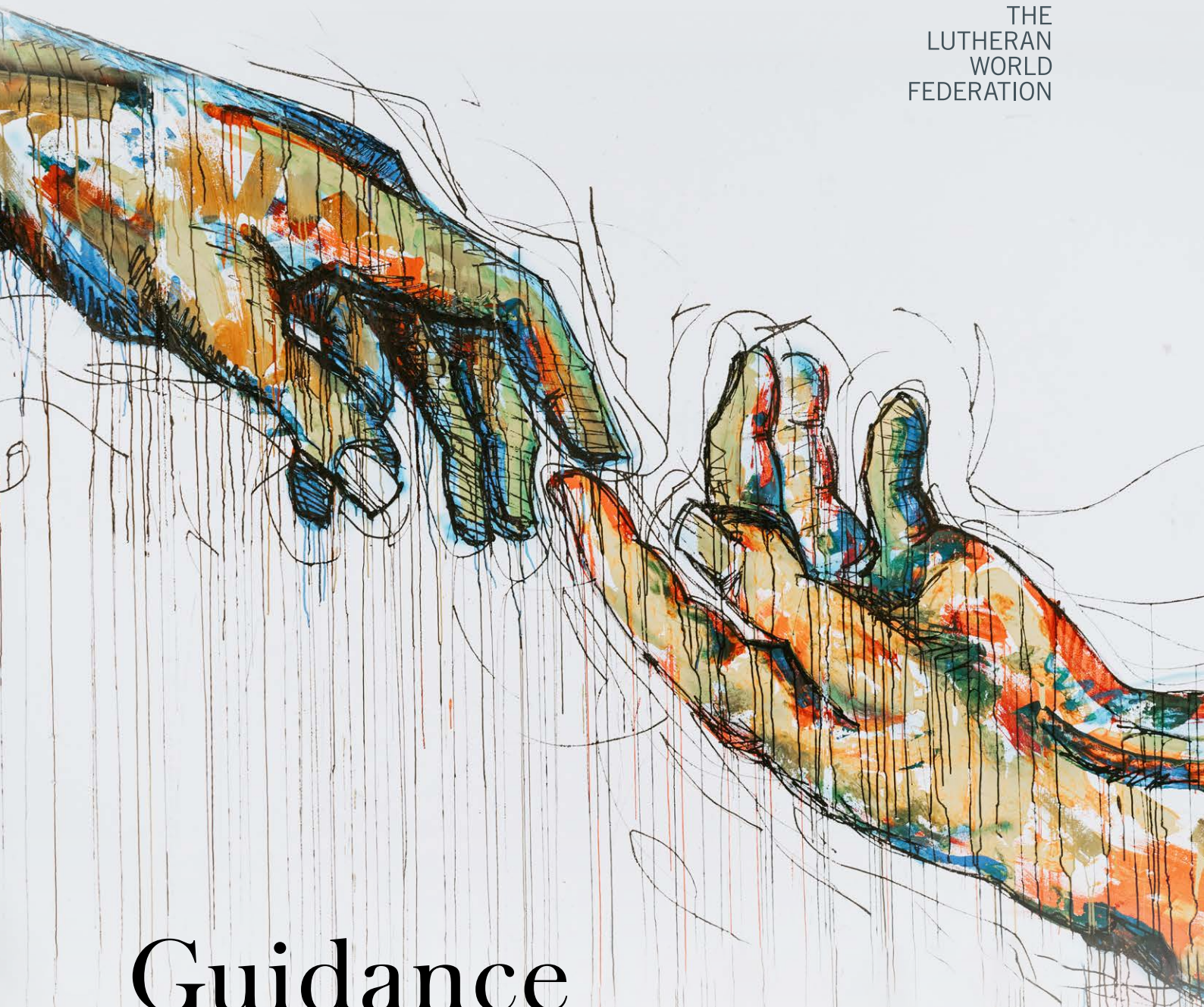




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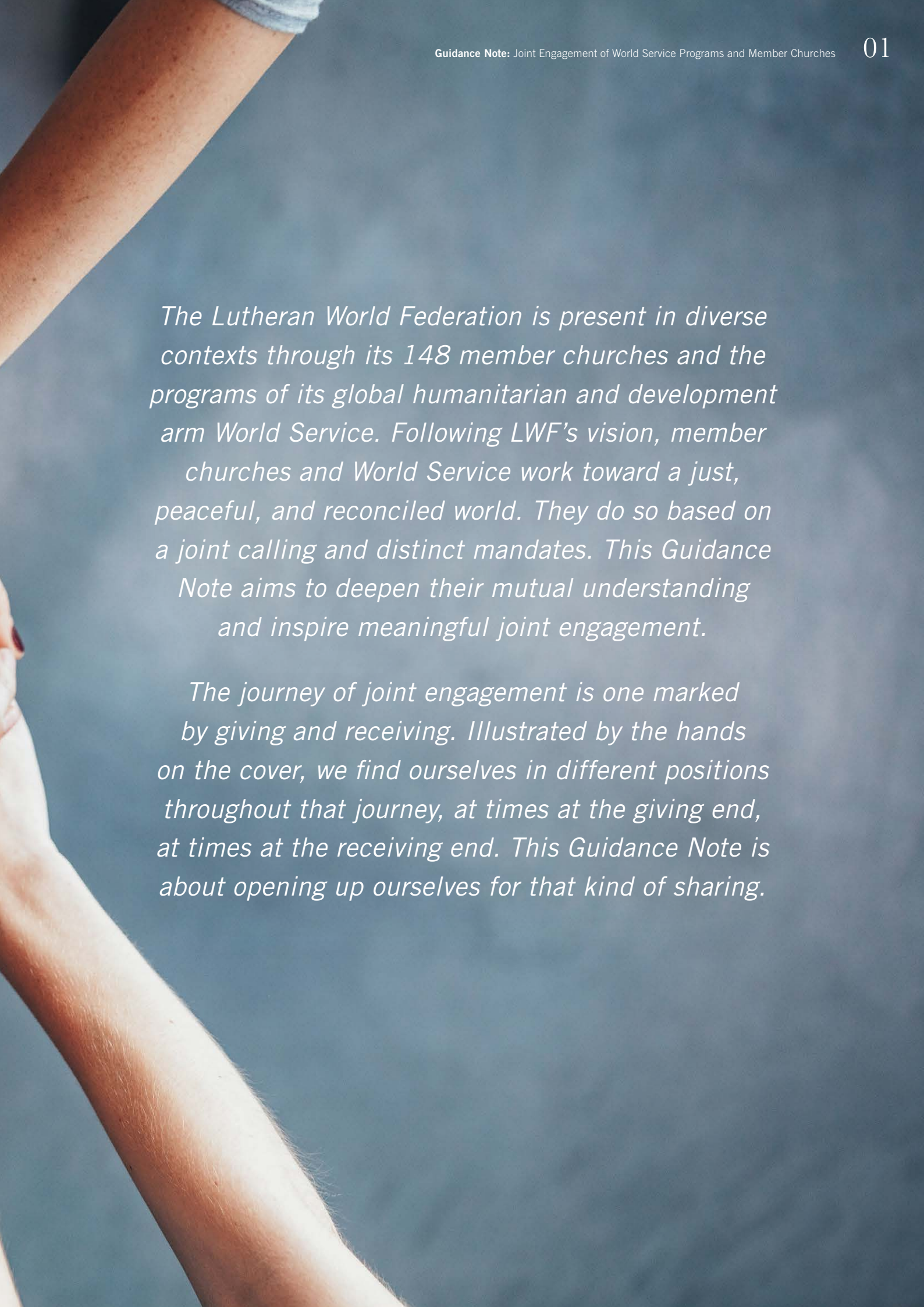


Guidance Note

**Joint Engagement
of World Service
Programs and
Member Churches**

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The Lutheran World Federation is present in diverse contexts through its 148 member churches and the programs of its global humanitarian and development arm World Service. Following LWF's vision, member churches and World Service work toward a just, peaceful, and reconciled world. They do so based on a joint calling and distinct mandates. This Guidance Note aims to deepen their mutual understanding and inspire meaningful joint engagement.

