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of Churches

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REPORT OF THE LWF GENERAL SECRETARY

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Introduction

- 1) It is with great anticipation that we in the Communion Office have been preparing for the second full meeting of this Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). We look forward to an intense week of prayerful discernment, discussions and decisions. We are always grateful for your availability and commitment to serve as members of the highest governing body of the LWF between Assemblies.

The times we are living in

- 2) We are living in challenging times. We could speak of many examples to substantiate this statement. Here, I will mention just a few elements as they relate to our life as a communion of churches:
 - Withdrawal, fragmentation, insecurity and encapsulating identities, dismissal of multilateral structures and instruments to settle conflicts.
 - Contempt for international order and rules, including the overall frameworks of international law and human rights.
 - Shrinking space for civil society, including churches. Where they find themselves in minority situation, churches are often subject to discrimination and violence.
 - Prospects of continuing decreases in church membership, with many implications for both the current outlook of churches and their long-term sustainability.

- A shift to populism, xenophobia and fundamentalism, which increasingly washes away the affirmation of freedom – a trend present also among churches. Theological foundations and assumptions hitherto common to us are now under pressure.
 - Young people are pushing decision makers to come to grips with climate change and the fact that the loss of biodiversity is an imminent existential threat to the planet. We have reached a state of emergency, scientists say, but the required sense of urgency to respond does not seem to be forthcoming.
- 3) As I attempt to show in this report, the Lutheran communion is addressing these developments through reflection, programs and action. Our presence and voice as a global communion offers a witness of prophetic defiance, one that speaks about God's compassionate and liberating presence in our world.

The LWF Strategy is giving direction

- 4) "With passion for the church and for the world – LWF Strategy 2019-2024" has been useful for our daily work and our processes, which are dedicated to bringing change to a 21st century world facing such difficult challenges.
- 5) My report aligns itself with these strategic priorities. While offering some highlights from our work, past and future, I won't repeat what you read in the *Annual Report (Annex 1)*, the *Implementation Report of the LWF Strategic Priority Areas for 2018 (Exhibit 10.1)*, nor will I go into details of the *Program Budget Overview 2020 (Exhibit 14.1)*.
- 6) I acknowledge, of course, that looking back at the year 2018 means focusing on a different strategic period with a different set of priorities.

Supporting churches' presence and vibrant witness in the world (Priority 1)

- 7) The two strategic priorities that guide our work are deeply rooted in our theological and spiritual foundation of "living and working together as a communion". We *do*, what we do, because of who we *are* by God's grace and action. This foundational principle shapes both the identity and the action of the LWF as a communion of churches.

Listening to each other as we explain who we are

- 8) This year we will launch the program to articulate our Lutheran identity in a global and contemporary perspective. Hosted by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, a global consultation will involve 55 representatives from 41 LWF member churches, carefully chosen on the basis of applications received. The guiding question for the consultation will be: How do LWF member churches articulate their Lutheran identity while witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their contexts?

- 9) This consultation responds to a strong impulse from the Twelfth Assembly. It keeps us working together on theological questions, which is indispensable for our journey as a communion. We look at this consultation as part of a process that will lay rich theological ground for the Thirteenth Assembly in 2023 (Exhibits 16 and 16.1). We are grateful for all support received to start implementing this important process.

The LWF as a system of knowledges, practices and resources

- 10) During the past year, LWF staff have spent time with a significant number of our 148 member churches, providing accompaniment, implementing programs alongside them, living out our communion relationships in tangible ways. We are thankful for the vice-presidents and the president, who, together with Council members, have helped to strengthen our presence in the regions.
- 11) However, several member churches have still not received visits during the past few years. This makes it difficult for them to connect and feel part of the LWF. This, in turn, undermines our discourse and self-understanding of being a global communion of churches grounded in the values of solidarity and mutuality. However, with regional secretaries now focused on communion relations as their primary task, we will be more intentional in our outreach as we seek to engage with as many member churches as possible.
- 12) Even then, the Communion Office's staff will not likely be able to be with all member churches on a regular basis. However, the LWF is more than what the Communion Office does. It is a living system, with incredible resources, relationships and processes, that are local, bilateral and regional, and which contribute to nurturing communion relations.
- 13) I want to propose that we intentionally live into this vision that understands the LWF as a system of resources. Such vision will tap into the enormous wealth in the communion, at times under-utilized, at times disconnected. It will, in addition, invite us to redefine the Communion Office's role as one with a focus on coordination and networking, and only directly implementing where it adds unique value.
- 14) We intend to start conceptualizing this vision, developing the theological framework for it, but also reflecting on practical aspects - how and when to present such bilateral actions as co-sponsored or done in partnership with the LWF.

