *Sola gratia* (by grace alone)
- *Solo Christo* (by Christ alone)
- *Soli Deo gloria* (to God alone be the glory)

In many places, those pillars—the legacy of the Reformation—have been either corrupted or replaced by other less glorious elements, exalting tribalism, sexism, money or power, all of which have dire and humanly degrading effects.

It is appropriate on this 500th anniversary to ask ourselves what the aim of the African

Protestant church is today. In many countries, human beings are no longer central to our theological thinking and action.

The theme of your assembly is “Liberated by God’s Grace.” It is because we have been liberated by grace that we must work for the liberation of others. If we do not do so, then we would be trampling the grace of God underfoot.

Despite some oases of peace, many places in the world are being exposed to all sorts of torments. How can we celebrate the grace of our liberation in Christ when around us and far from us, men and women are being mutilated, imprisoned, kept in sexual slavery, etc.?

I would so like to be optimistic about the future of the world in which we live...

But how can I rejoice in the face of indifference?

I would so like to rejoice at the day-by-day increase in the number of Protestants in my country and in the world but, alas, I am unable to do so!

How can I rejoice when the increase in the number of “believers” worldwide is still proportionately lower than the level of love and tolerance between peoples?

How can I rejoice when, every week, I am violently confronted with extremely violent rape of babies, girls, mothers and grandmothers?

How can I rejoice when I know full well that some economic and political decision makers deliberately close their eyes to the atrocities being suffered by women in order to protect the interests of certain international corporations engaged in the mining of “blood minerals”?

How can I rejoice?



The Luther Rose demonstrates its global reach during the first afternoon plenary of the Assembly. Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Velariano

My awareness that I am “liberated by God’s grace” causes me to rejoice—in part. But it also awakens in me my responsibility towards all those who are unjustly ill-treated.

How can I rejoice when I know that throughout the world thousands of women are being subjected to sexual slavery?

The privilege of being “liberated by God’s grace” compels us to fight for those in the world who are less free.

You know better than I that the Protestant Reformation was the event that triggered off modernity. In fact, before Luther, all those who condemned abuses in the church of the time were killed. Luther opposed the practices of the church authorities that were contrary to the Word—and was able to survive!

Luther knew that his condemnation of the abuses by the church authorities could have

cost him his life. He was thus able to write his famous hymn, which runs:

*A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon...
And were this world all devils o’er
And watching to devour us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;
Not they can overpower us.*

At that time, the spoken word was dominant and the ecclesiastical institution claimed to hold the sole truth. People’s words were silenced. Now, to silence a person is to deny that person their personality. It is to deny their right to existence. In fact, there is no right to existence without the right to speak. Fighting for freedom of speech is fighting for the advancement and survival of men and women. It is in that context that the Protestant Reformation played a role in the humanism of the sixteenth century.

ASSEMBLY REPORT

It was thus with the Reformation that a fresh wind of freedom and life began to blow upon the world. The power of the Word had been lost and was found.

But what is the situation today? What has the Protestant church done with that freedom of speech?

Where is the church when the rights of the weak are being flouted? Where is the church? What is the church saying in the immense debates over recent tragedies in Iraq, Syria and the Congo?

In many countries, the church has lost its voice. It has become dumb, compliant and thus less prophetic.

By definition, the mission of the church on earth is to be the salt of the earth. It should thus be indispensable to unpretentiously demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God on earth by defending justice and proclaiming the truth.

The church should be present wherever humankind is suffering. It must sometimes leave its church buildings, its cathedrals and its chapels to be alongside the homeless, the refugees, the illegal immigrants and all the unfortunate people who are around us.

Whenever the church has realized the extent of its calling, it has been able to move mountains.

It acted, among others, in the fight against apartheid with Bishop Desmond Tutu.

The churches, including the Lutheran Church, stood firm and played an important role in the abolition of slavery and of apartheid. Your fight against racism still goes on. It has not yet ended.

But unfortunately, the church has also often closed its eyes to those abuses for fear of retaliation or by conniving with the powers that be.

By acting in that way, we have lost our sense of vocation, we have betrayed God and we have betrayed God's people.

The church of today—and of tomorrow—faces a number of challenges: climate change, terrorism, migration, refugees, sexual violence and corrupt governments, particularly in Africa, who make and remake constitutions in order to protect their interests at the expense of the people.

If we are Christ's, we have no choice but to be alongside the weak, the wounded, the refugees and women suffering discrimination.

If we are Christ's, we must speak out, we must condemn evil. God has given the church the gift of speech for it to be the voice of the voiceless, to free the captives and always to watch for the coming of God's kingdom.

And if on our way, we meet adversity, opposition and persecution, we must not give up. We must keep on fighting to liberate the captives, to hold before us the kingdom promises and to make the words of Luther's hymn our own:

*And, though they take our house,
Life, honor, children, spouse,
Yet is their profit small;
These things shall vanish all:
The city of God remaineth.*

I thank you.



LIBERATED
BY **GOD'S**
GRACE

LWF's 12th Assembly
in Namibia 2017

Message

Introduction

We, the 309 delegates of the Twelfth Lutheran World Federation Assembly, gathered, prayed, deliberated and broke bread together from 10 to 16 May 2017 under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace” in Windhoek, Namibia. From various parts of the world, large and small churches, we represent 145 member churches from 98 countries and over 75 million Lutherans.

In 2017, we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This journey has brought us from 1517 to 2017; “here we stand” and “here we journey.” We have experienced and witnessed the joy, love and hospitality of the United Church Council of the Namibia Evangelical Lutheran Churches and celebrated the risen Christ dwelling in our midst.

During this assembly, we have again encountered and wrestled with the presence of sin today that continues to hold human beings and creation captive. As the Apostle Paul writes, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Liberated by God’s grace, we are freed from sin to turn outward to thankfully and joyfully love and serve our neighbor (“Freedom of a Christian,” 1520). We cry out from our diverse contexts: “Salvation—not for sale,” “Human beings—not for sale” and “Creation—not for sale.”

Liberated by God’s grace

In the world today, many social and economic factors put “freedom” to the test. The production of wealth is prized above all else and the commodification of human beings and

creation is normalized. No space is safe from violence. If we merely comply with these ideas, we deny the fullness of the Body of Christ.

In Christ, God’s love is given as a free and unconditional gift. It allows us to express our gratitude through a caring engagement with the whole of creation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). This understanding of liberating grace continues to influence all aspects of the life and self-understanding of our communion. We recognize three key areas of gift and call:

Reconciliation and commemoration

The God of Israel continues to reconcile us to Godself, to one another and all creation. We recognize and give thanks for the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue partners of the LWF.

We rejoice in the fruits of ecumenical dialogues while continuing to experience the pain of division. We give thanks for the historic 2010 action of repentance and reconciliation within the Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue and the positive actions since. Through documents such as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) and “From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 (2013),” we have learned to perceive our joint history not from the viewpoint of differences but of unity. We have witnessed to the power of God’s liberating grace by common prayer and public witness events such as the historic joint ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation on 31 October 2016 in Lund and Malmö,



Opening plenary session of the Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Velariano

Sweden. Such experiences enliven us for the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is also an occasion for the communion to reflect on what it means to be Lutheran in today's multi-religious world. Work is being done to build bridges across religious divides and to collaborate for the common good. Interreligious competencies, pastoral care for interreligious families and continued interreligious dialogue and collaboration will be essential for the continued liberation and reconciliation of all.

There are also situations within society that call out for God's liberating grace. Two specific examples of the need for this kind of reconciliation are the painful memories that cloud the relations of our host country Namibia with Germany as well as the ongoing

conflict in the Holy Land.⁸ We affirm and long for reconciliation in all places where God's liberation is needed.

Communion and context

The LWF document, "The Self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion," describes the LWF as a communion marked by "unity in reconciled diversity" (p. 5). Each member church is shaped by its context and called into unity in Christ. No church is too big or too small—each carries their unique tone in the communion choir.

We remain open to the presence of Christ and the hospitality of the other. We strive to be a communion that continues to confess the Triune God and to agree in the proclamation

⁸ During the Assembly, the LWF approved the public statement on "Reconciliation with respect to Genocide in Namibia," and the resolution on Israel-Palestine.



Workshop on “Migration and People on the Move.”
Photo: LWF/Brenda Platero

of the Word of God. We are united in altar and pulpit fellowship (LWF constitution, 3.1). In an increasingly polarized world, it is more important than ever for the communion to accompany churches as they navigate their contextual realities and trans-contextual gospel. We continue the Emmaus conversation on family, marriage and sexuality as discussed by the LWF Council at Bogota in 2012, and dialogue on other important issues such as colonization, commodification, racism, women in ordained ministry, biblical hermeneutics and gender. At the foot of the cross, we find our unity in Christ. Right relationships of accountability and autonomy will deepen our next phase of communion building and we seek the wisdom to follow and to lead into that future.

Prophetic diakonia

As an act of resistance against the economic and monastic culture of his time, Martin Luther

established the common chest—a shared fund to feed the poor. On the fifth commandment, Luther reflects, “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need” (“Luther’s Small Catechism”). The freedom of being a Christian compels us to care for our neighbor’s needs.

We give thanks for the continuing work and diaconal ministry of the LWF Department for World Service, the ACT Alliance, of which the LWF is a founding member and that of ecumenical partners. We give thanks for new partnerships in humanitarian relief with agencies such as Islamic Relief Worldwide and Caritas Internationalis. Our self-understanding as a communion is strengthened by our cooperation in loving compassion for the “least of these.”

As the global community strives toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, churches in all countries commit or re-commit to doing

their part to care for those often forgotten and excluded. For those making the long journey, whether across great distances or simply from day to day, may our acts of diaconal service continue to enliven our witness to a world and creation desperately crying out for liberation and justice.

Salvation—not for Sale

Salvation restores the life-giving relationship between God and God's creation. It redeems, liberates, heals, transforms, uplifts, empowers, reconciles and justifies. Salvation is a free gift. It cannot be earned, because God in Christ has given it freely. We must share this Good News of liberation freely, as it was first shared with us in Christ. Salvation cannot be sold because it cannot be owned. Salvation is not for sale!

Just as in Martin Luther's time, salvation is commodified today in ways that manipulate, extort, build false hope and even kill. False interpretations of salvation, including the prevalence of the prosperity gospel, are again being sold in the marketplace.

We recognize that the free gift of salvation is both personal and collective. This gift unbinds us to experience and participate in salvation through solidarity. The revival of the church and the full expression of holistic mission in our homes, church and society depend on the true freedom of all.

In holistic mission, proclamation of the liberating gospel, advocacy and *diakonia* must be accomplished and mutually shared in creative ways.

Human Beings—not for Sale

"God created humankind in his image" (Gen 1:26–27). Every human being has the same inherent value and dignity. While the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlines many of these principles, people of faith know that beings created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) are liberated not just to survive, but to thrive with abundant life.

In Baptism, we are called and empowered to participate in God's mission (*missio Dei*) as followers of Jesus, coworkers in promoting justice, peace and reconciliation. While economic and political ideologies seek to commodify the gifts of human life, we proclaim that human beings are not for sale!

The church should resist mechanisms of exclusion and strive to embody reconciling mechanisms of inclusion through our fellowship, worship and diaconal service. Equal access to common goods and decision-making processes, safety, especially for those who are vulnerable and meaningful participation and interaction among all groups are essential to this task. We commend the LWF "Church in the Public Space" (2016) resource for use and study in the member churches.

Full participation for all

In 1984, the LWF began to move towards the 40/40/20 quota commitments for inclusive representation for women, men and youth. We commend the Twelfth Assembly for meeting this quota overall. In local contexts, many, especially women and youth, are not fully represented.

We give thanks for the witness and work of the 55 LWF young reformer projects and the 25,000 people touched by these efforts. Youth have been leading the way on issues that are critical to our communion and striving toward full participation through intergenerational conversation and shared leadership.

Since 1984, the LWF has affirmed women's participation in the ordained ministry. We applaud the 119 member churches that

currently ordain those called, both male and female. As the communion continues to journey with those still on the way, we urge the member church which has ceased ordaining women to develop a process and timeline to reconsider this decision. The LWF Gender Justice Policy, now available in 23 languages, should be studied and implemented in all member churches.

Gender-based violence and violence against women in church and society

We live in a world where at least one in three women will experience gender-based violence. Rape committed as a war crime is the painful reality for all too many. Created in the image of God, violence based on gender is unacceptable. Churches have a responsibility to address power imbalances present in patriarchal societies, and to address stigma and taboos through appropriate and comprehensive sexual education. Conversations about gender inclusivity, gender roles, masculinity and transformative partnership are essential to this task.

Silence and shame, misinformation and manipulation can often be compounded within church settings. The church must be a safe space for all and perpetrators have to be held accountable. Code of conduct trainings, policies and studies such as the 2002 LWF document “Churches Say No to Violence against Women” are helpful starting places for all churches and organizations.

Rising inequality

Significant progress has been made to alleviate extreme poverty. Still, we live in an age where the “top eight richest people in the world control as much wealth as the bottom third of the global

population.”⁹ Resource distribution, access and policies that allow extreme wealth accumulation must be addressed. Racism, caste and tribalism often aggravate these factors. We commend all church-related and faith-based diaconal ministries and advocacy that work to alleviate poverty. We call on churches and related organizations everywhere to stand up and demand fair redistribution of wealth and social protection as a matter of justice and human rights for all.

Vocation and meaningful work

For Luther, every person is free to understand their life’s work as a calling in which they can communicate God’s love. All too often, today’s neoliberal market economy reduces human beings to commodities. This robs us of our human dignity and meaningful work. Human trafficking, forced labor, wage theft and predatory lending prohibit full inclusion and participation in the public space. Overwork, under- and unemployment continue to devalue the future of a generation and our world. Push/pull factors such as wage discrepancy and job market opportunities siphon away educated and skilled professionals, leaving many communities feeling the effect of the “brain drain.”

Education

Education is one possible mechanism of inclusion. Lutherans have promoted education for 500 years and must take responsibility to continue this legacy. We advocate for free, accessible quality education for all at all levels in their first language. Gender-sensitive and intersectional theological education, exchange programs and dialogue opportunities between Lutheran churches and interfaith communities can also operate as positive mechanisms for inclusion and transformation.

⁹ <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/just-8-people-now-have-the-same-wealth-as-the-poorest-36-billion/>



Workshop on “Land Rights and Land Grabbing in Africa.” Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Refugees and displaced persons

65 million people are displaced in the world today. We give thanks for the gift of the LWF department for world service that welcomes 2.5 million refugees and displaced persons in 24 countries. We request the LWF Communion Office to continue advocating on behalf of refugees and migrants and support member churches in developing their capacity to receive refugees and provide long-term development services to enhance their self-reliance. We affirm localized training and the use of LWF resources, such as “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders” (2013).

Advocacy

Advocacy is an integral part of our communion’s public witness. Addressing accountability with decision makers and duty

holders, both within and outside the church, is essential. We resist the increasing presence of polarization, populism, protectionism and post-truth and we encourage Lutherans to continue to focus on establishing effective legislation that ensures freedom, equality, rights and dignity of every human being.

Creation—not for Sale

God is creator of heaven and earth, and each part of creation is inherently good. As people who confess faith in the Trinity, we profess that God is relational. God creates and enlivens creation as the source of all being, not as an outside observer. Christ died and rose again for all of creation. Today, all creation groans under the weight of imbalance, overuse and misuse. Many enjoy abundance while some want even for daily bread. As a global community, we consume 1.6 planets a year—and our consumption continues to increase.

Human beings are created cocreators with God. We must resist the temptation and misinterpretation to act as masters with dominion over creation, but must rather act as stewards with responsibility to cultivate and care in coexistence with creation. The endless pursuit of growth and accumulation of wealth is often seen as the end goal, but we believe that the well-being of creation is God's intent and goal. Creation is not for sale! Climate change affects each place differently. But in the web of creation, we recognize that solutions for climate change are both global and local.

Education and alternative economic models

We must proclaim the truth about the dominant economic model of our age. In pursuit of economic growth, the land, sea and all their creatures have become commodities. This is an injustice! We seek alternative economic models that serve the well-being of all creation. Through general and theological education, the church can promote local and global efforts to equip this generation for positive change. The LWF can assist member churches to develop theologically robust programs of conservation, environmentally conscious lifestyle choices and advocacy.

Exchange, story sharing and advocacy

We affirm the work of the LWF in creation care, especially that of the LWF youth desk at Conference of Parties (COP) summits. We lift up the variety of work and ministry already done in local contexts and encourage the LWF to offer trainings and capacity building, especially for exchanges and story sharing. This globalized witness will strengthen member churches to lift up their unique voices. The presence of multinational corporations complicates

nationally-based advocacy, but creative partnerships between churches as well as with civil and private sector partners can also strengthen our efforts.

Liberating grace—the call we share

God's liberating grace fills us with faith, hope and love to participate in God's mission in this world. In this 500th Reformation year, we profess a message that the world needs today as much as ever: Salvation—not for Sale; Human Beings—not for Sale; and Creation—not for Sale! Liberated by the Triune God, we pray for the clarity and courage to go out enlivened by God's transformative, reconciling and empowering presence in our relationships, church and society.

Communion (*koinonia*) is a precious gift received by God's grace and it is also a task. The problems of this age need not define us. Earthly structures and forms may fall, but in Christ Jesus, sin and death have no power over us. Freed by grace through faith, we are liberated to be a church in service with the neighbor.

Let us share fully in each other's joys and sorrows; let us pray for one another and share our resources, spiritual and material, wherever possible. Let us resist the temptation to turn in on ourselves in sin. As Christ Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). We are liberated by God's grace and go out joyfully to accept this call.

Bible study working in small groups at the Assembly.

Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano.



Public Statements and Resolutions

Public statement on reconciliation with respect to genocide in Namibia

With our host churches in Namibia, we have rejoiced in their journey of liberation and independence. The LWF is humbled to be acknowledged for its contributions to this journey through actions of accompaniment, support and solidarity. That accompaniment continues today.

The LWF has also become aware of the painful events of history that continue clouding the memory of Namibians.

The fate of the Herero, Nama and other indigenous people under the rule of the German colonial powers at the beginning of the twentieth century continues to cause pain among the Namibian and German people until today.

The LWF knows from similar experiences around the world that painful memories will not go away until they are addressed. Only when the truth has been told and justice is sought can genuine reconciliation over the pains of the past take place.

We are encouraged to know that the Namibian and German governments have taken up this pain and are committed to a process of telling the truth and doing justice in view of what they both call today a genocide against the Herero, Nama and other indigenous people.

We are grateful for the role of churches and civil society groups that have promoted and

continue supporting processes of reconciliation and healing of memories.

Accompanying its member churches in Namibia and Germany, the LWF has come to understand the uniqueness of this specific process. There are no standard, ready-made solutions to be applied from other similar processes in the world, nor models to be simply transferred and adopted.

Namibians and Germans through their dialogue process need to identify and agree on how the history will be told, how justice will be done and how reconciliation will be promoted.

Together with encouraging Namibians and Germans further to pursue their dialogue process, the LWF is committed to offer accompaniment and support if called upon by our respective constituencies. As a communion with a passion for justice, peace and reconciliation, the process among Namibians and Germans is at the heart of its vocation.

Public statement on Venezuela

Deeply concerned and moved by news that has been conveyed to us about the grave situation in Venezuela, the Assembly calls upon Venezuelan society to:

- Build a society where everyone is included, notwithstanding their differences
- Recognize and make use of the important symbolic and legal resources that they have



First reading of Public Statements and Resolutions.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

already created and endorsed, such as the 1999 constitution

- Review and, if necessary, rectify economic policies, seeking to control inflation, promote production and ensure that people’s basic needs are met
- Request the government to facilitate the receipt of contributions from abroad, especially medicines and food.

The Assembly:

- Calls on Venezuelan society to take seriously the consequences of its actions in the context of growing aggression in global politics
- Affirms that the government cannot use growing aggression as a justification for denying unrestricted guarantees of the human rights of all people

- Affirms the implementation of sociopolitical conflict resolution mechanisms, which are available within the framework of democracy
- Affirms that conflict resolution mechanisms will require all parties fundamentally to rethink the view they have of themselves and the other in order to transform the currently polarized debate into one about the people’s common interests and objectives.

The Assembly calls upon the LWF and its member churches to:

- Assist the Venezuelan people in whatever ways are appropriate and available
- Continue to pray for the people and the situation.

The Assembly calls upon the Communion Office to organize an ecumenical visit to the churches in Venezuela.

Public statement on Indonesia

As the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) takes place 10–16 May 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia, more than 300 delegates from 145 member churches from across seven regions of the world gather together. The Assembly sets the vision and priorities of the communion; it is the highest decision-making body.

As the Assembly started its meeting on 10 May 2017, information was received that Mr Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), former governor of Jakarta, Indonesia, had been sentenced to a two-year imprisonment by the North Jakarta District Court on 9 May with reference to Indonesia's blasphemy law. Mr Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Christian, denied the accusation of blasphemy against him and plans to appeal. He argued that when he referred to the Qur'an in one of his speeches last year he did not at all intend to defame Islam.

Together with the LWF member churches in Indonesia¹⁰ present at this Assembly, the Assembly expresses its deep concern about the developments in Indonesia leading up to the court sentence. The judicial process was accompanied by mass mobilization of an unprecedented scale, which made it difficult for the judicial process to be impartial and free from political interests. The Assembly urges the Indonesian judiciary to maintain its independence. Instead of reference to a religious judgment of a religious community, this judicial process needs to be based on public regulations, not religious regulations.

The Assembly joins the many Christians as well as leaders and people across different religions who are deeply worried about the way

religion has been politicized in this process. This is very detrimental to the goal of people of different religions in Indonesia living side-by-side in peace.

The Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion or belief in Indonesia. It states that every person is free to embrace the religion of their choice, to worship according to their religion or belief and to choose their education and teaching, even as every person is entitled to freedom of belief and to express their thoughts and opinions in accordance with their conscience. This is in accord with the commitment to fundamental freedom that guarantees the freedom of each citizen to profess their own religion and to worship according to their religion or belief.

The Indonesian churches, together with other religious communities and civil society actors, have raised serious concerns regarding the blasphemy law¹¹ and its implementation as they undermine constitutional guarantees.

With the Indonesian churches, the Assembly urges the appropriate authorities to review this law in order to ensure that the constitutional rights are guaranteed. The Lutheran World Federation together with a civil society coalition from Indonesia has submitted a report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review on Indonesia, currently underway.

The Assembly calls upon all Indonesians to abide by the vision that the preamble of the Indonesian constitution sets forth as vision for their country, i.e., a society built on *Pancasila* in which people of diverse religions, ethnic groups and cultures live together to realize a just, peaceful and prosperous society.

¹⁰ Christian Communion of Indonesia Church in Nias (Gereja AMIN); Christian Protestant Angkola Church (GKPA); Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI); Indonesian Christian Lutheran Church (GKLI); Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church (GKPPD); Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP); Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS); The Indonesian Christian Church (HKI); The Protestant Christian Church (BNKP).

¹¹ Law Number 1/PNPS/1965, adopted into Article 156a of the Criminal Code.

Resolution on theological education

Theological education is central to our theological heritage and identity. “We know that without proper theological education questions around identity and unity of the church grow exponentially complicated”—General Secretary Martin Junge.

The LWF and its member churches must take steps to ensure that theological education also takes account of different contexts and is open to all.

Our contextual readings of the Bible must be connected to our theological identity. The contextual readings must hold *sola scriptura*, *sola Christus* and *sola fide* as interrelated.

Pastoral formation must integrate the social, political and economic dimensions and the changing landscape of theology.

The Assembly calls upon the LWF Communion Office to develop and publish a strategy by 2020 for collaboration to provide greater access to theological education. This increased access may occur through scholarships, shared teaching, online resources and by facilitating concrete partnerships among theological schools, including faculty exchanges. This strategy should ensure that anyone called to lay or ordained ministry can access and participate in theological education, even if they do not have a theological school in their home region or country.

Further, the Assembly calls upon member churches to:

- a) Support women in theological education with attention to the accessibility of that education
- b) Strengthen efforts at increasing local resources for scholarships
- c) Practice transparent procedures in the selection and awarding of scholarships
- d) Critically reexamine their models and systems of theological education and ministerial formation in order to bring contextual realities in contemporary issues into theological training and ministerial formation of future church leaders.

Resolution on strategic priorities and church revival

The Assembly aspires to see the LWF communion become a central catalyst to the core concerns of church leaders and synods in their ongoing efforts to be faithful stewards of the gospel in times of change, not least in Western churches. The Assembly calls upon the Council, as it considers strategic priorities for the coming period, to create platforms for contextual deliberations, exchange and learning for churches facing change. This change is due to secularization, post-secular trends and other societal and demographic factors, requiring that priority should be given to theological, catechetical, and missional revival-oriented program work based on issues of common concern.

Resolution affirming humanitarian response on behalf of those affected by the war in Syria and appealing for peace

The devastating war in Syria has resulted in more than 320,000 deaths, more than 6.3 million internally displaced persons, more than 5 million refugees and tens of millions in need of humanitarian aid.

The Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation:

- Expresses its deep appreciation for the local churches and others involved in providing assistance to those affected throughout the region
- Commends in particular the efforts of LWF World Service for their work with Syrian refugees in Jordan and with internally displaced persons and returnees to their areas of origin in northern Iraq
- Calls upon the member churches and their related agencies to sustain and enhance the work in response to the Syrian crisis in order to meet the needs of those suffering and those forcibly displaced
- Regrets that the United Nations Security Council has been unable to bring the war to an end
- Appeals to all parties—within or outside Syria—to seek a negotiated, peaceful resolution of the situation which recognizes and respects the pluralistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious reality of Syrian society
- Commends the United Nations special envoy for Syria, Mr Staffan de Mistura, for his tireless efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table through the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, as well as his special advisor, Mr Jan Egeland, who is working with the Task Force on Humanitarian Access. Participants in the negotiations should make every effort to refrain from public speech and actions in the context of the Syrian-led conflict resolution process that would impede or jeopardize the process
- Requests the general secretary to convey its commendation to the special envoy and special advisor
- Commends the efforts and resilience of civilians, civil society actors and churches

who year after year are the first and the last to respond to humanitarian emergencies, to accommodate their internally displaced and maintain the social cohesion and build confidence and conditions for peace in Syria.

Resolution on the inclusion of gender justice in the LWF constitution

The Assembly calls upon the incoming LWF Council to recommend amending the LWF constitution at the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF. This recommended amendment is to add the words “gender justice” to Section III., Nature and Functions, of the LWF constitution as follows:

a) “[The Lutheran World Federation]: furthers worldwide among the member churches diaconal action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, **gender justice**, care for God’s creation and sharing of resources;” (suggested amendment in bold)

Resolution on documenting guidelines and binding practices

The Assembly calls upon the LWF Council to analyze its governance structures and governance norms with a view toward documenting the guidelines and binding practices. In particular, matters pertinent to the nomination and election of Council members and the president should be made explicit. There should be gender parity in nominations for the offices of president and general secretary. The document including these matters is to be concluded and publicly available by 2020.



Youth delegates display thought-provoking signs to mark the theme “Creation—not for Sale”.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Resolution calling for an analysis of the composition and design of LWF regions

The Assembly calls upon the LWF Council to analyze the LWF’s governance structures to assess the appropriateness of the composition and design of the LWF regions and their relative presence on the LWF Council and to publicize a report on the topic. In particular, the report should address whether the current structure remains equitable, given demographic shifts within the communion. The report responding to this matter is to be concluded and publicly available by 2020.

Resolution on being church in context and its role in mission

The Assembly adopts these recommendations from the LWF consultation

on mission (Study Book, Appendix 2, page 63) and asks the LWF to include them in the future strategy:

LWF consultation on contemporary mission in global Christianity, Geneva, 16–19 November 2016

The LWF has always seen mission as at the core of its identity and mandate since the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all (Rom 1:16).

The LWF reaffirms its understanding of participating in God’s mission holistically as encompassing proclamation, diakonia (which includes development) and advocacy.

We acknowledge a great treasure of decisions, resolutions and resources and recommendations by different LWF governing bodies concerning mission.

These are still relevant today even though in many contexts they have not been fully realized.

We encourage all member churches to make good use of the resources available and accessible at the LWF Communion Office.

We also acknowledge the rapidly changing global and local contexts and their impact on doing mission. As we commemorate 500 years of Reformation, we are aware of the fact that all churches are facing opportunities and challenges of different kinds in relation to, e.g.,

- *Lutheran identity and theological formation*
- *Charismatic movement and Lutheran churches*
- *Secularism and declining churches*
- *Religious pluralism and fundamentalism*
- *Polarization and division in society*
- *Proclamation and discipleship*
- *Advocacy, diakonia (and development) in the present context*
- *Migration (e.g., immigration, emigration, integration, displacement, refugees)*
- *Youth in mission*
- *Women and men in mission*
- *Prosperity gospel and theology of glory*
- *Communication as a strategy and a means.*

As churches in ongoing reformation, we call on each member church of the LWF to rethink its being church in its context and its role in God's mission. The LWF is asked to provide accompaniment in this process, e.g., modeling, analyzing contexts, encouraging, enabling exchanges, etc. Each church has the responsibility to equip each of its members to fulfill the expectation of the Lord: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the

hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15-16)

We understand the mission of God as relational. We call on the LWF to continue and intensify its responsibility to convene, coordinate and enable mission cooperation and mutual accompaniment between different member churches, including their related agencies engaged in holistic mission.

The Assembly requests the Communion Office to provide accompaniment to churches to rethink their being church in context and their roles in God's mission. The Communion Office should also intensify its responsibility to convene, coordinate and enable mission cooperation and mutual accompaniment between different member churches, including their related agencies engaged in holistic mission.

Resolution on Israel-Palestine

The Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation takes note with deep regret that the long-standing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians remains unresolved. It also observes that the LWF, through its previous assemblies and council meetings, has called for peace with justice in Palestine and Israel. The Assembly reaffirms the efforts of the churches, the international community and all persons of goodwill toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This Assembly, like previous assemblies, calls for an end to the now fifty-year-long occupation, violence, political and religious extremism and any violation of human rights.

In fervent hope, the Assembly is grateful for all good faith efforts to negotiate a final status agreement that affirms two states for two peoples, internationally recognized borders between Israel and a viable, contiguous Palestine based on the 1967 armistice lines,

security guarantees for Israel and Palestine, mutual recognition and full and equal rights for their citizens, a fair resolution to the Palestinian refugee issue and a shared Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians with free access to the holy sites for the three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Even so, the Assembly is alarmed by increased tensions in the Holy Land as evidenced by sporadic fatal attacks on Palestinians and Israelis, the prisoners' hunger strike, the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and increased illegal settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and calls upon governments, intergovernmental bodies, people of faith and all others of goodwill to work to end the occupation, reduce these tensions and take all measures to avoid resorting to violence or military responses.

The Assembly is grateful to God for the ministries and institutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), e.g., its schools, other educational and social institutions, its congregations and its work for reconciliation, and those who have supported this important work. The Assembly also strongly reaffirms the ELCJHL's efforts in interreligious dialogue, which are indispensable for building a just peace and for healing of the conflict.

The Assembly also expresses appreciation for the life-saving work of the Lutheran World Federation's ministries, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital and calls upon the member churches, governments and intergovernmental bodies to continue to support these ministries in their humanitarian service to the Palestinian people.

Resolution on interreligious relations

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its member churches witness to the

liberating Gospel of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ in a multi-religious world. Recalling the action of the 1984 LWF Assembly meeting in Budapest to establish a desk for "The Church and People of Other Faiths," we give thanks for the interreligious work and witness carried out through the communion over the past thirty-three years, and in the local contexts of our churches. The 1984 Assembly statement, "Luther, Lutheranism, and the Jews," repudiating Luther's anti-Judaic writings, has been an important step in reaching out in right relationship to our Jewish neighbors. We recognize and give thanks for the fact that many of our churches in clear statements of repentance have taken up the painful aspect of our heritage regarding Luther's harsh and terrible statement on the Jewish people and Judaism. Several study processes with representatives from other religions, among them Muslims, Buddhists and representatives of local religious traditions, have helped to deepen mutual understanding and to strengthen joint engagement in areas of common concern.

Today, our multi-religious contexts are undergoing rapid and radical changes as the world's religions and Christianity come into increasing contact through global migration, immigration and forced displacement. While there are many powerful examples of peaceful coexistence, there are also complex realities of religious bigotry, extremism and interreligious conflict as well as violence, discrimination and persecution in the name of religion. The persecution of people because of their faith is a uniquely challenging and urgent concern of the LWF and its member churches. The LWF strongly affirms freedom of religion or belief for everyone and advocates for those whose basic rights are violated.

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the LWF and its member churches must discern anew our Christian vocation in the midst of religious plurality. Interreligious competencies, dialogue,



Message from the Women's Pre-Assembly in plenary.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

engagement and cooperation for the common good through *diakonia* and public witness are an increasingly important dimension of our Christian witness in a multi-religious world. We are encouraged by new projects, including the Ingage Program for youth in Indonesia, jointly organized by the LWF and the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) that draws upon the wisdom of young people who have come of age in this new reality. We are all called to love our neighbor and to work with our sisters and brothers of other religions and those non-religious to build bridges of hope, love, peace and justice in this deeply divided world.

The Assembly calls upon the LWF to:

- Strengthen interreligious relations through its member churches, the Communion Office and with ecumenical partners by engaging in dialogue and cooperation
- Encourage its members in their own contextual work in interreligious relations, especially at the congregational level
- Encourage member churches actively to participate in the LWF interreligious network for sharing of resources, best practices, theological reflection and building support across the communion
- Develop educational programs and capacity building through its member churches and the Communion Office to strengthen interreligious literacy
- Continue to strengthen its partnership with Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) guided by the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding
- Involve women and youth according to the 40/40/20 principle in all of its interreligious work.

Resolution on religious persecution in Asia

The Assembly expresses its appreciation to LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan for pointing out religious tensions and persecution in various parts of the world, particularly where Christians are in a minority position (Exhibit 5.1). We recognize particular incidents, both occasional and continued, of discrimination against certain faith communities that occur in many parts of the world.

There are increased incidents of atrocities committed against the Christian communities in particular parts of Asia. For example, church buildings destroyed in Indonesia; religious expression curtailed or suppressed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan; evangelical promulgation and conversions prohibited in many South Asian countries; religious fundamentalism causing increased intolerance at national and local levels in India and Indonesia; and conversion away from Christianity by deception in Malaysia.

The Assembly urges the LWF Communion Office to:

- Study these issues and publish findings on instances of religious intolerance and persecution, especially expressed toward the Christian community and how churches are affected
- Provide advocacy and public voice in solidarity with member churches as appropriate.

Resolution on women in the ordained ministry

The Assembly directs the LWF Communion Office to develop a written process for accompanying member churches in dialogue on women in the ordained ministry. Further,

the LWF should establish a mechanism for consultation and discernment over issues regarding women's ordination.

Resolution calling for a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry

The Assembly calls upon the LWF Communion Office to organize a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry in order to remove barriers and to affirm the way forward as adopted at the 2016 Council meeting in Wittenberg:

While also acknowledging that not all member churches are at the same point on the journey towards women in ordained ministry—that some member churches are still moving toward full inclusion and participation of women—we are convinced that the scriptural witness, in its breadth and scope, honors the equality of all created in God's image and recognizes the gifts of all in the same Spirit to those baptized into the new creation...

In the church, the equality of women and men is expressed and lived out as a sign of God's reign in this world. Therefore, no discrimination of women and men is conceivable in the life of the church. Any kind of discrimination in the way women participate in the ministry of the church (including ordination) harms the fulfillment of the mission of the church in the world as it is contrary to the nature of God's reign...

We recall the resolution at our last Assembly in Stuttgart for our member churches to commit "...to genuine, practical, and effective implementation of LWF policies and decisions regarding the full participation of women in the life of the church—and the LWF communion—as well as in society."

The process for this study would follow this suggested timeline:

- An initial consultative group to meet and discuss this matter prior to the end of 2018
- A working group to be appointed and functional by 2019
- The working group to release and publicize an initial report by 2020.

Resolution on the Gender Justice Policy

The Assembly commends the work done on the Gender Justice Policy, celebrates its positive reception and its translation into twenty-three languages thus far and urges the member churches to encourage their parishes to make gender justice a part of their curricula.

The Assembly directs the Communion Office to continue its work to support the ongoing implementation and accountability measures included within and associated with the LWF Gender Justice Policy, including conversation about gender roles, education about masculinity and partnership among women and men.

The Assembly calls on all regions and member churches to collaborate with and support the LWF Office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS).

Further, the Assembly urges the Communion Office to continue to support this work through allocation of resources sufficient for these purposes.

Resolution on sex education and the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence

The Assembly directs the LWF Communion Office and encourages member churches to focus on sex education and the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual coercion and sexual harassment within our churches. This focus is to be ethically and theologically comprehensive in cooperation with civil society. These efforts should include collecting the testimony of those who have survived violence, so that their story is told and the silence is broken.¹²

Resolution on refugees, internally displaced persons and forced migration

About 65.3 million people worldwide¹³ have been forced to move away from their home or region for preventable and non-preventable reasons. Some of these include natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes. Wars, political oppression, the effects of climate change, xenophobia, conflicts of various kinds and economic disparity force large numbers of people to leave their homes. On the way to safety many lose their lives, fall prey to human trafficking, violence and abuse.

The Assembly remembers that many of us have been or still are forced to migrate. Any of us could become a refugee and many of us have been before.

The Assembly commends the LWF member churches and LWF World Service for their long-standing work amongst and for refugees and displaced people regardless of religious affiliation. The Assembly commends

¹² Keynote address by Dr Denis Mukwege to the Twelfth Assembly.

¹³ General Secretary's report, Exhibit 5.3, section 2.1.

the LWF for tireless advocacy to safeguard the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms regardless of migratory status.

The Assembly commends countries that open their borders to receive refugees and displaced people. The Assembly commends those countries that seek to integrate migrants, address their needs and combat all forms of xenophobia, racism and discrimination towards migrants. The Assembly acknowledges the stress sometimes placed on host communities in the process of receiving new residents and providing for their well-being.

The Assembly notes with sadness that several governments of the world are building walls of separation rather than showing hospitality towards the stranger. The human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are not universally respected.

In response to this current situation the Assembly:

- Calls upon the LWF member churches and the Communion Office to address the root causes of forced migration where possible
- Calls upon the LWF member churches to continue advocating for welcoming refugees into their respective countries and pressure their governments, the USA and European countries in particular not to build walls but “to build bridges”
- Asks the LWF Communion Office to strengthen the implementation of the UN Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and actively contribute to the development of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM)
- Requests the LWF Communion Office and member churches to advocate for safe, orderly and regular migration and to support the development of internationally negotiated guidelines for the dignified treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations

- Requests the LWF Communion Office to support member churches that are developing or strengthening their capacity to receive refugees.

Resolution on youth participation

The Assembly affirms the importance of youth participation in the churches.

The Assembly commends the Young Reformers’ Network in conveying the insights of the Reformation for the new generation. The Assembly urges the Council to continue to sustain this network and expand it to include those preparing for leadership in the church.

The Assembly calls upon the member churches to act on the implementation of twenty percent youth participation at all levels within the churches to ensure youth involvement in decision making, planning, strategizing and a right to vote.

The Assembly calls upon LWF general secretary to ask member churches to submit a progress report of youth involvement to the next assembly of the LWF.

Resolution on climate change

The Assembly appreciates and gratefully recognizes the work and efforts undertaken over the last seven years by the LWF on climate justice, including youth participation and representation at the Conference of Parties (COP) as well as youth leadership in the #FastForTheClimate campaign.

Nevertheless, the Assembly calls upon the global communion to strengthen its efforts even more for climate justice.

The Assembly reaffirms the 2014 public statement calling for the LWF to be carbon neutral by 2050 and urges the LWF to put in place a concrete plan of action to achieve that goal.

The Assembly urges that youth participation and representation at the COP meetings continue.

The Assembly supports the continuation of the LWF climate network and its strengthening, including encouraging regional climate networks.

The Assembly calls upon the member churches to promote “Blue communities”¹⁴ across the LWF communion which respect the human right to water, promote water as a public good and encourage the use of tap water when it is safe to do so.

The Assembly urges the LWF to strengthen the theological work concerning climate change, including the promotion of currently available resources from the member churches,¹⁵ as well as capacity-building and education.

The Assembly, in recognition of the LWF COP22 delegation’s report (which was adopted in the LWF Africa Pre-Assembly) strongly urges the LWF member churches to integrate a climate change curriculum in their religious studies, e.g., Christian education, Sunday school or confirmation class.

The Assembly urges the communion of churches to advocate for environmental care and protection.

The Assembly calls upon the member churches to integrate these goals and engage governments and national or local organizations for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). “Creation—Not for Sale” points out the communion’s responsibility to care and to maintain God’s creation. Referring to the COP21 resolution—the Paris Agreement—the Assembly reminds the member churches about their responsibility and needed efforts to advocate for climate justice, especially in terms of engaging governments for low-carbon development and urging them to keep global warming below 1.5°C.

The Assembly affirms the fact that the global ecological crisis, including climate change, is human-induced. It is a spiritual matter. As people of faith, we are called to live in right relationship with creation and not to exhaust it.

Resolution on inequalities and resources

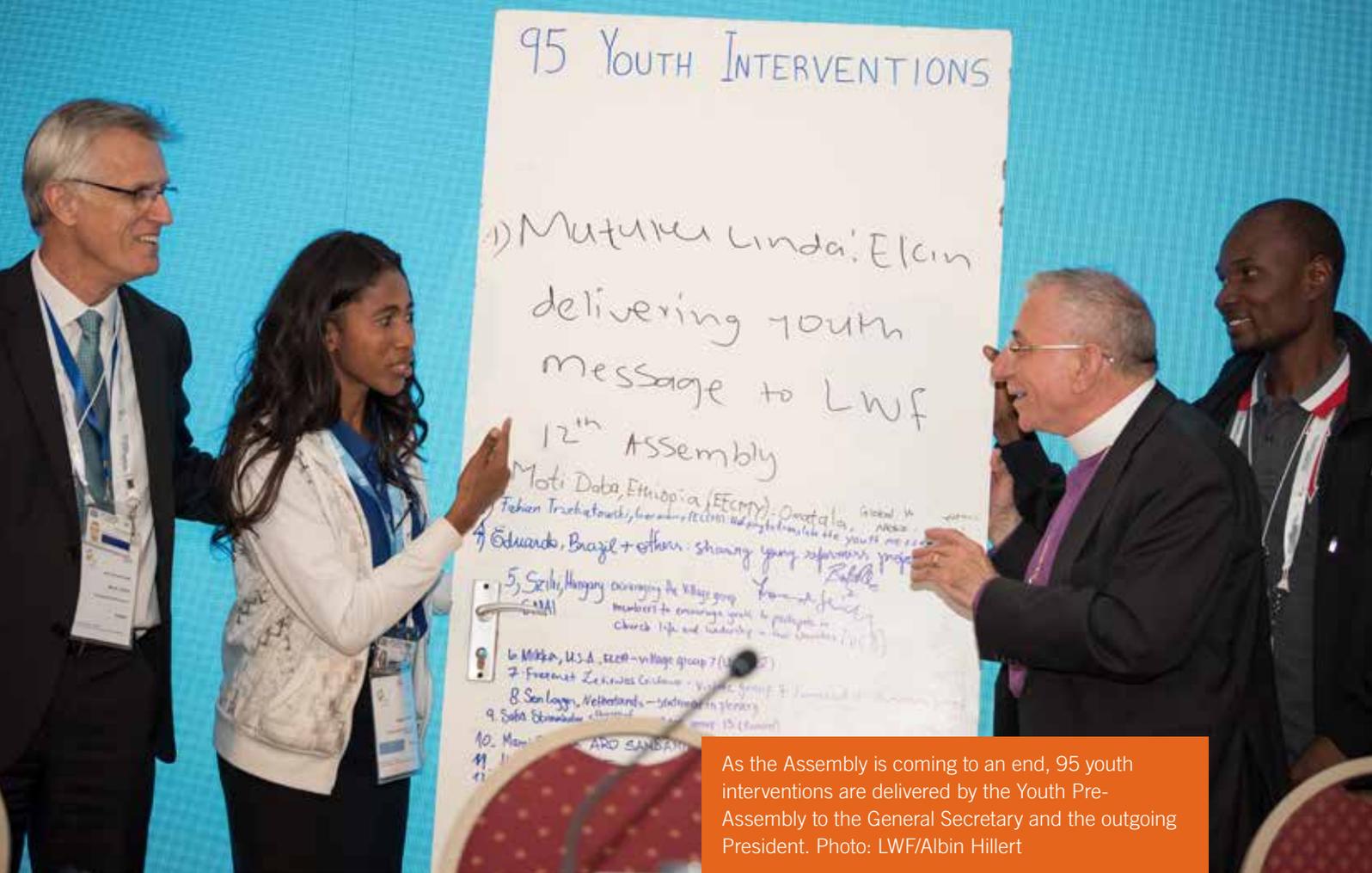
The Assembly recognizes that God has created enough resources for everyone to live in dignity.

As people of faith, we are deeply concerned about growing inequalities within and between countries. Increasing inequality indicates that the benefits of globalization and economic growth are often not shared. The benefits of globalization and economic growth could finance social protection such as health services, education and pensions.

The Assembly calls on the member churches and related organizations everywhere to stand up and demand fair redistribution of wealth and social protection as a matter of justice and human rights for all.

¹⁴ <https://canadians.org/bluecommunities>

¹⁵ For example, *A bishops’ letter about the climate*, at <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=1465598>.



As the Assembly is coming to an end, 95 youth interventions are delivered by the Youth Pre-Assembly to the General Secretary and the outgoing President. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

The Assembly also recalls and affirms the following resolution adopted by the Council at its 2013 meeting:

The São Paulo statement “International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life”¹⁶ was adopted on 5 October 2012 at a meeting held in response to and as a continuation of the decades of work around issues of economic, social and ecological justice with which the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Council on World Mission, and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have been involved.

The LWF Council commends the São Paulo statement to the member churches for their study and advocacy, and encourages the

Communion Office to continue to engage in the follow-up processes.

Resolution on Sustainable Development Goals

The 2016 LWF Council encouraged the member churches to be involved in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) which will indeed make the world a better place. However, we still find that many people do not even have the slightest idea what the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are, much less how to go about achieving them. The Assembly affirms the SDGs and calls upon all the member churches to:

¹⁶ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/finance-speculation-debt/sao-paulo-statement-international-financial-transformation-for-the-economy-of-life>

- Intensify their education and work on the SDGs
- Develop concrete programs, to work on achieving the SDGs in their respective countries
- Engage governments and national or local organizations for the implementation of the SDGs.

Resolution on commercialization and commodification of creation

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Gen 2:15).

The Assembly notes with deep concern that human life and creation are increasingly commercialized and commodified in our world today. Such commercialization and commodification devalues God’s creation and robs humans of their God-given dignity. In this way, every dimension of creation entrusted to humankind and human life itself is endangered. The Assembly finds disturbing that the practice extends even to the message of God’s gospel of grace, thereby putting a price tag on the ministry of the church, reducing it to a commodity that can be bought and sold.

The Assembly, therefore

- Encourages the LWF to find ways to help the member churches to become more theologically grounded in their teaching on human dignity and the value of creation
- Decries the excess destruction of natural resources, including the misuse of land for

commercial purposes only, because human destruction of creation is self-destruction since humans are an inseparable part of creation

- Acknowledges that due to human activities, creation is losing biodiversity at a highly alarming rate and understands that biodiversity loss threatens the delicate balance of the earth system as seriously as climate change. The Assembly calls on the LWF Communion Office and the LWF member churches to give special attention to and take action on biodiversity loss, including within the context of implementing the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Is concerned that through carbon emission compensation, pollution is commodified. The Assembly recognizes current efforts as a transition and calls for advocacy with corporations and countries for responsible and sustainable carbon emission efforts.

Resolution on social protection in times of inequality

As people of faith, the Assembly is deeply concerned by the growing inequalities and the impact on the lives of people everywhere. The Assembly calls upon the Lutheran churches and their related organizations to explore their role and resources of *diakonia* in promoting just societies, where wealth is shared fairly for the good of all and social protection is guaranteed as the right of all—so that no one shall be left behind.

Churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs) have historically been and continue to remain at the forefront of providing social services and support to those living at the socioeconomic margins.¹⁷ The Assembly therefore believes that churches and FBOs

¹⁷ “Diakonia In The Time Of Inequality,” Sigtuna Statement on Theology, Tax and Social Protection, Sigtuna, Sweden, January 2017, at <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=1605527>

have a critical role to play in actively working for just societies and securing social protection for all. The Assembly affirms publicly funded social protection as a moral imperative and as a human right for all and particularly for those that have been rendered invisible by current economic and development realities.

This is important because the Assembly believes that social protection is an essential requirement for a just society, regardless of nationality, legal citizenship or the level of economic development in a country. The Assembly also believes that taxation is a fundamental instrument for redistributing wealth and for financing the common good so that all can have life in dignity.

The Assembly calls on Lutheran churches and FBOs everywhere to stand up for and demand the fair redistribution of wealth and social protection as a matter of justice and human rights for all in the following ways:

- Continue to pioneer social services and support for those who are left behind and challenge governments to learn from these innovations to improve public social protection
- Raise awareness and build local community support to influence policies and actions in favor of social protection, just tax systems and equality at all levels
- Use the voice of the church to educate, inspire and transform peoples' attitude and behavior about tax and social protection in all sectors of society.
- Commit to working with others in the public space and engage in relevant policy frameworks and debates to call upon:
 - National governments to guarantee social protection for all and to mobilize

the necessary resources through fair taxation

- The private sector to recognize that major corporations and the super-rich minority are benefitting at the cost of the majority and that they need to honor tax and labor legislation and be transparent and accountable in their business practices
- The leaders in all sectors of society to support policy initiatives for a reformed financial architecture that promotes a more just and equitable redistribution of resources in line with the common good and to act upon the international responsibility to leave no one behind (see also the São Paulo statement, “International financial transformation for the economy of life”¹⁸).

Resolution on education not for sale

The Assembly affirms that education is an active and essential agent for youth empowerment on a daily basis. Furthermore, the Assembly affirms that education is critical in the fight against other justice issues, such as world hunger. Yet, in the highly modernized world of the twenty-first century, education and hence youth empowerment remain just a mere dream for many. Education is still inaccessible and unaffordable for many people around the world.

The Assembly calls on the LWF and its member churches to develop and implement a program to resolve this education dilemma, especially in countries where there are gross inaccessibilities and financial constraints.

Further, the Assembly calls on the member churches to advocate for free and compulsory education in their individual contexts.

¹⁸ Op. cit. (note 16).

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The Assembly encourages the member churches to work with their governments to have good and safe education for all children, including the contextualization of school curricula for better leadership and a better future.