The journey of joint engagement is one marked by giving and receiving. Illustrated by the hands on the cover, we find ourselves in different positions throughout that journey, at times at the giving end, at times at the receiving end. This Guidance Note is about opening up ourselves for that kind of sharing.

Introduction

THE OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDANCE NOTE

Meaningful joint engagement between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches and World Service (WS) programs is based on mutual understanding of LWF's identity. This includes having joint recognition of the distinction between the member churches' self-understanding and calling on the one hand, and the mandate of WS on the other. This document aims to foster such mutual understanding. It does not present a set of rules; instead, its goal is to provide inspiration and practical recommendations for building meaningful partnerships. The central conviction behind this Guidance Note is that better and closer collaboration and cooperation between WS programs and the member churches will materialize in a genuine comparative advantage of the global communion of churches as a mutually inspiring and empowering network that links the local member churches with WS.

This document compiles the findings of a series of interviews with staff of the LWF Communion Office and LWF member churches and the WS country and regional representatives.

The recommendations in this document are intended as a resource for staff of WS country and emergency programs (hereinafter referred to as WS programs) and the member churches on how they can engage with each other. In a wider sense, this document may also provide some orientation for WS programs that work in collaboration with other Christian and non-Christian faith-based communities.

How to use this Guidance Note

The following chapters guide the reader through essential steps toward deeper collaboration between WS programs and the member churches. The document first provides some background on the foundations for joint engagement, identifies common ground for working together, and outlines the added value and boundaries of collaboration. It then provides an overview of already existing good practices and practical recommendations for closer partnership. For quick reference, **blue** boxes indicate practical action points, **green** boxes indicate key opportunities, and **orange** boxes indicate common challenges.



1

Background

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR JOINT ENGAGEMENT OF WORLD SERVICE AND MEMBER CHURCHES

The term “diakonia” has been shaped by how Christians have tried to be faithful to the biblical call to serve their neighbors throughout the history of the church.¹ Diakonia is both a theological concept and a call to action; it is at the heart of both what churches are and what they do. As a theological concept, diakonia refers to the motives that guide the practice of churches’ service to others, for instance the understanding that all human beings are created in the image of God. As a call to action, diakonia refers to the ways in which churches respond to human suffering and injustice, engage in care for creation, and challenge unjust and oppressive power systems.²

Diakonia (service to others) has always played an essential role in the work and identity of the LWF.³ From its founding in 1947, the member churches felt compelled to heed the biblical call to become a compassionate and serving presence in the world. They discerned that their vocation to become a global witness of reconciliation, justice, peace, and service was stronger than the forces that had placed them in opposing camps during World War II.

Knowing that no local church could render such global service on its own, the Lutheran churches decided to join together: they established and mandated WS as their global instrument and key actor in international diakonia. Initially, the mandate of WS focused on assisting Lutherans suffering from displacement in the aftermath of the war. But the churches quickly realized that they could not restrict their humanitarian assistance to Lutherans only, and that God’s unconditional love for the world makes no distinction in serving suffering human beings. In 1952, following a joint process of theological reflection, the member churches decided that WS assistance should be impartial and respond to any form of “human need as it may develop in the world.”⁴

Today, WS is a widely recognized international faith-based organization working in 25 countries, as well as a visible expression of the global communion of 148 Lutheran churches.

As the diaconal arm of all the LWF member churches, WS is accountable not to individual churches in the areas in which it operates, but instead to the communion of churches as a whole through the LWF Council. The member churches support WS in a coordinated manner while at the same time engaging in diaconal action in their own contexts, based on their long track record of supporting the marginalized and disadvantaged.

The current LWF strategy focuses both on supporting the churches' presence and vibrant witness in the world (through, but not limited to, diaconal action) and on promoting human dignity, justice, and peace.⁵ The foundation for the work of both WS and the member churches is God's liberating grace, which empowers and calls us to actively and constructively engage with the world – a world in which the conditions for humanitarian work and the diakonia of churches have changed drastically in recent years.

Significant progress has been made in certain areas of human development over the past few decades. However, environmental, social, economic, and political conditions have deteriorated in many countries, leading to a decline in living conditions among ordinary citizens and causing tremendous suffering. Global structural injustices continue to prevent equal access to and distribution of goods, leading to increased economic inequality. Additionally, population pressures, climate change, and the overexploitation of resources have exacerbated the damage caused by natural disasters, resulting in increased social inequality, economic decline, political conflicts, wars, massive migration, and displacement.

These conditions have created new challenges for humanitarian and development organizations like WS and for the diaconal work of the churches. International organizations alone cannot address the suffering of people, meet their needs, or ensure that their basic human rights are respected. The importance of local civil society is growing,⁶ and so international organizations are making increased efforts to strengthen the capacities of local partners like churches to defend basic human rights, manage risks, and provide effective help to the most vulnerable in times of acute need.

Collaboration between the member churches and WS, a global humanitarian and development organization, represents a concrete opportunity for positive change. The LWF's theological work and connectedness with churches on the one hand, and expertise in humanitarian and development work on the other, implies a comparative advantage that not many development and humanitarian organizations can provide. Wherever the mandates of WS programs and member churches overlap, there is great potential to increase the impact of each other's work through joint engagement.

2

Exploring Collaboration

COMMON GROUND AND ADDED VALUE

The specific ways in which WS and the member churches engage with each other will always be unique to the respective context in which both are present. One determining factor for the possible scope and manner of joint engagement is the degree of overlap between the mandates of WS programs and churches in a specific country or region.

The entry points for collaboration may be more obvious in contexts where WS has a broad mandate that includes humanitarian and development work in different geographical areas where member churches are located, as compared to contexts where the mandate of WS is focused on specific interventions in specific locations. Similarly, with regard to the mandates and priorities of the respective member churches, joint engagement with WS programs may be more natural for churches that are already strongly engaged in diaconal action as compared to churches in which diakonia is not among the main priorities.

Irrespective of the context, collaboration will not happen automatically – it is a mutual process in which building trust takes time and commitment from both sides. Collaboration begins with initiating a dialogue between WS and the churches with the aim of clarifying the specific mandates and priorities of the WS program and the churches in a given context.



Key actions for churches and World Service programs

- **Collaboration starts** with cordial relationships: actively seek communication with each other's leadership.
- **There are many opportunities** to get into contact with each other. Invite each other's leadership to key events or celebrations and allow them to present their current work and plans for the future.
- **Prepare a calendar** of events and share it with each other.
- **Key action for member churches:** explain the theological foundations and focus of your church's diaconal work.
- **Key action for WS programs:** present your program, explain your strategic plan, and talk about the involved donors and other partners.

What do World Service and the member churches have in common?

- **Both are distinct expressions of the global communion of Lutheran churches.** The member churches make up the constituency of the LWF and form the LWF as a communion of churches, while WS is an expression of this communion of churches on the ground, bearing witness to its diaconal commitment.
- **Both share the same values,** which are based on the fundamental ethical principle of human dignity and rooted in the Lutheran faith identity: dignity and justice, compassion and commitment, respect for diversity, inclusion and participation, transparency, and accountability.⁷
- **Both aim to provide a practical witness** of God's love for marginalized and suffering people, with WS focusing specifically on the needs of refugees and returnees, internally displaced populations, host communities, and communities at risk. Providing assistance to those most in need without discrimination, ensuring that these people's rights are respected, and giving a voice to those whose voices are being silenced are part of their common mandate.
- **Both work in overlapping geographical areas:** either a country or a regional cluster of countries.
- **Both are embedded in the same public space,** which is shaped by specific demographic, political, economic, and social conditions, and are confronted with the same environmental context and challenges.

Through WS, the member churches have an international diaconal presence. WS is what it is today because of its vast network of partnerships within the global humanitarian system. Although its work is based on the deep theological conviction of the communion of churches that it should have a global diaconal presence, the context of its operations is the humanitarian system. WS is a recognized actor in international diakonia because it adheres to the humanitarian principles and complies with the regulations and frameworks that this system has developed over many decades. The churches' diaconal work, on the other hand, is motivated by their participation in God's mission and their undergirding theology of love and compassion for humanity and God's creation.