Communion building - about processes and expectations

- 15) For the years that are ahead of us, with a governance structure able to focus on communion relations and to guide our work, we have a great opportunity to continue our conversation about our shared journey as a communion of churches.
- 16) I recognize the need for two specific discussions. On the one hand, is the question of the LWF's regional expressions and their interaction with the global process of the LWF, including the Council. It is actually a bit strange. The Council receives some reports from LWF national committees, but there is no mechanism to receive and learn from that regional richness at the global level. Much progress has been made in the last 10 to 15 years to connect Council members to their regional platforms. However, where do they bring their reflections and input? How does the Council help

reflect and guide on deepening communion relations? I believe that an intentional approach to connect the regional with the global will further strengthen our communion. This, however, means finding time for such a discussion on the Council's agenda.

I take the opportunity to congratulate the Latin America/Caribbean and North America regions for their decision to merge into one region, the Americas.

- 17) On the other hand, from my travel and discussions with church leaders, I see the need to begin discussing the expectations LWF member churches may (or should!) have. It is probably more conducive to talk about "expectations" than "autonomy and accountability". Lutheran ecclesiology is complex, with local, national and global levels to consider. Reaching more clarity on what to *expect* from each other will be a big step forward for churches living into the call of communion.

Coherence around leadership formation and institutional capacity development

- 18) The LWF has a strong record of providing leadership training programs and capacity development, which have now been consolidated into *one* program. It includes: scholarship support; the annual retreat of newly elected leaders; annual seminars for lay and ordained leaders in the LWF Centre in Wittenberg; and planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) training for project holders.
- 19) We will have to invest in staffing this program. I believe that once constituted, this hub will support the coherence, synergies and impact of our broad range of leadership training. In addition, it will be much easier to seek partnerships in these fields of action, thereby expanding significantly the depth and the reach of the communion's engagement in this area.
- 20) I'm grateful that the Network of Theological Education and Formation (TEF) has been set up. Now we can start learning from each other, sharing resources, so that Lutheran churches are able to sustain their historic commitment to have well trained leaders, who are biblically grounded and theologically equipped to support the people of God as they participate in God's mission. Here too, we are implementing what the Assembly wanted to see in place. I express my appreciation to the advisory group that has helped to shape this commitment.

Becoming as holistic as we understand mission to be

- 21) While developing new programs under this priority, we identified a challenge that needs to be addressed. We speak of mission being holistic, encompassing proclamation, *diakonia* and advocacy. Yet, our program structure is not fully reflective of that holistic approach. There are many reasons for this. None of them should prevent us, however, from moving beyond that reality. We will be engaging in discussions to find ways of supporting proclamation, evangelism, and the overall mission engagement of member churches. We want to come up with proposals for this approach in the near future.
- 22) I am grateful for the positive reception by the LWF Project Committee of our proposed two-pronged approach to projects. The two approaches contribute to the overarching goal of deepened

communion relations. First, the revitalized Communion Solidarity Fund would seek to respond to *needs* as they are experienced locally. Second, this would enable *joint work* on the themes the communion has identified as priorities. We believe this keeps an important balance between the Communion Office's responsiveness to member churches and its strategic role to coordinate action regarding themes that the LWF Assembly identified as important.

Ensure promotion of gender justice at every level

- 23) One of these themes is gender justice. In a world that seems to be in a mood to reverse achievements of women and gains made on gender justice overall, we shall be prophetic and move forward as we work together on gender justice. We have a long record on which to build.
- 24) There is no future in the past – that was the basic message for the people of God as they followed God's call out of Egypt and into freedom. Our hope shall not focus on the past and thereby idealize slavery, but will dwell on the future, will look to embrace God's liberating grace that encompasses all human beings. Hope, as a gift of faith, is the antidote to paralyzing nostalgia.
- 25) Responding to the Assembly's resolution, I am very glad to see us undertaking steps to provide platforms and process to begin to work on the unpostponable: bringing men into the conversation and the transformation towards gender justice. A global gathering on transformative masculinities will be organized, to explore the factors linking gender roles, education around masculinities and overcoming sexual and gender-based violence (GBV).

