



# Lutheran Identity Process Phase 1

Full Report and Lessons Learned



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion  
of Churches

# Contents

<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>“WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON LUTHERAN IDENTITIES”</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Venue and Date .....	3
Introduction .....	3
Methodology .....	5
Aims .....	5
Participants.....	6
Day 1: Holy Spirit as gift and promise.....	8
Day 2: Our holy communion .....	8
Day 3: Formed and freed.....	9
Day 4: Regional deliberation on the themes.....	9
Worship and Music .....	9
Storytelling.....	10
<b>OUTCOMES</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Outcomes .....	11
<b>MAJOR THEMES AND FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Major themes.....	13
Major Findings .....	14
Follow up and preparation for Phase 2.....	17
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>19</b>

© The Lutheran World Federation, 2020

Editor: Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer,  
Department for Theology,  
Mission and Justice

Design and Layout: LWF Office for Communication

Photos: LWF/Albin Hillert  
(Except page 3: LWF/S. Gallay)

Publisher: The Lutheran World Federation  
– A Communion of Churches  
Route de Ferney 150  
P. O. Box 2100  
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
info@lutheranworld.org

© The Lutheran World Federation

[info@lutheranworld.org](mailto:info@lutheranworld.org)

# Preface

The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) call to live and work together as a communion of churches is rooted in a shared commitment to ongoing reformation. Lutherans are part of a living Christian tradition that is always reforming.

Since it was founded in 1947, the LWF has a rich history of theological study processes to understand that living tradition. The first studies focused on a critical recovery of Luther's theology and the confessional tradition. Studies in later years have explored the nature and purpose of the Church, justice according to the cries of marginalized people and the Earth, worship, the communion's self-understanding, and ways that Lutherans interpret the Bible. The LWF has now begun a process that aims to explore our shared Lutheran identity and the ways that diverse identities are expressed across our polycentric communion.

Today, the concept of "identity" is contested. Against the current backdrop of anthropocentrism and ecological disintegration, economic, social and political exclusion, gender-based discrimination and resurging ethno-nationalism, the concept of "identity" can be a binary, prescriptive tool to draw distinctions. But if the basis is Christian liberty, identity becomes

a foundation for liberation and bridge building. The liberation to find one's true human identity in loving relationship to God and every other creature is the core of the Lutheran confession, and our baptismal identity in Jesus Christ gives birth to a diversity of holy, life-giving expressions of our Christian vocation. As Paul's letter to the Galatians states, "For freedom, Christ has set us free." (Galatians 5:1)

Ultimately being Lutheran does not prescribe an identity as such. Being Lutheran describes a faithful way of being in the world that points to Christ as the revelation of God's love, while embracing the creative tension of ecumenical consensus, interfaith dialogue and interdisciplinary dialectic. Lutherans share normative commitments: the Bible, sacraments, a catechism, the Augsburg Confession among other confessional writings, means of grace and common contours for ministry and service. But like Luther's translation of the Bible, these norms are embodied through a diversity of languages, cultures, forms of worship, spirituality, service, and expressions of public witness in minority and majority contexts.

For that reason, expressions of the Lutheran tradition have always been negotiated. Conflicts and concord are well-preserved within the

confessional writings, and for good reason. Diversity is God's Wisdom woven into the fabric of creation. Maintaining unity in diversity is never easy. It is for this that Christ prayed in John 17:11. The LWF strives to strengthen our narratives about "our shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which [we] will continue recognizing each other, belonging to the communion, while witnessing in [our] diverse contexts." (*LWF Strategy 2019-2024*)

We begin this theological study process with the affirmation that our identity is based on the one who identifies us as a beloved of God. According to our confession of the ecumenical creeds, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and nurtures a diversity of gifts, by which we participate in God's reconciling mission.

From 2019-2022, the LWF will engage its member churches in a communion-wide study of contemporary Lutheran identities as they are lived in the local church contexts. The first phase of this process was a global consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in October 2019. This report summarizes the outcomes and findings of the consultation, and points towards preparations for the next phase of the global study process.





# “We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities”

Addis Ababa Consultation – Background

## Venue and Date

23 -28 October 2019

Ellily Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## Introduction

From 2019 until 2022, the LWF will engage in a global study of

contemporary Lutheran identities as they are lived in the local church contexts. In his 2016 report to the LWF Council, General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge asked: “How would we describe the “being and witnessing Lutheran” today in a global perspective? What are the key features of our identity and witness, and how do they relate to the key tenets of Lutheran theol-

ogy?...How could we articulate a coherent, shared narrative that helps us recognize each other as Lutheran churches globally, yet remain contextually rooted?...It is an essential project that fosters coherence, mutual understanding and mutual accountability as we jointly continue proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and witness to God’s love and justice in this world.”

The study process will feature dynamic theological reflection and participatory regional consultation aimed at listening for the ways in which we sound the common notes of Lutheran identity among the rich harmony of lived, contextual identities across our communion.

The goal of this process is to analyze the ways in which our Lutheran communion lives out its mission and spiritual life within the contemporary contexts of our member churches. Contemporary constellations of economic and political power, legal challenges, scientific and technological discoveries, and new psychosocial developments continuously call for new expressions of Lutheran distinctives such as law and gospel, faith and works, nature and grace, justification and sanctification, or freedom and vocation. Emerging cosmologies and cultural realities

shape the way we practice our faith and contextualize Lutheran identities. However, within these new horizons, we want to discern ways in which we creatively express our common Lutheran heritage.

Spirituality (the lived experience of faith) shapes our Christian identity and engagement with the world. Spirituality contains a deeply personal reality of one's personal experience of the Spirit of God. Yet, that relationship is nurtured in a community of practice. Identity is formed in the midst of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Some of the LWF churches call for renewal by reviving spirituality, and some churches struggle to understand the myriad expressions of spiritual gifts that call into question their experience of faith in the Lutheran Church. What can we say about the work of the Holy Spirit?

To start the process, the LWF engaged member churches and theologians in theological reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit, in a consultation on the theme, **“We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities.”** The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the Lutheran Seminary in Addis Ababa hosted the event in October 2019.

