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TWELFTH ASSEMBLY
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
2017 - WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

WELCOME TO NAMIBIA

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

Welcome to Namibia



TWELFTH ASSEMBLY
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
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Emma Nangolo and Erika von Wietersheim

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Introduction

In order to give Assembly participants a basic understanding of Namibia, the history of its people and churches and the continuing challenges they face as a young nation, members of the Local Assembly Planning Committee prepared the following article on Namibia, using the lyrics of its national anthem as headings.

*Namibia, land of the brave,
Freedom's fight we have won...*

Namibia is one of the youngest sovereign states in Africa. It only became independent in 1990, after a long fight for freedom from foreign rule. From 1884 until 1915 it was a German colony. Afterwards, its people lived under South African rule for 75 long years. Both states imposed their oppressive and racial colonial and apartheid structures on the country. Under German rule this led to the colonial wars from 1904 until 1908, the first steps in a long liberation struggle, whereby tens of thousands of mainly Herero and Nama people lost their lives through war, hunger and deprivation, as did German settlers and soldiers. It also led to massive land dispossession, a fact that until today has an impact on German-Namibian relations. Negotiations between the Namibian and German governments are presently underway with respect to an apology for the genocide and

corresponding compensation. The South African occupation of Namibia since 1915 led to further land dispossession, injustices and racial discrimination and finally to the start of the liberation struggle of all Namibians inside and outside the country in 1966. On 21 March 1990, in the presence of the United Nations and numerous heads of state, including the recently released Nelson Mandela, the South African flag was finally lowered. It was proudly replaced by the beautiful and colorful Namibian flag.

*We give our love and loyalty
Together in unity...*

Namibia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. And yet, this small population of about 2.4 million people is extremely diverse with more than 11 population groups with different histories, cultures and languages. These include Oshiwambo, Nama/Damara, Khoi, Otjiherero, Kavango and Afrikaans as well as German, Portuguese and English, with English being the official language (**www.gov.na**). With independence, Namibians had to find a new way of living together. After decades of division, the slogan "One Namibia, one Nation!" and the policy of national reconciliation paved the way for Namibians to slowly become a united nation.

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About half of the population live in the rural areas, mainly in the northern regions, while the rest live in the rather small towns of the country. Windhoek, the capital, lies right in the middle of Namibia with a population of about 370,000.

Contrasting beautiful Namibia Namibia our country Beloved land of savannahs...

Namibia got its name from the Namib Desert along the Atlantic Ocean – one of the world's oldest deserts, taking up a large part of the country. Although the country is bordered by mighty rivers like the Orange River in the south and the Kavango, Kunene and Zambezi Rivers in the north, Namibia's interior is dry and large parts are desert or semi-desert. Long years of drought are not only causing hardship for farmers throughout the country, but also in a city like Windhoek where strict water conservation measures are a must for all citizens and visitors.

And yet, despite the dryness, the emptiness, the remoteness, Namibia is an increasingly popular tourist destination because of its breathtaking landscapes and its exceptional fauna and flora. The beautiful Sossusvlei with its most photographed dunes in the world, the impressive Fish River Canyon, the rough Atlantic coast, the Kaokoveld and the Etosha National Park, the third largest game reserve in Africa, are just a few highlights that tourists from all over the world are eager to visit. Namibia is also home to the rare desert elephants, the world's largest population of free roaming rhinos and cheetahs, and to a seal population of almost 100,000

as well as large herds of antelopes. In Namibia we also have the famous Welwitschia plants, some of which are more than 1,500 years old, as well as the gnarled Camel Thorn trees in the south and the majestic prehistoric Baobab trees in the north.

As Namibia also borders the Atlantic Ocean, the fishing industry is another important economic sector as well as the mining industry, exporting diamonds, copper and uranium. Agriculture in Namibia only contributes around 5% to the national gross domestic product, with only 2% of Namibia's land receiving sufficient rainfall to grow crops. However, directly or indirectly, it supports over 50 percent of the country's population, and agriculture is the largest employer in the Namibian economy.

