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The President

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**Greetings from Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa**  
**President of the Lutheran World Federation and**  
**Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria**  
**To Pope Francis**  
**Rome, 7 December 2017**

Your Holiness,

I am grateful to be able to greet you as President of The Lutheran World Federation. I am accompanied today by Vice – Presidents representing the seven regions of the global Lutheran communion.

I come from Nigeria, the northeastern state of Adamawa. We are grateful to God for the witness of the church in Nigeria that continues to grow spiritually and keep the light of Christ alive. But my region is also faced by challenges to peace that continue to bear the brunt of the Islamic extremist group known as Boko Haram. As President of the Lutheran World Federation and head of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, I am firmly committed to build bridges and promote peaceful coexistence and justice among the people. I am sincerely grateful for our working relationship with the Catholic Diocese of Yola under the leadership of Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza who was recently elected chairperson of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Adamawa State.

Our world is in turmoil. In this specific juncture of history, I join your call for the church to extend pastoral support and compassionate service to the broken and the marginalized. Thus we will follow the one who “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

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Your Holiness, I am deeply grateful for your support toward us Lutherans in approaching the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary with a spirit of ecumenical accountability. Your presence and participation in the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund was a precious gift for us. It marked the significant turning point at which Catholics and Lutherans are today: the conflicts of the past no longer determine our relationship, but unity as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we are no longer enemies, but sisters and brothers.

We hear encouraging stories from all over the world about joint prayer services, and new ways of witnessing together, which followed last year's Joint Commemoration. We praise God for all these gifts!

In Lund we committed ourselves to witness to the gospel together. In Malmö, we signed the Letter of Intent between the Lutheran World Federation – World Service, and Caritas Internationalis, which reminds us that the unity of the Body of Christ reaches its deepest expression when it transforms us to live out the double commandment of love (Matthew 22:34-40).

We rejoice over the fact that we are already working together, for instance in Colombia, where we are serving those holding fast to an elusive peace. We are confident that this joint service will continue to grow in future. It is God who has brought us to this point.

Many people, many of our local communities, and many inter-confessional families in our churches have been reading and celebrating the joint commitments we made in Lund and Malmö as new signs of hope.

This hope is particularly tangible among those who long for a shared Eucharist but still gather around separate tables. Families who share everything in their lives but cannot share the bread and wine remind us in particularly painful ways of this open wound. It reflects so much of our own brokenness rather than the healing that is offered to us in His bruises (Isaiah 53:5).

Your Holiness, our people have the intuition to be one and are thus responding to God's will. Our further ecumenical engagement needs to be accountable to both God's call and the longing of our people for unity. Our joint theological dialogue will be further enriched by such "*pastoral ecumenism*." It is informed by our shared vocation to walk with our people, listen to their life stories and prayerfully discern God's call to the Church, sharing the gifts of God to nurture the people of God. In that context, the Eucharist is not only a goal of our shared journey but the crux of our relationship, and a provision for the faith journey, particularly for our inter-confessional families.

When signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999, “we held out our hands to each other as churches and we do not wish to let go ever again...” (Walter Cardinal Kasper). Now, as we have jointly marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, I would like to add: We have begun our irreversible journey from conflict to communion and we do not wish to let it cease ever again.