The Holy Spirit is a gift and a promise for all creation. The Bible affirms that the Spirit is the breath of God, by which creation was made, and the Advocate that continues to enliven creation. The Gospel of John reminds us that the Spirit, which is the dynamism of renewal and reconciliation, blows where it will, often in mysterious and surprising ways. Martin Luther affirmed God's Spirit is constantly at work behind the masks



Members of the EECMY Yetsedik Tsehay choir share song and music gifts with participants at the global consultation.

of creation; in every river and rock. However, if we blindly look for God's Spirit, we could trip on the rock or drown in the river! So that we would not have to grope in the dark, Christ promised to send the Spirit, and be present in our communion. The church is a community in which God's Spirit meets us, speaks a word of promise to us, and sanctifies us in love. This is the heart of the third article of Luther's Catechism and writings on the church, sacraments and sanctification. Lutheran spirituality is rooted in the promise present in proclamation of the Word and sacraments. These are the means of grace (*charis*) that nurture our spiritual gifts (*charismata*) and produce the fruit of the Spirit in our vocations. The Holy Spirit calls us, gathers us, and sanctifies us to participate in God's mission to reconcile all of creation.

Contemporary discourse about spirituality is frequently driven by individuals who claim to have spiritual gifts (*charismata*) via special revelations of the Holy Spirit. While the Spirit blows where it will, this type of spiritual narrative can be exclusionary, and often underwrites anthropological, social, and political narratives that are contrary to our Lutheran theological heritage. These narratives create anxieties about Lutheran identity and the practice of our faith, as well as fundamental confusion about the gracious, reconciling, and liberating nature of the gospel. LWF Pre-Assembly messages and Assembly resolutions have raised questions related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of our churches using the language of church renewal, revival, or the practice of spirituality. They call the

communion to provide a framework for addressing these fundamental questions as Lutherans.

## Methodology

- **The process is designed to be inductive and participatory.** We begin with the lived experience of our member churches and ask questions about the contexts that shape the ways they proclaim, teach, worship, and live out their faith through service and witness.
- **The process will be analytical.** We will interpret those regional findings in order to understand emerging niches in which our churches are being called to express our Lutheran witness.
- **The process will be constructive.** Through a process of trans-contextual reflection on regional findings, we will develop a joint framework for articulating our Lutheran identities in our contemporary, global context.

**Phase 1:** The process began with this global consultation in Addis Ababa that considered the lived experience of Lutherans through the lens of the third article of the Creed. The church's mission and our life together is the work of the Holy Spirit. Through an iterative, participatory process, each region identified representatives, who made up the slightly over 80 participants.

- a. Together, we considered the diverse contexts in which the church is called to live out its mission, as well as the diversity

of gifts that our member churches express as communities of spiritual practice and formation.

- b. On the last day of the consultation, regional teams harvested questions that will be collated and deployed in Phase 2, beginning in 2020.

## Aims

The overall goal of the Lutheran Identity Study Process is to analyze contemporary Lutheran spirituality, and affirm the way in which the Holy Spirit works through the ministry of the church to form, revive and equip us to live out our faithful vocations in the next 500 years of the Lutheran communion.

The consultation specifically aimed to create a framework for understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit that can be deployed in future regional gatherings and frame contextual engagement in the study process. The Addis Ababa consultation aimed to deploy an inductive approach to theological consultations. Rather than arrive with a set of questions about Lutheran identity, the aim of this consultation was to bring together a diverse representation of the global communion, engage in transformational theological reflection on our Lutheran heritage and contexts, and generate questions that will be the basis for Phase 2 and 3 of the Study Process. In other words, this study should be in the model of participatory observers, where the questions we ask of ourselves arise from the gifts and challenges of the living faith and practices of being Lutheran in our contexts today.

---

## Participants

The consultation had a total number of 85 registered participants. They included EECMY President Rev. Yonas Yigezu Dibisa, two LWF Vice-Presidents Rev. Dr Jeannette Ada Epse Maina (Africa) and Rev. Dr Nestor Paulo Friedrich (Latin America and the Caribbean), several LWF Council members, 10 attendees from the host church, three people from the local organizing committee, and LWF staff. Beyond this number, there were many participants who offered their gifts to the consultation, such as youth and adult choirs, and musicians from the EECMY.

Participants were intentionally chosen in order to bring together a mix of theologians, youth, church leaders, lay and ordained practitioners in local communities, and members of LWF governance. The goal was to create a community of theological reflection that was deeply informed by our theological tradition, richly formed through our contextual and cultural experiences, and aware of the current critical needs and narratives that we face as a global communion of local, living Lutheran churches.

### ***A process for nominating participants***

The process of choosing participants was extremely important to ensure a regional balance as well as the lay/ordained, gender and youth quotas. But considering the composition of expertise and experience was also critical to creating the diverse theological reflection proposed in the rationale above.

For this reason, the Program Executive for Lutheran Theology and Practice (new title, Program Executive for Identity, Communion and Formation) worked with the Regional Secretaries to create a metric to determine the number of participants according to number and population of member churches. In the end, the numbers agreed upon were:

- Africa – 12 participants
- Asia – 10 participants
- Central Eastern Europe – 6 participants
- Central Western Europe – 8 participants
- Latin American and the Caribbean – 7 participants
- Nordic – 6 participants
- North America – 5 participants

