



THE
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FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

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“... If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?” Matthew 18: 12

5 January 2016

2016 New Year Message from the LWF General Secretary

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Every single one counts. That was the lesson Jesus offered to his disciples with the parable of the lost sheep. Under the reign of God, no life should be disregarded, ignored, discarded or left behind. Those who understand what God desires for this world know that each life is unique, irreplaceable. And, more to the point, each life is needed; each has a place in God's world. The fullness of life of the many would be shallow and empty if it were enjoyed at the cost of even one little one who was lost, left behind, given up on, or excluded. Every single one counts under God's reign.

“Leave no one behind” was the theme under which ecumenical organizations worked to hold to account world political leaders negotiating a climate change agreement at the Conference of Parties (COP 21) in Paris from late November into December 2015. It was inspired by the parable of the lost sheep - and the entire ministry of Jesus. What the churches of Jesus Christ from around the world emphasized in their ministry of accompaniment and advocacy in Paris was that any development paradigm that operates with the logics and practices of exclusion isn't viable because it leaves the poor behind. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) joined other churches and faith communities in stressing that a climate agreement that doesn't include the most vulnerable misses the point because it threatens the very survival of human beings, denying therefore, future generations a basis for their lives.

“Leave no one behind” continues to be the LWF’s reminder to governments and societies shutting down their borders and building fences overnight to keep refugees out of their territories. What about those behind the fence, outside the fortified and secured walls of protection? Has it already been decided that they can be left behind? Can there be life worthy of being called life for the ninety-nine if there is no life for the one?

Many of the challenges faced by the human family and particular societies within that family over the past year mirrored a critical struggle over the value of togetherness or solidarity. We are living at a time when crucial decisions are being taken around the relationships between countries and among communities. We stand at a precipice: will it be solidarity or merciless competition that prevails?

“Not for sale” continues to be one of the important refrains—and sub-themes—that informs our journey toward the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. There is a prophetic affirmation in that refrain, a reminder that not everything should be under the rule of the marketplace, not everything should be subject to competition and contest, payment and transactions. “Not for sale” is also a prophetic reminder that there have to be spaces where generosity and grace will have precedence. Without solidarity, life becomes miserable.

So, as we embark on this New Year, 2016, I invite LWF member churches to:

- Be steadfast and bold in the proclamation of grace as a gift of God. Such a proclamation is in itself an amazing asset in a world otherwise succumbing to the dynamics of merciless competition.
- Remain passionate servants of the one who is left behind, hence to sustain and further their diaconal ministries among the poor and vulnerable.
- Continue drawing from the vision of God’s Kingdom, hence approaching life and the neighbor with a view to include, never to exclude
- Continue journeying together with sister churches in our Lutheran communion, accompanying each other in a spirit of solidarity. May these relationships of mutuality and solidarity nurture them for bolder witness and for intensified service, thus upholding in words and deeds what we have learned from the one we follow: leave no one behind!

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr Martin Junge

General Secretary

The Lutheran World Federation