Namibia motherland, we love thee...

With independence, Namibia wrote its own Constitution, recognized as one of the most democratic in the world. It contains a comprehensive catalogue of entrenched fundamental human rights, including freedom of speech, religion and assembly and the freedom of the press – rights that for decades were denied to the Namibian people under the South African apartheid system. In 1990, Namibia also became a secular state without a state religion – in contrast to the past, when the white Afrikaans Church was a close political ally of the apartheid government and had substantial influence on state schools and the political orientation of the government. The requirement of secularization led to, among other things, the abolition of religious education at Namibian state schools.



Lutheran churches in Namibia



Churches play an important role in Namibia's social life and partly also in politics. In Namibia about 90% of the population adhere to the Christian faith and of those about 50% belong to one of the three Lutheran churches in the country. This places Namibia among the countries with the largest concentration of Lutherans in the world.

Our three Lutheran churches are: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) with about 650,000 members, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) with about 350,000 members and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia – German Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCIN – GELC) with about 5,200 members.

The Lutheran churches in Namibia arose from the work of various mission societies from different countries, a fact which later, among others, created a problem forming a united Lutheran Church in Namibia. The mission societies were divided by nationality, form of church governance, liturgical traditions, degree of emphasis on the Lutheran confession and differing levels of willingness to accept, educate and cooperate with the local converts. For example, the Rhenish Missionary Society from Germany was based on Lutheran and Reformed traditions, while the early Finnish missionaries on the other hand were more puritanical. During their work the mission societies established educational institutions such as, in

1865, the Augustineum in Otjimbingwe as a school for the sons of Herero chiefs. Later, in 1910, it became a training institution for teachers and evangelists in Okahandja with lecturers, such as the missionaries Vedder and Esslinger. The Rhenish Mission also established the Heinz-Stöver seminary in Karibib, where kindergarten and hostel matrons were trained.

Here is a brief look at each of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia – German Evangelical Lutheran Church

ELCIN-GELC is rooted in the Rhenish Mission Society which arrived in Namibia in 1842. In 1900 two missionaries were sent to Namibia to separately serve the white German and the black community in Windhoek. One was sent by the Evangelical Church in Germany and one by the Rhenish Mission Society. The other missionaries of the Rhenish Mission Society served both the German and the indigenous communities until long after the Second World War.

In 1926, the German community in Namibia established their first synod as a German Lutheran Church in Namibia and on 30 May 1960 they formally constituted themselves as the Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Kirche in Südwestafrika (DELKSWA – German Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa). This development marked a high level of independence for the German Lutheran Church in Namibia. After its founding, the new

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DELKSWA entered into a contractual agreement with the foreign office of the Evangelical Church in Germany (ECG), which stipulated among other things that pastors would be provided for DELKSWA when necessary. These pastors were German citizens, seconded by ECG to DELKSWA. In 1963 DELKSWA became a member of the Lutheran World Federation, but was suspended in 1984, because it took no clear stand against the politics of apartheid in its country like the other two Lutheran churches. The suspension was lifted in 1991.

In 1992, the DELKSWA synod decided to change its name to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (German Evangelical Lutheran Church) – ELCIN (GELC). This name was chosen to express the common ground shared with the other Lutheran Churches in the country with the parenthesis referring to the origin of the church. The headquarters of ELCIN-GELC are in Windhoek and her official language is German. The church has a structure without a circuit or diocese, and is affiliated to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) and the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN). The current Bishop is Burgert Brand.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia

When the German community established its synod in 1926, the indigenous converts and their descendants remained with the Rhenish Missionary

Church, which only later came to be known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (Rhenish Missionary Church). After World War II, attention was given to the development and independence of the Rhenish Missionary Church, but ELCSWA (Rhenish Missionary Church) only became constitutionally independent from the Rhenish Missionary Church on 4 October 1957. The first elected president of the ELCSWA (Rhenish Missionary Church) was Hans Karl Diehl.