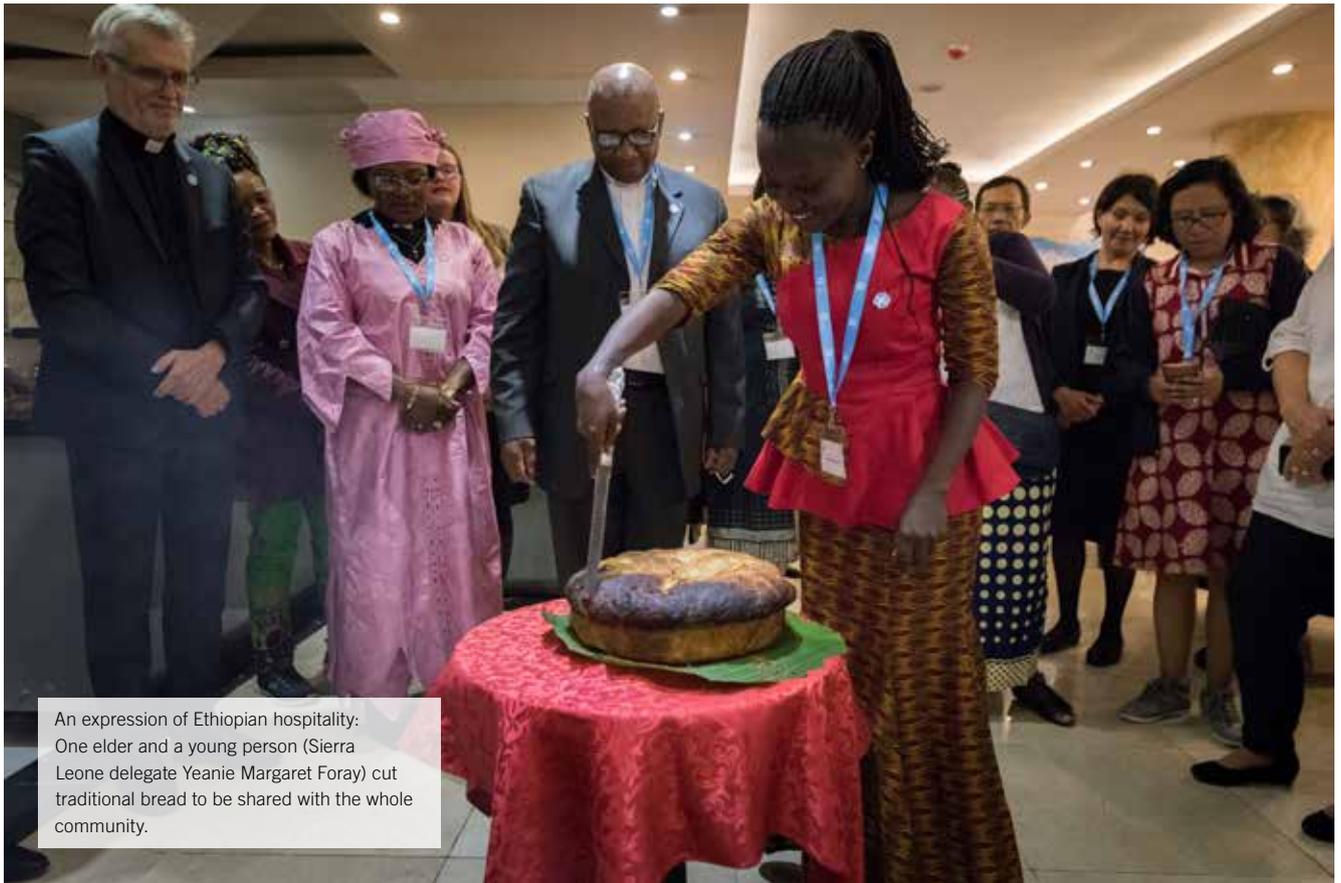
Each member church (or regional leadership) was invited to nominate up to three people based on the following general criteria:

- Lay or ordained Lutheran member of an LWF member church
- A capacity or desire to reflect on life and vocation in relationship to their Lutheran identity
- Have experience and access to communities of practice (for example parish ministry or diaconal work in the health or social sector, education, public policy and advocacy, work with women, youth, children, migrants, indigenous communities, vulnerable populations, etc.)
- Some experience with research methods or project leadership
- Sufficient level of English (though whisper translation will be available)

Following the reception of nominations forms the Program Executive consulted with LWF Regional Secretaries and the Youth Secretary to finalize choices according to qualitative contributions as well as quantitative quotas (lay/ordained, gender and youth). Based on the final choices, letters of invitations were sent to nominees, and communicated to member churches. The final number of participants from each region was different from those proposed, because speakers specifically invited to present content papers were counted separately from participants nominated by the member churches, though regional and gender balance were maintained among the speakers as well.

### ***Youth recruitment***

A special effort was made with respect to the full and meaningful participation of youth. The process of nominating participants already included 18 percent youth. But in addition, a special call for youth papers was broadcast. The Communion Office received 14 paper submissions, and the LWF Youth Secretary in consultation with the Program Executive for Lutheran Theology and Practice selected five to be presented at the consultation and published in the documentation. This special call ensured a percentage of youth greater than the 20 percent LWF quota. The youth papers provided some of the more significant theological contributions of the consultation, and the youth presence on the panels, leadership in worship and in plenary made a significant impact on the scope of the discussions.



An expression of Ethiopian hospitality: One elder and a young person (Sierra Leone delegate Yenie Margaret Foray) cut traditional bread to be shared with the whole community.

### **Local Organizing Committee**

The Local Organizing Committee was composed of EECMY members and coordinated by Ms Meron Girma Mamo and Ms Kemesi Sirika, administrators in the EECMY Department for Mission and Theology, with additional support from Ms Ruth Osmundsen. They managed the procurement of the venue and welcoming of participants and special guests, logistics related to local transportation, parish visits and local outings, presentations by local choirs, coordinating the consultation welcome and information packages, and staging various sessions.

### **The program plan**

The three study days were structured around one of three themes,

which provided a framework for exploring the work of the Holy Spirit:

- 1. Holy Spirit as gift and promise:** the Spirit calls us in Word and baptism
- 2. Our holy communion:** spirituality as sanctification and formation in community
- 3. Transformed and freed:** anthropology, spiritual gifts, vocation of the priesthood of all the baptized.

Theologians, ecumenical guests and interdisciplinary scholars from the social sciences engaged each daily theme through (a) Biblical study; (b) theological reflection on confessional texts or Luther’s writings; and (c) interdisciplinary analysis of religious experience in our diverse contexts. Lay and ordained participants presented short papers, in order to dig

deeper into the daily themes, which are detailed below.

### **Day 1: Holy Spirit as gift and promise: Moderator – Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer**

This day developed a Trinitarian foundation for understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit as person, gift and promise. It highlighted creation as the theatre for the work of the Holy Spirit, and how within this field of the Spirit’s activity, God operates in the world at large.