WS and member churches share the same values, but they use different language to describe those values and principles because they are embedded in different overall frameworks within which they understand their work. WS describes its work in mainly humanitarian terms, for instance by referring to the human rights framework or the international climate protection agreements. Churches, too, sometimes refer to those frameworks, but they may also describe their diaconal work in biblical and theological terms, for example by referring to the concept of justice or promoting care for God's creation. Ultimately, both WS and member churches aim to build a more just, peaceful, and reconciled world. Having a set of common values provides a good basis for working together and exploring ways in which the two organizations can complement and support each other. Discovering these shared values is a good opportunity to start a dialogue.



CHURCHES AND FAITH COMMUNITIES HAVE A SUSTAINABLE LOCAL PRESENCE.

CHURCHES HAVE LOCAL HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES.



KEY STRENGTHS OF CHURCHES AS WORLD SERVICE PARTNERS

LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE OFTEN FIRST RESPONDERS IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES. THEY ARE APPROACHED BY AFFECTED COMMUNITIES AND PROVIDE SHELTER, FOOD, WATER, AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT.

CHURCHES OFFER COMPLEMENTARY KNOW-HOW, INCLUDING SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT.



THE TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE OF WS (E.G. EMERGENCY RELIEF, LIVELIHOODS, PROTECTION) MAY ENRICH AND BROADEN CHURCHES' DIAKONIA WORK.

THE NATIONAL AND GLOBAL NETWORKS TO WHICH WS BELONGS CAN BE A RESOURCE TO STRENGTHEN THE ADVOCACY OF MEMBER CHURCHES BY CONNECTING LOCAL VOICES TO INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE, ADVOCACY, AND PEACE WORK.

THE UP-TO-DATE PROFICIENCY OF WS IN THE REQUIRED STANDARD PROCEDURES FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION WILL HELP MAKE DIACONAL WORK MORE EFFICIENT.

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KEY STRENGTHS OF WORLD SERVICE AS PARTNER FOR CHURCHES

WS CAN PROVIDE SPECIFIC KNOW-HOW ABOUT ESSENTIAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR RESPONSIBLE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT WORK.

THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH OF WS TRANSLATES CHRISTIAN ETHICS INTO HUMANITARIAN TERMINOLOGY.

!!

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Key opportunity for churches

Invite WS representatives to present their program at a special event for the church leadership.

WS and member churches are often seen as a single entity, i.e. as national and international arms of the global communion of Lutheran churches. Even if there is little or no collaboration between the two, it is important for WS and member churches to acknowledge their common roots and the fact that both are distinct expressions of the global communion. These common roots, the geographical proximity of the two organizations, and the fact that both operate within the same public space are all reasons for them to engage with one another.

Why engage jointly?

WS programs and member churches each have distinct assets and specific strengths, which, if pooled through collaboration, can be leveraged to effect more positive change for the marginalized and most vulnerable.

One major strength of member churches is their rootedness in local communities. All churches remain permanently present at the local level, and most either include marginalized groups in their membership or work with them in their diaconal activities. This gives churches firsthand knowledge of the demographic, socio-cultural, and economic context in which they operate. When a need occurs, they are already on site, as their members may be affected in the same way as the wider community. Moreover, well-established faith communities usually enjoy a high level of trust and social capital, which can be a great asset in effecting positive change.

The pre-existing social and physical structures of churches help them to intervene swiftly when services are urgently needed, in part because most churches involve their members in diaconal activities. When called upon, highly motivated staff and volunteers can act quickly and flexibly.

Because churches are rooted in their local and national context, they will remain present and so will their diaconal work. As all WS activity is project- and time-bound, collaboration with member churches may lead to more sustainable support for the most vulnerable. If member churches have gained the required capacity, WS could hand over part of its work to the church bodies responsible for diakonia. There also may be an opportunity for geographical complementarity: churches with the necessary capacity could carry out diaconal work that complies with accepted global development and humanitarian requirements in places where WS is not present.

In most developed countries, the state is obliged to provide welfare care for the needy. In many developing countries, however, socially disadvantaged people often do not receive such benefits. In these countries, churches play a much greater role in alleviating the suffering of socially disadvantaged people through their diaconal action and witness of God's unconditional love for all people. Some member churches are not aware of how WS could support such diaconal work. To help WS identify common ground for better collaboration, it may be useful to summarize what the church is doing (see blue box).



Key actions for churches

- **Make a list of the key values** underpinning your diaconal work.
- **Explain the approach taken** in your diaconal work and prepare a list of contact people (e.g. diakonia staff, coordinators of specific diaconal projects).
- **Prepare a list of the specific groups** of people served by your program (target groups).
- **Prepare a list of the specific needs** of the people you serve.
- **Identify the geographical focus** areas of your diaconal work.

One distinctive feature of WS programs is that they provide quality psychosocial care for people in dire situations. This goes hand in hand with the genuine work of the churches: one strength of churches' diaconal work and pastoral care is the ability to give hope, strengthen the self-confidence of people in dire need, and move people to common action, based on a theology of love and compassion.



Key opportunity for WS programs

Invite the church leadership (including women and youth leaders) to present the church's diaconal work at a joint meeting with your management team.

For its part, WS can support member churches in various ways to make their diaconal work more effective (see purple box). WS has 70 years of professional experience in disaster relief, rehabilitation, emergency preparedness, and development programs. The track record of WS as a recognized partner of international humanitarian organizations and national and regional civil society networks, is based on the systematic application of internationally acknowledged quality standards for responsible humanitarian work, the use of the required standard procedures for responsible project implementation, and a broad spectrum of specific technical know-how. Like the member churches, WS combines local rootedness with global connectivity and works to give a voice to local communities in international dialogue, advocacy, and peace work. To help churches identify common ground for better collaboration, it may be useful to summarize what WS is doing in a specific context (see blue box).



Key actions for World Service programs

- **Make a list of key values that govern** the WS strategy in your country/region.
- **Prepare a list of the specific groups** of people your program focuses on (target groups).
- **Prepare a list of the specific needs** of these target groups and how your program addresses them.
- **Identify the geographical areas** in which you work.
- **Describe the timeframes** of WS projects in the country/region.

3

The Boundaries of Collaboration

WHAT MAKES WORLD SERVICE AND MEMBER CHURCHES DIFFERENT?

Although WS and member churches have much in common in terms of shared values and belonging to the same global communion, there are clear differences in their roles and mandates. The LWF's member churches have mandated WS as their key actor for international diakonia to assist all those in need without discrimination of any kind. The scope of work of WS programs in specific contexts is determined by agreements concluded with governments, financial donors, and implementation partners.

The roles and mandates of WS and the churches differ substantially in terms of:

- **Focus of work:** While churches follow a holistic mission approach including diakonia, advocacy, and proclamation of the gospel, the mandate of WS is limited to international diakonia and advocacy, governed by the four principles of humanitarian presence (humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence). WS therefore cannot engage in or financially support any proclamation or evangelization activities, as those activities correspond neither to the mandate set for WS by the Lutheran communion of churches nor the obligations of the humanitarian system resulting from this mandate.
- **Lines of accountability:** Churches are accountable to their membership base, respective governing structures, and church-related partners as well as other donors who support them financially, e.g. mission agencies. In addition, churches are accountable to the wider communities they serve. In line with its people-centered approach, WS is primarily accountable to the people it seeks to assist. At the same time, WS needs to abide by the policies of host governments and comply with the regulations of its funding partners and their back donors. Any intervention funded through WS therefore needs to comply with the corresponding back donor requirements (e.g. codes of conduct, child protection policies, procurement regulations or anti-terrorism policies).
- **Scope of people served:** The mandate of WS focuses on work with refugees and returnees, internally displaced populations, host communities, and communities affected by disasters in their quest for justice, peace, and reconciliation – irrespective of their faith background and based on most urgent needs alone. Churches, on the other hand, may work with a broader range of people, including any kind of disadvantaged groups in the wider communities they serve. This may include WS target groups, but may also extend beyond them.

