



THE  
LUTHERAN  
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FEDERATION

The President

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## **GREETINGS**

### **from Archbishop Dr. Panti Filibus Musa**

### **President of the Lutheran World Federation and**

### **Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in**

### **Nigeria**

### **To His Holiness Pope Francis**

**Rome, 25 June 2021**

Your Holiness,

With gratitude we come today to share our joy and our hope as we, Catholics and Lutherans continue our journey from conflict to communion. Almost five years ago, we met in Lund. At the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation, we gave thanks, we confessed, we prayed together and committed ourselves to unity, acknowledging each other as branches of the true vine.

Because our journey continues, we look ahead, setting our hearts and minds on the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in the year 2030. The Confession was presented on a day like this: June 25. It represented an attempt to provide a common basis that would heal the growing wound in the body of Christ. As we prepare for its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I hope that we will reconnect with its original ecumenical intention of the confession, allowing it to become the common ground on which to strengthen our journey into communion.

This journey is irreversible. Yet, as we progress, we are still unsettled by clouded memories from our past. They often obscure the way into which God is inviting us forward. This year, 2021, is marked by one of those difficult memories: the 500 years of the excommunication of Martin Luther. We cannot change history but we can retell it in a way that it carries the promise of a better future, thus becoming our story of reconciliation. Your Holiness, your presence and participation at our Common Prayer in Lund was already a powerful symbol for what God has accomplished: we now see each other as sisters and brothers. I am grateful for ongoing work between the LWF and the PCPCU that will help us to build and clearly articulate this joint message of hope at the LWF's Assembly in the city of Krakow, Poland in the year 2023.

When we met several years ago, I said to you that the world is in turmoil. Unfortunately, today, this has only intensified. Violence, extremism, fragmentation, and dishonest

speech continue to assert themselves creating oppression and fear. The pandemic, holding us in its grip, has only exacerbated these worrying developments. We are grateful to you, your Holiness, for the strong, challenging, yet pastoral words you have addressed to all the churches, and the world throughout the global pandemic, reminding us of our deep bond as a human family.

For us, reconciliation has a face: Jesus Christ and with Jesus, the face of our neighbor. Love of God directs us to our neighbor, faith becomes active in love. In the encounter with the poor and those neglected and exploited by the world, we discover Christ meeting us, reaching out, making us one. I want to express my gratitude for the ways in the LWF World Service and *Caritas Internationalis* have come much closer together in service to our neighbor. I am convinced that, for our journey from conflict to communion to unfold its deepest spiritual meaning, it must always become a gift of justice and peace to people waiting for a sign of hope in their lives.

I bring you gifts on behalf of the global communion of the Lutheran World Federation. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* remains one of the key cornerstones for our journey and it has been newly translated into Italian with a preface written by the General Secretary Martin Junge and H.E. Kurt Cardinal Koch. They highlight the importance of inner conversion. The churches are part of God's transformative mission, living out God's gift of reconciliation and justice, always journeying ever-deeper into communion. As individuals and as churches, we are transformed by the encounter with one another. Part of this journey is made visible in the *JDDJ* that today brings together Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans, and Reformed in joint proclamation and service.

I also bring you this chalice and paten representing our calling to be one. They have been crafted for the LWF by the brothers of the Community of Taizé, who incessantly pray for reconciliation. The life of the Community of Taizé is a witness to prayer and action, to a life nurtured by God's word and by human solidarity. The glaze for this chalice and paten is made from the sand of the refugee camp in Zaatari (Jordan). Sharing the Lord's Supper together is also bearing the burdens of all those who have lost everything. The solidarity found in the meal shapes who we are and ought to become: a people who, seeing the transfigured face of Christ, walk into the valley to see Christ in the disfigured faces of the exploited, the hungry and the poor. In this journey, we become fully church, together. Let us act together now, deepening into visible solidarity our union in prayer.

Today globally, Lutherans and Catholics seek to discern how to live into God's action that makes us one. With prayer (Taizé), service (Zaatari) and dialogue, may the Holy Spirit continue guiding us, so that we will gather one day at the table where God, through the gift of Christ, has made us already one.