*Morning Bible Study: John 14:25-27* “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” This text demonstrates the person, promise and gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit creates and renews the earth, calls and claims each of us in our baptism to bear the fruit of good works in us. **Rev. Dr Jun Hyun Kim, Lutheran Church in Korea**

*Theological Keynote:* Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, General Secretary, Zimbabwe Council of Churches

Digging Deeper Papers:

- Rev. Dr Winston Persaud
- Rev. Dr Johannes Zeiler
- Ms Sofie Halvorsson
- Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer
- Dr Christian Poder
- Rev. Dr Mutale Kaunda
- Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer

## Day 2: Our holy communion: Moderator – Rev. Dr Wilfred John Samuel

This day focused on the church as communion, in which the Spirit acts to sanctify and form us. The liturgical and spiritual aspects of our life together took front and center, as we looked at the marks of the church as a community of practice: Holy Communion, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, etc.

*Morning Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 12:1-14* “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed...For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.” **Rev. Dr**

**Beverly Wallace, Luther Seminary, ELCA**

*Theological Keynote:* Professor Dr Jennifer Wasmuth

Digging Deeper Papers:

- Rev. Dr Nestor Paulo Friedrich
- Rev. Dr Cheryl Peterson
- Mr Uwe Steinmetz
- Rev. Birhanu Ofgaa
- Rev. Dr Marie Anna Auvinen
- Rev. Dr Emmanuel Clapsis
- Mr Christopher MacDonald
- Mr Sebastian Madjeski

## Day 3: Formed and freed: Moderator – Rev. Dr Cheryl Peterson

This day focused on anthropological aspects of spirituality, and explored the relationship between spiritual gifts and vocation. The



Participants in a small-group discussion.

Spirit produces fruit in each one of us. As part of the priesthood of all the baptized, we are called and freed to express our spiritual gifts (*charismata*) through our diverse vocations in the world. We test our spiritual gifts (and particularly the reality of different types of spiritualities as experienced today) against the biblical call that *charisms* be used to build up the body of Christ towards reconciliation and loving service to our neighbor.

*Morning Bible Study: Galatians 5:1, 22-25* “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” **Rev. Caroline Christopher**

*Theological Keynote:* Professor Rev. Dr Veli-Matti Kärkäinen

Digging Deeper papers:

- Rev. Dr Yacob Godebo
- Rev. Dr Wilfred John Samuel
- Rev. Harry Morudu
- Ms Sophia Gebreyes
- Rev. Yamilka Hernandez Guzman
- Ms Novrianna Gloria Hutagalung
- Ms Lotta Gammelín

## Day 4: Regional deliberation on the themes

This day focused on the way the renewing work of the Spirit is interpreted in our contexts. The day was devoted to regional gatherings of member church representatives and theologians. There was time

to reflect on the themes of the first three days, and contribute to a framework that can be deployed in future regional workshops.

*Morning Bible Study: Psalm 104: 30-31*, “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.”

Regional deliberation groups:

- *Africa Moderator:* Rev. Adama Faye, *Recorder:* Ms Ebisse Abdissa Gudeta
- *Asia Moderator:* Rev. Dr Songram Basumatary, *Recorder:* Ms Gloria Novrianna Hutagalung
- *Latin America and the Caribbean Moderator:* Rev. Eduardo Silva, *Recorder:* Sister Shelda Emmanuel
- *Central Eastern Europe Moderator:* Rev. Anne Burghardt, *Recorder:* Rev. Dr Elfriede Dörr
- *Central Western Europe Moderator:* Dr Nicole Grochowina, *Recorder:* Rev. Michael Markert
- *Nordic Moderator:* Dr Sven Thor Kloster, *Recorder:* Ms Helen Kémi
- *North America Moderator:* Ms Kristen Opalinski, *Recorder:* Rev. Dr Allen Jorgenson

## Worship and Music

The methodology of this consultation was designed to create communities of deep theological reflection that we hope to inspire throughout the phases of this study. In other words, our Lutheran identity is rooted in communities of Word and sacraments, where prayer, praise and thanksgiving form our

identities, and are vehicles for the experience of the Holy Spirit. For that reason, every morning began in worship, music and Bible study. Every evening ended with vespers. Each day was punctuated by the gift of a local choir or musicians. The first day we were blessed with the EECMY Yetsedik Tsehay choir; the second day, with Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Amanuel Buli; the third day, with the EECMY Ejole Kayo choir; and the final day with the EECMY Mekanissa Mekane Yesus children’s choir.

Music was also accompanied each day by Mr Uwe Steinmetz of the German Liturgical Institute of the University of Leipzig. The consultation was also an opportunity for Mr Steinmetz to introduce the upcoming research project on Global Lutheran Music, which will be launched in October 2020 in Wittenberg, in partnership with the German National Committee and the LWF.

On the final Sunday of the consultation, participants were divided and bussed to four EECMY congregations. Visits to local parishes always build communion. They were wonderful experiences for the parishes to receive their sisters and brothers from around the world, and create consciousness of belonging to a global communion. They were also wonderful experiences for the participants who received such hospitality, had their experience of the global communion expanded, and rooted our theological discernment about formation in the presence of the Spirit in local communities of Word and sacrament, particularly those of the EECMY who self-identify as charismatic Lutheran churches.

---

## Storytelling

One other unplanned moment of grace occurred as a response to the fruit that began to emerge from the rich sharing. In the course of our plenary conversations, one participant observed that the spiritual narratives that we were discussing actually raised the awareness that this experience could potentially be painful for some participants who have had negative formative experiences in the church. The suggestion was made that we might set aside the time for storytelling. On one of the evenings, we offered a time for those who wished to gather for a time of storytelling about an experience related to the themes, “What it means to me to be Lutheran...” or “What has formed my Lutheran identity?”

We agreed on a process that would create a space for gifting. Stories are not meant to be offered for theological debate. Rather, given and received as gifts. The methodology that we created was as follows. The forum opened with

a word about safe and confidential space, and a prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and grace. Stories were invited in pairs, based on the open question, “My Lutheran identity has been formed by...” Storytellers were given nine minutes to tell their story. Each story was followed by one minute of silence. Then the floor was open for responses, however, responses could only be words of affirmative gratitude. The space was holy, both in the sense that it was set aside for the purpose of gathering in the name of Christ, and in the sense that the community was a place for the Holy Spirit to move among us, and knit together a community of trust.

