



THE
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Report of the LWF General Secretary

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Introduction

While writing this report, I am glad to present it at a Council meeting in person. Finally, after three years, it is possible to gather face to face. Unfortunately, we will miss the participation of some Council members, partly due to the delays in issuing visas and partly due to restrictions related to the COVID-pandemic still in place in some countries. We keep those who cannot be present in person in our thoughts and prayers.

I want to begin my report with deep gratitude to you as the governing body of the LWF, which ensured that the work of the Communion Office could continue and that essential decisions could be taken despite the challenges related to online meetings. Your commitment to the LWF made it possible to have online elections for the new General Secretary in June 2021. Your support and guidance have been vital as I took up the new role in November. The fact that the change in leadership took place smoothly and the LWF continues to bring the Communion together, offering strong witness through its programmatic work, are signs of sustainability and continuity.

This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the LWF. The work of the LWF is still organized around the four foundational pillars from 1947: Rescue for the Needy, Joint Efforts in Theology, Shared Witness to Ecumenical Unity, and Common Initiatives in Mission. We need to continuously reflect on how to best "translate" these pillars into the work of the Communion Office and the life of the Communion, ensuring that all four pillars are well represented as we participate in God's holistic mission.

This report concentrates on the work of the LWF Communion Office from last June until the end of May this year.

The context we live in

During globalization, it is not only local but also the global context that plays an increasingly important role. I would briefly like to dwell on some of the aspects and tendencies that currently impact the world and were highlighted during my meetings with you, Council members and advisors from all LWF regions in March. These reflections were complemented by context analysis carried out by the Communion Office Leadership Team and the CO staff as we were preparing for our planning for 2023. Context analysis helps us see how far the work of the LWF is relevant in the current context and what needs for future planning rise from the context analysis.

- (a) It is evident that the **consequences of the war in Ukraine** will have an immense impact on the whole world with regard to the global economy, energy politics, and political landscape. At the same time, we as global Communion are constantly reminded that this is not the only conflict zone right now, and people continue to suffer due to armed conflicts in many parts of the world.

We can see an immediate impact of the war in Ukraine: millions of refugees have fled to neighbouring countries. What will happen after the first wave of welcoming, when the enthusiasm to help decreases? At the same time, many Western countries have decreased their humanitarian and development aid support to several regions, redirecting the funds to support Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. This will have consequences for many humanitarian responses worldwide. Further, the reduction in the export of Ukrainian wheat, which is essential for several countries in the Global South, can lead to famine in some regions. The urgent need to look for new energy resources may lead to questioning the green energy concepts and cause a return to nuclear energy and fossil fuels.

The World Bank is warning that the dual shocks of COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine will mean up to 95 million additional people will live in extreme poverty compared to pre-pandemic projections.

- (b) The **COVID-19 pandemic** and its consequences continue to impact the world. For example, many families have felt the stress of job loss, and many churches, particularly those that rely on donations from Sunday services, have had financial difficulties. In addition, there has been an increase in gender-based violence in almost all regions. Citing a 40% increase in SGBV (Sexual and Gender-Based Violence), UN Women refers to this rise as a "shadow pandemic."
- (c) Furthermore, many reported and unreported spiritual and psychological traumas have been caused by physical distancing in the past few years. In many regions, there has been an increase in people experiencing loneliness. Particularly worrying are the psychosocial consequences of physical distancing on young adults and school children.

An increase in individualism has been mentioned by many as another concern related to the impact of the pandemic. "My interests and my own needs first": decreasing empathy for the needs of others and disregard for one's responsibilities.

The fact that many churches and congregations went increasingly online has raised questions globally about what it means to be Church if we can only meet

online; which role does embodiment play in our theology and praxis as Christian churches. In addition, questions about the **vitality of church life** and concerns about the lack of future pastors were raised in some regions.

- (d) Around the globe, we continue to witness **the rise of authoritarian and populist regimes**. They undermine the democratic foundation of human rights and international law that provide legal mechanisms for safeguarding human dignity and paths to the peaceful solution of conflicts. In many societies, polarizing political forces continue to tear societies apart, e.g., by re-introducing or systematizing inequality or fomenting xenophobia. It is particularly dangerous when theologies and religious identity are radicalized along authoritarian and ethno-nationalist lines and are instrumentalized to promote respective economic and political ends.

Authoritarian patterns support and presuppose a certain kind of leadership: top-down, avoiding criticism, and willingness to learn from feedback and listen to voices different from one's own. When these leadership patterns start to infiltrate churches, there is a significant risk of hindering the use of God-given gifts bestowed upon God's people.

- (e) In many places around the world, one may also observe an increase in **fundamentalist and other misleading theologies**. Fundamentalist theologies tend to offer easy and clear answers to complicated questions. Research has shown that among the strongest cognitive biases we have as humans is looking for simplistic answers in the face of unknown and complex problems. This is a somewhat predictable cognitive coping mechanism to protect oneself, but it is a bias that hinders our capacity to discern sustainable and creative pathways through complex situations. The world has become increasingly complex and unpredictable, intensifying the temptation to seek simplification. As churches, we should nevertheless not align ourselves with simplistic answers. They tend to ignore, exclude, and oppress the very voices that can inspire new ideas or create new life-giving connections between people.

To avoid being instrumentalized for ideological ends, the church must carefully discern the spirits.

In almost all regions, **climate change and climate justice** issues were mentioned among urgent problems. We live in turbulent times since the real threat of a nuclear war has reappeared next to other causes that threaten biodiversity and have devastating effects on climate. Every political setback to our momentum to right the injustices of climate change compound the cycles that destroy life giving habitats and diminish the social and biological diversity of creation.

God is the creator of the whole world, and we read in Genesis that God declared the creation to be good for its own sake – not just for the sake of human beings. We must be reminded repeatedly about our responsibility to keep and cultivate the creation, not dominate and rule over it. It is good to be reminded that the first LWF resolution on climate change was adopted at the Sixth Assembly in Dar es Salaam in 1977. It encouraged member churches to “recognize that the degradation and exploitation of the Earth is one of the root causes of social and economic injustice.”

Today, many young people are highly concerned about issues related to climate, and many have a sense of hopelessness and dismay about it. Churches are called to offer

hope to young people, based on gospel's life-giving message, and to call them to take seriously their task to be good guardians of God's creation.

Implementation of LWF's strategic priorities in the light of our current context

As the context analysis was carried out in the spring of this year, most areas of LWF's work were strongly affirmed. Yet, at the same time, aspects are rising from the context analysis that calls for increased attention as we move on with serving the vision of the LWF.

The LWF is a unique global Christian communion, as its Communion Office brings together member churches, theological work, diakonia, advocacy, and humanitarian work. We need to ensure that all these aspects of LWF are well connected. It is essential to foster the understanding that there is *One LWF*. In the following, I will briefly dwell on the main strategic areas of LWF's work. I'll look back at the time between the Council in June 2021 and now, and reflect on what continues to be relevant for our ongoing work.

3.1. Communion relations

The LWF continues to journey together as a communion of churches. Let's think back and reflect on the times when the first Lutheran World Convention, a predecessor of the LWF, met in Eisenach in 1923, without the churches who were present even celebrating the Holy Communion together. We can see how much churches have grown closer to each other as a communion. The LWF has played a crucial role in bringing Lutheran churches together both regionally and globally and continues to do so.