Resolution on rethinking Sunday

The Assembly recognizes that there is a decreasing emphasis on Sunday as the day of Jesus Christ's resurrection in many of our contexts. This trend suggests it is necessary to rethink the meaning of Sunday as a day to worship and to celebrate faith in community, but also to keep the values of this meaningful day alive. Sunday offers the possibility to reinvigorate and maintain one's balance in a world which is becoming more demanding and

in which an increased effort is needed to retain Lutheran values.

Therefore, the Assembly recognizes that recent problems, such as secularization and regional circumstances where Christianity is not a majority, are challenges. The Assembly calls upon the member churches to rethink the meaning of Sunday and strengthen the holiness of this day.

Resolution to explore renaming the LWF as a communion

The self-understanding of the LWF has changed through the years from a federation of autonomous churches toward a communion of churches. In 1990, the LWF formally became a communion of churches. This current self-



A handcrafted Luther Rose in the Omatala, an open space for exhibitions, workshops, and informal encounters. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

understanding implies mutual accountability, hermeneutical awareness as well as attention to and acceptance of the diversity in the church of Jesus Christ. For the many LWF member churches in a minority situation, a renaming of the federation as a communion would have great impact.

The Assembly requests the LWF Council to consider exploring whether the time is right to rename the Lutheran World Federation as a communion (See Exhibit 5.2).

Resolution on supporting the participation of parents in LWF meetings

The Assembly calls on the LWF and its member churches to support all families, to help them nurture growth in love and mutual respect.

In the LWF, we are tackling many of the issues that concern gender justice, equity, education and the revival of the churches. In order to support parents in their engagement within the LWF and in order to model coherence between our public statements and our internal action, the Assembly calls upon the LWF to support those with parenting responsibilities who hold staff and other positions within the LWF by providing childcare during LWF assemblies and Council meetings, etc.

Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation expression of gratitude

The Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation convened in Windhoek, Namibia, expresses its deepest gratitude to the following distinguished persons, organizations and institutions for their indispensable contributions to the success of the Assembly

and to making it a fruitful, meaningful and important event in the life of the LWF and all the participants. To this end, the Assembly adopts the following expressions of gratitude.

To the United Church Council of the Namibia Evangelical Lutheran Churches (UCC–NELC) for generously inviting the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to Namibia and the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to all participants. The Assembly acknowledges and greatly appreciates the tireless efforts and energy the three member churches—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and its Presiding Bishop, Rev. Dr Shekutaamba Vaino Nambala and Bishop Dr Veikko Munyika, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) and its Bishop, Ernst //Gamxamub and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia–German Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCIN–GELC) and its Bishop, Burgert Brand—have voluntarily invested, both individually and collectively under the UCC–NELC, during the preparation and throughout the Assembly.

To the President of the Republic of Namibia, H. E. Dr Hage Geingob for his generous welcome reception dinner for all the assembly participants and recognition of the LWF's contribution, both morally and materially, to the noble struggle for independence of his country. The same goes for the Vice President, Dr Nickey Iyambo, the Prime Minister, Ms Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila and other dignitaries who attended the welcome reception in honor of the Assembly.

To the government of the Republic of Namibia for their unwavering support and cooperation from the day it was announced that the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation would be held in Windhoek until the end of the Assembly. We specifically underscore the fact that all participants were granted entry visas to Namibia, irrespective

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of their countries of origin, social class, age, gender or any other categories. This makes Namibia the first country where no single visa denial has been recorded for LWF assembly participants.

To the Assembly Planning Committee and its Chair, Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, including its advisors for their overall guidance, counsel and time spent for various preparatory meetings in the lead-up toward the Assembly.

To the International Worship Planning Committee and its Chair, Rev. Dr Stephen Larson, Assembly Worship Coordinator, Prof. Dr Dirk Lange and their local counterparts, the music directors, liturgical leaders and their assistants, drama/performance team, Assembly choir and others for carrying out spirit-filled worship services.

To the local Assembly Planning Committee, led by its Chairperson, Rev. Dr Emma Nangolo and Vice Chairperson, Dr Nashilongo Shivute, for their capable leadership, devotion and time they have given in guiding all the preparatory processes and actions in the lead-up toward and during the Assembly. Moreover, the Assembly offers special words of appreciation to the volunteers and stewards for their dedication to their multi-task assignments (welcoming participants at the airport, help with transportation, giving directions, technical assistance, etc.), eagerness to help or simply their smiles to assembly participants, making everyone feel welcomed and at home every day.

To the member churches, national committees, related organizations and our generous host the UCC–NELC in particular for contributing to the Assembly budget and others who have made in kind contributions to the planning and running of the Assembly.

Bearing in mind the water scarcity in Windhoek, the Assembly acknowledges and

offers words of thanks to the generous farmer Mr Finkenstein who provided drinking water from his own well free of charge for the entire period of the Assembly.

The Assembly expresses its profound appreciation for the many greetings extended to it by representatives of ecumenical bodies, brothers and sisters. We acknowledge the greetings provided by the World Council of Churches via its General Secretary, Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, the ACT Alliance through its General Secretary, Mr John Nduna, the Eastern Orthodox Churches through Metropolitan Isaias Kykkotis of Tamassos and Oreini, the Catholic Church and Pope Francis in particular through Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Global Christian Forum through Rev. Aiah Foday-Khabenje, the International Lutheran Council through its Chair, Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt, the Council of Churches in Namibia through its President, Rev. Andreas Biwa, the Anglican Communion through Archbishop Albert Chama, Anglican Primate of the Church of the Province of Central Africa, the World Methodist Council through its General Secretary, Bishop Ivan Abrahams, the Mennonite World Conference through Rev. Dr Cesar Garcia, the World Communion of Reformed Churches through Rev. Dr Christopher Ferguson, and Dr Jean-Daniel Pluss, Assemblies of God.

This Assembly recognizes and rejoices in the presence of both the former president of the LWF, Bishop Mark S. Hanson and the former general secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko among us.

To the many visitors who joined from places near and far at their own personal expense in order to share in the life of the Assembly.

To the Twelfth Assembly Keynote speaker, Dr Denis Mukwege, for his powerful and profound address that challenged the Assembly



First press conference in preparation for the LWF Twelfth Assembly featured Namibian church leaders speaking about hosting the Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

to live up to its theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace” by ensuring respect for gender justice within the life and structures of member churches and bolstering the fight against a sexual and gender-based violence-(SGBV) free society and world. The same goes to the respondents, Ms Patricia Rohner-Hege, Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine and Rev. Dr Samuel Dawai, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon, who interacted with Dr Mukwege, bringing the discussion to the realities and challenges of the LWF member churches.

To Bible study presenters—Prof. Dr Dennis Olson, Prof. Dr Bernd Oberdorfer, Rev. Dr Rospita Siahaan, Rev. Dr Mercedes Garcia Bachmann, who wrote a Bible study text that was presented by Rev. Mariela Pereyra and Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata—for their thoughtful reflections on the theological underpinnings of the assembly theme and its sub-themes.

To the assembly sub-themes keynote speakers—Rev. Dr Monica Melanchthon, Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke and Mr Martin Kopp—for

their insightful deliberation on the sub-themes, Salvation—not for Sale, Human Beings—not for Sale and Creation—not for Sale, respectively. Similar appreciation extends to respondents and moderators of the respective thematic plenaries who enriched the discussions through their contextual experiences.

To village group leaders for displaying extraordinary facilitation skills that made the village groups indeed open, safe and interactive spaces where the assembly theme and its sub-themes were further reflected upon and molded into concrete proposals for action by the LWF and its member churches.

To all those who participated in the *Omatala* exhibitions, storytelling and workshops for enriching the Assembly through the informal and sometimes entertaining exchange of ideas, traditional objects, clothes and foods that truly reflects the global nature of the LWF communion.

The Twelfth Assembly of the LWF records special gratitude to all those who contributed

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to the historical and forward-looking event of the global commemoration and celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. To Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Minister of Poverty Eradication, who offered a powerful and moving sermon, other ministers, choirs, worship leaders, technical teams, ushers, volunteers and others. Similarly, the Assembly thanks the management of the Sam Nujoma Stadium, the venue for the commemoration, and the entire community of Katutura township for their support.

The Assembly expresses its gratitude for the work of the LWF officers, the Council and its various committees over the past seven years. The Assembly in Stuttgart took many actions that required the attention and action of the Council. The Council has faithfully carried out those resolutions and statements. The members of the Council and its committees have faithfully executed their tasks, including providing helpful resources and assistance to the member churches.

This Assembly conveys acknowledgments to its various committees and their chairs who devoted their time and energy to make this Assembly productive and help it diligently to discharge its responsibilities as per the LWF constitution. These are—the Business Committee and its Chair, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, the Policy and Reference Committee and its Chair, Rev. Dr Robin J. Steinke, the Editorial Committee and its Chair, Oberkirchenrat Michael Martin, the Credentials and Elections Committee and its Chair, Rev. Karin Rubenson and the Minutes Committee and its Chair, Rev. Yonas Yigezu Dibisa.

To Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the LWF, for his wisdom and the overall leadership and managerial capabilities he exhibited both in public and behind the scenes to create an enabling and friendly environment for the smooth running of the Assembly. We

also thank the Assembly Coordinator, Ms Clarissa Balan, for laying the foundation of the assembly planning and the Assembly Manager, Mr Pauli Rantanen and his assistant, Mr Yann Bovey, for their meticulous planning, implementation and general oversight of the entire progression of the Assembly. The same appreciation is extended to the local Assembly Office, Dr Martin Nelumbu and Ms Ute Brand, for their persistent commitment including going extra miles when circumstances required, as happened many times.

To the Assembly coordinators for content, communications, finance, women and youth Pre-Assemblies as well as the entire LWF staff, co-opted staff and many others from the member churches who have unselfishly given their time and efforts to the Assembly. A special word of thanks goes to the core volunteers and stewards for their great service. Particular gratitude is expressed to the language service, the interpreters, the translators, the editors and the technical services for their continuous efforts to enable communication among the assembly participants. Similar appreciation is also extended to the medical professionals who made themselves available for any help throughout the Assembly period.

To all the Namibian government's branches, ministries and agencies—all the relevant security units, the Immigration Authority, the Civil Aviation Authority, the Post Office and others—who contributed their part to make this Assembly peaceful, joyful, colorful and successful. Special thanks to the Namibian Post Office for the issuance of a special postage stamp on the occasion of the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation and the global commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

To the representatives of the press, radio and television who have covered and reported on the activities of this Assembly; they have

assisted in communicating to the world the role of the LWF both in the affairs of churches and nations.

To the management and staff of the Safari Hotel and Conference Center, the main assembly venue, for their state-of-the-art facilities and professional services rendered that immensely contributed to the smooth running of the assembly business and associated events. The same goes for other hotels—Arrebush, Roof of Africa, Uzuri Guest House, Hillside Executive, Capbon Guest House, Hilton, Avani, Casa Piccolo, Klein Windhoek Guest House, Casa Blanca, Yoye Guest House, Shalongo, Chameleon backpackers, Protea Furstenhof, Windhoek Country Club, Maison Ambre, De Vagabond B&B and Hotel Palmquell—that provided comfortable accommodation and a friendly environment for the participants. Likewise, the Assembly thanks the families and local congregations who hosted participants of the youth Pre-Assembly and the delegations of Pre-assembly visits.

Last but not least, the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF expresses its profound gratitude, love and indebtedness to Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, President of the LWF, for his pastoral

and prophetic leadership of the communion for the past seven years. Bishop Younan's leadership and witness during the past seven years has affirmed our true global communion through his numerous visits of accompaniment to member churches in all the LWF regions and his powerful prophetic voice against injustices and human rights violations of all kinds, irrespective of where they occur or by whom they are perpetrated. His competence, experience and insight have guided the LWF as it has discussed and explored the practical implications of this global communion within our diversity.

This Assembly recognizes that there are many other persons and organizations who have been involved in the preparation, planning and functioning of this Assembly. Although unnamed, their contributions are not unnoticed and our hearty thanks are extended to them.

Beyond this expression, we thank God for the many blessings bestowed upon the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF convened in Windhoek, Namibia, 10–16 May 2017 and the global commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation observed at the Sam Nujoma Stadium, Katutura township on 14 May 2017.

Salvation —Not for Sale

Rev. Dr Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon

This is my first assembly and I am absolutely thrilled to be here. I am emotional, overwhelmed and grateful for the invitation extended by the General Secretary, by Rev. Anne Burghardt and by the Assembly planning team. I am also thankful to the Pilgrim Theological College for granting me leave to be here. I thank in advance the chair of this session and my two respondents and I look forward to the conversation that will follow.

There are two reasons why I am filled with some trepidation with regard to this presentation. One, I am not a systematic theologian or a Luther scholar. I try to stay away from deep and complex discussions on doctrine because I am invariably left with feelings of inadequacy. I see myself more as a practitioner than as a theoretician and am keen on learning how doctrine can serve the lives and well-being of peoples. For this to happen, doctrine and theology, I believe, will have to be liberated from reworked outdated platitudes and dogmatisms. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, my apprehension lies in how reflections from the two-thirds part of the globe are received. In a 2001 article, Marcella Althaus Reid³¹ suggests that theology as a political project functions in ways similar to capitalism in its need to dominate the world. This can be seen, she says,

in the manner in which control is exerted over method, theological and taxonomic interests. Foreign and strange thinking is known to have received a “treatment of de-authorization... or immobilization,” and this is a familiar experience to us. Some years ago, I was part of a Lutheran project on grace and one of the reviewers said the following in his review:

Liberation theologies of various sorts have found great favor in Lutheran World Federation circles in recent years, ... The tacit assumption of numerous essays ... could be stated as, “Our politics is better than your politics, and the sooner our kind takes over the better.” Needless to say, fitting such a notion into theological containers most of us would recognize as Lutheran takes some powerful magic.³²

Doctrines as transformative and reforming spaces

I rest my case. I am certain that if I am not “Lutheran” enough, I will hear about it. But I would like to stress that I am keenly aware that doctrines are important because they are normative in the shaping of Christian faith. In Serene Jones’ words, “doctrines have the capacity to shape the identity and character

³¹ Marcella Althaus Reid, “Sexual Salvation: The Theological Grammar of Voyeurism and Permutations,” *Liberation & Theology*, Vol 15, No. 3, (September 2001), 241.

³² Frederick Niedner in his review of Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm and Ted Peters (eds), *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), at <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2006/thur031606.shtml>.



Rev. Dr Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

of their adherents in positive and negative ways.”³³ Hence, doctrines are contested sites and spaces, since doctrines are constructed and interpreted in certain ways to mediate relationships that either liberate or restrict the well-being and flourishing of both individuals and communities. At the heart of theology is the reinterpretation and reconstruction of well-established, familiar and much-cherished doctrines. This process of remembering, reclaiming and reinterpreting doctrine, occasioned by milestones such as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, allow for analyzing and rediscovering the ways in which they have influenced our lives and our views of the world and their potential for addressing the many ills that confront the world and us as individuals today.

Doctrines can therefore be transformative and reforming spaces as long as we allow them to encompass new semantic arrays through engagement with different contexts. Those of us who see ourselves as the custodians of the tradition need not worry because,

*The Lutheran code has proven to be resilient, not because it is entrenched in a safer past, but because its code has an inner flexibility that allows us to confront and engage the anomalies of new contexts, and to assimilate them into a wider cultural linguistic universe.*³⁴

Salvation and the market

Our attention this morning is on salvation. Is salvation something we all think about? Are

³³ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 53.

³⁴ Guillermo Hansen, “Resistance, Adaptation or Challenge: The Versatility of the Lutheran Code,” in Karen Bloomquist (ed.), *Transformative Theological Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press on behalf of the LWF, 2010), 29.

we really preoccupied with being saved? How close is it to our desires? What is it that we want “saved” in our lives? There are many definitions of “salvation” out there, including many spurious ones which have distanced us from God—definitions that conform to market theologies and their current political, social and gender ideologies. History is replete with examples of the effects of salvation understood in totalitarian terms—controlling, defining and organizing people in rather dogmatic ways. Salvation cannot and should not be sold. But today, the idolatry of mammon has hijacked the world and this is only a part of the wider sacrilege by which our society has sacrificed virtually all its principles at the altar of consumerism. We now live with a philosophy of the market which is given quasi-religious commitment and under which we are being turned into customers in every walk of life. Moral and social values are all subject to the rigor of market competition. In a world where wealth is god, the name of the living God is enlisted to serve mammon as the charlatans of the church in every age have proved—from Tetzels selling his indulgences for buying forgiveness in the sixteenth century to televangelists selling salvation, healing and prosperity. This is certainly tantamount to twisting authentic Christian theology for financial gain. Much of the violence and bloodshed in this world spring from the bigoted belief of each religion that only their religion is capable of providing the ultimate salvation to humankind. Christian institutions are buying market analyses and commissioning public opinion surveys, seeking to penetrate cities and saturate likely markets. They are using big business strategies to market their brand of faith. As one report I read said, “The trend is for Christianity to be sold to third-world audiences by the same methods that proved so successful for cold-water detergents and underarm deodorants. Fielding a worldwide ‘sales’ force and commanding huge budgets, they also enjoy a lack of accountability.”³⁵ Another blogger has

written, “The world would indeed have become a heaven had the funds utilized for selling salvation been used for alleviating poverty and the misery of millions of a suffering humanity.” Far more disturbing is the wealth that individuals and organizations are amassing through the sale of salvation.

Greed for wealth and for power work hand in hand to exploit the vulnerability of peoples caught in a web of poverty, systemic oppression, conflict and violence. This is true of the state of affairs in many churches as well. As we were so powerfully reminded yesterday, women in particular and some men continue to suffer discrimination and isolation within the church. Those who speak about justice are welcomed and included as long as they do not question injustice, corruption, nepotism and abuse within the leadership or structures of the church. For such victims, the pain lingers and never really goes away.

And the clever sellers of salvation take note of the needs of the people, master the surroundings, contexts and their materiality. They construct needs, guilt structures, desires and package God and God’s salvation for sale. For many, all that they have to help them cope is faith and refuge in God as savior. Drowning in despair, and struggling to keep their heads above water, they become victims to these distorted and convoluted sales pitches of religious leaders and organizations offering ways out of the predicament. Desperation and fear clouds judgment, hinders creativity and prevents participation in resistance to such understandings of salvation.

Can salvation be sold?

Salvation is not for the church to buy and sell. Luther used his theology to serve the proclamation of the gospel—“that salvation is

³⁵ <https://newint.org/features/1981/04/01/selling/>

received and not achieved.”³⁶ Salvation was not a movement or progress from iniquity to virtue but rather a premise of life. Salvation or justification was therefore God’s gift to the faithful—a present, a living experience and not something in the future. It comes about through faith in the risen Christ, present here and now, with whom one becomes conjoined through faith and saved through his Spirit.

All human beings are now justified by God’s grace as a gift through redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood (Rom 3:24–25). It requires faith and courage to accept the certitude of this statement. For Luther, faith is the confidence that, because we are objects of an infinite and unconditional love, the negativities of human existence can have no finality for us: fear, despair, death and all troubles have been conquered. They are stripped of their power by the conviction that the very deepest of all human longings has been fulfilled. For if we really are loved infinitely and unconditionally by an omnipotent being, nothing can hurt us. To live one’s faith with such a trust, according to Luther, makes all the difference in the world. And yet this trust that Luther speaks of is not always apparent when surrounded by violence, corruption, nepotism, abuse, greed and marginalization.

The saving grace of God questioned and doubted

In December 2016, the Australian media were playing footage recorded by a drone that flew over East Aleppo, Syria. Michael Carlton, one of Australia’s best-known broadcasting and newspaper columnists, tweeted the footage to his followers with the caption, “Fairly convincing proof that there is no deity. Not

God. Not Jehovah. Not Allah. Nothing but man’s inhumanity to man.”³⁷ In some ways, it is difficult to counter the sentiment expressed here. Faith takes quite a beating when one is mired in fear, is fighting hopelessness.

Luther affirmed that faith often exists in tension with experience. There are “mountaintop” moments in life when human beings have a profound sense that all is right with the world. But there are other moments, Luther knew all too well, when bitter experience suggests that sin, death and the devil will have the last word. At such times, Luther said, “... faith slinks away and hides” (WA 17:1, 72, 17).

This was also the experience of Jesus Christ on the cross and is our experience as well. Reason, at such moments, interprets experience so as to contradict faith and only faith can overcome it.

It (reason) can be killed by nothing else but faith, which believes God....It [faith] does this in spite of the fact that he speaks what seems foolish, absurd and impossible to reason [namely, that he loves us]... (LW 26, 231).

The miracle is that faith, weak as it now may be, persists.

Faith, this trust that death and all troubles have been overcome, can sometimes seem as self-evident to us as Luther says, “three plus two equals five (WA 10:3). But more often in real life, it coexists in a complex relationship with doubt. In fact, Luther wonders at times whether people without doubt, “smug people, who have never struggled with any temptation or true terrors of sin and death...” can really know what faith is (LW 26, 127). In his preface

³⁶ Carter Lindberg, “Luther’s Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues,” in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 165.

³⁷ <http://twitter.com/MikeCarlton01/status/808965036676784128>



Morning worship at the Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

to his 1531 Lectures on Galatians, Luther warns that we have little hope of understanding St. Paul here unless we too are “miserable like Galatians in faith,” that is, “troubled, afflicted, vexed and tempted...” (LW 27, 148). The presence of doubt does not imply the absence of faith. Faith is a mysterious reality that hides beneath doubt and even beneath its absolute opposite, despair. So it is difficult to tell where faith is.

Salvation takes effect in the encounter with the Divine

In the midst of suffering and pain, voicing one’s doubt and resisting the forces of death, one experiences salvation. There is therefore a twofold understanding to salvation—voicing one’s pain and waiting upon the Lord to save—both made possible by our having been

justified by God’s grace. At the heart of the cry is the deep-seated belief in a deliverer God. The Psalter contains many examples of such expressions of doubt and dependence on the very same God to bring relief and deliverance. Salvation therefore “dawns at the mysterious meeting point of the cry of pain, divine deliverance and human response.”³⁸ This is very evident in the text of our Bible study this morning. The affluent man is drawn into unexpected communion with Jesus. His climb onto the sycamore tree is an active initiative on the part of Zaccheus, that is, he was enthusiastic in seeking out Jesus, which resulted in his transformation. The true initiative in the story however belongs to Jesus who had an innate sensitivity to the problems and needs of others. Although he was up on the tree, Jesus saw him and suggested a closer and a more personal encounter. The reign of God had

³⁸ K. M. Heffelfinger, “Embodiment in Isaiah 51-52 and Psalm 62: A Feminist Biblical Theology of Salvation,” in Patricia K. Tull and Jacqueline E Lapsley (eds), *After Exegesis: Feminist Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 73.

made its approach and Zaccheus embraced it with joy. Conversion and transformation are possible only through a personal encounter with the divine with an open heart. The result will not be one of passive acceptance or non-involvement in the suffering around us but rather a conscious determination to act and set right the wrong.

Salvation takes effect in faith and good works

The determination to act and set right the wrongs is the outcome of having been saved. In other words, salvation takes effect in righteous deeds or good works.

We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds (LW 31, 12).

We are to offer up ourselves for our neighbors' benefit and for the honor of God. This offering is the exercise of our love—distributing our works for the benefit of our neighbors. He who does so is a Christian. He becomes one with Christ, and the offering of his body is identical with the offering of Christ's body. (The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. IV, "First Sunday after Epiphany," p. 9)

Faith, though it alone justifies according to Luther, never exists without morally good acts. If it does, he says it is "false faith" (LW 26, 155). He explains in his 1536 "Disputation concerning Justification":

It is one thing that faith justifies without works: it is another thing that faith exists without works...we say that justification

is effective without works, not that faith is without works (LW 34, 175).

In other words, faith alone makes us righteous, or rather receives this righteousness (forgiveness) from God. Having thus been made good, we spontaneously do good. Luther writes:

When I have this righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile, that is...I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises (LW 26, 11).

Faith is passive receptivity and yet it is "...a busy, active, mighty thing... it is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly" (LW 35, 370).

Righteous deeds are those that serve the neighbor; they are thus worldly and "directed to the neighbor as a response to God's promise";³⁹ these righteous deeds are an indicator of the presence of God's saving grace within us. Anyone who has faith is willing to serve God by engaging themselves in the fight against all that is unjust, ungodly and sinful. Injustice and oppression are social sins and void of any saving significance. Continuing to live in situations of pain, suffering and fear has no saving value and hence these are to be contested and fought.

How are we to show that this salvation has taken effect in our lives?

Salvation takes effect in solidarity

John 1:14 reads "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus is the Word made flesh who lived among us, emphasizing "made his dwelling among us—identified with us, suffered with us and liberated us."⁴⁰ In order

³⁹ Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues," 166.

⁴⁰ V. Devasahayam, *Doing Dalit Theology in Biblical Key* (Chennai: Gurukul/ISPCK, 1997).

to bring salvation, Jesus had to become flesh and had to dwell in the flesh with the people. This is the mystery of incarnation. It is a matter of becoming one with the other through deep identification. There is no better example to this truth than the life of Jesus. In his life, the offer of salvation begins with identification and grows through innumerable acts of oneness with the people and ends with the communion meal with the disciples and his supreme sacrifice on the cross where he broke himself totally into the bread of life for the salvation of the world.⁴¹ Jesus' acts in favor of the flourishing of the people, especially the poor and the marginalized, became sacramental signs of God's identification with us for our well-being.

Salvation is inextricably linked to solidarity. True Christian freedom means to be with others and to identify oneself with them. Therefore the foundational event of Jesus' offering of salvation is his becoming one in flesh with the human family. When contrasted with the individualism of the free market in the contemporary world, we begin to realize the significance of the link between salvation and solidarity. A massive lie is exhibited as salvation.