Preparations for an effective leadership takeover by indigenous people were not made until 1967 when the church celebrated its 125th anniversary at Okahandja. In that year, the church synod introduced a system of moderators, a structure lasting until 1972 with no indigenous leaders yet appointed. In 1972 the first indigenous Namibian, Dr. Lukas De Vries, succeeded president Diehl as an elected head of the church. In 1985, the church decided to have a bishop as church leader. Dr Hendrik Frederik was elected and consecrated as the first bishop on 18 May 1986. Following Namibia's independence on 21 March 1990, the church was renamed Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN). ELCRN serves all the different ethnic groups of Namibia found in the central, southern, north-western and western regions of the country.

The headquarters of ELCRN are in Windhoek, and its highest decision-making structure is the synod. The church still maintains close links with

the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Germany, which superseded the Rhenish Mission. At present the church is a member of the Council of Churches in Namibia, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and LUCSA. The current bishop of ELCRN is Ernst //Gamxamûb.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia

After realising that the northern part of Namibia was extremely large and remote, Carl Hugo Hahn from the Rhenish Mission Society

invited the Finnish Mission Society to join them in Namibia. The first Finnish missionaries arrived in Namibia in 1869 and by 1870 were established in northern Namibia (Ovamboland). The early work of the Finnish Mission Society was closely knitted with the Rhenish Mission Society, but because of different interests and approaches, especially with local politics and coming from different church traditions, these relations were eventually weakened. After World War I the work of the Rhenish Mission Society in Ovamboland was completely taken over by the Finnish Mission Society. Some Rhenish missionaries also worked





among the Oshiwambo speaking people in southern Angola. These converts migrated to the northern part of Namibia during the First World War.

The Finnish Mission Society eagerly fostered the indigenous leadership and the growth towards an independent church. In 1925, a synod was formed and a church executive appointed. Although all executive members were missionaries, provision was made for two Ovambo pastors to be appointed as soon as the church could contribute half of the salaries for pastors and evangelists.

After World War II, the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC) was registered with the government, and in 1957 a new church order and regulations were drafted and introduced. This year marked the final end of the road to an independent leadership for ELOC, today named ELCIN.

In 1961 ELOC became the first Namibian Lutheran Church to join the LWF and is presently a member of CCN, LUCSA and the WCC. In 1963, Leonard Auala became the first Black Lutheran bishop in Namibia and a key church leader during

the liberation struggle, demanding freedom for Namibia, an end to violence and voting rights for all. ELCIN serves mostly in the northern, most densely populated regions of Namibia, where more than half the Namibian population lives. Its headquarters are based at Oniipa. The official language of ELCIN, according to the Church Constitution, is “the language of the people amongst whom the church serves, and according to the need, the official language of the particular country.” Being the largest church in Namibia, ELCIN divided into two dioceses in 2003, each headed by a bishop. The bishops are the highest church leaders and the synod is the highest church body, while the church board is responsible for the transfer of pastors in the dioceses. As in the past, ELCIN is still predominantly Oshiwambo-speaking, with a small Kavango minority. The current presiding bishop is Dr Shekutaamba Nambala who also leads the eastern diocese. Dr Veikko Munyika is the bishop of the western diocese.

United Church Council of the Namibia Evangelical Lutheran Churches

First attempts to unite the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia had already started before independence, but it took many ups and downs until finally, in 2007, they came closer to becoming one unified church by establishing the United Church Council of the Namibia Evangelical Lutheran Churches (UCC-NELC). In this body ELCIN has six delegates, ELCRN five and ELCIN-GELC four. The position of chairperson is filled on a rotating basis. The current chairperson is Bishop Ernst //Gamxamûb of ELCRN. While the three churches keep their own constitutions, the United Church Council represents the Lutheran Churches in Namibia and to the world with one voice. Being already united on a spiritual level, the council now aims to make this unity visible step by step. One huge step towards one Lutheran Church in Namibia is the invitation by UCC-NELC to the international Lutheran community to host its Twelfth Assembly in Namibia and to commemorate together the 500 years of Reformation in Windhoek.

