



THE
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Office of the
General Secretary

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2017 New Year Message from the LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26)

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

What a Bible verse and what an announcement with which to begin the year of the 500th anniversary of Reformation: “I will give...” God announces that a new heart and a new spirit will be given to us. Not because we have earned or merited them, but because God offers them to us out of grace and compassion, so that we can live.

By grace alone: this was the biblical message that Luther rediscovered and placed at the center of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Until today, this powerful and dynamic message continues to nurture the life and witness of individuals and churches around the world.

As we approach the anniversary of the Reformation I would like to invite the LWF member churches to continue upholding the following principles:

- Reformation is a global citizen: the LWF with its 145 member churches in 98 countries around the world is an expression of this global nature of Lutheran reformation. The member churches are invited to connect with this global dimension that enriches and deepens their own witness;
- Ecumenical accountability: the 500th anniversary of the Reformation constitutes a unique opportunity to harvest from the many important ecumenical processes and achievements of the last decades. The Mennonite Action, the recent Joint Commemoration of the Reformation with Catholics, the many agreements within the Protestant family... these are some of the powerful stories of hope to be told in 2017.
- The Reformation is ongoing: sometimes churches deal with their history, as if they didn't have any future. As we commemorate the anniversary of the Reformation we should seize the opportunity to discern God's call into mission in today's world.



LWF TWELFTH ASSEMBLY
WINDHOEK – NAMIBIA
10–17 MAY 2017

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Bearing these three commitments in mind I would like to invite the LWF member churches to be steadfast and to remain focused on the message of salvation by grace through faith alone. I am convinced that a world that ceases to hear the message of grace and compassion ends up becoming graceless and ruthless. Hearts that are meant to be of flesh and therefore profoundly human, risk turning into stone and hence become inhuman.

Through their proclamation, service and public advocacy, churches play a vital role in safeguarding a space for compassion, solidarity and justice in our world. By pointing to Christ, God's gift of compassion to a world struggling with conflict and alienation, the churches become witnesses to God's transforming power.

The 500th anniversary of Reformation is both an inspiration and the ideal context within which to offer this witness that is required today. I pray that God's Spirit be with each of the LWF member churches in this special year with its specific call to witness.