The ideological force of this cover-up is the philosophy that claims that everyone is saved when he or she attends to his or her own interests. Against this prevailing "gospel of the market," we are able to see in better light the Christian mystery of salvation as solidarity. Solidarity begets freedom, and freedom as an experience with others rather than a withdrawal into one's own self.⁴²

Solidarity is salvation because, according to our Christian faith, it is through grace that we are saved. In the opening of one's self to the other and in mutual self-giving, we experience

grace. The mutual self-giving is the grammar through which we learn the self-gift of God in Jesus Christ for the well-being of the world, especially the poor and the marginalized. In the culture of the market, we are trained to possess whereas in solidarity is grace, one is encouraged to give of oneself.

The material side to salvation

Is not material well-being an indispensable part of life? I cite here a poem that keeps speaking to me again and again: "From Jaini-Bi with love." The editor explains that "Jaini-Bi" stands for all people who suffer extreme deprivation in a seemingly uncaring world, but who receive a spark of hope from humanitarian concerns and actions.

From Jaini-Bi with love

*Every noon at twelve
In the blazing heat God comes to me
In the form of
Two hundred grams of gruel
I know Him in every grain
I taste Him in every lick
I commune with Him as I gulp
For he keeps me alive, with
Two hundred grams of gruel.
I wait till next noon
And now know he'd come:
I can hope to live one day more
For you made God come to me as
Two hundred grams of gruel.
I now know that God loves me
Not until you made it possible.
Now I know what you're speaking about
For God so loves this world
That he gives his beloved son*

⁴¹ Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 308.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 308-09.



Morning worship on the theme “Salvation—not for Sale”. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Luther too saw the need for doing works that address the bodily welfare of the community.

*[E]veryone must benefit and serve every other by means of his (sic) own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the **bodily and spiritual welfare of the community**...*⁴³

Matthew 25:31-46 stresses the significance of having been given food, drink and clothing. These are the material realities which matter to the poor, the least ones, for they are essential to their well-being. It is these very physical realities that the poor struggle for—and of which they are deprived in our history and today. Salvation then cannot be an alienation from these material realities but the transformation of these

realities from means of selfishness and death to become realities of life through sharing.⁴⁴

Hence, the contrast is not between renouncing the material in favor of the spiritual. The act of sharing one’s bread with the poor is an act of salvation because in that act for the well-being of the other, one encounters the God who became one with suffering humanity. Hence, the encounter with God takes place not in the abstract, but in the encounter with the poor. Logically then, those who are involved in feeding, clothing and caring for the poor are experiencing salvation and are in fact acting as bearers of God’s salvation. Not without reason then that Jesus chose food and drink to represent his very self and partaking in these realities through love and sharing as the experience of life and salvation. God is rice as in the poem just shared. The image

⁴³ LW 44, 130, emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Wilfred, op. cit. (note 41), 309.

of the promised land in the Old Testament is another image of salvation. Before we begin to spiritualize this image, it is pertinent to remember that the exodus was a journey from servitude, denial of material goods and alienation of labor experienced in Egypt to a situation of non-exploitation and freedom.

The immediate, provisional and mundane nature of salvation

“Justification must be less preoccupied with eternal salvation and more attuned to the gospel’s message to set free and restore right relations in this world,” says Munib Younan. The once-and-for-all grand salvation at the end of time in which all will be free from pain and suffering would be nice, but for many women and men, the most imminent need is liberation in terms of their most immediate circumstances. Ivone Gebara proposes that one think differently about salvation as it occurs in some small ways within the dehumanizing effects of poverty, powerlessness and violence.

Amy Willis outlines Gebara’s attempt to revision salvation in more immediate, provisional and mundane terms as follows:

“Redemption is found in ‘tiny events’ of present living and sharing. It is an everyday salvation, a salvation of the here and now, a salvation for this life and this moment. It is a far cry from the grand projects of world economy, official statistics, a religious apocalypse, a far cry from the salvation of heaven.” Nevertheless, moments of grace that people experience everyday are fundamentally salvific and should not be overlooked. They include “shared bread, wounds healed, gestures of tenderness, the straightened posture of a stooped woman, hunger satisfied for the moment, the birth

of a child, a good harvest.” All these can be held up as symbols of life and therefore of salvation.⁴⁵

In conclusion

We are all mostly certain that we have been justified and liberated through God’s grace. Yet it is my assumption that we have problems truly believing it and appropriating it in our lives and hence are hindered from taking seriously human emotions such as pain, anger, frustration, despair and sadness. It is in the cries of pain, frustration of individuals and communities that reveal that something is seriously wrong with the way the individual or the community is treated. But at the heart of the cry is the deep-seated belief in a deliverer God. A theology of salvation professes that well-being/flourishing is only possible because God intervenes and transforms the current conditions of human existence that impede this ideal. God intervenes to disrupt disruption caused by the many ills of society. Perhaps our inability to fully appropriate this truth is caused by the fact that we have imprisoned God in our minds and have not allowed God and God’s saving grace to descend into our hearts, our stomachs, our wombs, our guts which the Hebrew Scriptures have taught me is the seat of feeling, of emotion, of compassion. The ills in the world have to trouble, afflict, vex and tempt us to respond. In responding through acts of care and kindness, we bring into effect our salvation and the salvation of individuals beyond one’s narrow circle of concern.

⁴⁵ Amy C. Merrill Willis, “Counter Imagination in Isaiah 65 and Daniel 12: A Feminist Biblical Theology of Hope,” in Patricia K. Tull and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (eds), *After Exegesis: Feminist Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 240-41.

SALVATION
NOT FOR SALE



Morning worship at the Assembly on the theme of
"Salvation—not for Sale." Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Human Beings —Not for Sale

Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke

Human dignity as a theological concept

One of the key components of the Christian faith is its view of human dignity. Humans are valued for what they are—as created in the image of God—and not because of their social, economic or religious status.

The Reformation affirms this understanding of being human: by the grace of God, every human being is given an inherent value which will never be lost, regardless of how much powers and principalities may seek to invalidate it. God’s caring love, as revealed in Jesus Christ, recognizes and defends the dignity of every person, especially of those considered unworthy and of less value according to the prevalent standards in our societies. In addition, human dignity expresses itself in a rich variety of abilities and talents given to each of us. This view, that Luther strongly reiterated, claims that every person is entitled by the Creator to be a subject with a noble vocation to serve God and the neighbor.

It is therefore fundamentally wrong and against God’s will to reduce humans to objects and even worse to commodities, obeying the rules of the market. Human beings are not for sale! Neither the market nor political or even religious actors have the right to reduce human beings to mere pawns in their game of seeking wealth and power.

This conviction prompted Martin Luther to publish the ninety-five theses on indulgences. In his view, the selling of indulgences constituted an unacceptable commercializing of salvation, turning it into a commodity one could purchase and, as a consequence, reducing the believer to a mere consumer of religious “goods.”

Luther’s critique included another important argument. When counseling members of his congregation who had bought indulgences, he heard them say that they now considered themselves exempted from having to perform good works. According to Luther, this meant a turning away from their vocation as Christians and a negation of the gifts and talents God had freely bestowed upon them.

The first thesis expresses this concern:

When our Lord and master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Here, Luther uses the terminology of the sacrament of penance. The forgiveness of sins sets the believer free to do good works to serve the neighbor. Thesis 42 clearly states:

Christians are to be taught that the Pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.



Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Luther sharpened this position three years later, in November 1520, in “A Treatise on Christian Liberty”:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.

The dignity of being human is recognized and expressed in two relations: one in relation to God, which is a relation of life and freedom in Christ. The other is in relation to the neighbor as a vocation to serve the other and promote common good. This is another gift of being in Christ, of being recognized and confirmed as an indispensable subject in human relationships, as parent, neighbor, worker, citizen. Human life is indeed not for sale; it is for life and for the promotion of common good.

What is new here is that the “works of mercy” referred to in thesis 42 are not to be performed within the confines of religious

buildings or practices but in everyday life for the sake of one’s neighbor. This position remains a key element in the Reformation heritage.

The formula *ecclesia semper reformanda est* continuously calls us to remember that human beings count more than structures, including church structures. Do we convey the message of God’s liberating grace in a way that affirms human dignity and encourages believers to use their talents to serve their neighbor and promote the common good? Do we denounce policies and practices that rate human beings according to what matters in the world, like money and social position rather than according to what we are and called to be in God’s eyes?

Contemporary challenges that call for action stating that human beings are not for sale

What does the dictum “Human Beings—not for Sale” mean in response to trends in

times like ours in a globalized world that tends to evaluate people according to their role as producer or consumers?

The assembly study book identifies several topics out of importance in regard to our theme:

- Work and (un)employment in the context of the neoliberal market system
- Debt
- Forced labor and human trafficking
- Refugees and migration
- Corruption and non-inclusion.

The overarching phenomenon of profound relevance to all these topics is the increasing difference between rich and poor—both globally and within countries. This development threatens to deprive large portions of the world's population of a dignified life by excluding them from basic human rights such as work, shelter and social protection. The rest of us run the risk of becoming dehumanized if we passively allow this to happen.

Let us have a closer look at the issue of rising inequality:

The Oxfam report published in January 2017 states that “eight men own the same amount of wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity.”¹⁹ The gap between rich and poor is far greater than ever before; the report shows “how big business and the super-rich are fueling the inequality crisis by dodging taxes, driving down wages and using their power to influence politics.”²⁰

According to the report, seven out of ten people live in a country that has seen inequality growing over the last thirty years. Between 1988 and 2011, the income of the poorest ten percent increased by USD 65/per person

while the income of the richest one percent grew by USD 11,800 per person—182 times as much. It further shows that women, often employed in low-pay sectors, face high levels of discrimination in the workplace.

Increasing inequality is both a fundamental cause and a dramatic consequence in issues such as work, debt and human trafficking. Our faith-based commitment drives us to question this ruling economic paradigm, to unmask its inhuman practices and to support initiatives that envisage a fairer distribution of wealth and policies that defend the rights, especially of the poor and vulnerable, guaranteeing them social protection.

What have Christian faith and theology to do with economy? It is fairly obvious that since human dignity is a key issue, the church must resist powers and systems that deprive humans of their God-given dignity and support initiatives that aim to make the world better for all to live in.

This does not imply that the church should argue that it knows better than economists and politicians when it comes to matters such as markets, work, debt, migration and so on. The church does not seek a hegemonic position when discerning such issues; rather, as stated in the LWF publication “The Church in the Public Space,” it is the church's mission to contribute to constructing an inclusive public space that secures

- Equal access to common goods and political decision-making processes
- Safety, especially for the vulnerable
- Meaningful participation of and interaction among all groups in society.

The economy is too important to be left only to economists. Over the last years,

¹⁹ <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/just-8-people-now-have-the-same-wealth-as-the-poorest-36-billion/>

²⁰ Ibid.

churches have been involved in developing alternative concepts of economy with more emphasis on social and ecological issues than the models that mainly focus on growth and profit.

Here in Namibia, the churches have promoted the idea of a basic income grant (BIG); our assembly represents a unique opportunity to learn from this experience and jointly to reflect on its possible benefits and potential.

In 2012, the LWF together with the WCC and other ecumenical partners organized a conference in São Paulo, Brazil, in order to develop a plan of action for constructing just, caring and sustainable global financial and economic structures. It concluded by calling for an international financial transformation for the economy of life, with an architecture which “sets clear limits to greed and instead promotes common good.”

How can we as churches and as Christians engage in campaigns fostering an economy of enough and that reaffirm the values of simplicity and solidarity without appearing sour and moralistic; campaigns that unmask the myths of the market, which claims that the pursuit of happiness lies in accumulating wealth and in hedonistic lifestyles. How do we see our task of testifying to alternative lifestyles, of enjoying the gifts of conviviality and of seeing people flourishing in meaningful relationships?

Human dignity and *diakonia*

If we claim that human beings are not for sale, it follows that the church must engage in defending and promoting human dignity. This task belongs to the church’s diaconal mandate, inspired by the example of the Old Testament prophets who in God’s name raised their voice against the powerful who oppressed and exploited the poor and by the example of Jesus,

who defended the dignity of the excluded, healed the sick and restored broken relations.

How does this diaconal mandate come to the fore in concrete practice? It is expressed in three main ways:

The first refers to what we could describe as the diaconate of all believers. In Baptism, all Christians are called and empowered to participate in God’s mission, to be God’s coworkers in promoting justice, peace and joy (Rom 14:17).

Baptism affirms the dignity of all baptized, regardless of social and economic status. The act of Baptism is free. From this perspective, the sacrament of Baptism—the holy space where God is present and acts—announces that human beings are not for sale. They are dignified (or sanctified) by the Word (the free gift of God), water (the free gift of creation) and God’s empowering Spirit.

In an ancient church ritual, the deacon would present a candle to the newly baptized, recalling Jesus’ saying, “You are the salt of the earth [...]; you are the light of the world” (Mt 5:13–14). The gifts of Baptism equip and empower us to serve God and the neighbor. Therefore, use your talents! This is rightly the title of an important program of several Lutheran churches here in Africa.

The second way of expressing this mandate is to organize diaconal action and activities that aim at affirming the dignity of all, creating spaces that allow people to be the subjects in their own lives and empowering people for active citizenship.

Since its founding, the church has offered spaces for welcoming the poor and helpless. It established its first hospitals—as spaces of hospitality for the sick—in Constantinople in the early fourth century, thus starting a rich

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tradition of offering services to the sick and other groups in need. In many countries, these institutions pioneered public health and social services; they witnessed to the conviction that every human life counts and that security and care are basic rights.

Being inclusive and welcoming belongs to the intrinsic nature of the Christian congregation. The narrative in Acts 6:1–6 portrays a community that ignored a group of widows in their daily *diakonia*. Most likely, this refers to the daily sharing of gifts of the community, including food, friendship and prayers. Due to their age, gender, social status and ethnicity, the widows were victims of a mechanism of exclusion. Such mechanisms are well known today as well. Fortunately, the apostles then paid attention to the complaints and wisely reorganized the church, establishing the office of the seven—perhaps even the seven first deacons—responsible for the “*diakonia* of the table,” ensuring the inclusiveness and the welcoming practice of the church. Also today, *ecclesia semper reformanda* remains a mark of the church. It implies being attentive to voices on the margins and to finding ways of organizing church life in a way that is inclusive and affirms the dignity of all.

The Holy Communion is such a space of welcoming, of inclusion and of empowering for service. It reminds us of the hospitality of Jesus, who invited sinners and publicans to the table, often provoking the guardians of moral and social behavior of his time.

The third way of expressing the church’s diaconal mandate is through public advocacy. Advocacy is an integral part of all diaconal work; in addition, it is a distinct task, particularly for duty holders, and reminds them of their responsibilities.

Churches may be hesitant when challenged to engage in advocacy, thinking that they are

small and that their voice does not count. That would be to underestimate our value as Christians and citizens, as churches and agents of civil society and our vocation to participate in God’s mission for the healing of the world. Public witness and advocacy are integral parts of the diaconal vocation and its prophetic dimension.

This includes the task of encouraging Christians to engage in activities that aim at promoting the common good.

The UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is one such important issue. How can we as churches—and as Lutheran communion—contribute to the implementation of this agenda and its aim of leaving no one behind?

How can we respond to the question of growing inequality? At this assembly, a workshop will call on churches and faith-based organizations to mobilize the resources of *diakonia* to support agendas calling for tax justice and publically funded social protection.

The *Omatala* will provide broad information about the inhuman consequences of human trafficking, modern slavery, forced migration and other issues that challenge us to strengthen our diaconal action and public witness. Fortunately, it will also expose the manifold ways we, together with people of good will, identify ways which lead to a better world with more respect for human dignity and more space for meaningful participation of and interaction among all groups in society.

In times like ours, it is indeed a major cause to proclaim that human beings are not for sale. Thanks to God, it makes sense to proclaim that human beings are not for sale!



Chains express the theme “Human Beings—not for Sale,” morning worship at the Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Creation —Not For Sale

Martin Kopp

Introduction

Yesterday, we commemorated the 500th Reformation anniversary. It was a beautiful liturgy and a powerful experience of communion. Did you know that in 2017, the LWF is commemorating yet another anniversary? Indeed, this year it has been forty years since an assembly first spoke up on the issue of care for creation. It happened on this beautiful continent of Africa, in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1977.

Since then, we have been working on our theology and have kept translating our faith into assembly and council texts. We have done so within a broader ecumenical awareness and growing commitment, especially in relationship with the World Council of Churches but also, lately, with the Roman Catholic Church, following the publication of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si*.

Looking back on our journey, my opinion is that our theological tree has produced its fruits. We agree that we confess God as Creator of heaven and earth. We agree that all that exists shares the condition of the created. We agree that we human beings are creatures among other creatures, embedded in the living web of relationships. We agree, however, that we human beings are peculiar creatures, created in the image of God, free to do bad or good, standing in responsibility before God. We agree that God wants us to choose life and happiness and to be the good stewards of God's good and beautiful creation. We agree that taking

care of creation is at heart a matter of justice and peace, of protecting the most vulnerable people, the poor, women, youth and indigenous communities, who suffer most from the degradation of creation while they have often done the least to contribute to such destruction.

Forty years after Dar Es Salaam, I believe we have reached the point where our core care for creation ethics is theologically mature. Today, we face the question of the how. How can we initiate, deepen and strengthen actions to meet the ecological challenge?

In that regard, today's sub-theme gets right to the point. Creation—not for Sale. The intuition behind that wording—and actually the intuition behind all of the sub-themes of this assembly—is that economics and the economy are the main drivers of the world today. Thus, it is first of all economics and the economy we need to challenge.

Together, we will first take stock of the bill that nature is presenting us. We will then explore how the deeply flawed twentieth-century economic model can be replaced by a new economic paradigm: doughnut economics. I know it may come as a surprise to you and I recognize that the metaphor of a sugary pastry may seem unfit at first, but please, kindly bear with me and you will see how it makes perfect sense. Finally, we will discuss how we can bake the doughnut, shaping a sustainable and just present and future.



Martin Kopp.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Nature's bill

Some 50 years after the first Earth Summit, where do we stand regarding nature's bill?

Our ecological footprint

The ecological footprint²¹ indicator allows us to look at the big picture. It gathers all of the resource consumptions and waste emissions of an individual or a community under a unit of surface: global hectares. On the planetary scale, it shows whether humanity's ecological impact outweighs the earth's bio-capacity.

The comparison between our footprint per human being since the beginning of the 1960s on the one hand and the planet's bio-capacity per human being on the other,

shows that each and every year since 1970, our ecological footprint has been above the earth's bio-capacity. Today, our footprint is of 2.8 global hectares (gha) per person when the earth's capacity is of 1.7 gha. Even a theologian can do the math: we are using the equivalent of 1.6 planets per year. In a word, we are in an unsustainable situation of global overshoot.

Naturally, a country's footprint depends on its level of "development": on average, low-income countries consume 0.6 planet per year, low-to-middle-income countries 0.8 planet, upper-to-middle-income countries 1.9, and high-income countries 3.6!

Unfortunately, scientists do not project any improvement. According to a moderate business-as-usual scenario, the dynamic at play would lead us to a global ecological footprint of

²¹ Mathis Wackernagel, William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint. Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, The New Catalyst Bioregional Series, 9 (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1996). The Ecological Footprint data is available at www.globalfootprint.org.

almost three planets by 2050. Rather, what we need to achieve is a decreasing of our footprint back to one planet by the middle of the century.

The nine planetary boundaries

Zooming in and examining the earth system as a delicate balance, scientists have identified nine planetary boundaries²² that we should not cross in order not to drive the system into a new and dangerous state: biodiversity loss; climate change; pollution; stratospheric ozone depletion; atmospheric aerosol loading; ocean acidification; change of biogeochemical flows—notably the phosphorus and nitrogen cycles; land use and freshwater use.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are special boundaries because their crossing could, each by itself, drive the earth system into a new state.

Of the seven boundaries science can quantify, four have been crossed, leading us out of the safe operating space for humanity. Land use change and climate change have entered the increasing-risk zone. Biodiversity loss and the phosphorus and nitrogen cycles have entered the high-risk zone. Take good note, in particular, of the fact that the two boundaries, which have been identified as systemic, have been crossed.

Uncharted territory and the risk of collapse

On the whole, data shows that we have entered a truly uncharted territory. Simply put: our societies and life on earth are risking collapse. This is the top challenge of the twenty-first century! And it is not a matter of protecting little birds and flowers only—important as it

is—for we know that there is no human issue—poverty, migration, social justice, peace, you name it—that does not depend on the fate of our ecosystems. This integral approach is today recognized at the highest level, first of which the UN. It is as simple as this: there is no human well-being on a dead planet.

From endless growth to doughnut economics

Economics is at the heart of the ecological predicament. Let us explore how we can be freed from the old endless growth model by the new doughnut economics.²³

The failing of last century's model

To that end, we first need to understand the failing of last century's model.

The classic representation of the economy depicts a self-contained market.²⁴ The famous circular flow diagram indeed shows a relationship between households and businesses. Households provide labor and capital, businesses pay wages and profit. Households consume goods and services which are sold by businesses. At times, the circle is completed with banks, government and trade.

Throughout the twentieth century, it became universally admitted that the ultimate goal of the economy is exponentially to increase the gross domestic product (GDP). At the beginning, it was believed that growth was a means serving human advancement and happiness. In the meantime however, the tie between growth and welfare had become so strong that the means replaced the end and became the end

²² Will Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," in *Science* 347/6223 (13 February 2015); Rockström et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," in *Nature* 461 (24 September 2009), 472–75.

²³ Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics* (New York: Random House Business Books, 2017).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.



Participants in a workshop on “Homiletics of Hope in an Age of Climate Change.”
Photo: LWF/Brenda Platero

itself: endless growth had become the new good. Today, orthodox economists (and not only economists) do not wonder whether growth is still necessary everywhere, whether it is always desirable or whether there are natural limits to growth.²⁵ They seek growth for its own sake. Social and political spheres have been colonized by this viewpoint. Growth is the new catholicity.

The problem is that both this representation and this goal are deeply flawed. As a matter of fact, the circular flow diagram “simply” forgets that the economy is not soilless but relies on

society and nature. We have seen into what dire ecological situation this unfortunate oversight has led us. As for the goal of growth, social sciences have shown that it generally does bring about an increase in human well-being but only up to a certain level of GDP;²⁶ past this threshold, economic growth no longer improves well-being—it then depends on other factors.²⁷

Einstein rightly said that “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Economists and politicians generally offer more growth, “the fairy dust

²⁵ This is of course a reference to the reports to the Club of Rome. Latest update: Donella H. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, Dennis, L. Meadows (eds), *Limits to Growth. The 30-Year Update* (White River: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004).

²⁶ Manfred Max-Neef, “Economic growth and quality of life: a threshold hypothesis” in *Ecological Economics* 15 (1995), 115–118. Studies about over twenty countries based on alternative well-being indicators support the hypothesis. For example: Tim Jackson, Susanna Stymne, *Measuring Sustainable Economic Welfare in Sweden. A Pilot Index 1950–1992* (Stockholm: Stockholm Environment Institute, 1996).

²⁷ Among other studies: Richard Layard, Andrew Clark, Claudia Senik, “The causes of happiness and misery,” in John Helliwell, Richard Layard, Jeffrey Sachs (eds), *World Happiness Report*, 2012, 58–89.

supposed to make all the bad stuff disappear.”²⁸ Following Einstein, many think *au contraire* that we need a new vision for a new goal.

A new vision for a new goal

In our vision of the economy, we shall replace the self-contained market by an embedded economy.²⁹ In this picture, the economy made of households, the market, the state and commons is embedded in society, itself embedded in the earth system. The earth gets its energy from the sun, an energy itself used by our societies together with living matter and materials to run our economies. At the other end of the economic pipeline: waste matter and waste heat. This is a vision faithful to reality and science. It is proposed by Oxford University researcher Kate Raworth, to whom I recognize my debt.

In addition to this new vision, Raworth proposes a new goal: the doughnut... So now the time has come to nourish your curiosity.

She considers that the nine planetary boundaries constitute an ecological ceiling. Above the ceiling, we overshoot. Below it, we live sustainably. But this is only one part of the good life. Our societies are looking also for the fulfilment of key human demands and aspirations. That is why Raworth adds a social foundation, constituted of twelve main social boundaries: energy, water, food, health, education, income and work, peace and justice, political choice, social equity, gender equality, housing and networks. Below the foundation, we suffer social shortfalls. Above it, we can enjoy social well-being.

It is the conjunction of both boundaries that delineates an area—as a matter of fact shaped like a doughnut—that avoids both ecological degradation and social deprivation—in other words, the sweet spot of a safe and just space for humanity. The reaching of both goals is interdependent. For example, it has been shown that “environmental quality is higher where income is more equitably distributed, where more people are literate and where civil and political rights are better respected.”³⁰

This is then the new goal of economics: “... meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet.” Instead of pursuing endless economic growth whether or not it makes us thrive, economies should “make us thrive, whether or not they grow.” We have here a compass for the twenty-first century!

Clearly, we are not there. We have seen that four planetary boundaries have been crossed and that millions of people still live in the hole in the middle. We are transgressing both the ceiling and the foundation.

Baking the doughnut

How can we move to the safe and just space? How do we bake the doughnut? There is so much to say about energy transition, circular economy, zero waste trajectories and so on. I have chosen to point out three elements.

Convert

The first step is not technical; it is spiritual. There will be no outer economic and lifestyle evolutions without an inner conversion. In the

²⁸ George Monbiot, “Finally, a breakthrough alternative to growth economics – the doughnut,” in *The Guardian* (Wednesday 12 April 2017).

²⁹ Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, Chapter 2.

³⁰ Ibid., Chapter 6. See the study in question: Mariano Torras, James K. Boyce, “Income, Inequality, and Pollution: A Reassessment of the Environmental Kuznets Curve,” in *Ecological Economics* 25 (1998), 147–160.

New Testament, conversion is called *metanoia*, which literally means “change of view.” When it comes to “Creation—not for Sale,” this change of view should occur in two places.

On the one hand, it should occur in our minds. Converting means adopting the embedded economy representation, which fits science but also fits our theology of creation! Indeed, we believe that we human beings live in solidarity with the rest of God’s creation. It further means adopting an integral ecology: ecological and social advancements depend on one another.

On the other hand, conversion should occur in our hearts. Converting means mainly switching values. While obsolete economics values greed, which Paul calls idolatry (Eph 5:5), we value satisfaction and simplicity (1 Tim 6:6-8). While it is fueled by the lure of wealth which, according to the parable of the sower, chokes the Word so that it yields nothing (Mk 4:19), we are fueled by love and care (Lk 10:25-28). While it too often makes money an end in itself, we say that one cannot serve two masters: we cannot serve God and Mammon (Mt 6:24).

This conversion is carried out in our Christian spiritual life, nourished by the reading of Scriptures and theology, rooted in prayer, vitalized by the sacraments, lived out in community, empowered by our world communion. It is God himself, it is the Holy Spirit that enables us not to despair and give up, but rather to hope and to commit. Paul told us: “it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18).

Transition

The next step is the concrete transition. There is no denying that this is a huge challenge. We have all begun to be the change we want for the world—the LWF itself has been putting its words into action for many years.

But we must all do more.

In our homes, offices, meeting rooms, churches and all places of living and decision making, let us pin a doughnut economics diagram on the wall and wonder: does this habit lead to ecological overshoot? Or is it helping get below the ecological ceiling? Is that decision going to aggravate social shortfalls? Or will it help get above the social foundation?

Each and every area of life is concerned—housing, transportation, food, clothing, leisure and so on. I will not enter into these practical details here because they are so diverse and because great resources exist in print as well as online.

At the global level, I wish to distinguish three kinds of transition. I take the risk of oversimplifying, but I would say that there are three categories of countries:

1. Countries that have taken the vast majority of their members above the social foundation, but at the cost of a sky-rocketing overshoot of the ecological ceiling—here the challenge is to decrease the footprint while preserving well-being
2. Countries that have taken some of their people above the foundation, but that have already slightly passed the ecological ceiling—here the challenge is to lift the rest of the population out of deprivation, while getting back to a sustainable footprint
3. Countries that have for now left the vast majority of their population below the social foundation and could actually increase their footprint—here the challenge is to better everyone’s condition without overshooting.

You can probably recognize the category to which your country belongs.

Youth delegates in the room, a special word for you and the youth of your churches. If you are looking for a career, stop looking! Become a doughnut designer! Put your innovative minds to work and imagine doughnut communications, doughnut agriculture, doughnut cities, etc. Together, we can create new economies that will be distributive by design.

Commit to politics

Finally, as there is a structural limit to what a person or a community can do, we must commit in politics. At the personal level, your vote is of importance of course, but you can also be a candidate—if you have the luck to live in a democracy. At the church level, you can actively advocate with decision makers.

In several parts of the world, we see that in the face of the turmoil of our time, people increasingly support politicians who pretend to put their nation first instead of recognizing that our fates are interrelated; who designate scapegoats instead of discerning responsibilities; who want to raise walls instead of building bridges. I fear the unfolding of the

ecological crisis may make this dangerous stance grow stronger. That is why we need Christians to enter politics and accompany people through their fears and build tomorrow's reality with them, firmly choosing openness, hope and trust.

Conclusion

How should I conclude? We are merely getting started! I would like to tell you that it is right to understand the ecological crisis as a vital threat. This is what science tells us. But I hope I have managed to provoke a *metanoia* this morning in this room, demonstrating that the ecological challenge is at the same time a formidable opportunity. It is the opportunity to renew our framework of thought, to rethink our economics and to rephrase our common goal. It is the opportunity to make our societies thrive, meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet. In the end, liberated by God's grace, it is the opportunity for us to be in communion with the God of life. There may be no more difficult task. But there is no more beautiful challenge.

CREATION NOT FOR SALE



Morning worship at the Assembly on the theme of
“Creation—not for Sale.” Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Messages from the Pre-Assemblies

Asia

We are the 93 participants—including delegates lead by LWF President Bishop Dr Munib Younan, General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, DMD Director Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki, stewards and LWF staff from 19 countries—gathered together from 15–19 August 2016 for the Asia LWF Pre-Assembly in Bangkok, organized by the Asia Desk of the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.

In preparation for the Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, 2017 and for the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we reflect on the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace” from the perspectives of the diverse contexts in Asia. We commence our reflections with the sub-themes “Salvation—not for Sale”, “Human beings—not for Sale”, “Creation—not for Sale” and extend these to re-examine our values and practices within the church and society. At the Pre-Assembly, we also engage in a wide range of programs and activities. However, the more important task is to seek to articulate the message of God’s liberating grace for the next decade as we enter into another 500 years of continuing reformation.

“Liberated by God’s Grace” from the Asian perspective

We recognize that the LWF was formed in response to human suffering. Today, we, as churches in Asia, are facing common issues

and challenges such as poverty, discrimination, violence against women and the vulnerable, refugees, consumerism, individualism, the destruction of our environment and donor-controlled ministries. We are the church liberated by God’s grace. People cannot be liberated by money, power or technology but by the grace of God alone. Therefore, we cry out to God to strengthen us in spirit, to be able to share this holistic gospel; to empower us to help people in their suffering and poverty; and to recognize the giftedness of women and young people.

By the grace of God, we have the communion of churches as a gift and have already begun the mutual sharing in altar and pulpit fellowship; bringing together our different and diverse gifts to bear witness to the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and sharing the confessional Lutheran foundations. The challenge now is to begin sharing beyond the traditional north–south relations by extending it to south–south exchanges.

We join our voices to affirm: Salvation—not for Sale

We understand that people in our region try to gain God’s favor through many different practices including rituals and sacrifices, self-torturing, good works, education and the like. These influence our Asian Christian practices. In Asia today, money, education, technology, modern culture, family, pastors, leaders, charismatic preachers, the gospel of



Bishop Ben Chun Wa Chang, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong and Rev. Anne Burghardt, LWF study secretary for Ecumenical Relations, show the Chinese translation of the Reformation Anniversary booklets. Photo: LWF/A. Danielsson

power, Christian icons, liturgy, even Word and sacrament—all these can be misunderstood and can become our idols. We also acknowledge that the issue of a “prosperity gospel” is a serious challenge to our churches because it distorts the Good News of being liberated by God’s grace.

In our pluralistic religious contexts, we continue to affirm that the Word of God is the power of salvation. And our wholehearted acts of love, caring and sharing flow from our experience of being liberated by God’s grace.

**We join our voices to affirm:
Human Beings—not for Sale**

We see sad and horrific situations in many countries in Asia, including incidents of human trafficking, rape, gender discrimination in work places, violence against women, children and other vulnerable people and the abuse of power and financial resources. We urge our churches to provide a prophetic voice by speaking out

against such abuse, discrimination, violence and injustice.

**We join our voices to affirm:
Creation—not for Sale**

We recognize that Asia is the focus of rapid industrial advancement and consumerism, causing the destruction of the environment and affecting people in many ways. Destructive behaviors such as the disposal of industrial waste, mining, deforestation, nuclear power plants, the acquisition of farmland and the pollution of water sources affect people’s lives and livelihoods now and into the next generations. We urge our churches to create awareness for environmental justice for all ages through education and action.

We join with the voice of women

Our sisters urge the Asian church leaders to take intentional actions to motivate and

involve women in church leadership. They ask for fair selection processes and representation in all aspects of ministry and leadership: changes to the methodology of voting, which are based on gender justice and equality and allow women to nominate and be nominated.

They recommend that the LWF Gender Justice Policy be translated and contextualized in every member church with a plan of action, which encompasses both men's and women's issues and that it be implemented at every level including the LWF Assembly, LWF Council and the regional councils. They further recommend that every member church receive this policy with the recommendation that it is addressed to all sectors of church life and decision-making processes and that the churches be proactive in addressing all types of violence against women.

The sisters further encourage churches to embrace women who are doing theology by recognizing their capabilities in the ministry. They reaffirm the goal, as stated in the past five consecutive LWF assemblies, to include women in the ordained ministry. They further encourage the member churches that have yet to ordain women to join their fellow churches in the communion in doing so.

We hear the voice of youth

Young people are crying out in the midst of a confusing and rapidly changing

world, seeking inclusion and integration into church life. They show their deep interest and commitment to work together with others in their churches to find solutions to many issues such as: detachment from the worship life of the congregations, the gap between rich and poor, politics and climate change. They want to be part of the solution. Therefore, we affirm and support the development of the Asia Lutheran youth network (ALYN) which was formed at the ACLC 2015. We encourage youth leaders to engage in the ALYN.

We join our voices together with the youth at the Pre-Assembly to sing their song, "Liberated by God's grace to change the world!" The message of liberation by God's grace can reach more people when we communicate face to face and/or through the expanding range of social networks.

Vision for the future

As Lutherans in Asia, we see a communion of churches where our Lutheran identity, formed by God's liberating grace, is understood and lived out in the lives of all believers in the church and society. Our freedom in Christ is the Good News which unites us all. We are called to share this message with all people.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The delegates of the Lutheran World Federation member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean churches have gathered to prepare for the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to be held in Windhoek, Namibia in 2017, the year of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

We have had the joy of meeting with brothers and sisters of the North America region during our simultaneous Pre-Assemblies and with whom we shared devotional and celebratory time and moments of study and fraternal communion.



Pre-Assemblies for Latin American & the Caribbean and North America, in Paramaribo, Suriname. Photo: LWF/Hubert Hermelijn

We began the meeting recalling and reaffirming the diaconal, missionary, theological and ecumenical vocation enshrined in the constitution of the LWF.

We reaffirm that being free by grace calls us to be a communion working for justice, peace and reconciliation. And this connects us to the global nature of the Reformation, which is a “global citizen” and not the property of Lutherans.

We joyfully checked the progress achieved regarding the proportion of women’s participation in instances of deliberation and decision making in the communion, as well as the challenge to be a church in constant reformation.

We therefore reaffirm the ecumenical and interreligious responsibility of the communion, which has found expression in the pardon requested from the Mennonite community and

in the move from conflict to communion in our relations with the Catholic Church. We celebrate these testimonies of unity as reconciled and diverse communities in the midst of a fragmented world.

We recognize the challenges that our churches face in achieving sustainable development and reaffirm that interdependence and mutuality are an inseparable part of a sustainable communion. In a broader spectrum, the emergence of climate change and environmental damage forces us to address it in a framework of interdependence and mutuality, which certainly includes intergenerational solidarity. We celebrate the diversity of knowledge that enriches the experience and collective responses to these challenges.

We also express our pain and our solidarity with refugees and displaced persons caused by both the situations of violence and the deterioration of their environment. We are

sure that the Lutheran communion, precisely because it emerged as a tool to assist displaced persons after World War II, cannot ignore the fate of migrants and displaced people today.

We, the churches, shared our work during this time and the challenges we face in responding to the needs of our context in fidelity to the gospel. There, we verified important coincidences in our agendas and challenges: the relevance of *diakonia* as part of integral mission, the common pursuit of sustainability and the rich contribution provided by participatory strategic planning to healthy governance.

Ongoing initiatives in each country preparing for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation were also shared without dismissing the challenges that will be waiting for us on 1 November 2017 when the lights go out and the celebrations and commemorations are completed.

The Pre-Assembly devoted time to consider what it means to live as a communion through reading the “Self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion” document. After reflection on this material, it clearly emerged that communion is certainly a gift. But it is not a simple gift. Therefore, it was considered essential for the health of the communion that all parts take serious responsibility for mutual accountability in decision-making processes and their results. To take part in a common table means that no party can or should simply modify the agreements that were reached collectively. Frank, intentional and sustained dialogue is essential for the life of communion.

Free by the grace of God

The path to Windhoek led churches to deepen the theme of the Twelfth Assembly. These considerations led us to affirm dialogue as a condition for freedom and as an act of resistance against the logic of hegemony. Our

reflections have challenged us to engage in dialogue with different people and to be alert when dialogue happens between equals.

We understand that freedom also means that we are free to love and embrace the church that really exists rather than comfortable idealizations about church. But we are also challenged to recognize what practices in our churches should be called to repentance and transformation.

Salvation, creation and human beings are not for sale!

Reflection on these statements helped us to see how our consumer societies and unacceptable inequality can consistently link to concepts like “sustainable” and “sufficient.” We recognize that we are responsible to care for creation but are not its owners. Therefore, we denounce that those who sell what is not theirs. They are stealing.

Secularized and disenfranchised societies where we must bear witness to grace challenge us to rethink what we mean when we speak of salvation and to recognize that we do not always manage to share this Good News in a language that is challenging and understandable and appeals to people.

Our way to Namibia

The churches of the Lutheran communion in Latin America and the Caribbean denounce the painful reality of millions of enslaved people by unjust economic models. We are urged to live the gospel of Jesus Christ defending human rights, especially the rights of indigenous communities, migrants and victims of trafficking. We also call to work for gender justice, creating mechanisms of implementation and contextualizing of the LWF Gender Justice Policy and promoting mutual

accountability. We commit to the care of creation and commitment to climate justice. We stress that a fundamental tool to advance on these tasks is access to theological education faithful to the Word, confessional solid and contextualized in our realities.

It is our duty to express our deep concern about the deterioration of democratic processes and the situation of human rights and rights' defenders. This process began in Honduras and Paraguay and recently intensified with the rupture of democracy in Brazil and the difficult situation in Venezuela.

We also ask the Twelfth Assembly to consider organizing a working group to study all aspects of women in the ordained ministry. As churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, we affirm that no step back on the agreements reached in this regard should be taken.

We want to express our gratitude to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS) for receiving us so warmly and for letting us know their challenges and the rich cultural diversity of the context in which they announce the freedom for all including freedom for creation by God's grace.

North America

We, as delegates from North America, are grateful to have joined together for the first time

with the Latin America and Caribbean region for our Pre-Assembly in Paramaribo. This was



Pre-Assemblies for Latin American & the Caribbean and North America, in Paramaribo, Suriname. Photo: LWF/Hubert Hermelijn

an historic event as our two regions worked to prepare for our assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2017 under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace” with the three sub-themes of salvation, human beings and creation not for sale.

We give thanks to our host church, the Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk Suriname (ELKS), the Rev. Marjory Slagtand, President of the ELKS and Henk Rahan, ELKS Pre-Assembly Commission Chair for inviting us to participate and welcoming us with warmth and hospitality. We express our gratitude to the Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, for her work in coordinating the joint meeting of our two regions. It was truly a gift to gather together, to worship and to pray, to hear one another’s stories, to learn and also to be challenged by one another.

The movement of peoples— refugees, migration and human trafficking

As we engaged the theme and sub-themes together, we acknowledge the neoliberal and free-market economic system as a root cause of the movement of peoples today. We recognize that we are accountable to our neighbors in the beloved community both through things done and left undone. War, environmental degradation, natural disasters, human exploitation and injustice have created the largest migrant crisis since World War II. We have a responsibility to welcome migrants and refugees and to work to end the international and intra-national crime of human trafficking which is one form of modern-day slavery. Together, we work toward peaceful and just societies

Right relationship and human community

As Lutherans living into our baptismal covenant, we are empowered by God’s righteousness and called to live in right relationship with our neighbor. Racial justice, gender justice, full participation of youth and young adults and indigenous rights will continue to be key concerns in our work as churches. We need to acknowledge and repent of the harm done by colonization and continue in the work of reconciliation.

Environmental justice

We recognize the urgent need to care for God’s creation. As disproportionate consumers of natural resources, we must work actively to ensure clean, accessible water for all, mitigate land and soil pollution, manage waste appropriately and implement solutions for sustainable energy sources. We are called to be caretakers of the earth and to listen to the wisdom of indigenous persons related to life on the land.

Leadership

We affirm the LWF for fully embracing the call of Baptism as the priesthood of all believers⁴⁶ and hope for a deepened emphasis on the ministry of all the baptized alongside that of ministers of Word and sacrament and ministers of Word and service. In a time of rapid societal change, we need to envision and implement new ways of engaging in theological education and leadership formation for both lay and ordained that prepare leaders for the church of the future rather than the church of the past.

⁴⁶ “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Study Document” (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2015), 20.

Governance and life in communion

In the spirit of a church that is *semper reformanda* and recognizing the importance of structures of governance and organization in strengthening our life together and our public witness to the gospel as a communion, we recommend that the LWF:

- Develop a process for accompanying churches, especially in times of conflict, and a mechanism for consultation and discernment over issues of importance to member churches⁴⁷
- Add gender justice to Section III., Nature and Functions, of the LWF constitution, as follows:

[The Lutheran Federation]: furthers worldwide among the member churches diaconical action, alleviation of human

*need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, **gender justice**, care for God's creation and sharing of resources; examine issues of fair voice and participation of all members of the communion through our governance structures, including the composition and design of the LWF regions.*

- Consider the matter of dual membership in the International Lutheran Council and the LWF and how it affects our self-identity and life as a communion.

In deep gratitude for the rich theme of the Twelfth Assembly, “Liberated by God’s Grace” and the sub-themes emphasizing that salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale, we challenge ourselves and the communion to implement a life of “not for sale” in our home contexts, living fully into our freedom in Christ to love and serve the neighbor.

Europe

In preparation for the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Namibia in May this year, delegates and advisers of the three European regions met in Höör, hosted by the Church of Sweden.

The sermon “Recognized by his wounds” in the opening worship guided participants through the meeting. Archbishop Antje Jackelén preached on John 20:19–31, the story of the disciples encountering Christ appearing in the meeting after his resurrection.

Her message was: standing before God (*Coram Deo*), we turn to the human needs. Liberated by God’s grace, a communion in

Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

There is more to being sent than being excellent and doing great. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” means that there are going to be wounds. We are always going to be hurt and wounded and we will make others feel wounded. Maybe in the time ahead more than before, since four dangerous P’s are affecting our countries these days and hence also our churches: polarization, populism, protectionism and, with the word of the year 2016 (according to Oxford Dictionary), post-truth. We will have to resist, and thus we

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15, 16, 22, 24.



One of the outcomes of the Pre-Assembly is a message that is passed on to the Assembly, offering regional input on the Assembly theme and sub-themes and other matters relevant to the churches in the regions. Photo: LWF/A. Danielsson

will feel the pain of our own wounds as well as the pain of others' wounds.

We as churches will respond to the four P's as follows: we will proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ bringing people together, being eye-to-eye with a person, meeting others beyond borders and listening to the contextual stories, speaking out to each other, even when the content is uncomfortable. Churches should not contribute to fear but be a positive force to meet the fear that we know that people are struggling with.

Overall, churches should continue their longstanding effort to communicate and educate. We as churches have a long experience in living together and acting in solidarity (conviviality). Yet we recognize that Europe is not a homogeneous unity both in the secular as well as in ecclesiastical sense. When looking self-critically at the current state of Europe, national boundaries could enhance a

risk. It is a chance for the churches to overcome nationalism and those borders: Europe is much more than the European Union.

Together with the women in our churches (Women in Church and Society), we state that churches should condemn all types of violence against women, men and children and affirm the dignity of all human beings created in the image of God. Churches can play a positive role in promoting justice and building bridges of reconciliation between different religious and ethnic groups. Ordained ministry and leadership are a call from God; both women and men are called.

We are reminded that Christ has redeemed the whole world and not just humans and that the earth is the Lord's. Salvation cannot be earned by work or deeds; we receive it by grace. Through gratitude for that gift, we are freed to take action for the caring of creation.

Our overall strong recommendation is to develop robust ethical guidelines in order to unpack the not-for-sale themes: salvation, creation, human beings.

Some remarks to the sub-themes

Salvation—not for Sale: We will proclaim the liberating gospel of Jesus. The doctrine of justification is fundamental to our Lutheran heritage. We are saved and receive our dignity not by our own acts but by the grace of God. The gift of salvation needs to be rediscovered. Thus, it can call people to believe in God. Increasing pressure is exerted especially on young people in society for “not being good enough.” We as churches have to show and to practice what salvation can also look like as a daily experience in life so that we are freed and loved.

Creation—not for Sale: In light of the ongoing reformation of the church (*semper reformanda*) we respond to fundamental questions of human life and develop spiritual and practical guidelines in order to overcome consumerism and materialism. We as LWF want to work on ourselves and rethink our consumption patterns in order for LWF churches to become role models for sustainability and the accountable treatment of God’s creation.

Initiatives on local and congregational levels that aim at a change in attitude should be encouraged and supported. A special focus should continuously be set on issues in regard to climate justice.

Human Beings—not for Sale: In light of the crucified Lord, we are freed, even though it seems as if every human being has a pricetag in today’s economic system. The pressure for rising profits due to the financialization of the

economy is leading to the growing mistreatment of people. Human beings are being exploited for economic reasons. And this leads to trafficking and the growing marginalization of people with disabilities, older people and many more. We see the rising inequality in the world as a challenge to the churches and the LWF.

We ask the LWF to provide a framework and facilitate a process to analyze what it means to live in significantly changing societies like Europe in order to share our prayers, vulnerability and strengths, listen, learn, seek council with each other, discuss theology and envision reformation as ongoing as faithful disciples of Jesus in our time.

We experience the LWF as a growing communion of churches and therefore, we would wish to begin to explore whether the time is right to rename ourselves as a communion.

With so many people displaced and uprooted as refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, we as European churches are called to recognize, welcome and support them. We call upon ourselves to partner with newcomers and migrant churches as well as with people who are homeless or unemployed.

We continue to pray for those persecuted because of religion in all parts of the world, especially for Christians in Syria and other countries in the Middle East. Freedom of religion and belief should apply for all.

We look forward to meet the worldwide Lutheran communion in Namibia and joyfully to mark 500 years of Reformation together; harvesting the fruits of the liberation by God’s grace.

Africa

*From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace (Jn 1:16)*

Preamble

We, representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa, in preparation for the LWF Twelfth Assembly and the celebration of 500 years of the Reformation in Windhoek Namibia, held our Pre-Assembly at the Premier Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa from 6–10 February 2017 under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

We appreciate the presence of the LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, former LWF Vice President for Africa Ms Angelene Swart, former LWF Vice President for Africa who is currently the Namibian Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Bishop Dr Zephaniah Kameeta, former LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and former LWF DMD Director Rev. Dr Peri Rasolondraibe. We were equally blessed by and appreciated the presence of ecumenical guests, particularly the Moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, Dr Agnes Abuom and a salutation visit by a representative of the Minister of Social Development and the Religious Relations of South Africa, Ms Mayathula Khoza and other guests.

We had diverse presentations and reflections on different aspects of the three sub- themes of the Twelfth Assembly: Salvation—not for Sale; Human Beings—not for Sale; and Creation—not for Sale. We also received messages from the women and youth delegates at the Pre-Assembly.

We appreciate the opportunity for fellowship and to be nourished spiritually through worship with holy communion, morning and evening devotions, Bible studies, songs and prayers.

Hence, our Pre-Assembly was filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The message of liberation by God’s grace evokes in us a response of gratitude to care for one another and the whole creation.

We acknowledge and strongly affirm the work of the LWF in responding to global human suffering and the accompaniment of member churches in their various contexts.

We discussed at length several issues particularly affecting Africa but also the world at large and resolved as follows:

The commercialization and commoditization of creation

We noted with deepest concern that human life and creation are increasingly commoditized and commercialized for selfish reasons. In this way, every dimension of creation entrusted unto us and human life is endangered. It is disturbing that even the message of God’s grace and the ministry of the church are being commercialized as though it is something for sale.

We therefore,

- Decry the excessive destruction of natural resources including the misuse of land for commercial purposes only, declaring that human destruction of creation is self-destruction because humans are an inseparable part of creation
- Are concerned with the notion of carbon emission compensation, whereby people could pay for the pollution they make, that is to say, pollution is now permissible. We call for the prevention of such emissions.

Mission work/decline of Christianity

We noted the concerns expressed about the decline of the church in the Western world and the increasing negative consequences of secularization on the gospel message and ask for prayers on these developments.

At the same time, delegates called the attention of African churches to the developments in the Western world and what lessons to learn from their struggles.

We commend the efforts of some churches to start mission work and accompany sisters and brothers in the West.

Theological education

We noted the urgency to bring contextual realities and contemporary issues into theological

training and ministerial formation in Africa. Pastoral formation today must integrate the social, political and economic dimensions and the changing landscape of theology. Content training within the classrooms needs to be strategically connected to the life of the congregations. We further observed with concern the decline in number of students willing to engage in pastoral training, particularly due to economic reasons.

We therefore,

- Call on member churches critically to reexamine their models and systems of theological education and ministerial formation
- Encourage theological networking in the communion and ecumenically
- Urge member churches to motivate pastors and take due regard of their welfare

The Africa Pre-Assembly was told hunger dehumanizes people while the only way to divide the wealth in the world is through attaining quality education. Photo: LWF/Felix Samari



- Advise churches to strengthen efforts at local resource mobilization for institutional sustainability.

Refugees

It is with great sadness that we noted that some of the countries of the world are today too busy building walls of separation and refusing to welcome refugees. Equally, we noted with great sadness that even within the Africa region, people are denied the possibility of movement between countries.

We therefore,

- Acknowledge and commend the Communion Office for the good work amongst and for refugees and displaced people, regardless of their religious affiliations
- Commend African countries that open their borders to receive refugees and displaced people
- Call upon the USA, France, the UK and other European countries to open their borders and build bridges to welcome the refugees, remembering that they were also refugees at one time or another and still could become refugees themselves
- Strongly condemn the unabated annexation of Palestinian land by Israel. We see and understand it to be an effective means of robbing Israel of a two-state coexistence. We call upon the Israeli government to respect the 1967 border agreements
- Call upon African Union leaders to allow free movement of people and goods within the continent
- We remind the governments of their responsibilities and commitments to protect, promote and fulfill their obligations

under international law in international treaties

- Call upon churches to raise awareness concerning the perils of irregular, unnecessary migration and accompanying the returnees to restart their life.

Women's message

We noted that women's ordination continues to be a challenge. While acknowledging that a lot of progress has been made, yet the journey continues. As a gift for the church, we also noted that in many places, women are ordained but not really allowed to exercise their pastoral ministries in the parishes.

We therefore,

- Urge churches to continue ordaining women and support them to carry out their ministerial services
- Advise churches seriously to support theological education for women
- Encourage churches to promote gender justice in church and society and the inclusion of women in leadership.

Youth message

We were challenged by the message of the youth who pleaded that the social evils they are struggling with should not only be left to governments and secular organizations. We received with appreciation the report of the LWF Africa youth delegation to the UN Conference of Parties on Climate Change and commend the LWF in supporting these initiatives.

We therefore,

- Call upon churches to step up action in addressing the social vices affecting youth

such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol, drug abuse, forced marriages, school dropouts and poverty

- Strongly advise churches to create spaces including intergenerational dialogue to engage and accompany youth in dealing with these issues
- Urge churches to develop mechanisms for strengthening youth leadership development and participation in the church
- Remind African governments of their obligation to ensure the implementation of policies that create an environment conducive to job creation, employment and entrepreneurship
- Advise member churches to encourage and support initiatives aimed at building the capacity and participation of youth in addressing the challenge of climate change.

Reception of ecumenical agreements

We were reminded of the fact that “to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical.” Thus, we were inspired by the way the 500th anniversary celebration of the Reformation is being commemorated ecumenically and jointly.

Hence we,

- Commend the LWF for the past and ongoing ecumenical dialogues and various agreements reached
- Appreciate ongoing theological dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholic and other denominations
- Rejoice at the ecumenical celebration of these agreements at the grassroots level, making it a reality in their daily lives

- Encourage churches to sensitize and support members in general on these ongoing dialogues.

Peace, justice and reconciliation

We are extremely distressed by the increasing level of violence globally and in Africa in particular, some of which even happens within the churches. We declare that human life is sacred, thereby rejecting any form violence and injustice.

We therefore encourage,

- The churches to prioritize issues of peace and justice in their work
- Member churches to stand up strongly against the injustices promoted by any government, religious body or outlaws
- Churches to be the voice for those whose voices are not heard or ignored
- Member churches to work out processes of conflict resolution and training
- Churches to strengthen interfaith relations through interreligious dialogues for sustainable peace-building.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

We welcome the UN initiatives through the SDGs and appreciate LWF efforts to sensitize and accompany its member churches to clarify their roles in implementing these goals. We see these goals as having a direct connection to the biblical mandate to care for creation and humanity—a mandate that the churches have been carrying out through history as do many of our church programs today and as is underlined in the theme of the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

We therefore,

- Strongly advise member churches to integrate these goals into their diaconal services
- Encourage the LWF to step up efforts in building the capacity of member churches in implementing and monitoring the SDGs in partnership with governments and civil society organizations.

Concluding remarks

We appreciate and applaud the LWF Communion Office's support and accompaniment towards organizing this Pre-Assembly. We commit ourselves to the implementation of these proposals in partnership with governments, ecumenical partners and other civil society organizations.

Liberated by God's grace, we entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit to enable us remain firm in the faith in Christ and the care, healing and reconciliation of the whole of creation.

Women

Liberated by God's Grace. Are we Fully Liberated when our Sisters (and Brothers) are not? Our Liberation is Bound up Together and is a Gift of God

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

We celebrate that through our Baptism, we are liberated by God's grace

As women, we do not always experience this liberating grace due to our experiences of violence and our limited participation in church and society. Our experience of being liberated by God's grace is hampered. We call for freedom from violence and for the full participation of women in church and society.

We celebrate the Lutheran theological tradition and the women and men who have

participated in that tradition over 500 years. We celebrate the fact that women theologize, formally and informally and that the church is enriched with our perspectives through preaching, publishing, teaching, organizing and dialogue. What we all need is gender justice and it is rooted in adequate biblical interpretation and true preaching of the gospel. The truth of the gospel revealed through a Lutheran hermeneutic speaks against gender injustice. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10b).

We call for the member churches and for the communion to give a clear focus to holistic mission, which includes preaching the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to all humanity and seeking justice and dignity for all because salvation is not for sale.

We therefore call for the member churches and for the communion to confront critical issues, no matter how controversial, including gender-sensitive readings of Scripture and the use of biblical hermeneutics tied to power. We call for feminist Lutheran hermeneutics.



Women Pre-Assembly, Windhoek, Namibia, 3-9 May 2017. Photo: LWF/Brenda Platero

We celebrate that the Lutheran movement has been engaged in society for over 500 years

We call on the Assembly to acknowledge that we all live in patriarchal societies. We call on women and men to recognize the need for new gender roles and masculinities, recognizing that patriarchy and gender issues affect us all.

The church should advocate for human rights for all. In every context, there are practices and laws that harm women and girls. These include, for example, inheritance laws, early marriage, female genital mutilation, gender-based homicide, rape and dowry practices. In addition, refugees in many countries are particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination. The church should address these injustices with particular attention to the ways in which race, ethnicity and class exacerbate injustices because human beings are not for sale.

We call upon the member churches and the communion to strengthen ecumenical and interreligious relations to seek Christian unity and to build bridges in our deeply divided world.

We celebrate that we have a Gender Justice Policy and that it is now available in 22 languages! We commend the many churches which are already inspired by and implementing the principles, methods and practices outlined in it

We call on the LWF Council to amend the LWF constitution to hold a commitment to gender justice and specifically to the Gender Justice Policy. We call on everyone in the Assembly, the Council and the member churches' leadership to study and apply the Gender Justice Policy

for contextual implementation in all member churches. Communion leaders need to have a plan of implementation. This includes having it translated into at least one local language in every member church and to call for women and men across the communion to study the Gender Justice Policy together.

We call on the general secretary to continue to follow up on the implementation of the Gender Justice Policy, which includes a review of communion progress thus far and allocation of staff and finances to support opportunities and resources for more workshops and trainings to engage the Gender Justice Policy. We recommend a gender audit at the LWF Communion Office.

We recognize and celebrate the leadership of women in the church

We recognize that we are not yet meeting the full capacity of women's leadership within the church. We want to see leadership in the communion reflect women as well as men. We call for women to have the freedom to study, act and lead and for structural changes to create space for women's leadership. We call for full participation of women in decision-making bodies and for the LWF to review the structures and processes that impede women in leadership, including the opportunities to serve as general secretary and president. We encourage women to seek leadership positions.

We call on member churches to implement intentional initiatives to avoid tokenism and empower women's voices and full participation in leadership and decision making. We call for all structures in the communion and member churches to address church structures that create the best practices to elect the most qualified leaders. Member churches should

adopt the LWF 40/40/20 quota system for synods, church council, etc.

We need ongoing theological education as ordained and lay leaders.

The reporting from the women and youth pre-assemblies needs to have a separate and privileged time in the assembly agenda.

We call for a communion-wide conversation on leadership and power. For example, we experience a misuse of power based on gender when in LWF meetings and assemblies some men choose not to participate when women preside or preach.

We call for recommitments to overcoming poverty and economic injustice through women's empowerment.

Women's networks should be strengthened.

We remember Martin Luther's liberating understanding of ministry as service: "We are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. But the priests, as we call them, are ministers chosen from among us. All that they do is done in our name."⁴⁸ We celebrate that 82 percent of LWF member churches which ordain women. We celebrate and applaud the women and men who continue to work towards the full presence of women in the ordained ministry

Through Baptism, we women are fully part of the church. We are liberated by God's grace

⁴⁸ "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520). WA 6, 564:12 (LW 36:113).

and, as such, we should respond to God's grace in all spheres of God's ministry. We claim what is already ours—God's call to us.

We call for member churches that are not yet ordaining women to be in partnership and dialogue with member churches that have recently decided to ordain women. We call for the LWF Communion Office to provide a platform for this. We call for the ongoing commitment and reaffirmation at this Twelfth Assembly of the shared path of women in ordained ministry. We urge member churches which have ceased to ordain women to develop a process and timeline to reconsider this decision.

We celebrate women in theological education and theology with a gender lens. We call for opportunities in theological education for women to teach and to lead. We call for courses on gender justice to be included in theological curricula and for further development of gender-just and intersectional theology

We call for equal access for women and men to theological education and equal access to opportunities to serve thereafter. We call for a commitment not to use women as tokens in theological education or as a means for fundraising, but with appreciation for the gifts they bring to the churches. Scholarships should be given on merit, not on the approval of bishops. Women at times need flexible timing to attend seminary and women whose theological education is not equitable to that received by men need further education. Many women in theological education suffer from ideological isolation because the structures are dominated by men; thus, there is a need for structures of

support for women in theological education. We recommend WICAS to strengthen the effort on this.

We recognize that many member churches speak out against violence. However, there are serious problems not only in our social contexts, but within our own churches

We know of and experience widespread abuse within the church. Male clergy abuse female clergy, men in the congregation abuse women and girls in the church and sometimes church leaders refuse to address the problems. Domestic violence must end. We also call for an end to sexual harassment and sexual violence in all church structures by which women are coerced to engage in sex for church leadership roles. We call for all leaders within member churches to stop this form of human trafficking of female church leaders because human beings are not for sale. We call on member churches to address all forms of human trafficking in their communities. Culture, tradition and theology are used to stop women from speaking up, being heard and holding perpetrators accountable. We condemn all misuse of power because the church should be a safe space. Each church should develop and use a code of conduct. Once a year, church leaders should attend a code of conduct seminar led by professionals in the field to learn how to respond to and prevent gender-based violence. As a sign of solidarity, member churches are encouraged to participate in the "Thursdays in black campaign" towards a world without violence.

We celebrate women around the world who are on the move, from Wittenberg to Windhoek and beyond. We are thankful for the hard work and the inspiring challenges that WICAS has taken on, especially in the construction of the



Delegates at Youth Pre-Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

Gender Justice Policy and following up on its implementation. We thank God for wisdom, courage and strength along the way. We are

women liberated by God's grace. We are women on the move and we are many!

Youth

Before you is the 2017 Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Youth Pre-Assembly Message.

In the days of 3–9 May, 120 Lutheran youth from 61 LWF member churches gathered together in Ondangwa and Windhoek, Namibia, to participate in the Youth Pre-Assembly and to discuss our current context and envision our future under the theme “Freed by God’s grace to change the world.”

Through respectful discussion of diverse opinions and common experiences, we tackled the challenges we face and addressed how

we want to be active participants in finding solutions. Together, we shared in our joys and learned more about our distinct and collective Lutheran identity. We commemorate the 500 years since Martin Luther’s Reformation and see our communion as one that is ever reforming.

As young Lutherans in a changing communion and world, we know our obligation to take steps towards a thriving future. This future should be open, honoring cultural context, ever-changing and cognizant of the impact of globalization and cultural exchange. We know that things we might take for granted

now might not be taken for granted in the future. As we look forward to the Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, we are liberated by God's grace and are called to embrace our neighbor as Christ embraces us.

We affirm the current efforts for climate justice through activities such as fasting for the climate and the work done toward increased youth participation within the communion. These initiatives will continue as cross-cutting themes.

Moving forward, we have named three key priorities to shape the next phase of the LWF's youth work: the revival of churches, equity and education.

Revival of churches

To be a thriving church, we must have an active and strong membership in both church and society. We are grounded in the gospel, centered in worship, gathered at the table and sent to serve in mission. We must be bold, flexible and proud of our Lutheran identity in the face of ever-present change. We are not limited by the divisions of our past and affirm the LWF statement, "The Church in the Public Space."⁴⁹ Staying rooted in the gospel, we must honor our diversity and contextualize worship throughout the communion while improving our work to spread the gospel and being a welcoming communion. Lutheran youth play a significant role in the revival of churches and share this responsibility with the whole church. Intergenerational dialogue and leadership are essential to this task.

We celebrate the diaconal work of our communion and recognize the opportunity

for increased communication. This visibility raising is the key to show the world that being a Lutheran is much more than attending worship and providing services. Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we are freed to serve our neighbors.

Equity

To achieve justice, we must first strive for equity. Equity is fairness; ensuring that all people have the same access to opportunities while taking into consideration barriers that some might face. We firmly believe that equity for every human is based upon the underlying foundation of human dignity (*imago dei*). The full equity of people requires bringing the concerns of all communities, especially those historically marginalized, to the center. Respectful use and responsible sharing of land is also required to attain equity of creation. As youth, we know there is strength in the diversity of communities around the world.

In the pursuit of equity for all, we look specially to address gender justice within all communities. The role of women and men must be reexamined and engaged through ongoing dialogue to redefine these roles in our contexts. In order for equity to be attained, transformation must take place at the community, church and structural levels. We affirm the gender justice work of the LWF including the LWF Gender Justice Policy and propose continued attention to it on the grassroots level.⁵⁰ We know the presence of sin continues to separate us from one another and we long for the reconciling power of Christ to unite, heal, and empower us in this task.

⁴⁹ *The Church in the Public Space – A Statement of The Lutheran World Federation*, LWF Council Meeting in Wittenberg, Exhibit 9.3.1, June 2016.

⁵⁰ The Lutheran World Federation: *Gender Justice Policy*, 2013.

Education

Education is the key in addressing a variety of challenges facing our communion such as poverty and hunger, climate change, conflict and lack of empowerment. Education serves as the foundation for all of our communities and communion. Recognizing the human dignity of each person, quality education must be accessible and free. We advocate for education for all with full participation at all levels: lower, higher and vocational education. Proper and pedagogical education can transform our societies.

We do not only advocate for basic education, but also for proper theological education, exchange programs and dialogue opportunities between Lutheran churches

and interfaith communities that are part of the transformation. Following in the footsteps of Martin Luther, Lutherans have promoted education for 500 years and must take responsibility to continue this legacy.

Closing—a call to action

The world today is ever- and fast-changing and we, Lutheran youth, members of a global and varied community, accept our responsibility in this regard. Our three key commitments to reviving churches, striving for equity and education are our call to action for all. We are happy and proud to share and participate in this ongoing reformation and strive to carry this commitment into the next 500 years.



Music at the Youth Pre-Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

Sermons

Opening Worship, Rev. Elena Bondarenko

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations (Isa 61:1–4).

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is an old model: first people build temples and houses—temples for worship and houses to live in—and then certain times come and they destroy temples and faith, houses and their own selves. But the violent times also come to an end and descendants come to the ruins and mourn, pray and decide to restore, to renew the “the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations,” as Isaiah says.

This year in my country, Russia, we are celebrating not only the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, but also the 100th anniversary of two Russian revolutions which brought about the fall of the monarchy and persecution of the church. Thousands of churches were closed and destroyed, pastors were executed, homes were ruined and whole nations were removed

from their historical places. Of course it happened not all at once, but the beginning of all these tragic events was 1917.

When everything was done to silence and kill the church, it is a real miracle, that the bride of Christ, the church, survived—perhaps because one cannot exist without faith, but we as Christians believe that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, as Jesus our Savior and Lord promised us.

God's promises are really held. For 2000 years, the church has been teaching, proclaiming the gospel and administering the holy sacraments. The gates of hell tried to prevail, but the church is victorious because Jesus promised it.

Do we believe in God's promises? Do we know God's promises?

This year, we see wonderful colorful posters for the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. Let us play with them a little bit: we can put them in a different sequence every time. I think the sequence could be like this: creation—human beings—grace—salvation. This is the order of biblical history; this is also a series of the most important of God's promises to us.

God is our Father and creator, God created and continues to create life in different forms. And human beings are one of God's creations—a very interesting creation in fact. However, human beings need God's grace and salvation because of the tragedy of human sin and God donates us God's grace and salvation



Rev. Elena Bondarenko.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

in God's son Jesus Christ. This is a very important promise for all of us: the promise of salvation for every person.

God's promises concern life and everyday existence, our daily bread and all our works. God's promises open for us a truth that everything makes sense, all our deeds and even thoughts and feelings have a meaning and the ultimate goal is that we, with all our thoughts and deeds, can be saved.

Just imagine every single day in a world without God, without our faith in God. This is not a fantasy; it was a usual routine in Russia for almost ninety years. Atheism was an official ideology and church-going people were absolutely marginalized, excluded from society and deprived not only of privileges but sometimes even of basic standards of human rights and protection. More than that, they were persecuted for their faith. The life of most average people was a life without God,

without the beauty of the Holy Scriptures and church liturgy, a life without God's guidance and support in the chaos of times.

It is much worse than a life in exile and persecution, because life without God is a blind alley. There are no promises in it. Only one fearful promise that everything and everybody will die in their own time—and that is all.

It is a victory of the church that we are here today on a wonderful morning and it is still Easter time. Nature, our prayers and a communion of brothers and sisters proclaim that Christ is risen! So is the church. In spite of all tribulations, the church is also alive and people need it to sanctify their lives, thoughts, emotions and deeds. The seeds of the kingdom of God were planted and the green sprouts are visible, the kingdom is growing and some day, it will rejoice in its victory in the world as Christ rejoiced in Christ's resurrection, as the church rejoiced in its survival.



Bishop em. Dr Zephania Kameeta.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

The church faces new challenges now: wars and persecution are still there in the world, technologies are developing with a cosmic speed and many new ethical questions are raised. What will be the reaction of Christians? Do they still believe in God's promises? How will they answer these new questions?

This is what determines our way in the future. We do not have many answers and it is right not to know because we are just humans. Let us humbly confess our ignorance and trust in God our creator. What is in our power is to be honest and honestly to proclaim God's grace and to preach creation and salvation not for sale. This was the basis of the Reformation 500 years ago; this is the principle which we renew in a modern way nowadays.

God's gifts are not for sale. God gives us freedom and grace in abundance. God comes to save us in our time. And it is time to rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long

devastated, it is time to worship God according to the tradition, but also with our own, new song.

This is our faith, hope and worship. Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

May this divine presence of his grace, love and fellowship, reform, renew and release us to live lives in which people see and experience grace, love and fellowship. May this be further manifested in the one church of Jesus Christ and in our one world, irrespective of denomination, religion, race, tribe, color or status in society, while we all are caring for God's creation.

Global Commemoration, Bishop em. Dr Zephania Kameeta

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8: 31–36).

Prayer

Here we stand o Lord, in your world wherein so many acts of hatred and violence are committed. We remember with deep pain and tears in our eyes the many who perished in horrific acts of gender-based violence, especially women and children and heart-breaking car accidents in the past weeks and days in Namibia in which, tragically, many lives have been lost. Yes, here we stand with tears in our eyes when we remember what happened on Palm Sunday in Egypt.

We cannot do otherwise o Lord, because we are your servants, carrying your Word for the liberation of the world from hatred, violence and death.

God help us because, on our own, we will not be able to do anything. Only in your grace will we be able to fight the good fight, to finish the race and to keep the faith. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters from different parts of the world, welcome to Namibia and

greetings to you all who are attending the worship service this morning here in Katutura-Sam Nuyoma Stadium in the name of God the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit.

Despite all the dangers and darkness covering our world, we remain people of hope, covered and protected by God's grace! Yes, this is real, because we serve a God who is not static, but who moves, reforms and makes a new covenant. We will not give up and will never quit, because we firmly believe that hatred, violence, greed, the growing gap between rich and poor, abject poverty, injustice, exploitation, terrorism, extremism, discrimination and death do not have the last word. The darkness we see and experience today with the horrors taking place even at this moment, will come to an end. We will not only see the light at the end of the tunnel but in the whole tunnel.

God does not repeat the old covenant but makes a brand-new covenant with us. Therefore, the 500th Reformation anniversary and the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF are called upon to share this brand-new covenant of God's grace, love and fellowship within this divided, broken and bleeding world.

We are meeting here in Windhoek at a difficult, unpredictable and dangerous time in the history of humankind. Therefore, what we need now is not the justification of the wrongs of the past, but that God in his grace blot out all our iniquity and create in our world pure hearts of love, justice and peace.

Dear sisters and brothers, as we gather here this morning in worship and as we deliberate about the state of our world today, let us not focus on our weakness in view of the huge task given to us for the healing of

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the divided, wounded, broken and bleeding humanity, but let us focus on the gospel, which is the power of God that liberates all who believe. Even in the darkest hour where death seems to be ruling everywhere and justice seems completely absent, the “righteous will live by faith.”

In Namibia, we have examples in this regard; during the darkest hours in the history of our country under colonial and apartheid rule, Bishop Dr Leonard Auala of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo/Kavango Church (ELOC) (now ELCIN) and Moderator Pastor Paulus Gowaseb of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (Rehnh Mission) ELCSWA (now ELCRN) sent an open letter to the prime minister of the-then apartheid government in South Africa, among other things demanding elections in Namibia under the supervision and control of the United Nations. Yes, indeed the righteous, even when they are surrounded by death, continue to live by faith and shine like stars in the darkest night. This letter was read in all our congregations on Sunday 18 July 1971, a reading which gave hope and new strength to the oppressed.

During the workers’ strike of 1971–1972 in Namibia, Judge William H. Booth, a New York judge and civil rights leader, was sent by the International Commission of Jurists to observe the strike trial. On Wednesday 1 March 1972, I invited him to preach during the prayer evening in our church in Katutura, where I was serving as a vicar. He chose today’s sermon text, John 8, verse 32: “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” This powerful sermon was preached during the time when any opposition was brutally crushed and hope for an independent and a free Namibia was fading. But with William Booth in the pulpit, the church gathered in that historic church building was overflowing with new strength and hope. The congregation was on its feet throughout the sermon. Yes, we experienced the power of God at work.

The following morning, Thursday 2 March 1972, the Rt. Rev. Collin Winter, the Bishop of the Anglican Church who was the leader of the program during the Wednesday prayer evening service, received deportation orders from the colonial government. Bishop Collin Winter, Stephen Hayes, a priest, David de Beer, the Diocesan Secretary and Antoinette Halberstadt were ordered to leave Namibia on Saturday 4 March 1972 before midnight. But this oppressive government didn’t succeed in deporting the truth with them! Namibia became independent and today, we are remembering the 500 years of God’s grace in Namibia.

The question of the Jews in our text, who believed in him, does not sound out of place because today, we also think, behave and act in the same way. “From what can we still be freed? We are proud Africans, independent for many years and holding our destiny in our own hands”; “We are proud Europeans and sit at the top of civilization and development. What can we be released from?” “We are Americans, living in the most powerful country in the whole world and need nothing from any other country. What can we be released from?”

It may be true that we are not slaves of anyone. But certainly, we can be slaves of ourselves. Racism, tribalism, caste, greed etc., are sins. When we behave and act in this manner, we are slaves and in bondage to these sins within ourselves. By denying these sins and trying to justify them, we exclude ourselves from the divine heritage of being daughters and sons of the kingdom of God and true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear sisters and brothers, Jesus tells us this morning to let go of the things that enslave us and deny us the inheritance of the kingdom of God. When we hold onto his teaching of love, caring, sharing and fellowship, we become truly his disciples. By doing that, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. Jesus told



Rev. Lydia Posselt.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Thomas: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6) that this simply means that he is the truth whom we will know and who will set us free for his service in the world.

Dear sisters and brothers who are commemorating 500 years of the Reformation, let us go out from here with this liberating truth of our Lord Jesus Christ to be reformed and

reformers, renewed and renewing, liberated and liberating and to live lives in which people see and experience grace, love, justice, unity and peace.

When this happens, the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme love of God and the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit will be with all of us. Amen

Closing Worship, Rev. Lydia Posselt

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

The summer I was about ten years old, “Fruit of the Spirit” was the theme for the annual “vacation Bible school” in my home congregation. There was even a cute theme song and since I don’t remember the whole thing, I won’t sing it for

you. For the closing worship service at the end of that week, my class decided to put on a skit wearing T-shirts with each fruit listed. I think I got to be “gentleness.” What I do remember clearly is that no one in my class wanted to wear the shirt that said “self-control.”

We were only ten or eleven, but we already knew that “self-control” was something we all



Sharing a moment of prayer at the closing worship of the Assembly. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

secretly wanted to avoid. Self-control was not as “cool” as love, joy and peace. To describe someone as being “self-controlled” is not normally heard as a compliment. And honestly, I never pray for God to make me more self-controlled. Self-control seems to be freedom’s opposite, especially if Christ makes me “free.” Why do I need to control myself? I like to think that my self tends to be pretty decent and generally steers me in the right direction, at least under the right circumstances. But as Paul very well knew, when we think that way, we could not be more wrong.

The truth is, when I let my self guide my day-to-day life, I am not very loving, joy-filled, peaceful, patient, kind, generous or particularly faithful. When my self is in the lead, I suddenly find myself marching in the wrong kind of parade to the tunes of buying more stuff, acting unkindly, being afraid of my neighbor and generally being too concerned about myself.

These devious tunes lead us into captivity while disguised as “freedom.” We cry to God, “You’re not my boss” as a young child might say in my home country, but we find that our selves have led us down a road that leaves us vulnerable to broken relationships, bad choices, suffering and shame. We are in bondage and cannot free ourselves. We are captive, like the legend of the Pied Piper from the old European folk tale—captive in a parade that marches us toward death in body, mind and spirit.

There is another tune calling us, another parade that we are invited to join, another parade where we belong and find our home. Jesus frees us from the parade of death to be part of his parade of life. Not so that my self can be king—Jesus frees me from my self. I no longer belong to my self, limited by my flaws, imperfections, blind spots and fears. I no longer belong to the world which would have me believe that I am not enough and that certain types of people are not enough. I belong to

Christ, and you belong to Christ and together, we get to march in the parade led by the Holy Spirit.

And this is a parade that is going places—the destination or result (or fruit if you will) being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But this is not a purely inward journey in order to become extra-holy supermen and superwomen. This parade leads us out into the world, out to our neighbors, where the fruits of our freedom in Christ are given away to others, not hoarded or stored up for our own benefit. Just like we can't grow this fruit by ourselves without being connected to the "Jesus parade," we don't get to keep the fruit that we grow in the Spirit.

We have come to the end of our time together, uplifted and encouraged by our community and friendship. But we will soon be coming down from the mountaintop, leaving this place and going back out in the world. The glow of these exciting and inspirational days will fade and we will go back to our regular daily realities to face living in our divided and hurting world.

It can still be hard to hear the marching tune of the "Jesus parade" even after an experience such as this. There will be times where these uplifting hours will seem like a dream. Was I really there with all these amazing Lutherans gathered from all corners of the

globe? Did I really get to sing with them, talk with them, pray with them and receive the body and blood of Christ with them? It seems too good to have been real. I must have spent those few days in what felt like heaven!

A great memory, willpower of steel and excellent self-control aren't going to get this parade where it needs to go. During one of the weekly Bible studies I attended with other Lutheran pastors, one of us joked that the response "I will and I asked God to help me," that we say when we install pastors and lay leaders should instead be "I won't and I ask God to help me." As Paul says, the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak. But thank God, we are not steering the parade on our own. Guided by the Spirit, we are marching exactly where we are needed, straight into a world that is suffering and in pain. We are marching toward a future we can't clearly see yet, but that includes the healing of the nations, the reconciling of differences, the inclusion of the excluded and the freedom of those who have so long been in bondage, including ourselves. As we separate, we will march back to our home countries and hometowns, but together we will all be marching in the light of God.

To quote the man who began the Reformation 500 years ago, "This is most certainly true." Thanks be to God. Amen.

Address of the President-elect

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa

The President of the Lutheran World Federation, General Secretary, delegates, all guests, good afternoon.

I am overwhelmed by the support I have received here today. Thank you for this special call to serve the LWF and its member churches as president. I take this call as evidence of your confidence in me as one with whom you are willing to work as we continue our journey.

Let me say that I need a number of professors in carrying out this task. Those professors are here. They are the Council members you just elected. Trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we shall together seek to lead our communion towards our common vision to the glory of Christ Jesus.

The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches that regulates its formal relationships through its constitution, bylaws and other agreed procedures. These make our working together predictable and consistent. Yet the LWF is a living organism through which the Holy Spirit works and demands a relevant response in this rapidly changing context. I shall be faithful to these set constitutional commitments in a responsible manner.

I am also committed to a healthy relationship between governance and the Communion Office. This is needed to ensure that governance is of service to the communion.

In this regard, let me assure you, General Secretary Rev. Dr Junge, that I will support you and your office so that you can carry out your duties as LWF general secretary. I hope the mutual respect we have had for each other over a decade will only grow as we work together to give expression to the vitality of 145 member churches and 74.5 million members around the world.

In accordance with the constitution, I see this call as a global LWF communion call. And I promise that I will be the president of the LWF and will exercise my responsibility accordingly. While we have set up regional expressions as gateways for expressing our diversity, I see the Communion Office as a unifying space whereby all members of the LWF can contribute together towards the well-being of the communion.

I hope you will understand at this stage that I am not going to make any substantive remarks regarding the future of the communion. I believe that these will emerge as we collectively and prayerfully deliberate within Council settings and as we seek together to discern the environment in which God calls and sends us.

I look forward to working with all of you via my office and the staff at the Communion Office through the general secretary.

Once again I express great appreciation to you for giving me such an extraordinary responsibility at this time. I can only request



Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

your prayers and support so that, together, we can achieve the purpose of the communion as we move from the commemoration of 500 years of Reformation.

I accept the office of LWF president at a time when the world is yearning for leadership modeled on the servant leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do so because I believe this will be one of my contributions.

Let me end by saying, that this is indeed a memorable day in my life and for my family. I am grateful to my wife Ruth who is also a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and who is with me at this assembly. I want to thank you all for the honor you have bestowed on me with all its responsibilities. Once again, thank you.

May God bless you all.

Ecumenical Greetings

Pentecostal Assemblies of Switzerland, Dr Jean-Daniel Plüss

Dear President, General Secretary,
dear delegates and guests,
dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is a great privilege to address this Assembly as you commemorate Martin Luther's initiation of the Reformation 500 years ago. As a Pentecostal, it is meaningful to stand here, because our tradition has much in common with the fundamental concerns of the Reformation. We keep the Bible in high regard, we understand our faith as being anchored in Jesus Christ and we are aware that without God's grace, there is nothing we can hope for.

If we have so much in common, how much more do we share in responsively living our discipleship in Christ and our mandate to the world and God's creation. The Bible is clear: this is a task that we have to fulfil in common. I am therefore grateful for your ecumenical hospitality. It is an important symbol that we are part of the body of Christ.

One of your themes at this assembly is Salvation—not for Sale. Luther rightly condemned the abuse of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of his time which sold indulgences as a means to earn salvation. As a matter of fact, he emphasized that it is not through good works or financial sacrifices but only by God's grace and justifying faith in Jesus Christ that we might be liberated from sin and be reunited into communion with God. Today, we are faced with new temptations that claim to sell salvation by financial sacrifice and promise material wealth. The word "prosperity" has found its way not only into political speeches but into many sermons as well. Pentecostals especially have been accused of spreading a "gospel of prosperity."

It may surprise you that already thirty-seven years ago, classical Pentecostals published an

official position paper warning of a one-sided interpretation of biblical texts that mention prosperity. They said that although Christians believe in a loving and good God, they may expect suffering in life and that God's sovereignty in all things should be upheld. Although it is understandable that the poor and disadvantaged hope for a way out of their misery, the Good News stands above all ambitions of personal gain. At the same time, we know that Jesus Christ became fully human and suffered with our suffering. He knows our pain.

Today, it is more important than ever to speak clearly. Salvation is not for sale! Why? Because promises that mix salvation and material gain have not only permeated some Pentecostal and independent churches but the churches in general. It has become a global task of all Christian communities to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a manner that honors God, proclaiming the Good News and living a transformed life that corresponds to God's Word and shares in the hope of all human beings because we believe in a loving and caring creator. Therefore, we do have reasons to hope in the flourishing of our lives and to promote that which is true, honorable and just (Phil 4:8). We flourish when we help others to flourish because we are compelled by the great commandment to love God and our neighbor as we love ourselves.

So, as you assemble here to discuss important issues and commit to resolutions, I pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be inspired to do this faithfully, with hope, gentleness and boldness. For our salvation in Christ is a precious gift of God.

God bless you.



Dr Jean-Daniel Plüss.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Association of Evangelicals in Africa and the Global Christian Forum, Rev. Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje

On behalf of the Global Christian Forum, of Dr Larry Miller, the Secretary General who, for unavoidable reasons, could not be here in person, on behalf of my organization, the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and speaking for myself, I wish to extend warm Christian fraternal greetings in the name of our Lord to this august gathering of the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Namibia, commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation movement.

The Global Christian Forum is an open space in which representatives from a broad range of Christian churches (including our sisters and brothers in the LWF) and interchurch organizations meet to foster unity and mutual respect, to explore and address common challenges together. At the Forum, the different members of the body of Christ

cherish the opportunity to share their faith journey in Christ with one another.

The theme of the Twelfth Assembly, “Liberated by God’s Grace” could not be more apt as the church revisits the Reformation era. The grace of God brought Luther to the place where he had the urge to bring to the church’s attention that grace is a priceless and free gift from God, that it is the only means for our redemption and is not a commodity to be sold for money. This sparked off the Reformation movement.

Luther’s fellow countryman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the middle of the last century called the churches’ attention to the tension between what he saw as “cheap grace” and “costly grace”; free but priceless grace. According to Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is grace without discipleship. We want to enjoy

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the privileges of Christ but do not want to carry the cross of Christ—cherry-picking (courtesy of a Brexit/EU war of words).

At the other end of the spectrum, followers of Christ must incur the cost of discipleship. While grace is extended to us freely, we need to give everything up to receive it. If we must be merchants, we need to sell all our goods; pluck out the other eye if we must; cut off the hand—and this at the cost of our very lives. Bonhoeffer calls this costly grace. Discipleship is to respond to the call of Jesus Christ, where the disciple has to abandon his net, pick up the cross and follow Christ. Above all, grace is costly: to have the son of God take on humanity and lay down his dear life on the cross.

At the Global Christian Forum committee in Havana in March 2017, I had the opportunity to share a devotional thought with my brothers and sisters and I talked about God's infinite grace: reconciling God's holiness and love to reconcile humans with God, drawing on the following texts: Titus 2:11-14 and Luke 23:24.

God's judgment justly condemns us to damnation, as God's holiness demands. God's love and compassion compels him to embrace humanity. Humanly speaking, it is a conundrum since the Holy God lovingly embraces sinful humanity with a compromise. This is an impossible problem to resolve.

The almighty, all-powerful, all-wise God and God of all provision provided the answer. God gave his only begotten son to redeem humanity, reconcile God's attributes of holiness and love without compromise. God's love and holiness are both affirmed on the cross of the incarnate God-human; Christ our Lord. Humanity was judged in the one person who fulfilled the righteous obligations to make way for God's love to flow unhindered. This is grace and infinite grace!

Our response to the offer of grace is godly purity (Tit 2:12-14). We cannot continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom 6:1-2a). Godly purity is the outflow of our acceptance and understanding of the priceless and sacrificial gift of grace offered to us. Going back to our sinful nature and habits is a slap

Rev. Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert





Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

in the face of the grace-giver. God forbids that we succumb to such impertinence.

What is the state of our Reformation and evangelical heritage, affirmed in the “five *solas*” and bedrock of our biblical Christian theology today? *Sola scriptura; solo fide; sola gratia; solus Christo; soli Deo gloria.*

As we look at the church today, 500 years after the Reformation era, the suggestion has been made that Martin Luther would be happier in the Roman Catholic Church than the Protestant church, given

the reforms that have taken place. The suggestion here is to depict the strides the Roman Catholic Church has taken by way of positive reforms and, ironically, to also point to the incipient corruption in the Protestant or historic churches growing out of the Reformation movement.

How I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us and keep us in his grace! And now:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

World Methodist Council, Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams

The President and General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation,
distinguished guests,
sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is a singular honor, joy and privilege to greet you in the name of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Please accept my gratitude for your kind invitation to share in this historic Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation as Lutherans across the globe celebrate 500 years of the Reformation under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

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I bring greetings and best wishes to you on behalf of the World Methodist Council (WMC) which brings together the worldwide association of 80 Methodist, Wesleyan and related United and Uniting Churches of more than 82 million people in 133 countries.

We celebrate the fact that since the historic signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) in 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, where Lutherans and Catholics made a commitment to work towards reconciliation and pronounced a common understanding of justification, which laid the ground for dialogue and cooperation, the World Methodist Conference, meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in 2006, ratified the JDDJ and confirmed that “justification is the work of the Triune God and we are saved by grace alone.”

It is fitting that the LWF Assembly meets under the theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace” in Namibia, once a German colony and now, having recently being awarded the Mo Ibrahim Prize

for African leadership, stands as an example of good governance. The assembly sub-themes, “Salvation—not for Sale; Human Beings—not for Sale; and Creation—not for Sale,” are a stark reminder that we live in a market-orientated and commodified world. We applaud and join your prophetic stance against the forces of mammon.

We are confident that the golden age of the Lutheran World Federation does not lie behind you but before you as you tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century. God has brought you to this place and moment in history to pray, reflect and celebrate. As you march toward tomorrow’s world, we pray that you will move forward with unmatched boldness and commitment, drawing new energy from the same transcendent God who cared for and guided your forebears.

May the living God continue richly to bless the Lutheran World Federation.

Yours in Christian love and service.

ACT Alliance, John Nduna

President of the LWF, Vice-Presidents, General secretary, church leaders, delegates, assembly participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly honored to be invited, along with my colleagues from the ACT secretariat, to participate in the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation here in Windhoek, Namibia, representing the ACT Alliance. The Lutheran World Federation together with the World Council of Churches were the founding members of ACT. Membership in the Alliance is mainly drawn from LWF and WCC member churches and their related agencies. The ACT Alliance brings churches and agencies together. Together, we have a voice at the table, we respond to disasters and we learn and share in development practice. Together, we work with the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded communities and people. Together, we live out *diakonia*.

The three components of the Assembly theme, Salvation—not for Sale, Creation—not for Sale and

Human Beings—not for Sale, speak to some of ACT’s work, for instance, climate justice, fighting inequalities and fighting for the rights of refugees and migrants.

The rights of refugees and migrants are being violated every day by warlords, smugglers, traffickers and unscrupulous recruiters and business owners, but also by states, which fail to live up to the commitments to respect basic human rights and dignity. As one of the key members of the Alliance, the LWF has been a global leader in delivering critical assistance to communities in need and especially working with refugees and displaced people.

Together, the LWF and other ecumenical organizations working with ACT Alliance have stood in solidarity with affected people and communities to fight for climate justice. Through the ACT “Now for Climate Justice” campaign, we have helped ensure that the climate agreement was delivered in Paris in 2015. It is time now to ensure that this agreement is implemented in an ambitious and



John Nduna.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

equitable manner that safeguards the rights of all, especially women, who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

This Assembly, therefore, should also be a place where we can celebrate the successes of the high quality work that you deliver, guided by deep Christian values. I myself worked for the LWF in the field for eleven years, mainly coordinating refugee programs in the Africa region. I can testify to the caliber of work the LWF delivers, respecting the dignity of the people and communities you work with.

I wish you a joyous, fruitful and successful assembly and may the commemoration of the 500 years of the Reformation further deepen your spiritual lives.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to inform you that after working with ACT Alliance for seventeen years, of which twelve in the leadership role, I will be retiring from service at the end of this month. It has been a privilege to work alongside the LWF and its members for so many years!

Once more, wishing you a very successful assembly, God bless you all.

Eastern Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Isaias of Tamassos and Oreini, Orthodox Church of Cyprus

It is with brotherly love that I address this current Assembly and send everyone the paschal and everlasting greeting, “Christ is risen”!

Having vividly in mind and fully understanding the true meaning of the words said shortly before his passion by our Lord Jesus Christ to his heavenly



Metropolitan Isaias of Tamassos and Oreini.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Father, “that they all may be one” (Jn 17:21) and, most importantly, obeying these words as a divine commandment, the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation came to an important decision thirty-six years ago to begin a dialogue.

During this dialogue, many distinguished theologians on both sides have contributed tirelessly to the effort to help the two sides understand each other and come closer to making Jesus’ prayer for unity a reality. Some of the pioneers of this dialogue have since departed to become citizens of the heavenly kingdom and we must remember them and feel forever grateful to them, praying for God to rest their souls. Others chose not to participate in the dialogue; each had their own reasons for this and we must accept their decisions, looking forward to the day they will return.

Nevertheless, everyone who contributed and today continues this God-like effort is watching with great interest and much anxiety the path and progress of the dialogue. The road from Espoo in 1981 to Nicosia in 2016 certainly wasn’t easy although, looking

back to the common statements issued on various topics, there are a number of convergences between the two sides—a very gladdening and encouraging encouragement for the future of this particular dialogue.

At the same time, and this is no secret, several divergences that keep the two sides apart still need to be addressed. Obviously, these obstacles to progress in the dialogue are a cause for sadness.

Despite the disagreements and distance sometimes obvious in the papers presented by the two sides or most vigorously during discussions, please allow me to say that a common purpose unites us and spurs us on to continue in our mutual intention and will to continue talking to one another despite the difficulties and obstacles and to do so with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in brotherly love with the aim of coming closer to each other.

This is the intention and decision of the Most Holy Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios as repeatedly testified to by

his representative and Co-President of the dialogue, Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, who sends his greetings and warm wishes. The continuation of this particular dialogue is also shared by the rest of the Orthodox churches, which participate in it through their honorable representatives and in various ways contribute to the dialogue process.

To our delight, comfort and encouragement, we see the same intentions and efforts being devoted to

the dialogue by the honorable representatives of the Lutheran World Federation, with whom we share the same vision and are bound in great friendship.

This is why I feel honored to address this assembly and to assure you that our wishes, prayers and strong petitions to our merciful God are for this dialogue to continue “in a spirit of love and truth” and for it eventually to bear its fruits for the benefit of the people of God and glory to his Holy name. Amen.

International Lutheran Council, Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt

Most honored bishops and presidents,
dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On behalf of the International Lutheran Council (ILC), I bring warm greetings to your assembly. Thank you for your kind invitation to Windhoek.

As you may know, the ILC’s historical roots go back to the Prussian empire which grew in power throughout much of Germany in the nineteenth century. The Prussian king forced a merger of Lutheran and Reformed churches. This was called the Prussian union of 1817.

The congregations rejecting the Prussian union because of their real understanding of the Lord’s Supper formed the “Old Lutheran Church” in Germany. Many of our pastors were arrested and the persecution led Lutheran families to emigrate to America, Canada, Brazil and Australia. In their new lands, they established Lutheran churches that adhered to the Lutheran confessions. This began exactly 200 years ago.

The ILC’s origins can be traced to its foundational conference in 1952; today, it represents 3.3 million Lutherans worldwide in 38 member churches.

If you like, you could call the ILC the little sister of the Lutheran World Federation. And from a distance and with a twinkle in your eye, you could observe that it seems to be sister who is a little bit rigid or hidebound. As you might experience in your

own family, it’s sometimes much more difficult to communicate with a sister than with a friend from far away.

More seriously, we are aware of some frustrations among our member churches and we carefully discuss such situations. What are the reasons of such frustrations: do we have a different understanding of the hermeneutics, of the use and understanding of our confessions?

For this reason, we established annual conversations in 2005. This year, we started a new one with a special focus on two theological presentations on “The importance of our understanding of the Scriptures for the unity of the church.” Prof. Ziegler gave a lecture on the topic from the perspective of the ILC while Prof. Grosshans presented the LWF perspective. Dr Ziegler stressed that while the Lutheran confessions themselves do not include an explicit article on the proper use of Scripture, such principles can readily be recognized in the ways in which the confessions use Scripture. Dr Grosshans for his part emphasized that the unity of the church ought to drive our understanding of theology.

We are also aware of a many good experiences among our member churches. For example, it’s a pleasure for me to see my good friend David Tswaedi from South Africa representing LUCSA or other friends representing churches with double membership in both organizations.



Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Finally, allow me to commend your theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

According to Anselm von Canterbury, we should not underestimate human guiltiness and iniquity.

According to Martin Luther, it is absolutely impossible to overestimate God’s grace; God’s love is like a baker’s oven from earth to heaven.

God bless you and your assembly!
Thank you for your patience!

World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

Your Excellency, President Bishop Munib Younan, your Excellency, General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, dear sisters and brothers,

I bring you greetings, dear Lutheran sisters and brothers, from the World Council of Churches, a fellowship to which many of you also belong. I bring you greetings from the Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Dr Agnes Abuom and from the two Vice-Moderators, HE Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson. I greet you with the words of the holy Scripture: “and now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13).

The apostle Paul’s conclusion comes after addressing a conflict with those who thought they were better or more significant than others in the church in Corinth. The ecumenical movement is a movement of love. The many gifts, competences and particularities can go well together in the communion called church if the way is clear: “But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31). There is, dear sisters and brothers, a way from conflict to communion. It is a way in which we search for the truth and share the gifts together, but from the beginning to the end, it is the way of love. Indeed, it is so because love drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18).

This is true for all processes in the church and particularly for everything that happens in the ecumenical movement as we focus on the relations between us. One of the great contributions to the one ecumenical movement recently is that the LWF prepared an ecumenical commemoration together with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU) of 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation, paving the way from conflict to communion. After the prayer of confession and reconciliation in Lund on Reformation day 2016, those relations will never be the same. They must remain a relationship of love, so clearly initiated in the common spoken words and actions and signed by the leading figures of the LWF, President Munib Younan, the General Secretary, Martin Junge, and Pope Francis, accompanied by Kurt Cardinal Koch, the President of the PCPCU.

Another great contribution to the one ecumenical movement is that this assembly highlights several of the movement's important insights for all of us. Some of them have come through new understanding or at least through

a better understanding of the harsh and brutal realities in which we live in different parts of the world. Some have come through new sharing or at least a better and more open sharing of the gifts of our different theological traditions. Others have come through a combination of the two, through a mutual search for the truth that we owe one another: the truth about the world and the truth about God.

The theme of this assembly is indeed an eminent example of how the ecumenical movement deals with both and combines truth about the world and the truth about God.

The *oikoumene*, our common home in this world, is a household, an economy, within which we must work for the best outcome for our life together. The work we do should contribute to the economy of fairness and the welfare of all, to the social justice that can weave and support the social fabric we all need for our lives. In this, we recognize that our common home is not only my world or our world, it is God's world. Every day, the God of life is creating our lives, "me and all creatures," and gives us our

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



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daily bread (which was the focus of the last assembly, in Stuttgart). The resources for our lives are gifts of God's creation. We do not live by being in opposition to or promoting this or that principle or theory, but by being together in the reality of the God of life.

The *oikoumene* of God's salvation in our common home, the church, is a household of faith, where we share the truth about God and about ourselves. The insights into both theology and anthropology that characterized Martin Luther's thinking, writing and, not least, preaching, led to what we call the Reformation. It became a reformation of the church, but with many implications for life together in the whole society, the wider *oikoumene*. This tradition has brought forward a focus on the church as a fellowship created by the grace of God, as the gift of God received through our shared faith. This is the God of life who has lifted up the value of being human by becoming a human being in Jesus Christ.

The LWF is a strong and, in some senses, the strongest Christian world communion when it comes to resources available for its work. The work that is done is done for the benefit of the Lutheran churches and their ability to be church in their contexts. However, it is also done for the benefit of the wider church fellowship and the one humanity. Particularly through the work of your Lutheran World Service, you share your gifts with the most vulnerable and those who need them the most—I think today particularly of the many refugees who are finding a way toward life in fullness through the work of the LWF.

The most important and the most valuable things in life are not for sale. Lutheran theology and Lutheran churches have contributed to the common understanding of our faith in God. We are always before God, as God's creation—as sinners and as justified—not because we have brought our capital forward or even our ecumenical funds or merits, but because of the grace of God.

Luther is famous for his words on standing up for conscience and he showed us that sometimes we have to stand up, knowing where we need to take a stand. This is part of our ecumenically shared call to be prophetic. We live in God's ongoing

creation where we are accountable to God through our mutual accountability to one another.

But allow me to parse the metaphors in another way. We are not called only to stand but to move, to move together. Our relationship to one another is the arena in which we are called to be on a pilgrimage with open eyes, with open minds, to see how the reign of God is present and coming with the values of justice and peace. The LWF is with the World Council of Churches, with its churches and partners today, shaping the ecumenical movement as a pilgrimage of justice and peace. This is our way towards more unity today.

Your choice of venue for this assembly exemplifies the ongoing commitment to justice and peace that is a defining characteristic of the LWF. The stories of oppression and colonization, but also of liberation and restored dignity, are interwoven in the life of the Lutheran churches here in Namibia. The signs of hope we see here will bear seeds of even stronger signs of love and we hope and pray that this assembly will further inspire the whole region of southern Africa to remain steadfast in the legacy of justice and peace so forcefully demonstrated here.

In everything we attempt to be—whatever the color of our skin, whatever our gender or whatever the relationships in which we try to build a life in togetherness, in our capacities and in our orientation—we are called to search for the better way—the way of love. The way of love that drives out fear. Then we can truly see that the best is freely given and not for sale and we can develop both our economies and our ecumenical movement accordingly.

May the almighty God of life, Father, son and Holy Spirit, continue to guide the LWF as a communion in love and of love, generously sharing among themselves and with the whole ecumenical family. We are so proud and privileged to have the LWF as our close partner in the ecumenical movement and in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva as you give power and weight to our common witness in the international organizations, serving the well-being of the one humanity as well as in so many other contexts.

The faith we share is the faith that makes us believe in the coming reign of God among us in this world that is our common home. This becomes truly our shared hope when we open ourselves, when we come out into the world of God and to the fellowship

in the churches and of the churches. We are not going toward the twilight but toward the dawn of God's reign when we continue on the pilgrimage of love, the pilgrimage of justice and peace, for the greatest among them is love which is unconditional and endless.

The Anglican Communion, The Most Rev. Albert Chama

Dear Bishop Munib, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, distinguished guests and all members of the Twelfth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation,

I bring you the greetings of the churches of the Anglican Communion and of our Secretary General, Archbishop Josiah Fearon.

I also bring the greetings of the Anglican churches on this continent of Africa and of my own Province of Central Africa.

Anglicans pray for you at this Twelfth Assembly of the LWF that God will enrich and bless us all as you explore the theme "Liberated by God's Grace."

We have been praying for you this year as you commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther. The Reformation has shaped Anglican history, our theology and our liturgy. We recognize and give thanks for the warm friendship between Lutherans and Anglicans today.

The Most Rev. Albert Chama.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



ASSEMBLY REPORT

In some parts of the world, Lutherans and Anglicans are in full communion with each other. This is to be celebrated. In other places, there is more to do to bring our families truly together. We are one in Christ, and Christ calls us to an ever-deeper unity. I pray that here in Africa, we may see substantial progress. May we make more agreements of full communion on this continent. Let us establish a common faith and order and a shared life in witness, in discipleship and in mission.

Together, we can give thanks for the work of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission over many years. And now that our communions have established such a deep theological understanding, we no longer need to have a theological commission as our international forum. Instead, our shared work is assisted by the Anglican-Lutheran International Coordinating Committee. We receive joyfully the publication of a volume of reflections by Anglicans and Lutherans from around the world on the theme of “Liberated by God’s Grace” prepared by this committee.

The Anglican Communion values its partnership with the Lutheran World Federation very highly and encourages Anglicans everywhere to develop local friendships and shared work wherever possible.

Last year, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) met in Lusaka, Zambia. At that meeting,

we were able to say important things about this 500th anniversary year. The ACC encouraged Anglicans across the communion to be a part of these commemorations. They should join in shared services, study with Lutherans and other ecumenical partners and engage with them in mission activities. The ACC encouraged all to engage with the focus, “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

Lutherans and Anglicans are blessed by wider relationships too. In 1999, the LWF signed an historic text with the Roman Catholic Church: the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ).

The ACC recognized the significance of the JDDJ, welcoming and affirming its substance. The ACC connected the work of the JDDJ with work Anglicans have done with the Lutherans and with that on justification by the Anglican-Catholic Dialogue (ARCIC). In October this year, the Anglican Communion will publicly convey this ACC resolution to representatives of the LWF and the Catholic Church in a service in Westminster Abbey in London. Anglicans give thanks for both our reformation and the Catholic heritage.

Anglicans join you in the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.” God has set us free. We pray that we may make this freedom and salvation known to all people with whom we share God’s gift of life in his precious creation.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Kurt Cardinal Koch

It is my privilege to convey to you the greetings and blessings of the Catholic Church and of Pope Francis in particular. I am delighted to be present personally at the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation taking place in the year of the Reformation commemoration. In this year, we commemorate not only 500 years of the Reformation but also 50 years of intensive dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics through which we have been able to discover once more how much we have in common in the faith.

The dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation was the first that the Catholic Church commenced

immediately after the Second Vatican Council and it has proved to be very fruitful. A milestone in this dialogue was certainly the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on 31 August 1999 in Augsburg. It is a gift of grace that it has become possible to achieve a fundamental consensus in the doctrine that led to dispute and ultimately to the schism in the church in the sixteenth century. On the foundation of what had been achieved, we Catholics were pleased to accept the invitation of the Lutheran World Federation to celebrate the Reformation commemoration together. How that had become possible was demonstrated



Kurt Cardinal Koch.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

by Lutherans and Catholics in the joint document “From Conflict to Communion.” That text paved the way for the joint commemoration of the Reformation that took place in the Lutheran Cathedral in Lund, Sweden, on 31 October 2016 in a joint worship service presided over by Pope Francis on the Catholic side and by LWF President Bishop Munib Younan and General Secretary Reverend Dr Martin Junge on behalf of the Lutheran side. This event has been widely understood and acknowledged as a promising ecumenical signal.

In their joint declaration, Bishop Younan and Pope Francis affirmed: “While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the church.”⁵¹ Gratitude and the plea for reconciliation go hand in hand and form, as it were, the two sides of a joint Reformation

commemoration as expressed in the statement “From Conflict to Communion.” For a joint Reformation commemoration must take the conflict as seriously as the communion and, above all, make a contribution enabling Lutheran and Catholic Christians to progress along the path from conflict to communion.

As spiritual nourishment along this path, we have been given the purification of historical memory as Pope Francis cautions in the words: “We cannot erase what is past, nor do we wish to allow the weight of past transgressions to continue to pollute our relationships. The mercy of God will renew our relationships.”⁵² If mercy and reconciliation form the guiding perspectives of the ecumenical path, above all in this year of the Reformation commemoration, we can walk together through the open door to a positive future.

⁵¹ Joint declaration on the occasion of the joint Catholic–Lutheran Reformation commemoration on 31 October 2016.

⁵² Pope Francis, Homily at the vespers on the solemnity of the conversion of the Apostle Paul, in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 2016.

ASSEMBLY REPORT

In gratitude for the fruitful collaboration which the Catholic Church has experienced with the Lutheran World Federation and its leadership, I wish you every success in this Twelfth Assembly and God's blessings for your future undertakings. And in thanking you on behalf of the Catholic Church for the

fact that we are able to celebrate a centenary of the Reformation in ecumenical communion for the first time in history, I live in hope that we can continue to walk the path into the future together, liberated by God's grace and accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who will show us the way.

World Communion of Reformed Churches, Rev. Dr Christopher Ferguson

It is a great honor and a special privilege for me to bring greetings to this dynamic, prophetic and vibrant meeting of our beloved sister communion on behalf of myself and our President, the Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, a South African theologian and teacher who adds his own special enthusiasm that you are meeting in Namibia in this historic and forward-looking Reformation commemoration year. These greetings come from the over 240 member churches in 109 countries, which include Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, Waldensian, Czech Brethren and other first

Reformation churches as well as a significant number of United and Uniting Churches. Some of our United Churches are also members of the LWF, testifying to yet another strong link in our shared identity and vocation as ecumenical churches of the Protestant Reformation.

As you know, the WCRC is young as a communion of churches in its present form. In 2010, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council joined to form the WCRC. The commitment to unity and

Rev. Dr Christopher Ferguson.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



overcoming divisions within the Reformed family also represented a reinvigoration of our ecumenical vocation and the centrality of justice in faithful obedience to the God of life, following Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. As with other church families, we have embraced our identity as a communion—a *koinonia*—living into the gift and task that that implies. I sometimes summarize the challenge humorously by saying that we are a vibrant and dynamic communion of well over 80 million Christians, most of whom don't even know they are members. In the last seven years, we have faced significant challenges and have advanced in our understanding of being “called to communion and committed to justice.”

Soon after 2010, we entered into a significant financial situation that led us to make the very painful and difficult decision to move out of the Ecumenical Center and relocate our offices to Hanover, Germany. Thanks to the support, generosity and hospitality of our German churches, we have achieved a degree of relative stability but still face challenges. Our relocation not only brought with it the predicted disruptions for staff, infrastructure, institutional memory and programs, but also sent an unintended and untrue signal that the WCRC was moving away from the ecumenical family. It is clear that we have had to make extra efforts to find ways to maintain and even deepen ecumenical collaboration now that we are no longer in Geneva. Since I began my time as general secretary, the LWF has been especially open and constructive in ensuring that the special and important relationship between our two communions flourishes. I give thanks to your General Secretary, Martin Junge, and to your President, Munib Younan, for your profound ecumenical collegiality and solidarity.

I give thanks to God for the ecumenical vision and vocation for reconciliation and Christian unity of the LWF. You have inspired us and provided bold yet humble leadership in the deep and transformative process with the Roman Catholic Church moving from conflict to communion, which found such a powerful worldwide witness in Lund last October.

I am extremely happy to share with you that, thanks to your encouragement and faithful

persistence, the WCRC reactivated its engagement with the process of association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. After consultations and dialogue within our communion, we have decided to associate with the JDDJ in the spirit of “differentiating consensus” and have prepared an associating statement lifting up the Reformed understanding of the inseparable relation of justice and justification. We will formally sign our association in a special service of worship and witness to Christian unity in the context of the 500 years Reformation(s) commemoration to be held in Wittenberg during the course of our General Council meeting. In addition to the JDDJ association, we will add to our ecumenical witness with the LWF by signing together the “Wittenberg witness” in which the LWF and WCRC as churches of the Reformation make public and visible our commitment to Christian unity by pledging concrete steps to deepen the reception and put into practice the results of our Reformed-Lutheran dialogue “On being the Church.” We will make this pledge in order that the unity of the church for transformation becomes a reality in these times of peril for the people and the planet. There are many things that we can and should do together. I give thanks that God has given us the gift of partnership in mission, witness and *diakonia* with the LWF.

We are celebrating our General Council meeting in Leipzig, Germany, from June 29 to July 7. Our theme “Living God, Renew and Transform us” speaks to the urgency of turning to the God of life in the midst of a world viciously dominated by the idols of death and destruction.

I end my greetings by lifting up a theme text for our General Council:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:2)

In seeking to discern God's will in these troubled and turbulent times, we have been strengthened and uplifted by your life and witness. Your theme for this assembly has deepened our own reflections and has modeled for us how to bring the

Good News of God's grace into a world fallen among thieves. Together, we seek transformation, declaring with you: salvation—not for sale, human beings—

not for sale, and creation—not for sale. Thanks be to God.

Mennonite World Conference, Rev. Dr César García

It is with profound gratitude and humility that I greet this gathering in the name of the Mennonite World Conference – a global Anabaptist-Mennonite communion of 105 member groups in around 60 countries.

Dear President, Dear General Secretary, Dear Assembly delegates, guests and observers, Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

As “step-children” of the Reformation we are honored to join you in the celebration of your 500th birthday! And it is a special joy to celebrate your long tradition here in Namibia, in the continent of Africa, home to some of the most vibrant expressions of the ongoing renewal of the church that Luther and others began so many years ago in Germany.

As many of you know, the Anabaptist tradition that I represent also traces its beginnings back to the 16th century. For many years—centuries really—we generally told the story of the early Anabaptists through the lens of our martyr history; in that simplistic version of the story, our ancestors were the “true” reformers – while Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were indistinguishable from the Catholic theologians in calling on the state to enforce religious reform with violence. Today, thanks be to God and the initiative of the Lutheran World Federation, we have been invited to tell our history in a new way. Seven years ago, at the Eleventh Assembly of the LWF in Stuttgart, Germany, we joined you in a worship service of mutual repentance and forgiveness.

That service marked the culmination of nearly 30 years of ecumenical conversations—first at a regional level and then in the form of a joint Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission that convened from 2002-2008. The work of that Commission, summarized in a document called

“Healing Memories: Reconciled in Christ,” included a careful exploration of the “condemnations” of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession. But most importantly, the Commission recognized that reconciliation between our two traditions could go forward only through a shared commitment to “rightly remembering” our history—that is, to a more careful telling of our origins in the sixteenth-century that resisted the impulse on both sides to caricatures or heroic simplifications. We both had much to repent for in the actions of our spiritual ancestors.

The commitments that we made to each other in Stuttgart were transformative. They changed the trajectory of our shared history. Today, no account of our shared origins in the contentious debates of the sixteenth century is adequate if it fails to include the story of our commitment to reconciliation that we made in 2010.

The LWF demonstrated its resolve to honoring those commitments in the appointment of a “Task Force on the Mennonite Action.” Just a few months ago, that group issued a wonderful collection of essays, reflections and examples of Lutheran-Mennonite collaboration around the world in a small book called *Bearing Fruit: Implications of the 2010 Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites/Anabaptists*. The stories recounted in that book testify to the fact that in our new relationship our witness to God's love for the world is made more fully manifest.

Eight years ago, at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay in July of 2009, Ishmael Noko, then serving as General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, addressed our global body. In a deeply moving presentation, Bishop Noko described Lutheran sorrow and regret for the events of the past.



Rev. Dr César García.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

And then, anticipating the gathering here today in 2017, he concluded with a call for a renewed “commitment to the continuing reformation of our tradition and of the whole Church.”

The vulnerability you demonstrated by looking at the Augsburg Confession with new eyes; your posture of humility in expressing regret for the past; your many gestures of hospitality; and your commitment to continue to walk with us on the journey from repentance to reconciliation are all evidence of that commitment to “continuing the reformation of your tradition.” Thank you for allowing

us to be partners in that journey, as we walk together in the way of Jesus Christ, our reconciler and the source of our common history and identity; and thank you for sharing that journey with the world, for speaking in contexts of fragmentation and nationalisms about a new reality where forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. As your General Secretary, Martin Junge, has said “the reconciliation between Mennonites and Lutherans couldn’t stay among us: they had to unfold its full meaning by becoming a witness to God’s intentions to the entire world.” May God lead us in that endeavor!

Governing Bodies

Assembly

The highest decision-making body of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is the Assembly, normally held every six years. It consists of representatives from each member church. Among its many functions is the election of the president and the Council. Between assemblies, the LWF is governed by the Council, which meets annually and by its Meeting of Officers (Executive Committee as of June 2018), which meets twice a year.

Council

The Assembly shall elect members of the Council taking into consideration the nominations by the regions. The Council is the principal authority of the LWF during the period between assemblies. The Council shall consist of 48 members, the president and the chairperson of the finance committee if he/she is elected from outside the Council. The Council shall elect the vice-presidents from among its members taking into consideration the seven geographical areas. In addition, the Council shall elect two members for the purpose of ensuring gender balance and generational participation. The Council may appoint committees or ad hoc sub-committees as required and appoint their chairpersons.

Council members 2017–2023

Name (Male – Female – Youth, Lay – Ordained), Member Church

MUSA, Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus (LWF President) (M. O.), The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

AFRICA

Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa (Luccwa)

ADA EPSE MAINA, Rev. Dr Jeannette (F. O.), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon

MOUANGA NDEMBE, Ms Stevy C. (F.-Y. L.), Evangelical Lutheran Church of Congo

SEYENKULO, Bishop Dr Jensen (M. O.), Lutheran Church in Liberia

Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (Luccea)

MBISE, Ms LoeRose (F. L.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

RAKOTONIRINA, Bishop Dr David (M. O.), Malagasy Lutheran Church

WAMBUA, Ms Faith Mwikali (F.-Y. L.), Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church

DIBISA, Rev. Yonas Yigezu (M. O.), The Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia

Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (Lucsa)

MAGWAZA, Mr Khulekani S. (M.-Y. L.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa

MOYO, Rev. Elitha (F. O.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe

MUNYIKA, Bishop Dr Veikko (M. O.), The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia



Windhoek, Namibia: Newly elected LWF Council meets for the first time after the Assembly. Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

ASIA

North-East Asia Lutheran Communion

ANDO, Ms Fu (F.-Y. L.), Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church

CHEN, Rev. Selma (Shu-Chen) (F. O.), The Lutheran Church of Taiwan (Republic of China)

CHANG, Bishop Chun Wa (M. O.), The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong

West-South Asia Lutheran Communion

AZAR, Ms Sally (F.-Y. L.), The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (Jerusalem)

BORGOARY, Ms Ranjita Christi (F. L.), Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (India)

KERKETTA, Rev. Dr Christ Sumit Abhay (M. O.), Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church (India)

South-East Asia Lutheran Communion

SUMBAYAK, Ms Desri Maria (F. L.), The Indonesian Christian Church

TELAUMBANUA, Bishop Tuhoni (M. O.), The Protestant Christian Church (Indonesia)

VALERIANO, Mr Johanan Celine (M.-Y. L.), Lutheran Church in the Philippines

YAP, Bishop Aaron Chuan Ching, (M. O.), Lutheran Church in Malaysia

CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE

KLÁTIK, Bishop Dr Miloš (M. O.),
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession
in the Slovak Republic

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Ms Olga (F. L.), Evangelical
Church of Czech Brethren

SOJKA, Dr Jerzy (M. L.), Evangelical
Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

TKACH, Ms Vera (F.-Y. L.), Federation of
Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and
Other States

VIIILMA, Archbishop Urmas (M. O.),
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

CENTRAL WESTERN EUROPE

ALBECKER, Mr Christian (M. L.), Union
of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine
(France)

BRABAND, Ms Julia (F.-Y. L.), Evangelical
Church in Central Germany

JULY, Bishop Dr. h.c. Frank O. (M. O.),
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg
(Germany)

KLEIST, Pröpstin Astrid (F. O.), Evangelical
Lutheran Church in Northern Germany

MIRGELER, Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes
(M. L.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in
Northern Germany

OBERDORFER, Prof. Dr Bernd (M.
O.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria
(Germany)

SCHMIDT-KLIE, Mr Lasse (M.-Y. L.),
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover
(Germany)

VITIELLO, Ms Cordelia (F. L.), Evangelical
Lutheran Church in Italy

WESTFELD, Ms Bettina (F. L.) Evangelical
Lutheran of Saxony (Germany)

EUROPE – NORDIC COUNTRIES

ANTONSEN, Mr Jacob Breda (M.-Y. L.),
The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of
Norway

ÁRNADÓTTIR, Ms Thuridur Björg Wíium
(F.-Y. L.), The Evangelical Lutheran Church of
Iceland

DRANGSHOLT, Dr Kjetil (M. L.), Church of
Norway

HIETAMÄKI, Dr Minna (F. L.) Evangelical
Lutheran Church of Finland

JACKÉLEN, Archbishop Dr Antje (F. O.)
Church of Sweden

STUBKJÆR, Bishop Henrik (M. O.)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

ÁLVAREZ ROCHA, Ms Geraldina (F. O.)
Lutheran Costa Rican Church

FRIEDRICH, Rev. Dr Nestor Paulo (M. O.)
Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession
in Brazil

RODRÍGUEZ RAMÍREZ, Mr Grosvyn
Ariel, (M.-Y. L.), Christian Lutheran Church of
Honduras

STEILMANN FRANCO, Ms Karla Maria
(F.-Y. L.) Evangelical Church of the River Plate
(Argentina)

NORTH AMERICA

EATON, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. (F. O.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FLIPPIN JR, Rev. William Edward (M. O.)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

KOCHENDORFER, Bishop Larry (M. O.)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

PHILIP, Ms Cheryl (F.-Y. L.) Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America

STEINKE, Rev. Dr Robin (F. O.) Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America

Meeting of Officers

The Meeting of Officers (future Executive Committee) is the appointing authority of staff with programmatic and supervisory responsibilities, with the exception of Communion Office Leadership Team (COLT) members, who are appointed by the Council. The Meeting of Officers serves as the LWF Board of Trustees and Personnel Committee.

The committee includes the president, seven vice-presidents, the chairperson of the finance committee, and the chairpersons of the Council committees of the LWF Council.

The president, vice-presidents and chairperson of the finance committee represent the seven LWF geographical regions defined as: Africa, Asia, Central Eastern Europe, Central Western Europe, Nordic Countries, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America.

President

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, Nigeria
[Africa]

Vice-Presidents

Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA,
Cameroon [Africa]

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. EATON, USA
[North America]

Rev. Dr Nestor P. FRIEDRICH, Brazil [Latin
America and the Caribbean]

Archbishop Dr Antje JACKELÉN, Sweden
[Nordic Countries]

Pröpstin Astrid KLEIST, Germany [Central
Western Europe]

Ms Desri Maria SUMBAYAK, Indonesia [Asia]

Archbishop Urmas VIILMA, Estonia,
[Central Eastern Europe]

Chairperson of the Finance Committee

Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes MIRGELER,
Germany [Central Western Europe]

Members at large and chairpersons of Standing Committees

Full members of the Meeting of Officers

Ms Ranjita C. BORGARY, India (Standing
Committee for Constitution and Membership)

Ms Vera TKACH, Russian Federation (Ad-
hoc Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice)

Chairpersons of Committees

Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes MIRGELER,
Germany (Finance)

Rev. Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, Ethiopia
(Mission and Development)

ASSEMBLY REPORT

Rev. Dr Robin STEINKE, USA (Theology and Ecumenical Relations)

Bishop Henrik STUBKJÆR, Denmark (World Service)

Ms Karla M. STEILMANN FRANCO, Argentina (Co-Chair, Communications)

Mr Johanan Celine VALERIANO, Philippines (Co-Chair, Communications)

Finance Committee

Members of the Council

Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes MIRGELER, Germany (chairperson)

Mr Christian ALBECKER, France

Ms LoeRose MBISE, Tanzania

Ms Stevy C. MOUANGA NDEMBE, Republic of Congo

Bishop Tuhoni TELAUMBANUA, Indonesia

Committee for Mission and Development

Members of the Council

Rev. Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, Ethiopia (chairperson)

Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA, Cameroon

Ms Geraldina ÁLVAREZ ROCHA, Costa Rica

Ms Thuridur Björg Wíium ÁRNADÓTTIR, Iceland

Ms Sally AZAR, Palestine

Ms Julia BRABAND, Germany

Dr Kjetil DRANGSHOLT, Norway

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. EATON, USA

Pröpstin Astrid KLEIST, Germany

Bishop Larry KOCHENDORFER, Canada

Ms Olga NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Czech Republic

Mr Grosvyn Ariel RODRÍGUEZ RAMÍGUEZ, Honduras

Bishop Dr Jensen SEYENKULO, Liberia

Bishop Aaron Chuan Ching YAP, Malaysia

Committee for Theology and Ecumenical Relations

Members of the Council

Rev. Dr Robin STEINKE, USA (chairperson)

Rev. Selma (Shu-Chen) CHEN

Dr Minna HIETAMÄKI, Finland

Archbishop Dr Antje JACKELÉN, Sweden

Rev. Dr Christ S. KERKETTA, India

Mr Khulekani S. MAGWAZA, South Africa

Rev. Elitha MOYO, Zimbabwe

Prof. Dr Bernd OBERDORFER, Germany

Mr Lasse SCHMIDT-KLIE, Germany

Dr Jerzy SOJKA, Poland

Archbishop Urmas VIILMA, Estonia

Bishop Dr David RAKOTONIRINA,
Madagascar

Committee for World Service

Members of the Council

Bishop Henrik STUBKJÆR, Denmark
(chairperson)

Ms Ranjita Christi. BORGOARY, India

Rev. Dr Nestor P. FRIEDRICH, Brazil

Bishop Dr h.c. Frank O. JULY, Germany

Bishop Dr Miloš KLÁTIK, Slovak Republic

Bishop Dr Veikko MUNYIKA, Namibia

Ms Desri Maria SUMBAYAK, Indonesia

Ms Cordelia VITIELLO, Italy

Other members

Still to be appointed

Committee for Communications

Ms Karla M. STEILMANN FRANCO,
Argentina (co-chairperson)

Mr Johanan Celine VALERIANO, Philippines
(co-chairperson)

Ms Fu ANDO, Japan

Mr Jacob Breda ANTONSEN, Norway

Bishop Chun Wa CHANG, Hong Kong

Ms Cheryl PHILIP, USA

Ms Faith Mwikali WAMBUA, Kenya

Ms Bettina WESTFELD, Germany

Standing Committee for Constitution and Membership

Members of the Council

Ms Ranjita Christi BORGOARY, India
(chairperson)

Ms LoeRose MBISE, Tanzania (vice-
chairperson)

Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA,
Cameroon

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. EATON, USA

Rev. Dr Nestor P. FRIEDRICH, Brazil

Archbishop Dr Antje JACKELÉN, Sweden

Pröpstin Astrid KLEIST, Germany

Ms Desri Maria SUMBAYAK, Indonesia

Archbishop Urmas VIILMA, Estonia

Ad-hoc Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice

Members of the Council

Ms Vera TKACH, Russian Federation
(chairperson)

Rev. William Edward FLIPPIN Jr. (vice-
chairperson)

List of Participants

DELEGATES

Africa

Bishop Brian M.J. ABRAHAMS, Moravian Church in South Africa

Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA MAINA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon

Ms Esther Bano ADAMU, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Deacon Eno Basse AKPAN, The Lutheran Church of Nigeria

Rev. Rejoice ANDERSON, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Mr Sem Zenipo Halolye ANGALA, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN)

Rev. Tseganesh Ayele ASELE, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia

Most Rev. Dr Nemuel A. BABBA, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Ms Helen BAHRU, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia

Rev. Matilda BANDA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia

Bishop Dr Peter Amana BARTIMAWUS, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Mr Girma Borishie BATI, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia

Bishop Burgert BRAND, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC)

Bishop Dr Joseph P. BVUMBWE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi

Rev. Mamadou DIOUF, The Lutheran Church of Senegal

Ms Julie DJANABA Epse BARA, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon

Bishop Michael DUBE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe

Archbishop Christian EKONG, The Lutheran Church of Nigeria

Bishop Gilbert FILTER, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, South Africa

Ms Mae FREEMAN LAWOR, Lutheran Church in Liberia

Bishop Dr Paul Kofi FYNN, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana

Bishop Ernst GAMXAMUB, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN)

Rev. Simon GEBREKRISTOS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea

Dr Fregenet Zekiewos GICHAMO, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia

Rev. Robert GOYEK DAGA, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon

Mr Gutu GUDETA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Ms Mary Salomon JENGWE, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Bishop Zachariah W. KAHUTHU, Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ms Moges KIDANEWOLD, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Ms Clarisse KOMBO, Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic



“The blood of Christ was shed for you” is heard as the cup is offered to participants during the Eucharist.
Photo: LWF/Johanan Celine Valeriano

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Ms Monika NAMBINGA, Namibia

Ms Johanna NAMWOONDE, Namibia

Mr Wynand NARIMAB, Namibia

Mr Micheal NAWABEB, Namibia

ASSEMBLY REPORT

Ms Hileni NELENGE, Namibia

Mr Cami PETERSON, Namibia

Mr Hans ROOI, Namibia

Ms Margaret SADLER, Canada

Mr Reinhold SCHIELE, Namibia

Ms Ilse SCHIELE, Namibia

Mr Karl Friedrich TIETZ, Namibia

Ms Felicia WELSCH, Namibia



Message from the Women's Pre-Assembly.
Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

Liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world

Befreit durch Gottes Gnade, eine Gemeinschaft in Christus, die gemeinsam lebt und arbeitet für eine gerechte, friedliche und versöhnte Welt.

Libres por la gracia de Dios, una comunión en Cristo que vive y trabaja conjuntamente por un mundo justo, pacífico y reconciliado

Libérée par la grâce de Dieu, une communion en Christ vivant et collaborant en vue d'un monde juste, pacifique et réconcilié.



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