Namibia today: challenges and prospects



In his State of the Nation Address in April 2015 his Excellency Dr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, introduced the image of the Namibian House, “in which all its residents have a sense of shared identity... that will be a place of peace and refuge for all its children and... in which no Namibian will be left out.” He also introduced the concept of the Harambee Prosperity Plan, based on effective governance, economic and social development as well as international cooperation. *Harambee* is a Swahili word, meaning “pulling/working together”. While Namibians are more than willing to help build this house, they also know that there are many challenges to be overcome.

Unequal income distribution, urbanization and poverty

One of the most obvious indicators that too many people are still “left out” is the high incidence of poverty. Over the past decades the mining of uranium, diamonds and other valuable minerals have resulted in the accumulation of wealth in Namibia, which recently placed the country within the upper middle-income category of developing countries. However, this figure hides the fact that mining, as well as a relatively robust GDP growth rate in the past, have failed to create corresponding employment and raise the living standards of the majority of the population.

Namibia has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world and social and economic imbalances are present everywhere. More than one

in four households live in poverty and the wealthiest 10% control over half the total country’s income (*Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey*). While overall poverty levels could be reduced significantly through various interventions like an increased old-age state pension and different social grants, the gap between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, remains high. Both in the rural areas and in towns thousands of people live without decent housing, water and nourishment – a situation so severe that in 2015 a new Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare was created with former Lutheran Bishop Dr. Zephania Kameeta as Minister.

In addition, growing at 4-5% per year, the urban population in Namibia increased from 28% of the total population in 1991 to 43% in 2011 and has continued to increase. As a result informal settlements at the edges of towns are mushrooming, more people are living under poor conditions and more unemployment and crime is an inevitable consequence. Furthermore, people in towns, especially the youth and upcoming professionals, long for a small piece of land in town where they can build a house that they can call their own. The Government’s public housing programs are on their way, but have difficulties keeping pace. Prices of plots in towns have become very high due to unbridled land speculation. Building a simple house has become unattainable, and rents for students and small families are so high that most people cannot pay

them anymore, fall into huge debt or are forced to stay in informal settlements.

Social and health challenges

Connected with poverty and other factors Namibia also faces serious social and health issues of which only two are named here. Both factors obstruct economic development and the process of making Namibia “a place of peace and refuge for all its children”.

HIV and AIDS

Poverty and gender-based violence also contribute to Namibia having one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, which is around 13% among pregnant women. AIDS remains the leading cause of death among adults in Namibia and the sixth leading cause of death among children under the age of five. Although the prevalence rate among pregnant women has dropped during the last years, the social and economic impacts of HIV and AIDS continue to be felt.

Gender-based violence

In 2015, in his inaugural speech, President Hage Geingob specifically mentioned women. He said, “Let us respect our women and children... They are an integral component of humanity and its future, and to violate the rights of women is to violate this whole nation’s conscience.” However, in Namibia gender-based violence is sadly widespread. It is estimated that one out of five women are in an abusive relationship, and for the period 2012 to 2015 an average of 45 gender related crimes were committed in Namibia every day.

The two most common forms of gender-based violence in Namibia are domestic violence and rape. While poverty is one of the key contributors to gender-based violence, other factors such as uncontrolled alcohol consumption, the low status of women in some communities and changing gender norms, often threatening men in their traditional male roles, also have an effect. Gender-based violence is not only a

serious public health concern. It also results in a high rate of teenage pregnancy and hinders social and economic development, as well as the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.

Namibia has a Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and its Minister has repeatedly called on all Namibians to work together to make Namibia a home of peace for men and women, boys and girls. Hon. Doreen Sioka also initiated a plan of action in the fight against gender-based violence and an integrated approach has started various programs including gender sensitization and training of key service providers. In 2014 Government specifically requested the Church to hold a national day of prayer against gender-based violence in Windhoek, but its scourge continues unabatedly. In general, it is felt that the churches in the country should more actively get involved in the fight against violence. They have an enormous influence and coverage in all Namibian communities and have the potential to also overcome a culture of shame and silence, last but not least within the Church itself.