The outcome of this storytelling was astounding. While the space was held in confidence, and therefore cannot be reported, it is important to note in this report that the stories shared and received built bridges between participants who otherwise find themselves on different sides of ethical and ecclesiological divides. Tears were shed. Embraces were exchanged.

Communion was experienced. It was theology, in the sense of faith seeking understanding, specifically to know our sisters and brothers in Christ, and their experience of the living God, the Spirit of life.

In itself, the experience should be carried forward as a model of experiencing communion. Stories are not for debate and can only be received as non-threatening gift. When they are honored in this way, lives and dignity are affirmed, friendship and mutual love are nurtured, and the hope of a communion of reconciled diversity can be experienced in the flesh, if but for a brief moment.

Several participants noted that it was amazing to experience this kind of communion at such a consultation. In the future, facilitators may want to create these spaces every time we gather as a communion. Such experiences are transformative, and a way for the Holy Spirit to move, heal, reveal her wisdom, and strengthen our unity in the bonds of peace.



Rev. Caroline Christopher (India) and other participants from Asia, during a session discussing emerging themes for each region.

## Outcomes

This consultation produced three main concrete outcomes:

- 1. Questions that form the basis for regional questionnaires that will be sent to member churches and communities of practice (parishes, local ministries, youth groups, etc.) who wish to participate.*
- 2. Consultation papers will be published as a book in the LWF Documentation series that can accompany the process as a reader.*
- 3. Participants are prepared to speak of the process in their regional spaces, and be ambassadors for the study process.*

# ANDUNG-ANDUNG: A GRACE OF THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

- ▶ God is radically immanent in space, also in the smallest conceivable events, including in the event of grieving or mourning. In the event of the listening, sounds and voices are transformed into messengers of meaning and sensual-spiritual presence. In the event of the mourning, the wounds are transformed into grace.

Ms Novrianna Gloria Hutagalung (Indonesia) making a presentation.

# Major Themes and Findings

## Major themes

The following is a compilation of major themes gathered during the plenary feedback at the end of each day. This summary was compiled by a group of listeners, and is meant to accompany the questions developed by each regional group.

On the topic of Lutheran identities, the plenary began under the notion that while our identity is informed by a common theological, normative heritage, our identities are formed in the context of diverse cultures, languages, worldviews and political realities. However, the plenary conversation came around to the possibility that we could still speak of a shared Lutheran identity that is normative, though not prescriptive, and whose unity is expressed in diversity. We acknowledged that sometimes we can speak of a shared identity, and at other times identities.

The need to speak of a normative identity was particularly significant to churches that are a religious or cultural minority. This requires further exploration in light of questions around particularity and universality, as a communion of churches in the context of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. The following summary points were gathered from a plenary feedback, and organized into categories according to what we consistently affirm, themes that will require further elaboration, and areas we cannot support.

### *Themes that we consistently affirmed*

- A common confessional foundation: Lutheran identity is rooted in the *solae* including the Word, the Trinitarian ecumenical creeds, Lutheran confessional documents (recognizing that some churches also recognize the Formula of Concord, Barmen Declaration, etc.) including the Catechisms with special emphasis here on the third article
- Common marks and spirituality, including prayer, music and worship, the cross, Word and sacraments, service, etc.
- Liturgical spirituality, including Word and Sacrament as a means of grace, is related to the holiness of the church
- No one cultural expression is prescriptive of Lutheran identity
- Lutherans have a strong pneumatological foundation but it is not always well expressed
- The one economy of the Holy Trinity necessarily links Christology, ecclesiology and pneumatology; justification and sanctification; creation, salvation, renewal; charis and charismata; etc.
- Word and sacraments are constitutive of the church, and means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works
- Baptism and the priesthood of all the baptized are fundamental to understanding the source of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit, and that the baptized are called and equipped to participate
- All members of the community are charismatic, if charismata are properly understood in light of the concept of baptismal vocation
- Theology of the cross and pneumatology are integral to our understanding of the gospel and God's gracious work in the world, and should not be interpreted in isolation from one another.
- There is a need to discern spirits and the spirits of the age (social, political, economic, scientific, theological philosophies that form and inform contemporary discourse)
- We can return to our theological and confessional tradition to ask new questions in order to find new creative expressions of our living faith that speak to contemporary narratives that we face, particularly in relationship to anthropology, care for creation and the social, political and economic spirits of the age
- *Confessio Augustana* V and VII are an affirmation of a way to

discern spirits, linking Word/Sacrament and the Holy Spirit

- We are engaged in this study in the midst of ecumenical, inter-faith and interdisciplinary dialogue particularly in situations of Lutherans as a religious, cultural, philosophical or political minority

### **Themes to elaborate**

- The relationship between pneumatology and Christology (whether that be a Christological pneumatology or a pneumatological Christology)
- The Spirit works through the Word and sacraments, but we need to develop our theological understanding of how God's spirit works in the world at large, in light of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. The Freedom of God should be a major theme of future theological reflection
- The relationship of the work of the Spirit in the world at large with earth care
- A Lutheran-centered process of discerning the Spirit and the spirits of the age (including economic, materialist, political, social, structural, patriarchal, power, etc.)
- Teaching spiritual gifts in a way that is rooted in 1 Corinthians 12 and the theological concept of the priesthood of all the baptized
- The centrality (or foundational nature) of the priesthood of all the baptized for understanding the

work of the Spirit in the world at large, and in the church (through the charisms found throughout the priesthood of all the baptized and in the ecclesial ministries)

- The relationship between mysticism and charisms
- The need to develop a pneumatology of charisms
- The relationship between the concept and discourse on mission and the Holy Spirit
- A more complex notion of colonialism and neo-colonialism as it relates to religious identity and expressions of power (and patriarchy) between churches and within church structures
- We need to research Lutheran theologies of charisms that already exist or function *de facto*
- In the process ahead, we need to engage indigenous perspectives more deeply. Several participants represented indigenous peoples, and the reality of indigenous and traditional wisdom was raised, but not systematically treated. These perspectives are a necessity going forward.