- Working modalities:** Due to the specific mandate of WS and the requirements of its funding partners, the working modalities of its programs are shaped by time-bound project cycles with fixed budgets and clearly determined requirements for project implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Member churches' diaconal work, on the other hand, is embedded in their broader mission work and therefore tends to be less time-bound and technical than may be the case with WS programs. The degree to which the churches' diaconal work is institutionalized depends on many factors, such as the church's size, membership, and context. Some member churches have established dedicated institutions that are mandated to carry out their diaconal work. The working modalities of such churches may be closer to those of WS programs, making collaboration easier. Churches that do not have separate institutional structures for their diaconal work, on the other hand, often have rather ad-hoc and spontaneous working modalities that are quite different from those of WS programs. This setup may nevertheless present a great opportunity for joint learning and complementary collaboration.

If these differences are not well understood by both sides, collaboration may become difficult, as joint engagement may be hampered by expectations that do not match reality. As with any human institution, the structures, specific priority areas, and day-to-day policies of churches and WS programs are determined by human capacities, including those of members/staff and leadership. They are also shaped by leaders' individual personalities, experiences and personal qualities, such as charisma and assertiveness.

Finally, the scope of a given church's activities is limited by a set of external conditions, such as politics, economic conditions, rule of law, etc. which cannot be changed and can only be marginally influenced. This is especially true for churches in a minority situation. If member churches and WS are to move toward deeper collaboration, they must accept that both parties have certain limitations, which must be addressed in the dialogue between the partners.

Challenges, risks and possible ways to overcome them

The member churches and WS are embedded in different frameworks and thus have different working modalities and terminologies. WS staff tend to use humanitarian jargon to describe their work, while churches tend to use biblical references and theological concepts. Their working modalities, too, may differ based on the respective external requirements. These differences can make it more difficult to find common ground and a shared language. Both parties must **invest time and effort if they wish to better understand each other's points of reference and working modalities.**

At times there may be distorted perceptions on both sides – member churches and WS offices – about each other's respective mandates and approaches. This is partly due to the different frameworks and terminologies mentioned above. Some churches find it difficult to understand why WS cannot engage in diaconal activities involving evangelization, or financially support the church in its broader mission work. WS staff, on the other hand, might assume that all churches have an additional agenda of proselytization in serving the most vulnerable.

Such distorted perceptions need to be overcome on both sides. **Engaging in open dialogue about each other's mandates and resulting working approaches and modalities is key.** Regarding joint projects, it is also important for WS and member churches to intentionally explain to back donors how the humanitarian principles are upheld in the implementation of joint diaconal activities.

Many churches feel that the Christian identity of WS is not very visible and that a spiritual connection between the churches and WS is missing. WS engages in a non-discriminatory and merit-based recruitment process, and so employs Christian as well as non-Christian staff who may have limited knowledge about the identity and work of the member churches. It is therefore **essential to support WS staff in gaining an understanding of the Christian values and Lutheran identity.** One way to do this might be to incorporate a related module into the WS staff induction program, possibly in collaboration with church representatives. Churches, too, could learn a lot from this process. Having Christian and non-Christian staff work together on a daily basis creates **unique opportunities for mutual learning**, much as it does in the interfaith work that LWF is known for globally.

The level of capacity to implement diaconal projects can vary considerably between churches and WS programs. While some churches have well-institutionalized diaconal structures, others may face capacity challenges, especially regarding internal control and accountability mechanisms. In the case of joint projects, this can pose reputational and financial risks to WS if compliance with back donor requirements cannot be ensured.



Key challenges for churches and World Service programs in working together

- **Different terminologies and working modalities:** Since churches and WS are embedded in different frameworks within which they understand their work, finding a common language and deepening mutual understanding may be difficult.
- **Distorted perceptions on both sides:** Churches may not always understand why WS cannot support or be affiliated with evangelization; WS staff may sometimes assume that all churches seek to convert people through their diaconal work.
- **Limited knowledge about the identity and work of churches:** WS' multi-faith staff may have a limited understanding of LWF's faith identity and the work of churches, which can make interactions with church representatives more difficult.
- **Capacity challenges for churches/ reputational risks for WS:** Weak accountability and transparency processes in some churches can lead to gaps in compliance and pose reputational and financial risks to WS.
- **Limited personal and material capacities on both sides:** It is difficult to deepen mutual understanding and collaboration if there is no time to engage with one another.

It is therefore **key for both partners to clearly define the requirements of any joint project and to make an honest prior assessment of their respective capacities**. Drawing up capacity-development plans could also be a way for WS (and the LWF Communion Office) to help churches strengthen their capacities in areas such as financial management and internal control.

One major challenge lies in the limited personal and material capacities on both sides to deepen the relationship and the collaboration. WS programs are under immense time pressure when implementing their humanitarian and development projects in the field, and churches – especially church leaders – also have limited capacities to engage in joint meetings and conversations. In addition, WS program budgets largely consist of earmarked project funding that must be used exclusively for the clearly spelled-out provisions in funding agreements. This limits the scope of action of WS programs and may lead to a limited capacity to work with member churches. One option for WS programs is to have a basket fund for strengthening the capacities of local partners, including churches. Another way of addressing the challenge of limited resources is to engage in joint projects that include the funding of dedicated positions on both sides. As the examples in the next chapter illustrate, **doing diaconal work together can be a great opportunity to deepen mutual understanding**.

Better relationships between WS programs and churches can be facilitated by all involved stakeholders, including the LWF Communion Office. Two-way communication between WS and the member churches can help the churches become more familiar with the work of WS and vice versa. It is key for both sides to deepen their understanding of the different frameworks in which WS and the member churches are embedded and the resulting differences in language, working modalities, and regulations. Both WS and the member churches represent the global communion of churches through their distinct mandates; this natural connection between the two organizations exists and should be acknowledged.

4

Forms of Collaboration

EXISTING MODELS AND GOOD PRACTICES

In most countries where WS country programs and member churches are present, one or more of the following forms of joint engagement are practiced:

- **Cordial relationships**, including mutual invitations to visit or take part in informal and formal events
- **Joint participation** in and mutual support through national and supra-national networks
- **Joint projects** as opportunities for mutual learnings
- **Working together** through staff exchanges and secondments
- **Capacity strengthening** through training sessions
- **A joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Letter of Intent (LoI)** describing how one or more member churches and a WS program intend to collaborate, which values and principles the joint engagement is based upon, and what the respective roles and responsibilities will be.
- **A joint advisory group**, composed of an equal number of representatives, that meets regularly to share information and discuss issues of common concern.

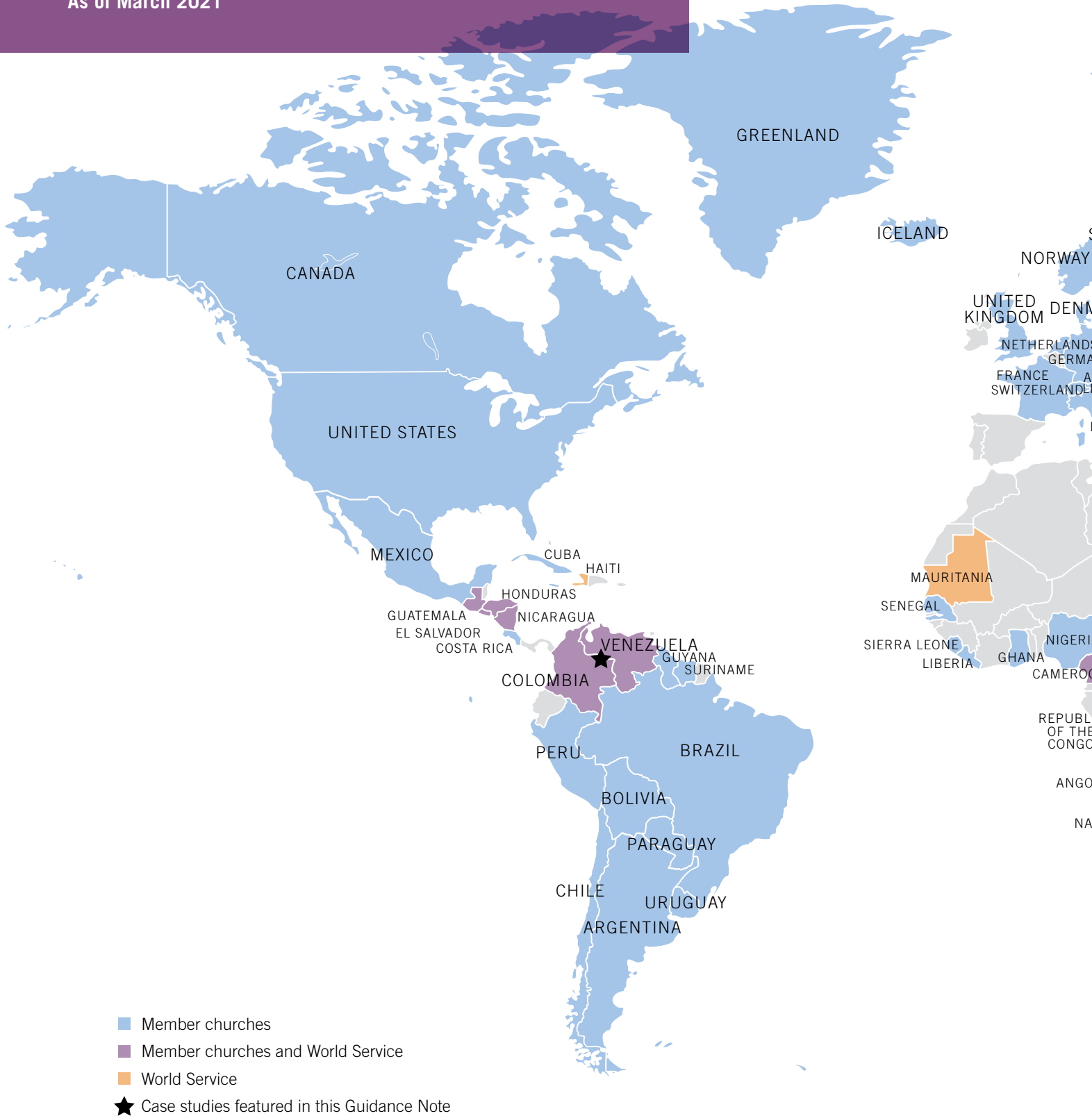
All these forms of collaboration require a mutual openness to engage jointly, so the first and most basic step is to establish a **cordial relationship**. This is a precondition for other, more involved forms of collaboration.