Mobilize, empower and include - taking LWF youth work a step further

- 26) The Global Young Reformers Network (GYRN) 2.0 is in place. Some 140 young people, nominated by their churches, participate in this new generation of young leaders.
- 27) Last year, I mentioned that no church, particularly those concerned with declining membership, should undertake any visioning process without including youth. When I say this, many church leaders nod and agree. However, the complexity of the next step often overwhelms them. What to do? Where to start?
- 28) I see the LWF Youth desk delivering on this vital aspect of the sustainability of the church. This is why we have connected it to the program for Leadership Formation and Institutional Capacity Development. *Mobilize, empower and include* are the key words describing the scope of LWF's work with young people. We intend to work with both youth and their churches to create the knowledge, tools and practices to support the inclusion and participation of youth.
- 29) The LWF has these ready-made resources and knowledge to offer to the revival of the church, an issue so vividly discussed during our last Assembly.

And there will be still the church: coping with dramatic changes

- 30) Reflecting on my visits to member churches and discussions with their leaders, I see several churches facing dramatic change, almost having to re-invent the way they witness. They are faced

with substantial questions, such as how to train their leaders, reach out, make their message intelligible, define their place in the social fabric of their respective societies. In some contexts, being in the church is no longer the cultural norm. In other contexts, it has never been, which is a “know-how” that could be an important resource today.

- 31) In the face of these dramatic changes, and amidst all the anxiety they may stir up, it is important to take the point of departure from those who still gather to live out their Baptism, and who will call their space and their journeys of faith with others “the church”. And it will still be the church, and the church will still be, by God’s grace. There is no church “dying”. The church is changing. Or must change. If there are things coming to an end, it is because there are new things about to begin.
- 32) What is the new way we are looking for? In my travels and discussions with member churches, I see a lot going on. There are encouraging practices being tested, models being discussed. Churches are thinking outside the box to grasp what God is doing new in the church. I see the LWF’s role as helping to better connect the many initiatives, ideas, and experiences, local and regional, that are already in place. There is a big opportunity for cross-fertilization and learning in the communion across regions.
- 33) In my travels and visits, I see a growing tendency towards a *pastor-centrism* and a *clericalization*, two separate manifestations, which seem, however, to be enhancing each other. The Lutheran church is one that understands the priesthood of all believers as a fundamental theological principle. Yet, we seem to be burying that talent, instead of using it (Mt. 25: 14-30). For various reasons (sustainability of the church and ownership, growth, conflicts, organizational checks and balances), I sense that we should take up discussions about the ordained ministry in the Lutheran church, its place, its function, and how to educate and train towards that important office. The topic, maybe framed by the theology of Baptism, is of decisive importance. I would love to receive your input on this.

The vitality of ecumenical relations

- 34) At this Council meeting, you will act on the report on *Baptism and Growth in Communion* of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (Exhibit 10, Annex 2). At the same time, you are being asked to appoint the Lutheran members of a new commission, which will take up the demanding topic of Church, Ministry and Eucharist (Exhibit 8.3).
- 35) Dialogues with other communions continue. The process with Anglicans has been slightly delayed, while the new dialogue with the Orthodox church will hold a preparatory meeting later this year. The meeting with Pentecostals is scheduled to take place in September.
- 36) There is one new development to mention - the intended launch of an official dialogue of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU). This is a similar development to the one launched in March 2019 involving the five signatories to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), about which we have widely communicated. In both cases, it seems that our bilateral ecumenical processes are taking steps to now include multilateral dimensions as well.

- 37) I don't believe it is one method over the other, but definitely we have to figure out what the one means in view of the other. Although with questions, the LWF is open to these new developments, not defensive, seeking to discern together how this amazing dynamism adds vitality to the quest for unity.
- 38) At the Council meeting, you will receive a joint publication of the five signatory communions, which includes the original JDDJ, the statements from the other three communions and the Notre Dame Statement from March 2019. This joint publication is a good indication that we are taking concrete steps as we move together.

Here we journey - concrete steps towards the 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms

- 39) Looking further ahead, the LWF and the PCPCU have initiated preparatory processes regarding the 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms in 2021. The Diet of Worms holds a particular place in our memories because of Martin Luther's famous words from those negotiations - "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise" - and his ensuing excommunication. For Roman Catholics, Luther's likening the pope to the anti-Christ is fixed in their minds. The 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms, therefore, comes with painful memories that bring clouds over our improving relationships.
- 40) Together, the LWF and the PCPCU have commissioned a study that will shed light on the historic context of the events of the 16th century and trace the ensuing developments since then. The year 2021, therefore, shall become an opportunity for us to remember "Here I stand" while considering a next step - "Here we journey" – that bears in mind our ecumenical relations. I shall be able to share concrete plans for 2021 at the next Council meeting in 2020.