### **Emerging themes that we cannot support**

- Rooted in our confession that we are justified by grace through faith, Lutherans cannot support any use of spiritual gifts that commodifies the gospel or grace, burdens the human con-

science, confuses spirituality with special revelation, creates a special class of charisms or has any aim other than building up the body of Christ.

## **Major Findings**

- Lutheran identity and identities are formed in a matrix of normativity and experience that includes all of the *solae* (Word, grace, Christ, faith), our confessional, theological tradition, liturgical tradition as well as the pluralistic societies in which our cultural tradition is formed, multiple religious belonging, and traditional or indigenous belief systems. In this way, the Lutheran tradition is always living, and the expressions are always being negotiated as well as renewed.
- While Lutheran churches are often constituted with different confessional bases (i.e. some ascribe to the Formula of Concord and some do not, while some recognize the Barmen Declaration and some do not), the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism are recognized by all member churches of the LWF. For this reason, a special emphasis was placed on the Catechism, not only as a confessional document, but a teaching tool, and therefore a vehicle of our tradition that continues to be applied in a dynamic, living way in ecclesial settings, and within homes as a means to nurture all baptismal vocations.
- Within the Lutheran tradition, liturgy has a significant role to



Worship was a central part of the consultation, with delegates taking part in daily Bible study and evening devotion.

play within the transmission of the tradition, and as a means of grace where the faithful experience the Holy Spirit as gift and promise.

- Liturgy as performative theology and dialogical aesthetics: The consultation highlighted the special role that liturgy (including Word and the sacraments) plays in forming identity (confessional, anthropological and cosmological), transmitting faith, and shaping the tradition itself. As performative theology, the means of grace do what they say and communicate what God is, and the community or assembly is itself participating in realized eschatology, as well as equipping and liberating us for our vocations. Additionally, as dialogical aesthetics, indigenous or cultural traditions also shape our worship and the way that God’s Spirit is active in worship. The consultation recognized the special part that worship as a central, lived spirituality affects the formation of children and informs their education.
- Multiple religious belonging deeply affects the way our religious and theological identities are formed today. This encourages constructive and critical dialogue with indigenous and traditional wisdom sources of identity, as well as ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.
- Lutheran identity is open and liberating. Lutheran identity is always formed by ecumenical realities that balance particularity and universality. Lutheran identity always asks us to interpret ourselves in light of the gospel before God and the world and then re-enter into our tradition and context, equipped with a holy dynamism.
- Lutherans put an emphasis on discerning the spirits. *Oratio/meditatio/tentatio* provides a method for discerning spiritual gifts for the building up of the body, as well as the “spirits” of the age, such as exploitative power, patriarchy, ethno-nationalism, commodification, fetishism, consumerism, xenophobia, etc., which co-opt narratives of “spirituality” and “spiritual gifts”. What is important is that while Lutherans have a rich and strong pneumatology, spiritual
- Forming and informing our identity is related to the call to make disciples. In this light, strong emphasis should be placed on the making – formation.

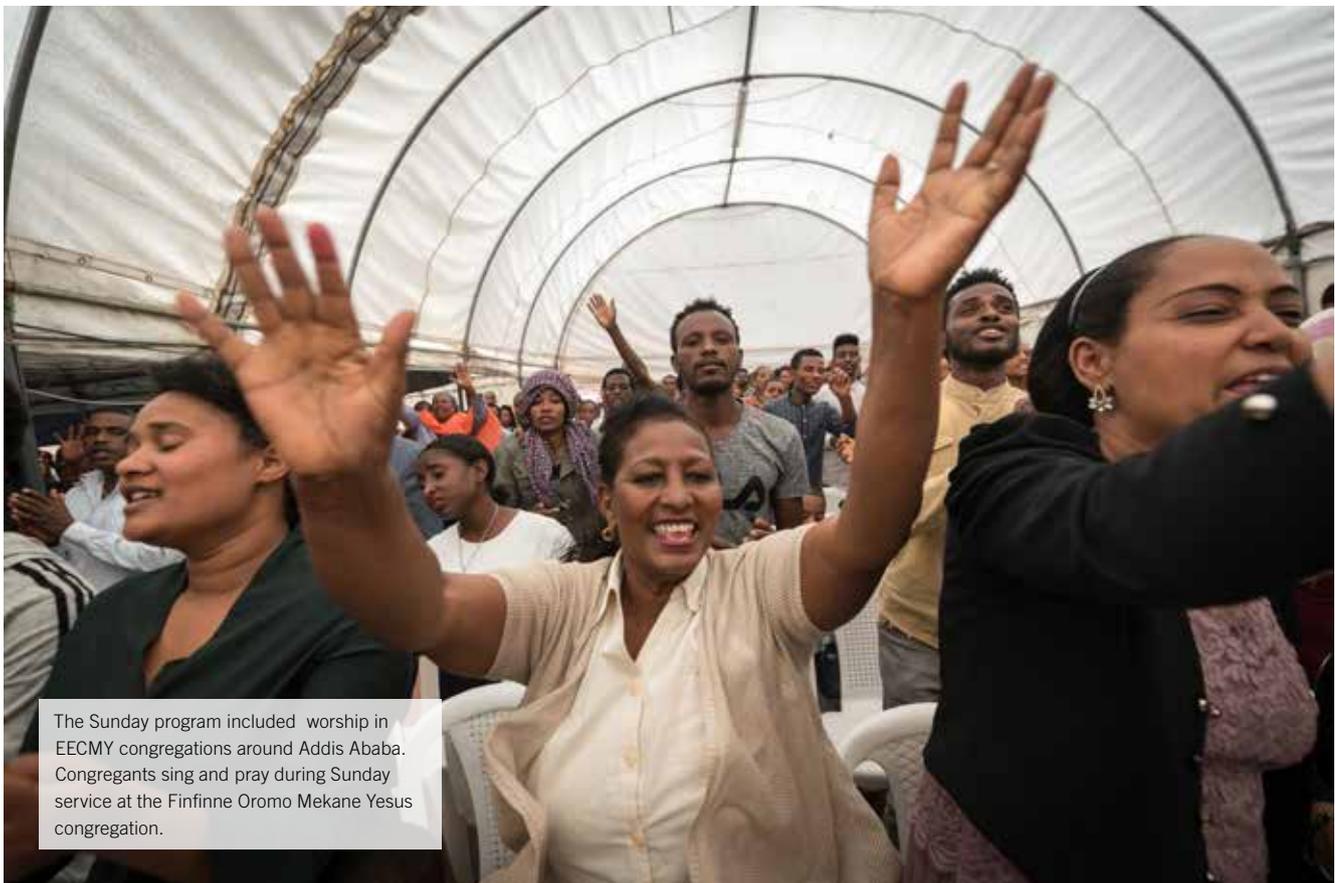
gifts are always given in love in order to build up the body (1 Corinthians 12-13). In order to address spiritual narratives that commodify gifts or suggest special revelations that glorify a new clerical, shamanistic or spiritual class, Lutherans must develop theological frames and mechanisms of discernment (*tentatio*) in order to equip people to differentiate between what gifts are used to build up the body in love and compassion, and what gifts are being exploited through claims of special revelation as a new theology of glory, as a means of commodifying grace in our age.

