

Global Christian Forum Greeting to the Lutheran World Federation Council

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

We are living at an opportune time in the history of the Church, when God is at work in fresh ways for Christian unity. The Global Christian Forum is one manifestation and one instrument of this new reality — and it is from this Forum that I bring you fraternal greetings and heartfelt thanks.

The Forum arose in response to changes in global Christianity over the last century, and in recognition of achievements and limitations in the historic quest for Christian unity. These changes include the emergence and growth of new expressions of the Christian faith around the world and the dramatic demographic shifts towards the “Global South.”

From the beginning of the initiative that we today call the Global Christian Forum, Lutherans and the Lutheran World Federation have played an indispensable role in activating and shaping it.

The GCF arose in response to a Lutheran theologian asking “who is missing?” In this new situation of global Christianity, he asked, who is missing from the ecumenical table? When Konrad Raiser formulated that question in the late 1990s — no doubt while sitting in his WCC general secretary office one floor above us in this house — at least one quarter of Christianity was missing from the ecumenical table. Today the percentage is no doubt greater.

The GCF’s particular concern is to set a table where all churches will gather and to invite to it especially those who have had little, if any encounter with one another. When any of us are distanced from one another, all of us are diminished. “The eye cannot say to the hand ‘I have no need of you’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor 12:21). In response to the contemporary ecclesial situation of fragmentation and above all in response to God’s vision of uniting all things in Christ (Ephesians), we are always asking: “Who is missing from among us? Who still should be invited to the table?”

Leaders of the Lutheran World Federation participated in the discussions and decisions which followed Dr. Raiser’s question. Since then and to the present day, leaders of the LWF and of LWF member churches have participated significantly in the numerous regional and two global gatherings of the Global Christian Forum. The LWF’s seeking forgiveness from and reconciliation with Mennonites has become an exemplary story for Forum participants — and an example to follow in many ecclesial relationships around the world, both between and within confessions. As we have sought counsel over the past 18 months on directions for the Forum’s future, conversations with Martin Junge and Kaisamari Hintikka have provided memorable words and usable thoughts. Kathryn Johnson, the LWF representative in the GCF international committee, played a crucial role during the Forum’s transition from one

secretary to another, and she nows play a crucial role as secretary of the Forum's Theological Working Group. The LWF-related Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg provides hospitable and collegial office space for the GCF, and thus for me personally. And then there is the matter of money. Lutheran contributions are an important part of GCF's financial health. For all of these manifestations of Lutheran giftedness and generosity, we give thanks to God — and of course also to you!

Finally, in a rather unconventional but hopefully not inappropriate manner for a greeting of this sort, I would like to speak one more word of thanks to someone in this house. I do so in response to a question that I am often asked, including by Lutherans. The question is "how are relations these days between the Global Christian Forum and the World Council of Churches"—a World Council of Churches led once again, as you know, by remarkable Lutherans, Moderator Walter Altmann and General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit.

The WCC and the GCF are in the process of finalizing our first memorandum of understanding and cooperation. Its introductory paragraphs include these sentences:

This memorandum is a timely marker of the evolution of the relationship between the World Council of Churches and the Global Christian Forum, celebrating all that has been achieved and affirming their distinct and complementary roles in the quest for Christian unity. (...) The GCF acknowledges with gratitude the WCC's role in bringing forward the concept of such a Forum, in promoting its development, and its continuing support. Without these, the GCF would not have come into being. Its continuing life is enriched by its ongoing relationship with the WCC.

My hope is that for all of you who call this house "home", your continuing and intensifying engagement in the Global Christian Forum will enrich your ecclesial life and facilitate the realisation of your ecumenical mission, which is now more crucial than ever in and for the one universal body of Christ.

Larry Miller
GCF Secretary
Ecumenical Centre
Geneva, 14 June 2013