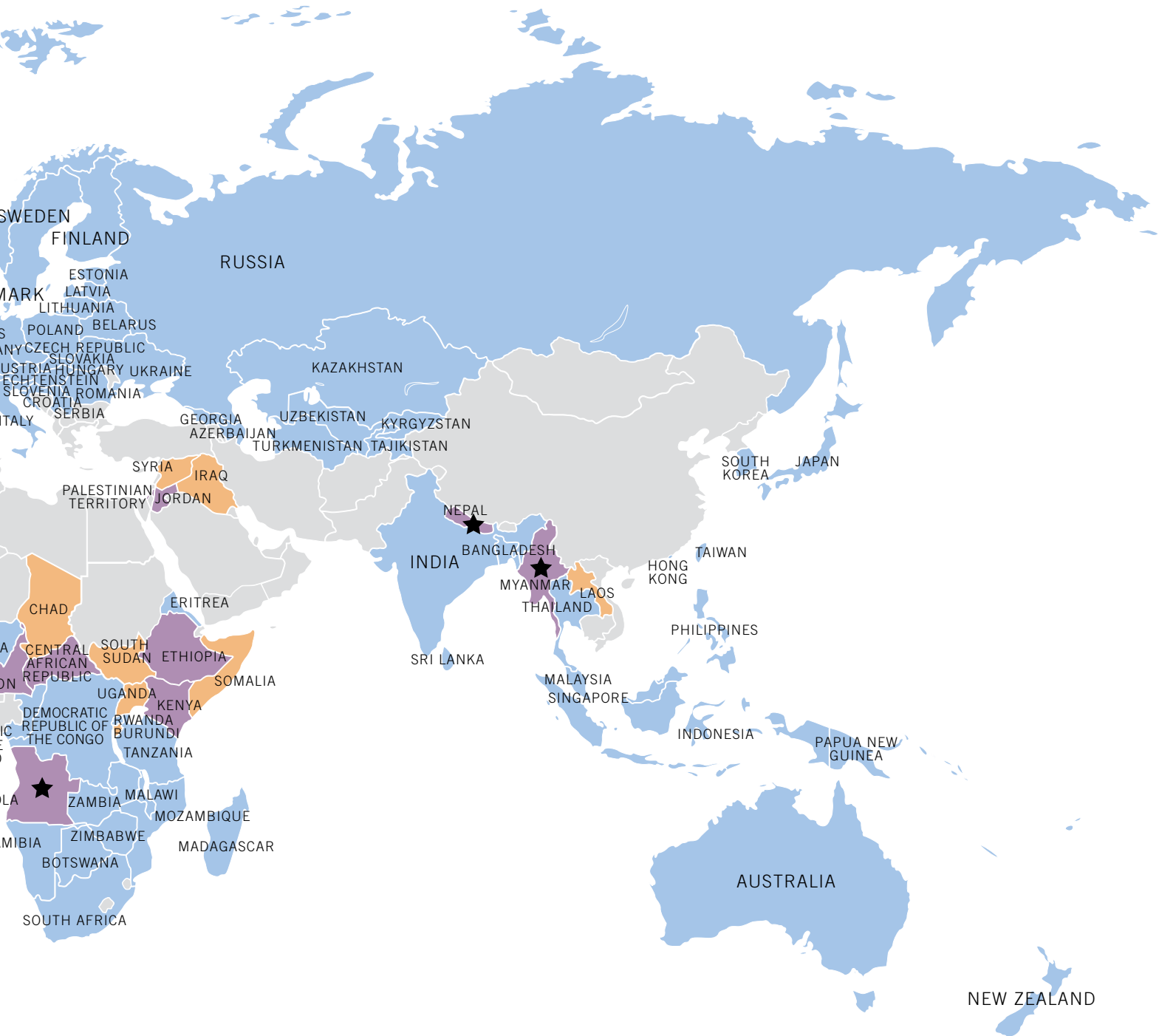
Participating in national or regional forums and networks can help churches and WS programs assemble coalitions for change and mobilize resources. ACT forums and national or regional church councils can also serve as platforms for dialogue between WS and the churches. However, joint participation in these types of forums and networks should be supplemented by bilateral meetings between churches and WS programs.

Joint projects serve as test cases in which WS and member churches can experience working together and evaluate how their collaboration can be improved. They usually require sharing authority and decision-making power and include cooperative planning, definition of outcomes and roles, task accountability, transparent budget discussions, and a clear structure for communication. Joint projects are also an excellent opportunity for churches to strengthen their capacity to implement diaconal projects through a learning-by-doing approach.

Presence of LWF member churches and World Service programs

As of March 2021







Key actions for churches and World Service programs

- **One-off interventions or the occasional invitation to participate** in public events can be a good starting point, but they should not be confused with collaboration. True collaboration entails a continuous process of balancing roles and responsibilities without jeopardizing the relationships with the different constituencies of both partners. It requires both sides to accept boundaries for working together. It helps to:
 - **Clarify mutual expectations** through dialogue, and prepare a list of issues that need further clarification.
 - **Identify “no-go” issues and limitations** determined by external factors and conditions.
 - **Discuss and mutually agree** on a list of quality requirements.
 - **Compare each other’s available capacities** with those required and the respective needs for working together for a specific project (reality check).
 - **Make a list of elements** that need to be included in the medium-term strategy to increase the capacities of both partners.
 - **Clarify visit dates and agendas** and arrange for joint meetings.
 - **Inform all stakeholders** about relevant decisions concerning the unified approach of the LWF – since improving collaboration and “acting as one” requires a consistent approach from all LWF stakeholders that support the member church: the national/ regional WS program and the different departments of the LWF Communion Office.

Exchanging or delegating staff is an efficient way to increase mutual understanding and overcome barriers related to terminology, jargon and professional language. This form of collaboration is also a good way to exchange specific knowledge, information, and expertise. Having WS and church staff work together on the same team ensures that different terminologies and viewpoints will be incorporated into the process of accomplishing things together.

Capacity strengthening goes beyond transferring technical skills and professional know-how through training. It is a process of mutual learning by accomplishing goals together, as trainers, project managers, and pastors also need to learn how trainees acquire information and what they find particularly important for their work. The real value of this mutual learning lies in the opportunities it creates for informal and in-depth discussions and exchanges. While churches may benefit from the humanitarian and development know-how shared by WS, (including technical skills like proposal writing, project monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and financial management), WS staff may gain insights from the churches about the LWF’s faith identity, the role of diakonia in the church’s broader mission work, and local or regional contextual issues.