- Lutheran identity speaks about a method and mode of being in the world. Lutheran identity is not informed solely by a set

of theological or confessional propositions. Lutheran identity is formed by the lived spirituality of our experience of God's Spirit through Word, sacrament and service, recognizing and including mysticism. Part of that lived spirituality involves discerning our experience of daily life. A faithful trust in God's presence in the world shapes our mode of being in the world. The *tentatio* of Luther's theological method implies a critical reflection or engagement with the world that trusts the Holy Spirit will help us discern between law and gospel, what is promise and what is contrary to God's desire for creation. The consultation recognized the value of an inductive, pastoral approach to theological reflection and self-understanding that values

experience as theological "data", and sees our living theological and confessional documents as normative but not prescriptive.

- To the goal of discerning concepts of charism and the spirits of our age, the consultation repeatedly lifted up the concept of the priesthood of all the baptized as a critical way to frame spiritual gifts as part and parcel of baptismal vocation. The consultation found consensus in that, while criteria need to be developed for discerning spiritual gifts and adapting for the reality of certain spiritual gifts (speaking in tongues or healing), a theology of charisms should be rooted in the baptismal concept of the priesthood of all the baptized. This doctrinal position underwrites the profes-



The Sunday program included worship in EECMY congregations around Addis Ababa. Congregants sing and pray during Sunday service at the Finfinne Oromo Mekane Yesus congregation.

sion that all the baptized have received the same grace from the Spirit of God through Christ, and therefore all gifts are equal. By democratizing administration, teaching, diaconal service, etc. on the same plane as speaking in tongues and healing, then there can be no claim of special revelation (therefore reducing exploitation) related to any “special gifts.” This link strengthens the link between *charis* and *charismata* (grace and gifts), as well as justification and sanctification, which is one mark of future Lutheran theological engagement.

- The consultation remarked that liberty is an organizing principle of Lutheran identity. While justification by grace through faith is the cornerstone of the Lutheran tradition, liberation implies that no theological locus or religious practice should ever bind what has been loosed. For that reason, liberation by God’s grace (e.g. Paul’s letter to the Galatians) implies that nothing given as a gift and promise should be used to burden the heart or conscience, or as a religious means to an end. Like the priesthood of all the baptized, liberty is an organizing principle that will help in constructing any theology of charisms, or criteria for discerning charismata or spirits of the age.
- The concept of liberty also applies to our understanding of God’s work in the world at large. To this end, the freedom of God emerged as a significant area for further theological reflection

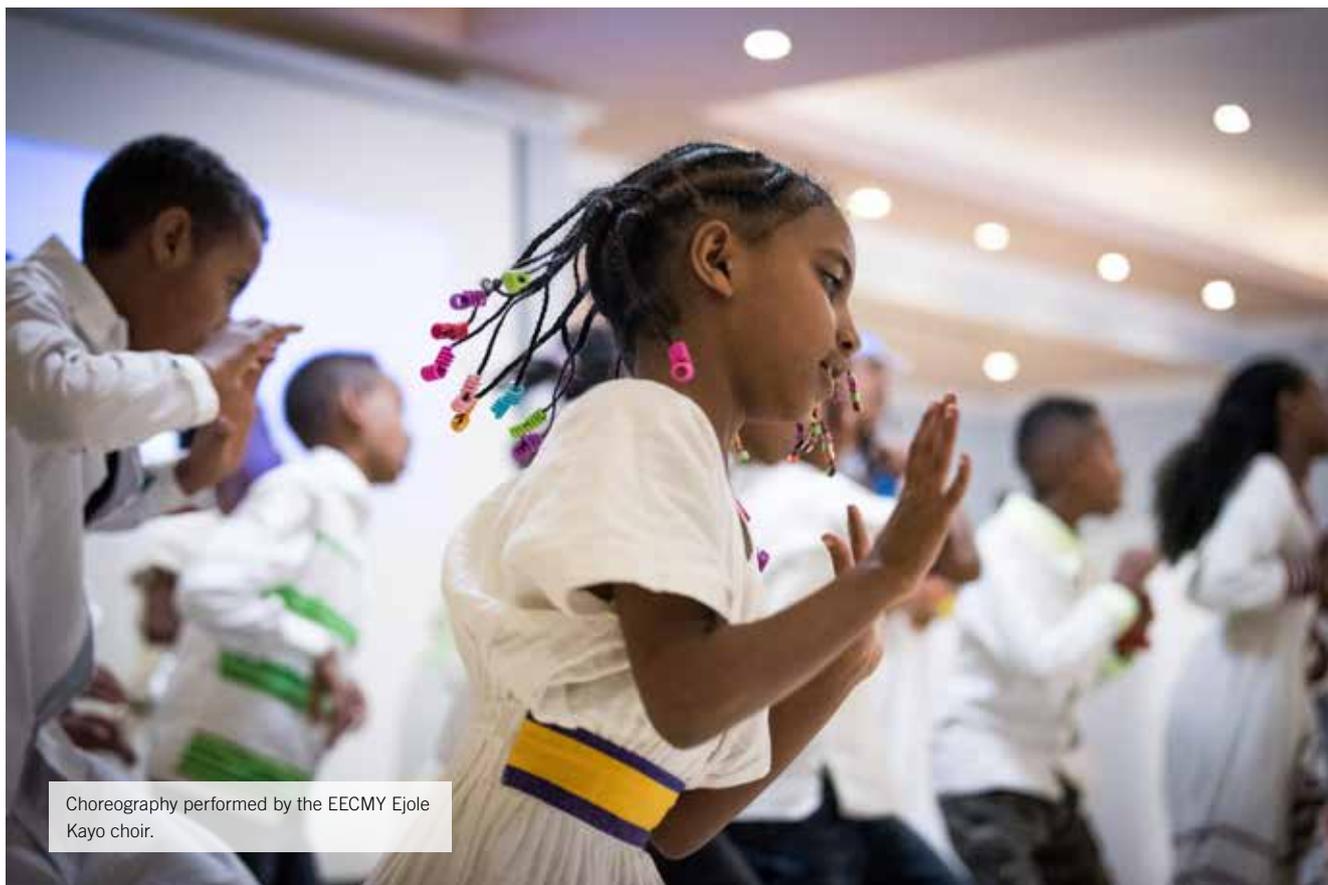
that must be engaged. In many ways, this goes well beyond questions of Lutheran identity. But, in many ways, our Lutheran theological tradition began with basic questions of God’s freedom, which eventually led to questions about God’s liberty to act through the church, and therefore in the lives of human beings. Most of our anthropological questions are related to the concept of the freedom of God, as are our continuing questions of public theology, ethics and the church in the public space. However, perhaps most relevant to the discourse of our day, are the ecological implications of the freedom of God. What is our profession regarding God’s presence and work in the world? Church’s mission in light of the Spirit’s work in creation at large? How does that understanding of mission relate the church to other faiths, indigenous traditions and the public space? How does that inform our vocation to participate in God’s work in the world as Christians (and therefore Lutherans) and shape our anthropology *per se*? These are lingering questions that can be explored in the coming years. Due to their ecological and anthropological significance, perhaps the freedom of God and the Spirit’s work in the world at large will be one of the most fruitful arenas for Lutheran theological reflection at the beginning of the next 500 years of our living tradition.

