



A presence of mercy

New Year's greeting of the LWF General Secretary

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)

Dear sisters and brothers.

Greetings of peace and hope in this New Year 2021. May you experience God's steadfast presence throughout the year ahead of us. A presence of strength and encouragement that inspires and guides you daily, nurturing and transforming your lives for powerful witness in your contexts.

"Be merciful." That is a timely heading for the witness of churches in a world that has gone through crisis. Many lives were lost and communities suffered greatly under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scientists and researchers have managed to develop vaccines that will hopefully reach populations globally and help contain the further spread of the pandemic.

Yet, we know that for many people and communities challenges will remain. Some speak of a "third wave", which won't be about the coronavirus anymore,



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but about mental health. As leaders and pastors in your congregations, you probably know very well what I am writing about. Spiritual, psychological, and mental challenges are on the rise. Many are suffering, are stressed and anxious.

You know as well about the significant economic and social challenges that individuals and communities are facing. According to the United Nations, 235 Million people will need support in 2021. That equals 1 of 33 persons worldwide. Never in the last decades has this ratio been higher. Violence is also increasing, including sexual and gender-based violence which mostly affects women and girls.

“Be merciful”. This reminder helps us focus on the pastoral task entrusted to churches ministering to congregations and communities. Churches are invited to hold fast to a vision of life in fullness in Christ, resisting apathy or accepting the pain of communities as a “new normal.” They shall on the contrary be compassionate as they speak to their people, walk with them and serve them.

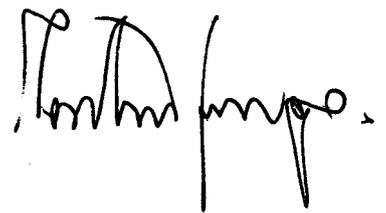
The verse for this year does not come only with a call demanding action from our side. It also comes with a powerful reminder about the deep source of mercy and compassion: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.” This is a foundation we can build on, a reminder of the action God has and continues to take daily in our lives and in the world.

Nurtured by the word of God and the presence of Jesus Christ in bread and wine, rooted in prayer, embraced by a community of believers that goes beyond time, we are called to witness to that which we have received. Filled with the gifts of God, aware of God’s abundant mercy, we are called to become a presence of mercy in this world.

As always, we will do this together, as a global communion of churches: praying for each other, supporting and encouraging each other, learning together, and serving together. ‘Mercy’ shall be our watchword as we continue announcing God’s liberating grace in this new year that has just begun.

Happy New Year!

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