Formal agreements, such as a general Lol or a more specific MoU, may outline conditions for the collaboration between the partners. Developing such formal agreements together is an ideal opportunity to jointly reflect on and put into writing shared values and principles. Such agreements often signal that more concrete action may follow, e.g. binding project agreements.

A joint advisory group may provide non-binding strategic advice to the collaborating partners. It is informal in nature and provides recommendations based on the knowledge and experience of its members, who should represent a wide spectrum of views and positions, e.g. with regard to cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, inclusion of people living with disabilities and minorities, environmental sustainability, and ecumenical and interfaith relations. Participating in a joint advisory group is also a good way to stay connected and informed about each other's work.


There are many good examples of how LWF member churches and WS programs have developed ways to collaborate with each other. The following case studies provide several examples of good practice from which other country programs might draw inspiration and learnings.



Key opportunity for member churches and World Service programs

- **Create and use platforms** for communication and exchange. Inviting each other to events, meetings, and conferences creates opportunities for exchange and mutual learning.
- **Work together** on specific joint projects (mutual learning-by-doing).
- **Organize staff** exchanges (i.e. mutual secondments and delegations of staff).
- **Organize joint capacity** strengthening training sessions (e.g. on the humanitarian principles, code of conduct, project monitoring, narrative and financial progress reporting, planning methodology, Lutheran faith identity, or joint brainstorming on local or regional needs).
- **Introduce new WS** staff to the LWF's faith identity, the central role of the churches, and the theological dimensions of diaconal work.
- **Set up written agreements** to formalize firm commitments between WS and the member churches.
- **Contribute to strengthening** ties between the different departments of the LWF Communion Office, and find ways to more effectively harmonize their cooperation with WS programs and member churches.

CASE STUDY:

Asia –
Myanmar

The collaboration between the four LWF member churches and the World Service program in Myanmar is a good example of multilateral joint action among churches and WS.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

The Federation of Lutheran Churches in Myanmar (FLCM) is the partner of the WS country program for the joint LWF Churches and Emergencies project. This project has reinforced cohesion and consolidated collaboration among the participating churches.

WS Myanmar assists the churches with proposal writing and provides training in the requirements for accountable and transparent implementation. The funding for the project is administered by the WS program, but the implementation is solely the responsibility of the member churches.

WS Myanmar's participation in the regional MMF has led to a deeper understanding of the local churches and learning about the Lutheran churches in the wider region.

The LWF has four member churches in Myanmar: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Myanmar/Lutheran Bethlehem Church, the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, the Myanmar Lutheran Church, and the Mara Evangelical Church. All four churches are part of the Federation of Lutheran Churches in Myanmar (FLCM). One of the objectives of the FLCM is to strengthen member churches' diaconal action to alleviate human need, promote peace, human rights, and to care for God's creation.

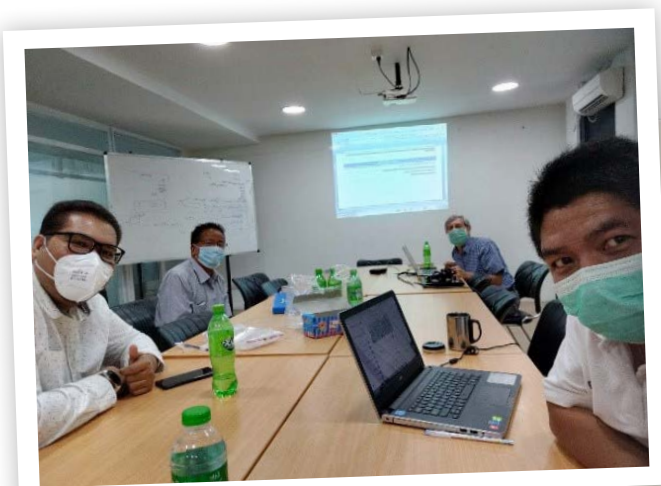
WS has been operational in Myanmar since 2008. From the beginning, the Myanmar member churches have experienced good collaboration with the WS country program. Since 2017, the FLCM has been hosted in the office of the WS Myanmar program in Yangon. Through the support of member churches and mission partner funding, the FLCM is able to handle basic administrative tasks and fund the position of the FLCM General Secretary.

Over the years, the partnership between the churches and WS Myanmar has grown in mutuality, respect, and willingness to explore ways to further deepen the relationship.

At the same time, both sides recognize the need to further deepen their understanding of each other's working modalities and mandates.

The communication between the member churches and WS Myanmar takes place bilaterally and through other forums. For instance, WS and church leaders participate regularly in meetings of the Mekong Mission Forum (MMF), a regional network of member churches and mission partners to accompany churches in the Mekong region. WS Myanmar has also invited the Myanmar churches to events organized by the WS program, such as the LWF President's visit or the visit of the LWF Committee for WS.

In addition, WS Myanmar administers small grants for diaconal church projects provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Through these grants, the four churches can individually implement diaconal projects according to the specific needs in their communities. In late 2019, the churches established the FLCM Social Welfare and Relief Committee to coordinate emergency preparedness and response work among the churches in the context of the joint LWF project Churches and Emergencies.




Myanmar church leaders and the LWF World Service Myanmar Representative prepare a COVID-19 project proposal.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

In April 2020 the four Myanmar churches submitted a joint proposal for COVID-19 response.

The LWF country program staff supported the church leaders in developing the project concept. Before implementation started, WS facilitated trainings for church workers on COVID-19 awareness raising.

CASE STUDY:

Africa –
Angola


The relationship between WS and the LWF member church in Angola shows how joint action and solidarity during emergencies can deepen collaboration.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Despite some hurdles, the collaboration between WS Angola and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola (IELA) has developed positively during the project's implementation and resulted in a very trusting relationship between WS and the member church. The joint project has offered many opportunities for learning-by-doing and has increased their mutual understanding of their different roles and scope of action.

The church has developed a greater interest in addressing development issues as part of its diaconal work, particularly since WS supported IELA by linking it to a local NGO experienced in literacy work.

WS has employed church staff for specific projects, which helped strengthen their capacity not only in accountable project implementation but also in technical issues, e.g. water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

WS and IELA have conducted joint meetings with the provincial and municipal authorities, resulting in greater recognition of and appreciation for the work of WS and the local church in the province.

The joint engagement of the WS Angola program and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola (Igreja Evangélica Luterana de Angola, IELA) has several roots. In the 1980s, WS ran an emergency program in Angola during the country's civil war. Today, the work of WS focuses on quality services, protection and social cohesion, with several projects on integrated rural development, land, and human rights.

The relationship between WS Angola and IELA was reinforced when WS provided support during several emergencies following the church's request for help through ACT Alliance appeals. In addition, over the years the church leadership has demonstrated a keen interest in engaging with WS, which has contributed to a very constructive collaboration.

A joint project on education and women's literacy in southern Angola, initiated by the church, became a starting point for closer collaboration with WS Angola. Funding for the project has been provided by the LWF Communion Office, both to the church for implementation and to WS Angola for assistance.

A recurrent challenge for the collaboration has been the shortage of qualified church staff and limited know-how, especially in terms of reporting and financial management. At the request of IELA, a training workshop for the church was held in Angola, organized by the Communion Office with the involvement and participation of WS staff.

IELA and WS Angola leadership see great potential for expanded collaboration in the future, even if the knowledge and skills of church project staff need further reinforcement to increase the capacities of the church as a partner for project implementation.

One important lesson learned from the Angola project is that adequate resources need to be provided to WS programs to accompany member churches, as the related processes can take a long time. Additionally, while the project has had the positive outcome of deepening the relationship between WS Angola and IELA, both parties recognize the importance of acknowledging and upholding the clearly distinct mandates of the member church and the WS program. A complete merger could risk WS being seen as engaging in the church's broader mission work, which would damage the reputation of WS as a humanitarian implementer and/or cause it to be excluded from funding by international organizations.



IELA bishop Tomás Ndawanapo and LWF World Service National Coordinator Abrão Mushivi during a field visit in August 2018.

REGULAR EXCHANGES

Bishop Tomás Ndawanapo and Abrão Mushivi are in regular contact with each other, even though their head offices are distant.

Each time the bishop visits the capital Luanda, he makes an effort to visit the WS national office. Mushivi and his staff, too, pay regular visits to the church national office in southern Angola.

CASE STUDY:

Latin America – Colombia & Venezuela

The collaboration of WS and member churches in Colombia and Venezuela is an example of the importance of regional and cross-border cooperation between the churches.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:**

Since 2002, WS has supported the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) through capacity-strengthening measures, which has improved the church's reputation for education and emergency response work. Thanks to the close collaboration between WS and Caritas and its good reputation among Roman-Catholic partners, it has also become easier for the church to carry out advocacy initiatives.

Through the LoU, a formal agreement now exists between WS and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (IELV) detailing the nature of their relationship, their underlying values, and their respective roles and responsibilities. This letter has been signed by the WS Colombia representative, the IELV President and the WS Director. The agreement includes provisions on financial support for the church to enable it to provide services.

The regular dialogue between WS and the churches has helped both sides to deepen their understanding of each other's mandates and working modalities. For instance, WS staff have learned more about the churches' diaconal and mission work in both countries, and the churches have deepened their understanding of certain donor requirements and humanitarian procedures.

It may also serve as an illustration of a successful entry strategy for a new WS country program. WS has been operating in Colombia since 2002 at the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia, IELCO). The engagement and collaboration of WS with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en Venezuela, IELV), on the other hand, is relatively recent and started picking up speed in 2019.

Collaborating with the churches is important for WS, as both organizations engage in diaconal work focused on the most vulnerable people and support initiatives that particularly benefit women and indigenous groups. The IELCO in Colombia and the IELV in Venezuela are Lutheran minority churches in predominantly Roman-Catholic contexts, making their diaconal work all the more important in both countries. The geographical complementarity between the diaconal work of the churches and the WS program is also seen as a comparative advantage, not only by WS and the churches, but also by related agencies and donors.

In both countries, cordial relationships have been built between the WS Colombia program and the Lutheran churches. Regular bilateral meetings between WS and the churches provide a space to explore possible collaboration on emergency response work, identify mutual advocacy opportunities, propose joint engagements, and so on.

In addition, WS and the churches meet regularly in the context of the ACT Alliance forum. At the start of every collaboration, WS has initiated its work under the auspices of the member churches before analyzing whether a separate entity may be needed.

In Colombia, WS has participated in the annual church assemblies, using this as an opportunity to present its strategy and share updates. In Venezuela, the collaboration between WS and the IELV began with an official letter from the church requesting WS to support the Venezuelan people; soon after, a formal Letter of Understanding (LoU) between WS and IELV was drafted. This LoU reflected the desire to build a longer-term relationship, limiting the possibility that a change of leadership on either side might jeopardize the joint engagement.

The collaboration between WS and the churches in Colombia and Venezuela focuses on accompanying the member churches in their support of communities in response to crises, as opposed to mere capacity strengthening without implementation. This can take the form of staff secondments, support of programmatic and financial quality assurance, guidance on monitoring, evaluation and reporting, or other thematic and technical training.



JELV president Rev. Gerardo Hands together with LWF World Service Colombia-Venezuela Representative Adriana Franco Chitanana.

TANGIBLE SUPPORT

After a series of discussions and an initial exploratory mission, WS staff visited Venezuela in mid-2019.

This resulted in an official request from the JELV to support the people and processes in the country. Since then, WS has been working with and through the church in Venezuela.

CASE STUDY:

Asia –
Nepal

The relationship and collaboration between WS Nepal and the Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC) is a good illustration of the opportunities and the challenges of working together in a non-Christian environment.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

The Lutheran Community Welfare Society (LCWS) and WS are jointly implementing several projects, some related to development work and others to humanitarian action. These include the LWF *Churches and Emergencies project*, launched in 2019, as well as smaller projects related to organizations that focus on people with disabilities, advocacy for the inclusion of marginalized people, capacity strengthening of local governments, and on rural livelihoods development.

Capacity-strengthening training provided by WS Nepal has helped the church to increase its diaconal capacities, including with regard to local fundraising (e.g. with private organizations, such as national banks for emergency response).

WS Nepal has provided support for the institutional development of LCWS and NELC through the secondment of a WS senior-level manager to work as an advisor to LCWS on knowledge management, technical support, and policy updates (e.g. gender policy, child protection policy, financial management).

Both partners maintain a close and cordial relationship and collaborate at different levels, including joint projects, staff exchanges, and regular meetings. WS Nepal mainly collaborates with the diaconal arm and local NGO of the church, the Lutheran Community Welfare Society (LCWS). NELC leaders sit on the LCWS Executive Board, so any WS collaboration with LCWS directly involves the church. LCWS acts as a local implementing partner for the WS Nepal program for joint projects.

WS Nepal and LCWS both focus on particularly vulnerable groups and emphasize that they provide their services to all people, irrespective of their religious affiliation. For NELC, it is very clear that their social and development work in the (mainly) non-Christian communities does not involve evangelization activities. The church is mainly present in the eastern part of Nepal, where WS Nepal regards LCWS as a natural partner.

WS Nepal has sought to strengthen the diaconal capacity of LCWS, which appreciates the technical support it has received on professional know-how for project implementation. WS has also supported NELC in its role as an ACT Alliance Nepal forum member. The church does not regard WS as a donor, but as an equal partner that is part of the same Lutheran communion of churches to which NELC belongs.

In turn, WS recognizes that the church contributes an important rights holders' and insider perspective of community life to the program. WS Nepal leadership maintains the vision that the church's diaconal arm might someday take over part of the WS program – at least in the eastern part of the country, and once the church's diaconal capacity has been strengthened.

Christian faith-based organizations face particular challenges in Nepal, which is a predominantly Hindu society. At times they are targeted by the government and the media with allegations that they are trying to proselytize people. Such accusations can make it difficult for WS Nepal and LCWS to operate freely. For this reason, both organizations promote diaconal work from an interfaith and multi-religious perspective. However, there are differences in approach: LCWS clearly states its Christian basis and Lutheran faith identity, while WS Nepal highlights its role and reputation as a humanitarian organization.

As in other non-Christian contexts, it is important for WS Nepal to strengthen the understanding of its mainly non-Christian staff about Christianity and the religious language the church uses. Both WS and church staff also need to explore more deeply how to deal with different staff religious affiliations.