## Follow up and preparation for Phase 2

The Addis Ababa Consultation was Phase 1 of a three-phased theological study process. Phase 2 will last from 2020 until 2021, and will be constituted by an intentional engagement with member churches and local communities in a process of research and collecting input regarding Lutheran identity today. The COVID-19 crisis has caused a delay, and necessitated a new approach to this stage of the process. But while we will not be able to access LWF regional leadership spaces or regional gatherings, we hope to have many creative channels for input (video, creative projects, poetry, photography, hymnody, etc.).

One way to increase communion-wide participation in Phase 2 will be through monthly webinar meetings under the title, “Being Lutheran.” The aim of these webinars is to explore the findings of the Addis Ababa consultation. Speakers from across the communion will be invited to deepen our theological reflection on these themes, and provide a creative, dialogical space to increase participation in the study process. Being Lutheran webinars will be open to any member of the LWF who is able to register online. Details about the webinars and information about access will be available and updated on the LWF website.

The second focus of Phase 2 will center on the research questionnaire. This questionnaire will be based on the input of each regional reflection circle from Day 4 of the Addis Ababa consultation. Each regional reflection circle submitted



Choreography performed by the EECMY Ejole Kayo choir.

a set of questions. These questions were harvested from conversations and discussions during the consultation. Common questions will be collated into a section that can be asked to the whole communion, and therefore used in a comparative or trans-contextual way. But the questionnaire will also include a regionally specific section, which will include contextually specific

questions that arose from each regional reflection circle.

The questionnaire will be designed as a standardized, open-ended questionnaire, to be broadcast to member churches, and available for use in local fora. The questionnaire will be descriptive and reflexive. It will value different deductive and inductive responses. It will privilege spirituality and

experience as theological data, recognizing that Lutheran identity is rooted in a living tradition that includes dynamic practices, and normative but non-prescriptive confessional foundations. This report, and the documentation of the consultation papers, will accompany the questionnaire.

# Conclusion

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran reformation was commemorated under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.” At the beginning of the next 500 years of the Lutheran tradition, the LWF begins a study process that considers Lutheran identity in relationship to the work of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, our self-understanding begins with the freedom of God and the Spirit’s ongoing work to renew and reconcile all creation. Instituted to continue the work begun in Jesus Christ, the Church is called and gathered in communities where we are enlightened and equipped by the Spirit, through the means of grace to bear the creative and transformative fruit of Love.

The bond of peace among the churches of the Lutheran tradition is rooted in the Christian confession of one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4:3). That bond is maintained by the unity of the Holy Spirit that each person receives in

the gift and promise of the gospel, proclaimed through the Word and sacraments. However, that one gift bears a diversity of gifts and fruit in each of us. In this way, the work of the Holy Spirit accounts for our unity and our diversity, our common identity and our unique identities, as we participate in God’s mission.

This inductive process of mutual discernment and discovery began with a rich experience of our diversity in unity. Rooted in the Bible, and our common confessions and catechism, consultation participants experienced the diversity of Lutheran spirituality and theology. It was summarized succinctly by one participant who commented, “I belong to the Lutheran family with one, but diverse identity. Our unity is based on what the Holy Scripture teaches regarding the Holy Spirit and our Lutheran traditions, though our practices of common faith are shaped by diverse con-

texts...all deeply believe we serve and glorify the same Lord. Some of our churches have experienced Christianity for a century or less while others have many centuries of experience and resources. The Spirit is working in a way that we can learn from each other.”

And as one participant urged, “The Holy Spirit is in our Lutheran churches all over the world. She lives and creates...She moves us. Therefore, we need to accept her invitation of motion.” So may the Holy Spirit affirm our faith and inspire our holy imagination as we learn together and follow God’s Wisdom.

*Report compiled by Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer*

*LWF Program Executive for Lutheran Theology and Practice (new title, Program Executive for Identity, Communion and Formation)*



Women delegates at the consultation.



“We will further develop a shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which they will continue recognizing each other, belonging to the communion, while witnessing in their diverse contexts.”

(LWF Strategy 2019-2024)



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION