



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

Office of the  
General Secretary

[lutheranworld.org](http://lutheranworld.org)

To: LWF Member churches

Geneva, 29 June 2020

Respected church leaders, dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are living through times of challenge and change, but God's call to mission remains unbroken. It is in this spirit of hope and encouragement that we write this letter to you as you lead LWF member churches around the globe facing the impact of COVID-19 and its various consequences on individuals and communities.

### We give thanks for your witness

There are wonderful stories about steadfastness in faith and amazing reliance as churches around the world relate to this unprecedented juncture and its implications.

We give thanks to God for these stories. Truly, God has been a mighty fortress (Psalm 46), sheltering the church from paralyzing uncertainty, and inspiring it for creative witness. In many different ways, worship and prayer life has been maintained and kept vibrant even when communities were not able to gather physically. New theological topics resulting from the particular challenges of COVID-19 are being discussed. New ways have been found to stand with the suffering neighbour, thereby embodying God's love in actions of compassionate service.

The pandemic has also exposed deep-seated inequalities and injustices in our communities and the world, including racism, which has surfaced with particular virulence. We give thanks for churches all over the world standing firmly against racism and other forms of discrimination, violence against women, including sexual violence, and injustice.

We encourage you to continue participating in God's holistic mission, proclaiming the word of God, serving the suffering neighbour, and speaking publicly to issues of justice and peace.

### The right time to be the church

In 2 Timothy 4:2 the apostle encourages the church to be always prepared to witness, in or out of season.

There is much that the church can offer people and communities longing for life to be full again, pained by anxieties and fears: words of faith, hope, and love. The unemployed, the hungry, the oppressed and those pushed aside rely on decisive action that protects our shared humanity.

Difficult as our contexts may have become: now is the time to be the church. The church is endowed with rich treasures and talents. The church is called to share these gifts of the Holy Spirit with unbroken determination. Freely we have received, freely we shall give (Matthew 10:8).

We encourage you to see this current time as the perfect season to holistically witness to the Triune God. Now is the time to be the church.

### **Now is the time to come together**

This is not the first time the world undergoes turmoil and challenge. The time when the Lutheran World Federation was founded (1947) was such a moment.

The world was so broken at that time. It was coming out of war, waking up from a nightmare, traumatized by widespread brutality and the realization of how deep humankind can fall. It was trying to find a direction, to reset relationships among people and nations, after the moral compass had gone so terribly wrong. Economies were stalled. Political systems questioned. Fear, anxiety and hopelessness marked the mood of the time.

In this situation of uncertainty and chaos, Lutheran churches around the world came together and founded the LWF. Truly, an act of prophetic courage.

In doing so, they followed the deeply spiritual and theological insight that the church cannot be fully church on its own, in isolation from others. They realized that only by coming together and cooperating would they be able to respond to the theological, pastoral, and diaconal challenges of the times. They understood that their local presence of compassion, healing, and reconciliation, required a global expression that would both nurture and strengthen their own witness.

We encourage you to continue nurturing and sustaining the communion of churches. Come closer together, reach out to each other, connect, work together, support your regional and global structures as places of mutual learning, sharing of resources and global witness.

### **A changing church in a changing world**

Today, just as at the founding of the LWF, the cooperation among Lutheran churches is and will be particularly important as they live up to the changing contexts and adapt to new realities. There is much to learn from each other.

It should not be difficult for Lutheran churches to do this since we trust in faith that the Holy Spirit creates and preserves the church (Apostolic Creed, Third Article, Small Catechism). We heed the call of the Holy Spirit in the church as it engages an ongoing process of reformation (*ecclesia semper reformanda*).

Yet, we know how difficult it can be to find new language, new forms, new expressions of being the church, honouring what we have inherited from earlier generations and bringing it alive in the contemporary world. The vitality of the church can be seen in its openness to be challenged to answer anew the fundamental question: what is the gospel today? The Lutheran World Federation is also responding to this new context, reviewing programs and structures that the Communion Office will be offering to meet the new challenges and demands, always mindful of the financial realities of its member churches.

We encourage you to remain open to change and to help shape the change in prayerful discernment and resolute action, always remembering that, ultimately, the churches' call is to share God's deep love for the world for which Christ was given as a gift of life.

### Leave no one behind

Last week, the UNHCR published the staggering fact that almost 80 Million people are displaced and/or seeking refuge in the world. This is an unprecedented number and becomes yet another expression of the turmoil, violence, and the injustice that is so rampant in the world.

The churches founding the LWF in 1947 made a major commitment to the reality of people uprooted, displaced, and seeking protection. We give thanks for our founding fathers and mothers, who understood that coming together as a Federation was not an end in itself but would find its deepest meaning in the Federation's eagerness to become a healing presence among those suffering most. Wherever there is one single person lost, the community cannot be whole (Matthew 18:12-14). This basic understanding about relationships that Jesus brought to his disciples remains relevant until this very day.

We encourage churches of the Lutheran communion and their agencies to continue working together to offer a ministry of compassion, service and justice among refugees and all persons in vulnerable situations. We particularly encourage local churches and the global communion to stand together with those heavily affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope”

As we end our letter, we share with you the theme of our next Assembly in the year 2023 in Krakow, Poland: “One Body, one Spirit, one Hope.” It is a timely theme that embodies so much of what we aspire to be as a communion.

We invite you to journey with confidence and hope towards that day when we shall come together again in our global Assembly to celebrate God's gifts, to be enriched by the presence and the witness of one another, to tell each other stories of God's transformative power in our different contexts, and to be encouraged in God's mission as we return to our places.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, God's mission is ongoing. Because of that, the church has a future. Let that hope guide us locally and globally as we go through these times of change and find ways of being the church, both locally and as part of the global communion of Lutheran churches.

With greetings in Christ,



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LWF President



Rev. Dr Martin Junge  
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