Today in Namibia more than 200,000 Namibians are living with HIV, of which an estimated 17,000 are youths between the ages of 10 and 19. Women have a much higher rate of infection than men (16.9% compared to 10.9%). An estimated 2.6% of children 15 years and younger are HIV positive. Apart from poverty and gender-based violence, also alcoholism, cultural practices such as concurrent partnerships as well as the disruption of traditional and Christian values in modern day Namibia are contributing factors.

The government in cooperation with international organizations has worked hard to fight the pandemic in Namibia. Currently, about 68% of

HIV positive people receive antiretroviral therapy. HIV testing among pregnant women is also high, with more than 95% of pregnant women knowing their status, while over 90% enroll for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission program.

The government is strongly supported in its efforts by the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) together with its member churches that react strongly to the spread of the HIV virus. Through diaconal ministry the Church provides care and support to sick people. The very first voluntary testing center was established on the CCN's premises in Katutura, Windhoek. Today the center has multiplied throughout the country. Churches

continue to provide home-based care with trained volunteers caring for and supporting sick people in the villages and counseling infected people. The HIV-AIDS Center of the ELCRN in Rehoboth is a good example. At the same time both government and the churches often look on helplessly as a growing number of so called faith healers pretend to cure HIV and AIDS through prayer, thereby undermining government and church efforts and putting the lives of their followers in danger.

The burning land question

In Namibia land was and is a very emotional issue and the issue of just land redistribution hits the newspaper headlines almost daily. During the liberation struggle land increasingly became an emotionally charged symbol, and the struggle for independence was often equated with the struggle for land. After independence expectations were therefore high that black Namibians would not only get their land back as a whole but also that the

majority of individual Namibians would get a piece of the land cake to reward them for their long years of struggle while access to land was denied to them by previous regimes. However, land reform, mainly meaning that land in the hand held by white farmers would be redistributed to black farmers through various land reform instruments, could only to a very small extent meet these expectations. Even if all white farmers sold their farms and every farm was made available for resettlement, not more than 30,000 families could be resettled in the long run. This is a very small number compared to the more than 240,000 registered applications for land that arrived at the Ministry of Lands soon after independence. Therefore, when independence came, it led to huge disappointment and also resulted in an unhealthy competition for land, accompanied by favoritism and corruption in several cases. It also led to tension between those who wished to acquire land for a home and those who sought food security for the country.





Wounds of the past

Colonial dispossession also created deep wounds especially among the Nama and Herero people, who had lost large parts of their ancestral land during German colonialism. However, at the 1991 land conference, attended by 500 participants from all over the country, it was decided to draw a line under the past. Participants felt united by their common history of oppression, colonialism and apartheid and by the wish to jointly build a new and just state. This included white landowners, who would enjoy the protection of their property rights as provided in the Namibian Constitution and who would only in exceptional cases be expropriated. Their farms would therefore be purchased on the basis of the “willing buyer-willing seller”. However, this meant the wounds of the past with respect to colonial land dispossession would not be addressed, a situation which has recently caused increasing civil unrest among the affected communities.

Furthermore, new forms of land conflict arose. To date, almost half of all Namibians live on communal land that belongs to the state, which means that they may use it but do not own it. Now increasingly, traditional leaders are accused of allocating large tracts of land to influential business people or politicians, often evicting people who lived

on the land before, despite legislation prohibiting this. Poor people who depend on the land for their livelihood are displaced, helplessly looking on while the powerful look away.

Since its 2011 synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) has supported landless people’s movements. These groups have paid numerous visits to the regions affected by colonial dispossession to hear about the people’s current situation with respect to resettlement and land reform, and their findings demonstrated that in some regions the land issue has not become less but even more emotional than ever before. To alleviate the situation, in 2016 the government accelerated the land reform process in the form of a highly increased budget for the purchase of land for resettlement, and in the same year the Minister of Land Reform announced a government decision to convene a second National Land Conference this September.