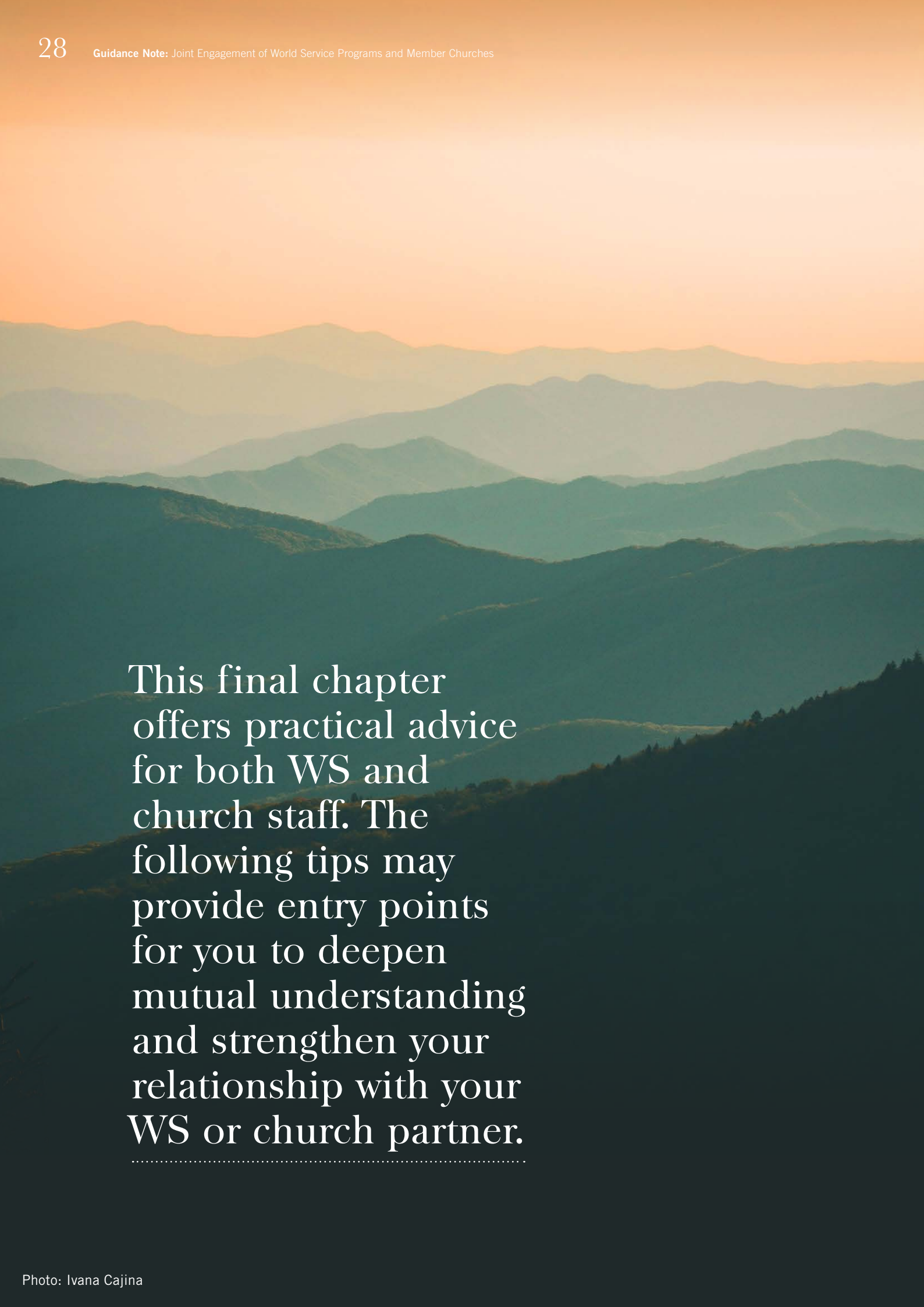
Photo left: Giuseppe Mond
Photo right: LWF/Albin Hillert

NURTURING UNDERSTANDING

In the context of Nepal, a joint understanding of LWF's faith identity is key for meaningful engagement between the church and WS.

In a context where Christians are a minority, Nepal also provides good opportunities for interfaith engagement.

WS staff participate in a joint worship service with the church during a visit of the LWF General Secretary in 2018.



This final chapter offers practical advice for both WS and church staff. The following tips may provide entry points for you to deepen mutual understanding and strengthen your relationship with your WS or church partner.

5

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN WORKING TOGETHER

TOP TIPS



Church representatives: Every church has recognized authorities (Bishops, Presidents, General Secretaries, elders, women leaders, deacons, etc.). Each church member or staff will provide perspectives from their own experience and background; they may or may not be speaking on behalf of the church, unless there is an understanding that they are officially representing the church leadership. As WS staff, respect the authority of their knowledge and expertise.



WS staff: A basic principle of WS is to provide support to people irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, or political conviction, without discrimination. This principle also governs WS staffing policy. Even if your member church does not subscribe to the same human resources management policy, try to appreciate the value and power of diversity and inclusion and the learning opportunities this may create.



Flexibility in getting together: Working with churches requires accepting their specific speed of negotiation. Church leaders often have a heavy workload that includes many responsibilities beyond the diaconal work of the church. As WS staff, you may not get a timely response to an email or phone inquiry; a visit may be cancelled unexpectedly due to an unforeseen circumstance. You may also receive unexpected urgent requests or visits from church representatives. Be prepared for these occurrences and be accommodating, or politely explain your time constraints. Agendas for planned visits, while necessary, also need to be flexible. Meanwhile, international humanitarian organizations such as WS are also embedded in a network of partnerships, as well as internal relationships and responsibilities. Maintaining these relationships is extensive and time-consuming. Meetings may absorb a large part of staff working capacity, making it difficult to meet spontaneously. As church staff, it may be better to agree on a regular series of meetings in advance.



Language: Church representatives and humanitarian experts may speak in their own “language” at times. Every community has insider language which may not be clear for people outside of that community. As WS staff, ask yourself how you could express technical jargon in a more compelling and accessible way, and ask your church partners to clarify terms you may not understand. As a church representative, try to remember that WS staff’s main job is to implement humanitarian and development projects. Some may not be familiar with churches or the Christian faith tradition. It is therefore a great learning opportunity for them if you explain certain theological or church-related terms (e.g. “diakonia”) and the way your church functions. It is important for both sides to try to keep their language intentional, clear, accessible, and imaginative. Keep in mind that humanitarian work and the message of Jesus Christ must be available to all people, irrespective of their religious or social affiliation.

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Hospitality: Providing a warm welcome for your church or WS partners shows them you appreciate their time and effort. Creating a welcoming environment may mean receiving new visitors when they enter your office, having a WS representative or church leader welcome them, or providing a meal (or breaks with coffee, water, and snacks) during longer conferences. Sharing a meal is a great opportunity to get to know people and communicate more informally.

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Compensation: When working with church representatives and volunteers, consider providing them with appropriate compensation for their expertise and time, taking into consideration the number of hours or days they will be spending with you. Community members take time off from jobs or other responsibilities to participate in your conferences, projects or programs. Their service should be considered appropriately in your financial project planning. On the other hand, it is important for church representatives to keep in mind that WS staff sometimes invest time and effort without appropriate funding in activities such as capacity-strengthening training sessions with churches.

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Keeping in touch: Discuss the best way to stay in touch with one another. Even if there is a formal MoU, you should check in on a regular basis to maintain the relationship. If you are unable to meet face-to-face, discuss alternative methods of staying in touch and working toward your collaboration goals. For example, it may be easier to maintain personal trust through phone calls, phone messaging apps or video conferencing technology than by e-mail. Try to expand the regular exchanges beyond the immediate leaders of the church and WS program by including other WS and church staff in the conversation, depending on the issues discussed.

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Data appropriation: Local knowledge is often inaccurately or inappropriately used or shared to further projects. To build trust with churches, it is important to discuss and agree on how information will be obtained and shared, keeping in mind that the unsecured circulation of sensitive data may seriously damage or discredit the work of a church, particularly in a non-Christian context.

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Endnotes

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- 1 The Lutheran World Federation, 2009, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia*, p. 8
- 2 Ref. World Council of Churches, 2017, *Ecumenical Diakonia*, Revised draft 21.04.2017, p. 8
- 3 In “From Federation to Communion” (1997), Schjørring, Kumari, Hjelm and Mortensen note: “Without the concreteness of dedicated operational service and mutual aid, early efforts at international cooperation of Lutherans would perhaps have drowned in an ocean of idealism without the moorings of binding commitment.” (p. 85)
- 4 Ref. Schjørring, Jens Holder; Kumari, Prasanna; Hjelm, Norman; Mortensen, Viggo, 1997, *From Federation to Communion – The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, pp. 104-107
- 5 Ref. *With Passion for the Church and for the World*, LWF Strategy 2019–2024, p. 16
- 6 BftW Analysis 38, 2013: *Civil Society – A Strong Pillar of Democracy: The commitment of civil society to justice and political participation around the world*
- 7 Ref. *With Passion for the Church and for the World*, LWF Strategy 2019-2024, pp. 8-9.

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LWF MEMBER CHURCHES

The LWF has 148 member churches, representing over 77 million Christians in the Lutheran tradition in 99 countries across the globe. The LWF member churches share a common Lutheran heritage, shaped by the diverse contexts in which they experience and witness to God's liberating grace. As a global communion of churches, LWF's member churches live and work together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

WORLD SERVICE PROGRAMS

World Service is the humanitarian and development arm of the LWF. From LWF's beginning in 1947, its member churches have mandated World Service as their key actor in international diakonia to assist all people in need without any form of discrimination. Today, World Service is a widely recognized, international, faith-based organization working through country and emergency programs in 25 countries. World Service seeks to bring people of all backgrounds together in the common quest for justice, peace, and reconciliation.





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