Strengthening interfaith relations

- 41) The long vacancy in the Communion Office's position holding responsibility over this area has slowed us down on this commitment, which is crucial for most of our member churches. We are grateful that we eventually succeeded in hiring a theologian. It is particularly important that he comes from Asia, a region that has a lot to share on this topic.
- 42) The LWF was invited to become a member of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion. This platform is significant and strategic because it helps guide the UN's engagement with Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), an area where the LWF has taken a strong role, given its identity and scope of work. It brings us into contact with the high level leadership of different FBOs, fostering dialogue and cooperation.
- 43) No faith community has the monopoly over violence, Pope Francis has said. No faith community is free of the risk of perpetrating it, I would add. Just think of our process around *From Conflict to Communion* and the history of abhorrent violence that makes it so necessary and urgent.
- 44) Following the despicable massacres of Muslims worshipping in New Zealand, and Christians in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, the LWF President Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa and I jointly rejected

any form of profiling, stigmatization or stereotyping of individuals or communities because of their religion or belief. We have, in addition, called for the protection of all places of worship, including churches, which are increasingly the target of violence in different parts of the world.

- 45) We want to continue standing in solidarity with those worshipping communities, wherever this occurs, with our message of life and hope. There is no other message given to us. Hence, we shall resist letting hatred and violence have the last word. Instead, we will continue listening to God's defining word, spoken on Easter Sunday. We have good reasons to remain steadfast and uphold that message.

Promoting human dignity, justice and peace (Priority 2)

- 46) The story of the transfiguration of Christ (Mt 17) has become very important to me. Blessed by the encounter with the *transfigured* Lord on the top of the mountain, the disciples descend with their Lord to the plains, where they meet and heal those with their faces *disfigured*.
- 47) This movement of the disciples shows us that communion relationships are not an end in themselves. Their ultimate purpose is to transform and call us to vibrant witness and loving service in the world. The church, including global church organizations like the LWF, has its roots in God's eternal movement towards the world, seeking first the lost, the broken, the excluded and the forgotten.

The communion's ministry of justice and compassion – LWF World Service

- 48) The number of refugees and internally displaced people globally continues to rise, reaching 68 million in 2018. Simultaneously, the resources to meet their needs are decreasing. The LWF World Service ministries today reach around three million people.
- 49) World Service continues to engage in humanitarian work, responding in all of its Country Programs. There have been a number of contexts that have called for new or increased responses. World Service increased its work in Colombia to assist Venezuelan refugees; expanded engagements in Cameroon to respond to the Congolese and South Sudanese refugee crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya; and assisted the former LWF program RDRS Bangladesh's response to the massive influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh.
- 50) In Mozambique, we collaborated with the local church to respond to the severe flooding following cyclones Idai and Kenneth. Ongoing humanitarian response in Angola, Myanmar, Iraq, Jordan, Djibouti, Somalia and Chad continued. Plans for engaging in Syria were developed and first visits to the country made to explore possible collaboration with the churches.
- 51) World Service programs continue to work in all phases of the development cycle – from emergencies to recovery to long-term development - depending on the situation in a given country. Specific action to support the development of sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities is a core feature of all programs. For example, in Cameroon, improved crop production methods, animal rearing, fishing, vocational training, and income-generating activities were the backbone of LWF's livelihood related

activities. In Iraq, livelihood initiatives, which included vocational training for young men and women, provided pathways for a better future. Recently, the first class of 377 vocational trainees graduated, of whom almost half were women.

- 52) Despite very high levels of insecurity, we have worked with UNICEF to address severe cases of malnutrition in troubled areas of the DRC, while also providing psychosocial support and promoting gender equality. In Colombia, where human rights are abused at many levels, we work with courageous local partners to build more resilient communities with a special focus on gender and climate justice.
- 53) Funding perspectives for the humanitarian sector remain challenging. The decision of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) in late 2018 to end access to its humanitarian funds for all Swiss non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has necessitated the exploration of alternative funding for World Service, including a stronger focus on Swiss funding. Early signs of potential in this area are very encouraging and we will continue our efforts to expand on those first successful attempts. We will also continue to diversify funding sources by targeting new government resources and relevant foundations. Despite the challenges, the 2018 audit shows a balanced result, albeit with a turnover reduced from 2017, after 11 years of steady growth.