During the years of the pandemic, the contact between churches was most often reduced to online encounters. With restrictions being lifted increasingly, international travel has again become possible. Although we want to make sure at the LWF that we don't return to the pre-pandemic levels of traveling both due to financial as well as environmental reasons, it is evident that some meetings should preferably continue to take place in person, particularly the ones that bring together representatives from different churches. Quite a few meetings of this kind have taken place since June last year: in July 2021, the EECMY and ELCT bishops, presidents, and national management teams met for a seminar, bringing together more than 80 participants. In October, a regional extended LUCA Consultation was held in Addis Ababa, bringing together church leaders and LWF Council members and advisors to empower member churches for mission during the pandemic and support them in encountering misleading and harmful theologies. In May this year, face-to-face leadership conferences took place in Santiago de Chile and Bangkok, bringing together Latin American/Caribbean and North American and Asian leadership. Both were important meetings that enabled church leaders to (re-)connect, exchange experiences, and reflect on the future. In addition, the African Leadership Conference is planned to be held in person in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia at the end of June. European church leaders also plan to meet in person this year in October in Bratislava (Central Eastern Europe) and Eisenach (Central Western Europe) for their regional meetings. These meetings are of particular importance for newly elected leaders, offering a possibility to connect to the Communion and get to know other church leaders in the region. I have decided to prioritize these meetings in my travel schedule as they enable me to connect with the regions and hear first-hand about their joys and concerns.

Connecting member churches to each other is one of the important tasks of the LWF Communion Office. This means also asking how to increase interregional cooperation and partnerships which are not “given” due to historical connections between churches (e.g., how to foster South-South relationships, etc.).

Throughout the pandemic, churches have continued to be accompanied by the Regional Secretaries. When traveling was still very restricted in Asia, LWF Asia organized virtual fellowship gatherings for all heads of churches to create a virtual space for the leaders to come together for a moment of sharing, prayer, and updates. Called 'Midweek Fellowships,' these meetings were aimed at strengthening the communion relations in the region, especially during the time of Covid-19. During the pandemic, regular meetings with ecumenical officers and LWF contact persons in the Nordic Region also began. Since the beginning of this year, Regional Secretaries have undertaken many visits to member churches, offering accompaniment and listening to concerns and joys. In several cases, like in Cameroon, Venezuela, and Colombia, regional secretaries have, during their visits, also met with the local World Service Country programs' representatives. In addition, the Europe Secretary has been instrumental in supporting the “One LWF” approach in responding to the war in Ukraine by bringing the colleagues from the Communion Office together with church leadership in neighboring countries to Ukraine.

Next to organizing meetings that bring together church leaders, communion relations also need strengthening through other programmatic activities of the Communion Office. Since last June, many respective reflections and conversations have taken place with various stakeholders. The document "Communion relations in a changing global context," presented to the Committee for Communion Relations (see Exhibit CCR 6.2), summarizes some proposals. Beside the request to the LWF Communion Office to be proactive in bringing the newly elected church leaders together to introduce them to the global Communion, several other programmatic aspects are mentioned in the document. A request for more accessible theological resources has been frequently noted, including resources that reflect why it is both possible and necessary for Lutheran churches to ordain women: a practice that is disputed by some other churches. In addition, a need for increased project support for mission activities and the revival of the Church is being highlighted. Last but not least, there is a need to discuss if informal talks with International Lutheran Council should be reconvened, despite some of the difficulties that occurred during the past few years and led to the suspension of these conversations.

The LWF is a communion of autonomous churches in altar and pulpit fellowship with one another. These churches serve people in different contexts. What remains vital for their unity is to keep Jesus Christ and the message of God's grace which leads to the renewal of life, at the center. Secondly, it is essential to concentrate on what unites us, not what divides us. At the same time, the questions relating to the mutual accountability of member churches have increasingly started to emerge. Questions about the criteria for unity in the Lutheran Communion, based on the understanding of Holy Scriptures as interpreted through the lenses of Lutheran Confessional Writings, primarily of Confessio Augustana, are being asked. Therefore, at this Council meeting, a process for developing a Mutual Accountability Framework is being proposed. Given the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of churches, such a framework for mutual accountability cannot become a legislative text, a "bylaw" for communion relations. Instead, at this stage of the LWF's journey as a communion, it is a framework to which LWF member churches would commit and use as churches deepen their understanding of unity as a global communion.

In several passages, this report refers to the war in Ukraine. The latter also has direct impact on LWF membership. Until now, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (GELCU) has been a member of the LWF through the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and Other States (former Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States). However, the Lutheran churches that belong to this roof organization (in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, *Kyrgyzstan*, *Uzbekistan*), have already earlier expressed their wish to individually become members of the LWF. The reason for that is the fact that all these churches are registered as independent churches in their respective countries and membership through the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and Other States can thus be seen as a remnant of the early post-Soviet era. The last meeting about direct membership of these churches took place in September 2021 with the participation of former General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, the Regional Secretary for Europe, and myself. The prospect of direct membership was offered, while it was emphasized that all requirements as stated in LWF Constitution and Bylaws, need to be met. We have received an application for direct membership in the LWF from the GELCU with all supporting documents by this Council meeting. This enables the Council to act on this application.

3.2. Ecumenical relations

The LWF has always understood itself as a confessional communion, confessing to the core message of justification and the gospel of God's liberating grace. Still, it never perceived itself as a narrow-minded confessionalist body and has thus always identified itself as ecumenical and engaged in joint efforts towards Christian unity. While now and again, there are certain pushbacks in some ecumenical developments globally, it is encouraging to see that as the LWF, we continue to dialogue with all our major ecumenical partners.

Bilateral conversations

After some delay, we are glad that the **Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission Report *Baptism and Growth in Communion*** was finally published in February. Preparations for the next dialogue phase are underway. At the Joint Staff Meeting with PCPCU in Rome in February, the Common Word to be presented at the Assembly in 2023 was discussed. One of the following milestones on our joint journey with the Roman Catholic Church will be the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030, where we want to look at the ecumenical significance of this confessional writing that has such a fundamental significance for Lutherans. The Consultation process on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), which had a good start in the first half of 2021 and brought together all five signatories of the JDDJ, can hopefully continue to explore what is the significance of the Doctrine of Justification today in a world where salvation often needs to be "earned," be it through professional or personal success or through adhering to the promises of the prosperity gospel.

Called to live and witness as one LWF, uniting theology and service, we are also called to jointly reflect, with our ecumenical partners, on our understanding of the gospel and service to the neighbor. The fifth ecumenical imperative in *From Conflict to Communion* (2013) states: "Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world." Our task is thus not to keep these two avenues apart but to link joint proclamation and joint service. For more information and background, please see the Report of the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations (Exhibit CER 5.1). Therefore, as LWF, we continue to be grateful for our cooperation with *Caritas Internationalis*, reflecting on how our humanitarian response is rooted in our faith and willingness to serve the neighbour.

The **Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission**, which met in-person only once since the beginning of the current dialogue phase in 2018, has kept in contact through online meetings. Responding to the current post-pandemic situation and globally relevant topics, the focus of the Commission will slightly shift and pay more attention to the questions around conciliarity and synodality. More reflection on this shift will take place during Commission's next in-person meeting in Germany in December 2022. This discussion may also bring learnings for some of LWF's internal processes, e.g., the Mutual Accountability Framework.

