



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

Office of the  
General Secretary

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To the LWF member churches

Geneva, 17 February 2021

Respected church leaders, dear brothers and sisters,

With our first joint letter in 2021, we want to wish you a blessed year. We pray for your health and safety, for guidance and strength from God, for hope and joy in the Gospel.

It has been a year since the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in many countries. A year since restrictions were implemented to curb the spread of the virus and avoid harm to people. This has been an intense and in many ways challenging year for the churches.

### Your witness to the gospel

We remain thankful and deeply encouraged by the ways in which churches around the globe have responded to COVID-19:

- Helping their own members and society at large to understand their own responsibility to avoid harm on most vulnerable neighbors
- Supporting the measures adopted by public health authorities
- Finding innovative ways to continue offering prayer and worship life amidst dramatically changed contexts
- Offering pastoral accompaniment to people in fear and anxiety, and diaconal support to people and communities deprived of income and livelihoods
- Supporting the spiritual needs of church members and engaging with the theological questions that arose from the pandemic
- Advocating with local, regional and national governments for their action, their concern for those most vulnerable, and to remain focused on justice and dignity for all.

We want to acknowledge the immense effort of leaders at all levels, lay and ordained, to witness to God's liberating grace in times of pandemic. We trust that the seeds they all have sown, probably often in tears, will lead to a harvest with shouts of joy (Ps 126:5).

***Please pass on our gratitude to all those in your church who are offering a witness of hope and compassion to the people they serve.***

It has been a gift to see how you have come together, sub-regionally, regionally and globally, to share experiences, learn from each other and pray for each other.

***We encourage you to continue reaching out to each other, connecting with others, and helping each other to respond to the challenges at hand, including theological questions related to how to build and nurture faith communities.***

We want to acknowledge the many lives that the virus has taken. We continue receiving news, almost daily, of leaders at all levels of the church who have been infected by COVID-19 and are struggling. We continue receiving news of churches whose members and leaders have been called into the glory of God.

***Continue praying for those who suffer from void and pain in their lives and communities as they mourn those that were called to the Lord.***

### **Until all are safe, no one is safe**

The pandemic is not yet over. Ahead of us are more days requiring perseverance, resilience, and discipline. We encourage you to remain vigilant and attentive, following the advice offered by public authorities. Make sure you don't invite the virus into your lives, households and congregations, but keep it away.

We are thankful for science and researchers who have developed vaccines that can significantly curb the spread of the virus. Yet, we know that people have questions and are at times unsure on the efficacy of the vaccines, and possible side effects. Unfortunately, there are many narratives of suspicion, if not conspiracy, spreading particularly in social media and through messaging services.

***We ask you to acknowledge these questions and anxieties and offer support so that people can find factual, accurate information they are able to rely on.***

In addition, we observe with deep concern that the access to the vaccines is very unequal. Wealthy countries have secured their doses – sometimes manifold! – while other countries and their populations have been excluded from access to the vaccine. COVID-19 has indeed been a great “revealer,” exposing some of the deep structural disorders in the world, and exacerbating them even further. We pledge the LWF's ongoing advocacy at a global level for fair and just access of all to vaccines.

***We ask you to advocate for the inclusion of all people and nations in vaccination schemes. Securing vaccines for some but not all won't curb the spread of the virus. Until all are safe, no one is safe.***

### **Remember the poor (Gal 2:10)**

The LWF Communion Office is working hard to continue supporting LWF member churches in these times of exceptional challenges. We are grateful for the member churches' strong response to the two cycles of the Rapid Response Fund. Altogether, churches implemented 109 projects. Each of them, we know, offered hope and relief to local communities. We praise God for this.

More work is currently being done so that further support can be offered. We see how the pandemic has disrupted local economic life. Many are going hungry, violence is increasing, particularly against children, girls and women. Farmers have not been able to plant or look after their crops. Many eyes are looking at the church as one of those few local structures that would be able to offer relief and hope.

***We plead with you: continue remembering the poor and to serve them.***

### **The season of Lent – theological resource on Holy Communion**

This week the season of Lent begins. This is a special time to trace Jesus' journey to the cross, where he took on himself hatred, violence and death so that humankind could find new life.

The season of Lent culminates in the Holy Week, during which Holy Communion is celebrated in our member churches. Yet in many countries, the celebration of Holy Communion will face the obstacle of restrictions preventing congregations from gathering in person.


Attached to our letter is a resource for your ongoing theological and pastoral discernment regarding the questions at stake while faced with such a scenario. It is not a prescriptive text, but offers avenues along which LWF member churches might take up their own discernment and decision-making process on this issue, which is pastorally and theologically very sensitive.

Dear brothers and sisters, we journey together. We support each other as companions in God's mission. We uphold solidarity and mutuality. These continue to be powerful resources to face these challenging times for the church and for the world.

We invite you to pray for each other. Include these prayers for each other in your Sunday worship, helping your church members to see themselves as part of a global communion, united in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.



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