Shrinking space for civil society - it's getting worse

- 54) The space for civil society is shrinking. There are increasing challenges in accessing affected communities. In addition, in 2018 we experienced increased security concerns. Many host governments are placing new and stringent demands on international NGOs (INGOs) and NGOs, but also on churches who are working to serve the most vulnerable populations. Often, this results in increased costs and added compliance requirements.
- 55) Human rights defenders, particularly those advocating for environmental issues, are under severe threat. There has been a notable move to frustrate human rights work on the part of governments. In Colombia, for instance, in the first four months of the current year 51 rights defenders have been killed.
- 56) While such instances are increasing in the global South, destabilizing blows are happening in the global North, with attacks targeting the very foundations of international law and multilateral structures. Those supporting refugees, for instance, are today criminalized, facing heavy fines if not imprisonment. As a result, we seem to be heading towards times of uncontrolled Darwinism: political, economic, military and social. What we see is bullying, not cooperation. People and their rights, particularly minorities, are the first victims of this movement.
- 57) Donor requirements are proliferating, with new compliance demands being introduced by almost all actors, especially relating to safeguarding and counter-terrorist legislation. Many of the requirements are donor-specific, adding to serious challenges for NGOs to meet compliance requirements regarding capacity and resource allocation.

- 58) This development has been identified as a crucial area for advocacy in the coming years. The declared goal of the donor community to support local civil society is being fundamentally contradicted by increasing and often conflicting demands, which suffocate rather than empower local actors. Reinvigorating the stalled Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action process to harmonize donor requirements would mark a big step forward.

Member churches making a difference to people and communities through Diakonia

- 59) The LWF has a good record of equipping and resourcing churches for diaconal action. In a time in which care and concern for neighbors is vanishing, it is crucial that churches continue God's story of love for humankind - revealed in Jesus Christ - by serving the broken and disenfranchised on the margins of our communities.
- 60) Joining in the Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church's 75th anniversary celebrations, it became very clear to me that its acceptance as a very small religious minority is intimately connected to its strong identity as a diaconal church. It is not there to *conquer* anybody, but to *serve* everybody. In a context of increasing religious tensions because of fundamentalisms on all sides, this missiological self-understanding is making a significant difference - to the people, to the communities, and to the church.
- 61) Just as we are integrating our leadership formation and institutional capacity development programs, we are linking our various programs and components related to *diakonia* to strengthen cohesion and impact. Here we will also continue developing the program Waking the Giant to equip LWF member churches to better participate in the promotion and implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Growing cooperation between World Service and the churches

- 62) I am particularly encouraged to see that in-house cooperation has increased significantly between the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) and World Service. As a case in point, they have joined hands to respond to the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Angola to build up its diaconal capacity. It is a good model, and it is going well. There are several other cases, which show that we are moving in the right direction.
- 63) However, we still have contexts where this is not yet satisfactorily working. At next year's Council meeting, we plan to present a document that describes the LWF's diaconal vocation as one both grounded in and shaping its theological identity. The document will also explain why the LWF has an operational arm, and how it relates to member churches where applicable; and it will detail what each side should expect from the other. Such a document would support both our World Service colleagues and our member churches in telling the story of World Service, and in addressing issues as they arise.
- 64) LWF projects provide important support for churches and their diaconal initiatives. They equip them to serve in their contexts. They will continue playing this important role in the LWF. In addition to

efforts to reposition the Communion Solidarity Fund, we firmly believe that the four thematic areas in the new hub “Action for Justice” offer added value to our traditional and potential new funding partners. The themes are Human Rights, Gender Justice, Climate Justice, and Interfaith and Peace. We will work towards securing funding that would allow us to issue program-related calls for applications around these four themes.

It’s as real as the people suffering from it: the climate crisis

- 65) I am grateful for youth calling upon us to wake up to the reality of climate change, or should we rather say, the climate crisis. It is a somewhat uncomfortable call, but a necessary one. I wish so much they wouldn’t have to skip school for their Friday demonstrations. I know, however, that they will go back, once they see that we have woken up. It’s up to us to bring them back to school.
- 66) There are many positive things happening on the climate justice front already. I was very encouraged to see Bishop Dr Fredrick Onael Shoo, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, always asking to plant trees when visiting communities and congregations. He has succeeded in connecting his office and his leadership with the issue of ecological justice. What he is planting in the hearts and minds of his people can’t be overrated. He is also offering church leaders globally an act of leadership worthy of imitation.
- 67) The Communion Office is now ready to support LWF member churches to engage in fighting climate change, something they urged at the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek in 2017. We have hired staff for a new position - Action for Justice. We are safeguarding time for theological work in the new Department of Theology, Mission and Justice, so that our action is rooted in theological reflection. I will be inviting our related agencies to be in partnership with this work, so that together we can set up a structure to support projects of LWF member churches that want to play their part in fighting climate change.