The youth as future builders of the House

In Namibia young people who were born after independence in 1990 are fondly called “born frees”, a generation that was never exposed to the

oppression of apartheid. The hope was and is great that this generation would bring the country to a new level of prosperity, cooperation and future-orientated thinking. In his Inaugural Address on 21 March 2015, President Hage Geingob stated, “I invite the youth of this country to bring their ingenuity, their innovation and idealism to contribute building a solid Namibian House.”

However, although the Government has continued to spend an extremely high portion of its annual budget on the education sector year by year, it has not yet managed to improve the quality of education in such a way that it has prepared young people adequately for the job market. Although access to education has improved since

independence, still many young people leave school either without any suitable qualifications or basic skills for the job market, or even with certificates that do not qualify them for employment in most professional sectors. This has resulted in the high level of poverty among the youth, as well as in frustration, hopelessness and crime. One of Namibia’s most important challenges is therefore for the Government to improve its education system and for the churches to accelerate their youth programs. They need to cater for Namibia’s market needs as well as find new ways to include the Namibian youth as full, productive and responsible participants in society and the economy; only then can they accept the President’s invitation to help build the all-inclusive Namibian House.

Reconciliation between Germany and people affected by the 1904-1908 genocide

Colonial land dispossession is also still part of Namibia’s foreign relations with Germany. In 2015, Germany finally acknowledged that the colonial war in Namibia from 1904 to 1908 was a war crime and genocide. This started a process of bilateral negotiations between the Namibian and German governments about the steps to be followed, such as official acknowledgment, apology and some form of reparation. These negotiations are complicated and contested. In Namibia, members of the affected communities have demanded to be more directly included at a high level under the slogan “not about us without us”.

This January, an ecumenical consultation on genocide took place with representatives of churches from Namibia and Germany. They convened to listen intensively to diverse experiences and views “with the hope to foster the process of mutual understanding, healing and uniting our communities ... realizing that the discussion of this matter by the Church is long overdue.” The churches strive to continue mutual consultations. They emphasize that it is now the time their generation took the responsibility to finally “overcome and recover from the trauma and guilt which was caused by the events from 1904-1908... as many Namibian descendants still carry this traumatic experience in their soul until today.”

Nation building and prospects for the future

After 27 years of independence Namibia remains a peaceful country with a stable government. It takes its rightful place on the continent of Africa, a continent that envisions, according to President Hage Geingob, “an Africa managing its own affairs and letting the world know that we are a continent keen to break away from past legacies and move towards an era of peace, stability and democratic rule. This is the new Africa of electoral democracy.”

The challenge remains to bring economic democracy to the people. To achieve this, Namibia needs to become a united nation and build trust among its citizens – between old and young, between the different races and tribal communities, and between the people, the government, the business world and last but not least the churches. One of the major advantages of the church in Namibia is that almost all Namibia’s citizens are church members. They occupy positions in government and business and in all parts of public and private life.

“As Namibia is predominantly Lutheran, the upcoming Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to be hosted in Namibia in 2017 will encourage Namibian Lutherans to follow closer what Lutheranism means,” says Bishop Nambala of the ELCIN. And Prof Klaus Nürnberger writes in the 2017 Local Assembly Planning Committee

publication *Here We Stand*: “God’s creative power is ever active and ever motivated by God’s redeeming love. And God’s initiative arouses, empowers and directs our initiatives...Christians never lose hope and become fatalistic; they never fold their hands and become despondent; they are never afraid to be different from the world and stand up for the truth. Luther said that the world may be heading for ruin and he cannot prevent it from doing so, but at least he will boldly tell those who have ears to hear what they are doing and challenge them to move with Christ in the opposite direction.”

Nothing but such a new and powerful motivation could be more important in our times, absolutely nothing! Whether one initiates a development program in one’s local congregation, or serves an NGO, or sits in the board room of an enterprise, or is a member of a trade union, or joins a political party, or becomes a teacher, or gives lectures on economics at the university – the main thing is that one pulls one’s weight, not on the strength of one’s own feeble resources, but with the gifts and the empowerment given by God.”