By the time of the Assembly, we will be able to present the report of the first **Lutheran-Pentecostal dialogue**. The final meeting of this dialogue group that reflected on Christian identity in light of Luke 4: 18-19 and which brought together for the first time LWF and representatives of various classical Pentecostal churches will take place in the USA in September 2022. The dialogue group will also propose a way forward for a new dialogue phase.

In the brief context analysis above, I mentioned pushback against human rights, as one of the issues we struggle with today. One area particularly affected is freedom of belief, which impacts some member churches. Therefore, I am glad that the LWF has initiated a Religious Freedom Study Group with the **World Communion of Reformed Churches**. We plan to hold a joint conference in November 2022 to address issues around freedom of religion.

Following up on issues addressed in ecumenical agreements enables the ecumenical journey to advance. It is good to see that a team of scholars from different regions of the LFW has come together to look into the challenges addressed in the Trilateral Report of the **Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic** multilateral conversation on *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*. The group has met twice, outlining challenges in a Lutheran understanding of baptism and its relation to ecclesiology, discipleship, and witness.

One significant follow-up development is that finally, co-secretaries and co-chairs of the **Anglican-Lutheran International Commission on Unity and Mission (ALICUM)** could meet in person in May, in conjunction with the Anglican-Lutheran Joint Staff Meeting. The implementation of ALICUM's mandate aims to implement ways for increased cooperation between local, regional, and global initiatives.

Multilateral ecumenism

Besides bilateral conversations, the LWF continues to be committed to multilateral ecumenism. It is advantageous to be located in the same physical space as WCC and the ACT Alliance, enabling close contact with both ecumenical bodies. Cooperation with Faith & Order could be further enhanced. This cooperation is on our to-do list for the coming months.

The LWF also continues to be present at the Global Christian Forum and at the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, which will meet later this year. In addition, the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Dirk Lange, was asked to participate in the extended facilitation group for the Global Christian Forum preparing for their global ecumenical Assembly in 2024 in Ghana.

A holistic approach to ecumenism's thematic foci and grassroots ecumenism

The approach to ecumenism needs to be holistic. The task of bringing together theological reflection and service to the neighbour in ecumenical reflections and cooperation has already been mentioned. Theologically based reflections on advocacy, the concept of justice, and human dignity have played an essential role in multilateral ecumenism and should also be part of bilateral ecumenical conversations. A holistic approach to ecumenism moreover calls for the deepening of spiritual ecumenism that brings together people from different denominations in prayer and worship.

Many valuable ecumenical agreements have been developed over the past decades. The Institute for Ecumenical Research (IER) in Strasbourg, an institute formed after the LWF Assembly in Helsinki (1963), has been a primary driver in much of this work. It is currently in a phase of revisioning and renewal (see Exhibit 19.1). The LWF is privileged to have such a theological think tank. An urgent task both for the IER and the LWF is to ensure that the many consensus documents and resources get "to the pews" and become more than a source of reflection for academic theologians; ecumenical relations are slow to advance. Many valuable ecumenical agreements have been developed over the past decades. Yet, ecumenical relations are slow to advance until these resources get grass-rooted and become more than a source of reflection for academic theologians. Therefore, we need more than a purely linguistic translation of dialogue documents. We need "translation" of these documents into local contexts and ways of making their key messages accessible locally.

It is crucial to connect global to local and local to global in ecumenical relations. However, not all LWF member churches have a full-time ecumenical officer. Still, by creating an Ecumenical Officers' Network, we intend to bring together key people working with ecumenism in LWF member churches.

3.3. Supporting churches' presence and vibrant witness to the world

Although there are many interactions between different departments when implementing the strategic priorities, Department for Theology, Mission, and Justice (DTMJ) is primarily responsible for this strategic priority. Formed in 2020, the department is working well, with motivated staff. The aim of the work developed by DTMJ is to a) develop theological reflection and educational resources and to articulate what it means to be Lutheran; b) offer platforms for reflection and joint work on gender justice and women's empowerment; c) reflect and act on eco-justice and climate issues from a theological point of view; d) reflect how can churches raise their voice in public space; e) to raise voice for those whose dignity and rights are oppressed and attacked.

In DTMJ, there are currently four programs. Three of them, Theology for Transformation, Leadership and Institutional Development, and Diakonia, are directly linked to the strategic priority of "Supporting churches' presence and vibrant witness to the world." In contrast, the fourth program and unit "Action for Justice" has many links to the strategic priority on "Promoting human dignity, justice, and peace." For a more detailed information, see CTMJ Exhibit 6.

Theology for Transformation

Lutheran identity

At a consultation "What does it mean to be Lutheran today?" in Addis Ababa in 2019, a process on Lutheran identities was introduced. Since the Council meeting in June 2021, (1) a series of webinars on themes related to Lutheran identity have been released, (2)

the book *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global perspectives on Lutheran Identities* has been published, (3) small-scale test projects in the Africa, European and Asia regions have been launched, and (4) a global survey was sent and discussion guide to member churches has been developed. We are now in the process of harvesting what has been done so far. A group of theologians and practitioners from all LWF regions have convened. They are currently drafting a study document that will synthesize findings from into a pedagogical tool for LWF member churches.

It has become clear that Lutheran identity is formed through a normative theological tradition, including the Bible, confessional writings, catechisms, and the lived experience and spirituality of worship in dialogue with our cultures and daily life. We can see how this process contributes to a shared understanding of the theological and spiritual identity of the LWF member churches rooted in a common confession while witnessing in diverse contexts. As we move on towards the next Assembly, we will focus on how our diversity is reconciled in the unity of our common confession. This process framed significant issues related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the churches and all the baptized, the dialogue between worship, culture, and our engagement in public as well as how Lutheran spirituality connects us to God's work in the world and helps us to make meaning through our lived faith.

In the Lutheran tradition, Confessional Writings have a special place and ensure that we always use the justification of the sinner as lenses through which we are to interpret the Holy Scriptures. To deepen the reflections on Confessional Writings and to meet the need to make more accessible materials on some of these writings available, a consultant has been hired to support the team working on the Lutheran identity process.

[The Bible Year](#)

September 2022 marks the 500th anniversary of one of Martin Luther's most significant literary achievements: the publication of his German translation of the New Testament. This publication of the New Testament – Luther's "September Testament" represents his core theological convictions (i.e., Scripture as the Word of God, Jesus as the Word made flesh, and preaching of the gospel as the living Word for us). Moreover, the publication of the New Testament in the vernacular language made it accessible to people, enabling them to read and reflect personally and in the Church, and paved the way for several other Bible translations in vernacular.

As LWF, we want to mark this major achievement of the Lutheran Reformation. While officially placed in the Communion Relations program under the supervision of the Europe Secretary, a project consultant has been working closely with the Theology for Transformation team in preparing some core activities for the Bible Year that will be released in September-October this year. We want to make available bible studies and reflections on bible passages that have particular relevance in Lutheran theology, ask people from LWF member churches to share the Bible stories that have a specific meaning in their lives, and compile resources on hermeneutics. Please follow our website to get more information about our Bible Year activities.

[Theological education and formation](#)

Lutheran identity within the LWF is linked to the strength of formal and non-formal theological education and formation within its member churches. Therefore, the LWF has always maintained a commitment to theological education and reflection as one of the pillars of the Lutheran Communion. In fulfilment of the resolution on theological education from the 12th LWF Assembly, the 2019 LWF Council received the strategy to form a global Theological Education and Formation (TEF) Network. The TEF Network

aims to strengthen Lutheran education and formation across the LWF communion. While the strength and expertise for theological education exist within the member churches, the Communion plays a crucial role in facilitating synergies and partnerships across the Communion. The Theology unit now offers this multilateral platform to convene theological institutions, member churches, and partners in education (WCC ETE, Wittenberg Centre, IER, etc.) in trans-contextual dialogue aimed at analyzing the context of theological education, mapping resources and needs, and responding to future needs to develop theological leaders and educators. Currently, the Steering Committee has three goals (1) exchanges between institutions, (2) sharing of resources via LWF Learning and other platforms, and (3) supporting theological educators and teaching theologians, which will begin with an ecumenical consultation on theological education in December 2022.

We are looking at possibilities to increase funding for theological education to have a full-time position working in this field, as theological education, both academic and continuing training, has been mentioned as key priorities by most LWF regions. Theological education, which supports critical thinking, helps avoid simplistic answers that avoid the complexity of life and are insensitive to different contexts.

[Women in the ordained ministry](#)

The 12th LWF Assembly called upon the LWF Communion Office to organize a process to study women's experiences in the ordained ministry to remove barriers and affirm the way forward. This process is ongoing, and stories have been collected. There are stories of empowerment and gratitude and stories about harassment and inequities, including lower pay. Based on the responses, themes are picked up, and a group of theologians will develop content material for the communion on issues like vocation, baptism, justification and gender justice, ecclesiology, power, and authority, as well as biblical and confessional hermeneutics.

Hélène Ralivao Fund

The Hélène Ralivao Fund for Women in Theology and Leadership in the Africa region (HRF) (a) provides direct scholarships for women studying theology and leadership in the African region of the LWF and (b) coordinates a program of research and resource development on issues related to the intersection between theology, gender, and leadership, that will serve women and men within the region and across the Communion.

- (a) In 2021, the LWF awarded the first round of direct scholarships to a group of ten women, and a second group is to be selected this year.
- (b) The Theology, Gender Justice, and Leadership in Africa (TGLEA) program has begun in partnership with the ELCT and Tumaini Makumira University. The first cohort of 17 women and men will gather for theological research integrating Biblical studies, hermeneutics, practical theology, and contextual field research. Their work will identify timely issues related to gender justice and women's empowerment, which will be developed into shareable training materials and publications for the Communion. The targeted rewarding of direct scholarships and coordinated research and content development will contribute to the overall outcome of empowering individual women as theologians and leaders and sustaining systemic change in churches and their societies towards more inclusive, safe, and just communities of women and men.

Leadership and institutional development

The Communion Office supports leadership strengthening within the Communion and enables peer exchange among church leaders. We also want to be a resource for the leaders, involving them in processes as to their needs. We are beginning to organize mentoring support through peer groups, especially for women in the Communion. Further, the LWF is deeply committed to the inclusion of youth in its governing bodies and working groups. If we don't involve youth in decision-making processes, we risk talking about the youth but not with the youth.

RoNEL (Retreat for Newly Elected Leaders)

Due to the pandemic, no in-person RoNEL was organized last year. However, the process was started with an online retreat in November 2021, and it will be followed by an in-person meeting in Geneva and Wittenberg in September this year. The focus of RoNEL is induction to the LWF, Lutheran identities/theology, and practice of transformative leadership. The purpose is to reflect on individual leadership skills and strengthen relations among leaders throughout the Communion and the Communion Office. To strengthen the link to Communion Relations program, Regional Secretaries have been given a more instrumental role now in designing the first post-COVID in-person sessions of the RoNEL.

Youth Desk and revitalized Global Young Reformers

The new Program Executive for Youth joined the LWF in May last year. During the year, the Global Young Reformers Network was revitalized. Among other things, they planned and led the Reformation Day Service for the LWF and organized their Peace on Earth Advent Gathering in December, launching a 'year of peace' theme for 2022, a topic that has become very timely. The focus was on strengthening the presence of LWF youth in social media.

It is also good to see that Peace Messengers Training, aimed at equipping young people from LWF member churches with skills for peace-building and conflict resolution, is being revitalized this year. The training will take place in Geneva in early June. To emphasize the importance of peace-building skills among the youth, I was happy to donate the monetary award that I received along with the Friedenstein Peace Prize in May this year to implement this training.

Diakonia

Diakonia is an integral part of God's holistic mission and a way to express Christian love towards the neighbor. The LWF continues to be strong in Diakonia, and from the reporting period, I would like to highlight the COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund and Member Church projects. Furthermore, as a new initiative, a Communion Solidarity Fund will be created, as is outlined below.

Covid-19 Rapid Response Fund

The Covid-19 Rapid Response Fund has played an essential role for many member churches, both in its support for local response to the pandemic and as a sign of solidarity within the Communion in a rather difficult time. The LWF approved both projects with an emergency response focus and those with a livelihood/recovery focus during the year. Almost 200 Covid-19 Rapid Response Projects have been approved with a contribution of EUR 1,3 million. Many of these projects were approved for member churches in the Global South.

Member Church projects

The Member Church projects continue to be a tool for supporting the member churches in their mission. They strengthen the churches' relevance in their contexts, contribute to strengthening their capacities, and are an expression of Communion solidarity. Right now, there are 56 ongoing long-term Member Church projects.

Creation of a Communion Solidarity Fund

The idea of establishing a Communion Solidarity Fund (CSF) goes back to 2019, following increasing numbers of requests from member churches to the Communion Office for support in emergencies. The traditional long-term member church projects and funding mechanisms were unsuitable for responding to immediate and urgent needs. The new fund was presented to the LWF Executive Committee in November 2019. It should "enable the communion to expeditiously respond to short-term needs as they are presented to the Communion Office." When the pandemic started the idea was put on hold. At the same time, churches and partners reached out to the Communion Office, expressing their will to support those churches taking initiatives to address the urgent needs resulting from the COVID-19 crisis in their local communities and churches. This was a strong sign of solidarity highly appreciated throughout the Communion.

However, other urgent needs are occurring, and they still need to be addressed as the churches are often the first responders in the local setting. As rapid response projects have proven to be a relevant and feasible intervention, it's now time to revive the proposal of a CSF as an instrument for cooperation in the Communion. The fund will be to enable the LWF to respond to needs requiring a rapid, short-term response due to unforeseen events or developments like conflicts, natural disasters, public health concerns, or other emergencies affecting member churches and/or their wider communities. In addition, urgent pastoral needs may also be considered. The CSF aims to enable the Communion Office to keep standing with churches responsively, thereby expressing communion mutuality and solidarity as one significant identity marker of the LWF. While hitherto the system of project cooperation has been shaped by a pattern of support of some few churches and their agencies in the global North to churches in the global South, we now invite all member churches to contribute to this fund as to their ability.

3.4. Promoting human dignity, justice, and peace

The LWF is committed to upholding human dignity and working for justice and peace. Next to our theological and diaconal work, this happens through our work in advocacy and our humanitarian and development work on the ground, the latter being primarily carried out by the Department for World Service, which was established as a programmatic unit of the LWF 70 years ago, in 1952. Moreover, due to LWF's strength in bringing impulses from the global level to the local and from the local to the global, we can support our member churches and country programs in bringing global processes to the ground and vice versa, in bringing local concerns to the worldwide attention.

Action for Justice

The advocacy hub of Action for Justice is placed in DTMJ but has strong programmatic links to the Department for World Service (WS), concentrating on advocating for human rights, interfaith and peace, climate justice, and gender justice. One of the critical achievements at the beginning of the year was launching the new advocacy framework (<https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-advocacy-framework>). The *Lutheran World Federation Advocacy Framework* is designed as a tool to guide the Communion's response to challenges in the world today. Advocacy in the LWF is rooted in the witness

of member churches at the local, national, regional, and global levels and the work and experience of LWF World Service and its partners. Advocacy is carried out in these contexts by individual rights holders, groups, communities, and institutions. As a communion of churches present in all regions of the world, the LWF brings added value to advocacy on multiple levels: rootedness in communities; deep and broad knowledge of, and experience in, humanitarian and development work; global reach and access to key decision-making processes; life-affirming and transformative theology that calls for human dignity, justice, peace, reconciliation, and care for creation; and rich ecumenical, interfaith, and civil society collaboration.

Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process through which all UN Member States are provided the opportunity to review the human rights records of all other Member States. The aim of this mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations wherever they occur. It is an excellent opportunity for LWF member churches to become active in the public space and to advocate for human dignity, with the support or through the LWF Communion Office.

In LWF's advocacy, emphasis has been put on UPR advocacy processes with selected country programs and member churches. During the reporting period, the country programs in Angola, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Myanmar, and Nepal received support. The work on member churches' involvement in UPR has been strengthened during 2021, with member churches in Angola, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Iceland, and Italy being involved and supported. In addition, a capacity-building workshop for African member churches involved in UPR advocacy was organized in Sierra Leone in November 2021 in cooperation with Regional Secretary for Africa. In addition to the UPR, the program engaged with other human rights mechanisms, including CEDAW, CRC, the Human Rights Council, and the UN Security Council.

The LWF, through Action for Justice, has engaged in several discussions and advocacy on vital human rights issues and human rights situations in specific countries with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other UN bodies.

UN Climate Change Conference

The LWF continues to be represented in the COP conferences by a delegation of young people. At COP 26 in Glasgow in November, a hybrid LWF delegation took part (4 delegates in person and 28 online) comprised of young representatives from LWF member churches from all regions. It was very active and together with accompanying staff from the Communion Office, organized a gathering for LWF member churches participating (31 representatives) in the COP26 and an interfaith climate justice dialogue.

Four LWF youth delegates from 3 regions were a part of official COP 26 panels and side events organized by the LWF and other ecumenical organizations. In addition, the LWF co-organized the Global Prayer and Action Chain for Climate Justice with ecumenical and interfaith partners. More than 150,000 people of faith worldwide joined the petition, demanding that climate negotiations deliver climate justice for those most vulnerable to climate change.

Gender Justice

At the LWF, we continue to work together with our member churches and World Service country programs, developing tools and resources to ensure gender equality at all levels of work and ministry, following the understanding that gender justice is grounded in the

theological concept of men and women, created in God's image as equal in rights and dignity. The LWF continued its advocacy for gender justice through various platforms.

In March, Action for Justice facilitated the participation of an LWF delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was held as an online event. In addition, four different parallel events were organized or co-organized by LWF.

In 2021, the 16 Days Campaign saw an increased number of LWF member churches and country programs running advocacy campaigns locally, using the campaign media kit developed by the Action for Justice program.

Consultations on the Gender Justice Toolbox were held with LWF member churches and country programs leading up to the finalization of the toolbox in the last quarter of the year. Translation into French, Spanish and German is ongoing. The Toolbox launch and rollout are planned to take place in 2022.

The annual Women's Human Rights Training took place in September. This time the focus was on empowering participants to contextualize the training and conduct training in their regions. The first regional pilot was conducted in Africa in October with a view to expanding to more regions in the future.

One of the resolutions of the 12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, called for a constitutional amendment to include 'gender justice' in the LWF Constitution. This proposal was discussed by the Executive Committee in November, calling for further reflections on this resolution. Standing Committee for Constitution and Membership will reflect on proposals that have been worked out by the Communion Office, based on deliberations in the Executive Committee in November last year.

Interfaith and Peace

Engaging in interfaith dialogue and cooperation is a key to building mutual understanding and trust between churches, communities, and nations, particularly in times of social hostility and polarization. In preparation for the LWF Assembly in Krakow it is vital for LWF to engage in Jewish-Christian relations. The city that will host the Assembly was once known as one of the centers of Jews in Europe. It is not far from Auschwitz, a place of the Holocaust where one of the worst crimes against humanity took place during the Nazi regime. The LWF has initiated a Task Force to prepare a study document focused on equipping member churches to engage in dialogue with Jewish communities. The Task Force met this year in Jordan and made good progress. The study document prepared by the Task Force will become a part of preparatory material for the Assembly.

In May, a webinar on renewing Jewish-Christian relations was organized by the LWF with presenters from the LWF and Jewish community, including the Chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Relations, Rabbi Dr. Sandmel.

The LWF's cooperation with interfaith actors also reaches to humanitarian response. Later in June, the LWF, Islamic Relief Worldwide, and HIAS will organize the Welcoming the Stranger, Living as Neighbors conference. The organizations are teaming up to strengthen faith-based responses to the world's unprecedented refugee crisis as growing numbers of people flee their homes to escape war, conflict, and persecution. The conference was initially planned to follow a joint pledge of IRW and LWF to the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. However, it has been postponed until this year due to the pandemic. Instead, grassroots faith leaders working to welcome refugees will meet with faith leaders on a national, regional, and global level.

Through fostering greater dialogue and building connections between grassroots and global actors, the conference aims to improve understanding of the work done by local faith actors around the world in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees, including through core protection and peace-building work. It will also explore enabling more supportive environments for local actors to carry out such work and share learning and best practices that can be replicated at a greater scale.

Working and living together as One LWF: Joint Engagement of World Service Programs and Member Churches

We need to continue to ensure that different departments of the LWF are not working as “silos” and that there is a good collaboration between member churches and World Service programs. Several examples of intensified cooperation have emerged since the last Assembly. New guidelines published in 2021 have helped articulate and address some of the common challenges and differences between the actors. The *Guidance Note: Joint Engagement of World Service Programs and Member Churches* was a milestone. This document aims to enhance meaningful joint engagement between the two based on a mutual understanding of LWF's identity. This includes mutual recognition of the distinction between the member churches' self-understanding and calling on the one hand and the mandate of WS. The document aims to foster mutual understanding that can lead to meaningful collaboration.

Serving the Needy: Department for World Service

LWF World Service (WS) continues to offer relief to some of the most vulnerable in this world through more than 20 country programs. UNHCR has reported increasingly worrying trends in conflict and fragility-related displacement for the first half of 2021, with almost 100 million people displaced worldwide. These figures have risen fast because of the war in Ukraine to this record number which was announced by the UN 22 May. These figures speak for themselves and they remind us how important the work of WS is in supporting people in need on behalf of LWF member churches.

In early April, I visited Uganda and the largest WS country program. I was deeply impressed by the commitment of our local staff, working in remote areas and offering support to the refugees. It was good to see how strongly the work of the WS is affirmed by the local UNHCR staff and the representatives of local municipalities. Faith identity, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or else, constitutes an essential part of the identity of the people we serve on the ground. Thus, it is also vital to collaborate with local religious leaders to ensure a long-term and sustainable impact of capacity development. Moreover, international agencies have an increased understanding of the crucial role faith leaders play in development linked to humanitarian response. The LWF structures offer a good opportunity to explore this potential more deeply. Here, we can build upon our good cooperation with Caritas Internationalis, Islamic Relief Worldwide, and HIAS.

The relations between WS and UN agencies have remained strong and have even expanded. New funding has been received from new UN sources such as ILO, although the support from LWF's most established UN partner, UNHCR, has been declining over several years. This is partly due decentralization in UNHCR which has led to confusion around decision making in the organization. It calls for increased effort from our side to establish strong relations with the regional offices. However, it is important to note that currently, we are still the largest faith-based implementing partner of the UNHCR.

Despite the operational environment becoming ever more challenging for humanitarian actors, with UN appeals continuing to be underfunded and the majority of that funding going to fewer recipients, WS's turnover and implementation rate increased in 2021. This is encouraging. However, with the war in Ukraine, a new situation has emerged in the humanitarian landscape. Governments in Europe are channeling their support to Ukraine and, at least partly, the funds seem to be taken from responses to other humanitarian crises globally. This poses serious challenges and raises ethical questions for the LWF as a global actor committed to continuing with humanitarian response also in other parts of the world (see more in the section on the Ukraine response).

Some highlights and concerns

After a break of almost three years, the World Service leadership in the country programs and emergency operations gathered in Kenya in early May 2021 for their Global Leadership Team Meeting. It was an important opportunity for reconnection and reflection on critical strategic, leadership, and management issues. While we are talking about the need to strengthen 'One LWF,' World Service emphasizes in addition to that the need to talk about 'One World Service' in the context of the overall LWF due to the very different contextual realities where the country programs are operating.

Here are some highlights and issues of concern from WS:

- (a) The number of serious security incidents in-country programs has increased. This has required a setup of Crisis Management teams in Geneva several times during the year to support the country programs in resolving the situations. This is partly due to the escalating political situations, e.g., Myanmar's military coup continuing to fuel the conflict around the country, Ethiopia's descent into civil war and wide-spread, ethnically fuelled conflict, etc.
- (b) Work on strengthening the systems for Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse continues to grow. The engagement of the WS in the key INGO coordination bodies in Geneva has grown significantly over the period since last June. One example of this is that WS has participated actively in the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR). which has included participating in the creation of the most important initiative to date to prevent the movement of humanitarian staff having been found to have engaged in sexual harassment or abuse, the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme. WS is in the process of rolling this out to the field.
- (c) Digitalization continues to gain ground in data collection and management areas, increasing the need for specialized staff. Equipping teachers and school children with digital skills are also to be further explored, potentially with the support of some new partners.
- (d) From September 2021 onwards, the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem has been forced to turn away new patients referred for cancer treatment due to the ongoing cash crisis. Despite a payment from the US government in October, it was insufficient to solve the ongoing crisis after four years of no funding. Furthermore, as the 2021 EU payment to the Palestinian Authority, earmarked AVH and the East Jerusalem Hospitals, was severely delayed, the crisis deepened. It is estimated that until May 2022, around 500 patients have been unable to access life-saving care and treatments affected as a result of the halt in the AVH patient intake.

(e) In every WS country program, there are things to be proud of. Here is a short list with some examples:

- *Angola*: strengthening civil society organizations and working together on advocacy for drought and land laws
- *Burundi*: provided decent housing for 54 households that had nowhere to live
- *Cameroon*: changing to renewable energy in the camps, from fuel to solar
- *Central African Republic*: improved the nutritional status of malnourished children in the communities
- *Central America*: helping farmers and preparing communities to adapt to the impact of climate change
- *Chad*: LWF got reconnected to many partners after a long, difficult period
- *Colombia*: expansion of refugee work inside the country
- *Ethiopia*: responding in Tigray, opening an office in the region after 36 years, and responding in the terrible situation of open warfare
- *Haiti*: remaining operational through the earthquake while facing increasing violence, several hurricanes, and a deteriorating situation in the country
- *Iraq*: strong local partners and local staff, balancing direct implementation with local partner implementation
- *Jerusalem*: remaining operational throughout the covid crisis
- *Jordan*: working on Syrian refugee protection in camps and host communities
- *Kenya*: reaching more children in schooling during the covid pandemic
- *Myanmar*: remaining operational in the increasingly difficult situation in the country, providing relief to remote and hard-to-reach communities
- *Nepal*: deepening the work with people with disabilities and supporting their organizations
- *South Sudan*: the program has grown in remote areas preparing for the returnees from Uganda

- *Uganda*: achieved zero mothers dying in childbirth in Palorinya settlement and host community during the year
 - *Venezuela*: work with vulnerable communities
- (f) In 2021, the WS Prague office was opened in the Czech Republic. Creating an office in Prague is in line to explore the possibilities of decentralization for some support positions, particularly the new ones, to maintain the financial sustainability of the LWF. At the same time, having an office registered in an EU country may open new avenues for EU-related funding for WS.

Ukraine response

As the war in Ukraine involves several actors and is rather complex, a separate section of this report is dedicated to the Ukraine response.

LWF condemned Russia's military attack on Ukraine on 24 February immediately and called for a just peace for the people in Ukraine. A joint ecumenical prayer was organized with the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Mennonite World Conference, World Methodist Council, Conference of European Churches, and others.

In response to the crisis in Ukraine, where most of the refugees are mothers with children seeking refuge mainly in neighbouring countries, where we also have member churches, a *One LWF* approach was adopted from the beginning, harnessing the resources of the LWF in the Department for World Service, Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, in the Office for the General Secretary (OGS), and in the Department for Planning and Coordination, building on the collective strength of the different units of the LWF. Joint visits of staff members from DWS, DTMJ, and Regional Secretary for Europe to LWF member churches in neighbouring countries took place early during the crisis to see the realities on the ground. In addition, a coordination structure has been set up internally to ensure a well aligned and effective response.

Meanwhile, member churches in neighbouring countries, i.e., Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Czech Republic, and Hungary, have been invited to apply for community-based support for refugees and the national coordination of congregation-based projects. In addition, there is a need for pastoral care and children's daycare and basic needs such as accommodation, food, etc.

An LWF office has been opened in Poland and the LWF has been registered there. So far, the LWF has opened three cash enrollment centers in Gdansk, Ostroda, Wroclaw. It is planned to open three more in the near future. By this, the LWF aims to reach more than 60 000 families. In addition, practical implementation support has also been received from LWF WS Prague Office.

In May, Bishop Pavlo Shvarts from Ukraine visited the Communion Office in Geneva. In coordination with the Church in Ukraine, an assessment visit is planned in mid-June to Kyiv and the Oblasts Sumy and Chernihiv. The LWF is also preparing for registration in Ukraine.

With the current war in Ukraine, several questions relating to peace ethics, just war and just peace, implications of the teaching of two kingdoms, etc., have surfaced. The Communion Office will call for conversations on these topics, as many member churches

are struggling with the current situation, last but not least, because of the appeal to Western countries to deliver weapons to Ukraine.

Organizational Sustainability and Effectiveness

Various global challenges (COVID-19, world economy) have reinforced the need to continue to transform LWF into a more crisis-resistant, more sustainable organization that can deliver on its vision, mission, and goals efficiently. We kept our focus on the strategic priorities in this segment with the support of the Financial Sustainability document approved by the Council in June last year.

To ensure that planning for the coming year considers the current contextual realities and is as inclusive as possible, strategic planning meetings were organized in the first quarter of the year. The Communion Office Leadership Team worked on aligning annual planning processes more clearly with strategic plans, including stakeholder analysis and external context analysis with professional support. Further, regional meetings with Council members and advisors helped to listen to regional concerns and realities. Based on the input received from the regions and on the outcomes of the programmatic work of the Communion Office, staff was involved in the analysis of the impact of today's global context.

Some improvement has been made in aligning internal work plans with the budgeting process. In addition, we have merged some reports to better use resources in streamlining planning and reporting.

To better assess how the current strategy has been implemented so far, if and how areas of priority have been covered, and where are areas of improvement, a mid-term assessment of the strategy is planned for the second half of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. The results will be presented to the Assembly to support the highest governing body in giving directions for the Communion Office's work for the next strategic period.

In view of fundraising, conversations have been initiated with some of our major partners (Brot für die Welt, Church-Related Agencies) on the strategic direction of funding and to consult with partners about their needs and priorities. Further, ideas have been developed to optimize our planning resources for longer-term funding commitments.

In the current situation where funding for humanitarian, diaconal, and development work is becoming tenser and because of the war in Ukraine, many resources are being prioritized for this conflict, we as the LWF need to ensure that we continue to respond also to needs and sufferings elsewhere in the world. To increase our funding in this regard, we have prepared a proposal to the Council to set up a new foundation entitled to receive funds from the Swiss public to support the activities we carry out globally.

We also aim to increase our outreach to private donors. This, however, requires increased visibility of the LWF and more awareness about the LWF in our member churches. We have constantly been investing in our communications platforms (a new website is being created, social media channels), which help grow our visibility and audience, necessary conditions for extending fundraising. In 2021 LWF's social media community has increased to more than 40.000 followers who follow the LWF's work with great interest and help share LWF's work more widely.

Following up on previous decisions and greatly influenced by the profound changes in the labour market due to COVID-19, we have continued moving towards modifications in

the working methods and work culture. The Communion Office has continued decentralizing positions in all departments (e.g., a PMER position for World Service with placement in Prague, the regional secretaries for Asia, and Africa are working from Malaysia and Cameroon). The CO has introduced flexible working modalities in a move towards a “hybrid” working culture of online and in-person meetings. To strengthen the organizational identity and working culture, the Communion Office, is working with internal communication and recently launched a weekly internal briefing.

Some savings were achieved by reducing office space in Geneva and decreasing business travel and costs for meetings. To cope with the new situation, the methods of collaboration, direction, and supervision of the work have required learning new, remote work tools and a more employee-centered approach. While working from home continues to be allowed for a specific portion of time also for colleagues based in Geneva, the staff is expected to work from the office at least two days a week, and some of the key staff working with different programs from the regions, such as Regional Secretaries, Gender Desk, Youth Desk, are expected to travel to the Communion Office in Geneva during strategically relevant periods such as during the times of planning, government meetings, etc.

Some strategic investments have taken place through investing in various areas that will have long-term effects on LWF. For example, accessing and using digital work tools to communicate and handle documents and human resources (Teams, Sharepoint, Docusign, LWF People) improves the administrative work in the headquarters. Moreover, it is continuously extended to the country level, shaping the way of work. In addition, work is ongoing with the Endowment Fund on strengthening its strategic support through its investment policy.

The exchange rate of CHF (Swiss franc) to Euro continues to be a challenge, as much of the LWF funding is received in Euro. The current strength of CHF has put some constraints on the LWF budget. However, we have done our best to mitigate it by covering as many costs through our EUR accounts as possible and have asked member churches to transfer their membership fees in euros.

Since the last Council meeting in June, a Code of Conduct for LWF Staff has been compiled. This Code of Conduct (CoC) for LWF staff builds on the constitution of the LWF, its bylaws, vision, mission, and values. It also draws on the commitments and expectations of stakeholders and partners with whom the LWF works in its different capacities. This Code of Conduct aims to hold fast to the principle that each person has a God-given dignity that must be protected and respected and that everyone's dignity, irrespective of their social status, gender, ethnicity, age, ability, or ability other differences, must be upheld. I trust that this Code of Conduct, aiming at everyone working for the LWF in different capacities, helps orient how we should behave towards one another to respond to God's love for human beings.

Preparations for the 2023 Assembly

The preparations for the Assembly are well on track. In December last year, I had a chance to visit the Assembly sites and the host church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. It was good to see the excitement among our local hosts and the excellent cooperation between the LWF Assembly Office and the Local Assembly Planning Committee (LAPC).

The location, Krakow in Poland, has gained new significance since the war started in Ukraine. Poland has received millions of Ukrainian refugees, many of whom have arrived in Krakow. Despite this, our local member church and the city of Krakow continue to be committed to welcoming the LWF Assembly to Poland. Since the war started in Ukraine, representatives of some member churches have approached the Communion Office, asking how safe it is to move on with holding the Assembly in Krakow. At the moment, there are no signs of the war escalating into Polish territory. During this Council meeting, there will be a chance for a short interaction with the presiding Bishop Samiec from Poland. He'll offer a greeting, and there is a possibility to join him for a tray lunch in order to hear more about the current situation.

The theme of the Assembly "*One Body, One Spirit, One Hope*" is timely and rich, and I invite you to introduce it in your churches and contexts. Last October, a booklet introducing the Assembly and its theme was shared with member churches. It is an initial guide to reflections about unity, belonging to one body, inclusion and exclusion, hope, and where we draw it today as Christians.

The Assembly is the highest governing body of the LWF. It brings together all member churches, offering thus a unique opportunity every 6-7 years to reflect jointly on the joys and concerns of the Communion and its trajectory for the next period. All member churches were asked to nominate their delegates by 31 May. Not all the churches are able to meet this deadline. It is evident already at this stage that with the first round of nominations, we will not be able to meet the LWF quota of including 40 % of women and 20 % of youth among Assembly delegates. This is partly because smaller churches can send only one official delegate to the Assembly. The delegate usually is the head of the Church, who is male in many cases. Together with the Assembly Office, we are looking into ways to reach the required participation of women and youth to meet this commitment to inclusivity.

More detailed information about the current stand of Assembly preparations can be found in Exhibit 15.1. First, however, here are a few things that I would like to highlight:

- (a) The LWF Assembly Office was opened in Krakow in autumn 2021. For now, we had to give up the office space, to be used as transit accommodation for 25 women and children from Ukraine. Our local parish is making available another room in July for the Assembly office.
- (b) The International Worship Planning Committee is well on track with its preparations and met in-person (with a couple of members joining online) in Krakow in March. A "Biblical arch" has been identified as a thematic thread for the Assembly along its (sub)theme(s), and Bible study leaders are being identified. We want to make sure that all regions will be represented.
- (c) A Task Force composed of the different representatives from existing committees has been formed to plan and ensure a well-coordinated and coherent program for the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. We want to make sure that our visit will honor the victims of the Holocaust but also be mindful of other genocides committed by totalitarian regimes. The International Worship Planning Committee will reflect on this visit's liturgical and pastoral frame. A reference has already been made to the Task Force that produces material on Jewish-Christian relations that will be part of preparatory material for the Assembly.

- (d) The Assembly Reference Group will meet before the Council in Geneva. In addition, they are in the process of finalizing the "Assembly Reader." Based on this material, Assembly Study Guide will be compiled. The aim is to finish it before the first pre-assembly in March 2023.
- (e) Although the situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland is not a matter of concern, we continue to monitor the situation closely and, for now, continue with preparations as planned.

Conclusion and looking ahead

Even though the pandemic had a substantial impact on the life and work of the LWF member churches, the LWF as a communion offered strong witness as it continued to participate in God's holistic mission. Through an increased number of online meetings but also re-occurring in-person meetings, the LWF brought together representatives of member churches and different stakeholders. We will need to continue to grassroots the LWF to increase the awareness among church members about belonging to this global communion. This will also play an essential role in securing the financial sustainability of the LWF.

In recent years, the polycentric character of the LWF has frequently been discussed. This notion goes back to the Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, who spoke of it in the first decades of the 20th century. He primarily had centers in the Global North in mind: Germany and Central Europe, Scandinavia, Northern Baltics, and North America. Meanwhile, there are many centers of Lutheranism in the Global South, as today, almost 50% of Lutherans live in the southern hemisphere. In my opinion, one critical task of the LWF Communion Office is to be a "super-connector," connecting the different centers of Lutheranism, supporting and encouraging new partnerships between churches, also in South-South direction. I remember vividly my visit to our member church in Tanzania with the LWF Vice President for Africa, Rev. Dr Jeannette Ada Maina. She expressed the wish to see other African churches visiting that church and learning from it. Besides connecting different churches, co-branding with member-church-related institutions remains an important task. Many resources are available in our global communion that can be used globally. Currently, we are working on guidelines for co-branding to offer clear guidance on where and under which conditions co-branding is possible.

At the same time, the LWF needs to continue to offer inspirational work in various programmatic fields and serve the needy on behalf of its member churches. During the regional meetings with you, Council members, and advisors, it was encouraging to hear a strong affirmation for LWF's programmatic work, including

- (a) the importance the LWF has paid to public theology and theological education and formation. There is a need to find additional resources to support this work;
- (b) studies on Lutheran identity, including its implications for the concept of leadership, and appreciation of the fact that the LWF has started to develop easily accessible theological materials;
- (c) focus on the involvement of youth and women;
- (d) engagement for gender justice and human dignity, and related advocacy;

- (e) focus on climate justice, whereby a need for sharing good practices about inspiring actions and being a “green church” was mentioned;
- (f) humanitarian work, particularly in remote areas, as well as increased efforts in linking the work of different departments to one another in responding to humanitarian crises (the ‘One LWF’ approach in responding to the crisis in Ukraine was strongly affirmed);
- (g) support for diaconal work of member churches was strongly affirmed and the need to continue with small-scale resp. rapid response projects;
- (h) work for Christian unity and increased cooperation with ecumenical actors such as Caritas Internationalis.

A few areas were mentioned based on the context analysis where the LWF could strengthen its work.

- (a) The LWF has been strong in offering psychosocial support through its country programs, but there is a need to strengthen capacities in the field of pastoral care in our member churches. Our churches should be able to offer space for listening to accompany those who struggle with their lives and existential questions.
- (b) Due to the war in Ukraine, the questions of peace ethics have surfaced again with a new intensity. The LWF is called to offer reflections on the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms, on concepts of just war and just peace. Although our task is to make the new creation a little more visible in the world around us, we are still living in a broken world with all its implications. However, we know that our Lord Jesus Christ has said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Empowering our member churches to be peacebuilders and to have expertise in conflict resolution is a request that can often be heard these days.
- (c) “Joint efforts in mission” is one of the four pillars the LWF was founded upon. LWF’s understanding of mission as holistic mission has been well explored in the document “Mission in Context.” However, when talking about holistic mission, there is a need to make sure that all its aspects: *sharing the gospel, worship and prayer, public witness and advocacy, and Diakonia and serving the neighbour* are all represented in the life and work of the global communion and its member churches. In addition, we need a stronger programmatic focus on the sharing and interpreting of the Word of God and theological reflection about liturgy and worship. Building on the Bible Year initiative and by exploring possibilities of co-branding with institutes working on liturgics, we hope to be able to meet these needs.

For the LWF to carry on its multifaceted work on the scale that we are used to seeing, sufficient resources are needed, both funding and staff. In terms of staff capacity, we are stretched. We need to secure both to deliver on our priorities and meet our goals.

To safeguard the continuation of relevant witness in the context where major donors are decreasing their contributions, and membership figures are declining in some of the larger member churches in the North, we need to explore new funding avenues. The proposal to establish the LWF Swiss Foundation is one of those new avenues. We will also need to pay more attention to reaching private donors; this has a lot to do with the visibility of the LWF and with reaching the grassroots. We will also continue exploring

how to be more efficient as a decentralized organization, with staff working in Geneva and in other countries. The mid-term review of the current strategy will assess the impact of decentralization.

Dear Council members and advisors, this will be your last in-person meeting in Geneva as the Council elected during the 12th Assembly in Namibia. Next year is an Assembly year, and most of the work of the Communion Office in 2023 will be marked by this significant event. I trust that it will be a joyful and forward-looking Assembly, filled with re-connecting and many good conversations. I want to thank you for your steadfastness in carrying on your duties as Council members during the past few years, where we all had to learn new modalities of working and connecting. You have made history by helping to bring the communion safely through these turbulent times.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all LWF partners for their support. I am looking forward to continuing our good conversations about shared priorities to see how to be the messengers of hope and God's love for human beings.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank the whole staff of the LWF for their committed work. It is a joy and pleasure to work with professionals who are proactive and committed to making the world a better place. My special gratitude goes to the Leadership Team, who has been very supportive since I assumed the office in November last year.

We'll continue our journey, guided by the LWF vision of a communion that trusts in the liberating grace of God and is united through Jesus Christ, working for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

Appendix

List of travels

December 13-15 visit to Poland to meet with the leadership of the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Poland and to visit some of the main Assembly sites

January 31-February 2: Joint Staff Meeting with PCPCU in Rome

March 25-31 visit to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

March 31-April 6 visit to the WS Country Program in Uganda

April 20-21 visit to the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

5 May Reception of the Peace Prize "Friedenstein" in Gotha, Germany

May 9-13 visit to the Leadership Conference of Latin America & Caribbean and North America in Santiago, Chile

May 19-23 visit to the Asia Church Leadership Conference in Bangkok, Thailand

6 June Preaching at the festive worship on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Nordkirche, Ratzeburg, Germany

*Respectfully submitted by
Rev. Anne Burghardt
General Secretary*