Advocating and promoting human rights – a more coherent approach

- 68) The hub in the structure of the Communion Office’s Action for Justice initiative is a significant step forward. It brings together what we have and what we are good at: local roots, ongoing quality programs, sound theological reflection and relevant access to influence global processes. Our voice will be more credible, more unique, and will therefore add more value to our collaborative efforts.
- 69) As a fundamental strategic choice, we want to continue upholding the legitimacy and necessity of multilateral structures, platforms and instruments expressed through the UN. This is what we can do, and what we should do in the face of the “Darwinism” I identified above.
- 70) This is why we are directing our efforts towards the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) system, to which UN member states subject themselves regularly. During the last year, we supported local voices so they could be heard in countries such as Nigeria, the DRC, Angola, Colombia, Nepal and Myanmar. It has worked well. In several cases, we didn’t end up with a local-to-global framework, but we were able to bring the global back to the local. Thus, we supported structures and policies where people need to see the change happening for the full enjoyment of justice and their rights.

- 71) Our ecumenical process to equip human rights defenders to be able to promote women's rights has been particularly important. In the last years, we have equipped 129 defenders, both male and female, to use the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and other UN instruments to promote justice for their communities. You will receive a publication during the Council meeting that compiles relevant lessons learned during these last few years.

Partnerships

- 72) The sustainability of any organization depends on its ability to engage in partnerships. Stand-alone organizations and entities, history reminds us, rarely prevail.
- 73) The LWF is blessed with a strong network of partners, both within and outside the communion. The Strategy gives a good overview of the breadth of that network. In the days ahead, we will seek to become more intentional in nurturing and deepening those partnerships. This is true for all of them, including traditional partners and related agencies. The days when partners would support the LWF "because it is the LWF", are over.
- 74) We have many partners but let me refer in this report to the ACT Alliance, of which the LWF, through World Service, is a founding member. There is cooperation at all levels ranging from local forums to governance, working groups and communities of practice. The LWF remains the largest implementing member of the Alliance. ACT held its assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, in November last year. During the assembly, a new strategic plan was approved, which expands the scope of action of the alliance. The LWF is represented on the board of ACT. The World Council of Churches is now holding the seat of the founding members on the alliance's executive committee.
- 75) Relations with Caritas Internationalis (CI) continue to develop. Annual discussions between management teams took place in April, and relationships have been established in several countries. We received an invitation from CI's world service director to deliver the keynote address at its recent general assembly as a special gift and expression of growing commitment to work together.
- 76) Also, the relationship with Islamic Relief Worldwide is progressing well. The joint publication launched last year on "A faith-sensitive approach in humanitarian response: guidance on mental health and psychosocial programming" has had quite a strong impact and has been taken up in several scholarly and policy-making settings, including within the UNHCR.

Finances

- 77) The chairperson of the Finance Committee will offer a comprehensive report on the LWF and its financial situation. We in the Communion Office continue to carefully monitor income and expenditures, and I remain thankful for the diligence and commitment of my colleagues to manage resources and avoiding deficits. For several years now, the LWF has been able to navigate turbulences and volatility and remains financially stable.

78) However, this doesn't mean we should relax our approaches. Nor should we become comfortable with the status quo. We know that realities will change. There will be volatility outside the LWF and developments within the communion's member churches. We are in the privileged position of being able to prepare for such change out of a position of strength. Our location assessment (see below), income strategies and plans for enhanced financial sustainability are undertaken in that spirit and put us in the best possible situation to tackle with developments.

Human Resources

79) I am very grateful for our committed and competent staff who work so hard every day. This year has been particularly draining in view of a demanding process of structural and programmatic redesign. I am thankful for their wonderful solidarity and enthusiasm in moving some of the new ideas forward.

80) While the Personnel Committee will present more detailed information about issues related to human resources, I want to bring to the attention of the Council the increasing difficulties we are facing in recruiting staff. I identify two general challenges: we are not receiving enough applications; and the whole process around church endorsements is unclear, at times becoming an additional restriction. We understand that the first challenge is related to the pending decision on the location of the Communion Office. In addition, the demands on staff seem to have chilling effects on some interested persons.

81) Regarding the second challenge, it is often unclear for churches what exactly is asked of them when an endorsement is requested. I would appreciate hearing your experiences and perceptions, so that your input informs discussions of the Personnel Committee when it meets later this year.

82) Security concerns are increasing, and LWF has a duty of care for its staff. We are further developing systems and awareness to deal with this situation. Often, this means navigating the tension that results from the fact that many of our member churches live in insecure contexts, which also applies to the work of the World Service, and the legal obligations LWF needs to comply with as an employer.

Communications

83) I have previously noted the encouraging reach of our Advent campaign on social media. The 24 Advent hymns shared reached close to 1.2 million people on Facebook and Twitter and gathered almost 170,000 views. They were widely shared by the LWF member churches. I find this development important for two reasons. First, it has helped to give our global communion exposure in local contexts through social media. "Grass-rooting" is a constant challenge, making the LWF a tangible reality for people in the pew. We are encouraged that we seem to have managed this to a certain extent and want to continue working along these lines. Second, the Advent campaign was about worship, which is the deepest expression and gift of our shared life as a global communion of churches.

- 84) We are moving forward with the process to establish networks of communicators in the regions of the LWF. Good progress has been made in some regions already, on which we can continue building. This is a unique way of generating the traction between local and global news – in both directions – and to enhance participation of LWF member churches in the life of the communion.

Specific items on the agenda

- 85) To conclude, let me offer a few additional items relating to the agenda that is in front of you at this 2019 Council meeting.

Restructuring

- 86) As communicated in December last year, the restructuring process has been re-designed with decisions postponed until this Council meeting (Exhibits 11 and 11.1). I have used the additional time to furnish the Council with more detailed information, which I hope has added clarity regarding the reasons for the change, what the changes are, and what they intend to achieve. Questions we heard during the many presentations around the new structure were compiled and answers were provided in that same document.
- 87) We all know that there is no ideal or perfect structure. There is always a flipside to structural proposals. Yet, I am convinced that the structure that is being proposed to you is best responding to current realities. This is the best way for the LWF Communion Office to move forward.
- 88) You will have noticed that the restructuring process also has consequences for the way the Council is set up and the processes that it follows. I have consulted with the vice-presidents of the LWF as I reflected with my colleagues about the best ways to structure the Council (Exhibits 12 and 12.1). I ask for your understanding and your solidarity. Please undertake this journey of change with us and embrace the change that comes also for you.

Final report of the Task Force assessing the location of the Communion Office

- 89) This Council will receive the final report of the Task Force assessing the location of the LWF Communion Office (Exhibit 15). I am grateful to the Task Force chaired by National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada for the careful work it undertook.
- 90) The process was designed to avoid unnecessary strain and tension in the communion because of the sensitive nature of the assessment. Participation was secured through the involvement of the Council and the Executive Committee, who helped to shape criteria and retained the authority to steer the content and design of the process. I believe that this design helped us to strike a reasonable balance between managing the risks and encouraging participation in the process.
- 91) The question of the location of the Communion Office has been with us now for four years. I can increasingly sense the stress on staff. I also see the effects on the whole of the LWF. To a certain degree, it is beginning to slow us down, if not to paralyze us because of specific demands requiring

action, which, however, can't be taken until the future is clear. In view of this, I respectfully plead with you to take decisions – difficult and complex as they may be. The LWF and its Communion Office need clarity.

International Lutheran Council – recent developments

- 92) The LWF remains committed to the basic principle not to talk about other bodies, but with each other. This is also true for the International Lutheran Council (ILC), even if annual meetings are for now temporarily suspended. Yet, recent developments compel me to bring to the Council information that has a bearing on how we relate to the ILC.
- 93) The ILC is seeking to grow. As things stand, the only way for them to grow is by encroaching on the LWF. There aren't other unaligned Lutheran churches large enough for the ILC to approach if its agenda is growth. We take note of this yet keep focused on LWF's identity and mission.
- 94) I have informed you about the confusing process around the admission of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) into membership of the ILC in September 2018. Later, the MLC informed us in writing that it had never requested membership in the ILC.
- 95) What we are witnessing now is disturbing: Earlier this year, I informed you that a diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania was accepted by the ILC into a newly established special category of membership, which accommodates individuals, groups or entire dioceses in their institutional process. Will churches now be fragmented from the inside, broken to pieces?
- 96) For now, I believe the LWF shall stick to its initial decision, to wait for the Lutheran church-Missouri Synod's (LCMS) general assembly in June 2019 and see how LCMS decides on the issue of double membership. Once this is clear, we will see what these worrisome developments might mean and then we will see what comes next.

Expression of gratitude

- 97) This year has been demanding in many respects. We will have to continue carefully balancing our resources, both financial and human, vis-à-vis expectations and demands.
- 98) I want to start by acknowledging the incredibly hard work of staff, both in the Communion Office, and in the regions, and in the LWF World Service Country Programs. It is amazing to see their commitment, and miraculous to see their generosity and good will. Knowing that these last months have been additionally demanding, I am always humbled by their attitude.
- 99) I am grateful to my colleagues in the Communion Office Leadership Team, who helped to steer a period of additional complexity and challenges due to the restructuring process. It has been very demanding indeed, particularly considering the already challenging portfolios each of them holds.
- 100) I also want to express my appreciation for the constant support of the LWF president, Archbishop Musa. I don't think I will ever know what it means to be an archbishop in Nigeria, with all

the challenges and issues he faces. However, there has never been a situation where he hasn't made himself available for phone calls during which I could consult with him and receive direction.

101) I want to thank the vice-presidents and the chairperson of the Finance Committee for their ongoing and committed support. I offer my thanks to the whole Council. I have tried to keep it updated with key information throughout the year and hope to continue nurturing a relationship of good cooperation and mutual support.

102) Without God we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). I always pray that God may receive our work with compassion and love and forgive all errors and mistakes.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr Martin Junge

General Secretary

Appendix: LWF General Secretary's travel June 2018 – May 2019

2018:

June 24 – 25: Wittenberg, Germany

Worship service and farewell to the Director of the LWF Centre in Wittenberg, Rev. Hans Kasch.

July 19 – 23: Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo

Representation of the LWF at the celebration of 50th anniversary of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo. Sermon on festive worship, meetings with provincial government.

August 31 – September 1: Assisi, Italy

Representation of the LWF at the Assisi Ecumenical Prayer for Creation, participation in public events.

September 12 – 19: Nepal

Visit to Nepal, Celebration of 75th Anniversary of Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church and visit of the LWF Country program. Meetings with local, provincial and national government, ecumenical and interfaith. Presentation at the festive celebrations, visits to project sites and congregations.

October 3 – 5: St. Paul, MN, USA

Address to the ELCA Minneapolis Area Synod Annual Joint Ministerium meeting.

October 12 – 13: Augsburg, Germany

Speech at the Symposium on Luther and Cajetan organized by the University of Augsburg.

October 28 – 30: Uppsala, Sweden

Panel moderation at ACT Alliance Assembly

November 6 – 8: Nairobi, Kenya

Presentations and meeting with church leaders at LUCCEA 6th General Assembly

November 26 – December 1: Jericho, Palestine

LWF Executive Committee and Board of Trustees meeting, and joint meeting with the AVH Hospital Board.

2019:

January 24 – 25: Vatican City, Rome, Italy.

Annual staff meetings between PCPCU and LWF.

January 29 – February 7, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Visit to EECMY and LWF Country Program; speech at CMCR, meeting with DASC and High-level meetings with authorities, visit to project sites and congregations.

February 9 – 10: Espoo, Finland

Participation at the Consecration of the Bishop of Espoo

February 12: Hannover, Germany

Consultations with the German National Committee of the LWF.

February 20 – 24: Arusha, Tanzania

Participation at the ELCT Bishop's retreat, introduction to the LWF, visit to project sites, delivery of sermon on Sunday worship.

March 7- 8: Vatican City, Rome, Italy

Keynote speech representing Christian perspectives on SDG during interfaith inauguration during Conference on Religion and SDGs organized by the Vatican

March 9 – 10: Schwerin, Germany

Participation at farewell events for Bishop Gerhard Ulrich, chairperson of the German National Committee and presiding bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches (VELKD)

March 12 – 13: Paris, France

Presentation at an ecumenical colloquium on the Joint Doctrine of Justification by Faith, past, present and future, organized by the Catholic Institute of Paris.

Visit to LWF member churches

March 25 – 29: Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN, USA

Ecumenical Consultation with the 5 signatories to prepare 20th anniversary of signature of the JDDJ and agree on joint process.

May 1st – 3: Copenhagen, Denmark

Meeting with leadership of Ev. Lutheran Church in Denmark

Participation and panel moderation at Partnership on Religion and Development PaRD General Assembly

May 11 – 13: Kappel, Zurich, Switzerland

Representation of the LWF at the WCRC Executive Committee meeting and the 500th anniversary of Swiss Reformation.

May 15 – 21: Astana, Kazakhstan

Visit to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kazakhstan, high level meetings with government, Embassies, meeting with representatives of the Union of Lutheran Churches with representatives from Georgia, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Meeting with pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kazakhstan, visits to isolated communities.

June 2 -3: Hamburg, Germany

Participation at the regional meeting of the Central Western European Region (in combination with GNC meeting).