Report of the Assembly Planning Committee to the LWF Council

Introduction

The Assembly Planning Committee held its second meeting on 14 to 18 March 2015 in Windhoek, Namibia. In addition to the members of the Committee, members of the Local Assembly Planning Committee led by its Chairperson, Dr Emma Nangolo took part in the meeting and reported on the local preparations in Namibia. The moderator of the International Worship Planning Committee (IWPC) Rev. Dr Stephen Larson, Chairperson of the International Worship Planning Committee also attended the meeting to report on the work of the Committee which had its first meeting on 2 to 6 March 2015, in Geneva, Switzerland. The Assembly Planning Committee missed the participation of Rev. Dr Gloria Vargas Rojas who had to cancel her flight to Windhoek at the last minute due to her husband’s illness and Rev. Dr Chandran Paul Martin (consultant) who sent his apologies.

At the outset, it is important to note that the second meeting of the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) represented also the end of the mandate of the Committee as provided in its Terms of Reference. This will mean, then, that the LWF Council continues overseeing the Assembly preparations based on progress reports presented by the Communion Office and will take further decisions upon its recommendations. Overall, the Assembly Planning Committee is of the opinion that with the actions as proposed in this report the key elements framing and giving direction to the further work and journey towards the Assembly are in place.

Executive Summary

The APC began its work on Saturday evening with an informal dinner with members of the Local Assembly Planning Committee (LAPC). On Sunday, 15 March, APC members were assigned to different Lutheran congregations in Windhoek to worship and share the Eucharist with them. Some APC members were asked to deliver the sermon. On the whole, the Sunday worship was one of the high points of the experience in Windhoek and one that Assembly delegates “need to experience.” In the evening of 16 March, a symposium on the theme, Liberated by God’s Grace: Celebrating a Journey of Solidarity with Namibia in 2017, was organized in conjunction with the APC. Rev. Martin Junge spoke on the theme of the symposium and the Namibian response was delivered by Bishop (emeritus) Zephania Kameeta. The event was moderated by Honourable Peya Mushelenga, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia and a member of the LAPC. This highly successful public event was a first attempt at promoting the Assembly in Windhoek and gathered a diverse group of people representing the diplomatic community, representatives of Namibian government, churches and ecumenical partners as well as local congregations.
From 16 to 18 March, the work of the APC was based on an annotated agenda and documents prepared by the Communion Office. This agenda was organized according to the following major topics:

- Assembly Concept Note and the Communion Office Operational Plan on the Assembly
- Twelfth Assembly Program and Principles Guiding the Crafting of the Assembly Program
- Methodology and Process towards the Twelfth Assembly
- Guidelines for Council membership
- Fundraising Strategy and Subsidies Policy

It is around these major headings that the APC has developed its proposals for the Council to consider. In addition to these, the APC also received and acknowledged the report of the Local Assembly Planning Committee.

The “Namibian and Southern African dimension” of the Assembly was explored. It was pointed out that this will be ensured taking into account the transversal dimension of the Assembly program. Here, the question of preparation is also relevant. If part of the LAPC assignment is about “equipping and empowering” the Assembly delegates, this would mean imparting to them, perhaps in the form of a publication, the history of the churches, the context and the challenges they face in the country, the situation of young people and how in the midst of complexity they are responding to the challenges and are playing an important role in the continued task of nation-building and how, in the process, the situation of the most marginalized are addressed. Aside from a publication, there will be other opportunities within the Assembly programme to lift up Namibia and Southern Africa. An important discussion item to continue processing is the visitation program prior to the Assembly, as well as the possibilities to host Pre-Assemblies in Namibia.

The launch of the Assembly in Namibia in 2016 will be an important and major event not only for promoting the Assembly but also for fundraising and building excitement about the Assembly in the whole country. The role of the United Church Council – Namibian Evangelical Lutheran Churches (UCC-NELC) as the host of the Assembly, and therefore providing guidance and direction to the LAPC needs also to be lifted up. The issue of healing and reconciliation also features both in the relationship between the churches and with the LWF. Detailed terms of reference provide the basis that define the practicalities of hosting the Assembly. A relationships flow-chart defines the lines of communication and accountability.

The meeting of the APC ended on 18 March with appreciation for the work that was done and for all the preparations and solid work undertaken in the Communion Office. Appreciation was also expressed for the way the meeting was moderated and the conversations that grew as a result. Gratitude was expressed to Bishop (Emeritus) Kameeta for his presence and wisdom as well as for the work of the LAPC. The APC also noted that the LWF is well on its way in its preparations and prayed for God’s blessings for the continuation of this important task of preparing the Twelfth Assembly.
Issues for consideration and decision by the LWF Council

1. **Twelfth Assembly Concept Note (Exhibit 11.1.1)**

   The APC affirmed the importance of the Concept Note in terms of providing the framework and ideological platform of the Assembly. The Committee also appreciated the language of the document because it communicates well to the member churches and for the first time, a clear articulation of the role of the pre-assemblies vis-à-vis the Assembly as well as how the Assembly is linked to the future brings to light the importance of this gathering and the role it plays in strengthening the global communion and in charting the direction for the next period in its life. The vision of a joyful, transformative, forward-looking and outward-looking Assembly reflects a dynamic expression of Lutheranism and is particularly appreciated by the APC.

   It is

   RECOMMENDED: to adopt the Twelfth Assembly Concept Note (Exhibit 11.1.1) and encourage its continued use while preparing for and communicating about the Assembly.

2. **Communion Office Operational Plan for the Twelfth Assembly (Assembly COOP, Exhibit 11.1.2)**

   The Twelfth Assembly COOP 2015-2017 presents the overall framework for the preparations and implementation of the assembly. This should be read in conjunction with the LWF COOP 2015-2016 in which objectives for the programmatic work include those of the Assembly and the 500th Reformation Anniversary. This tool ensures the achievement of the Assembly objectives integrated into the ongoing roles of the Communion Office.

   It is

   RECOMMENDED: to approve the Twelfth Assembly Communion Office Operation Plan for 2015-2017 (Exhibit 11.1.2).

3. **Overall Concept and Methodology of the Twelfth Assembly (Exhibit 11.1.3)**

   The Assembly Planning Committee welcomed this document that builds on the Concept Note and offers insights into how various processes are being designed that will inform the journey of LWF member churches towards the Twelfth Assembly. While evidently many issues will require further decisions, and plans need to be assessed in view of availability of resources, conditions on the ground and the needs arising from further process, the APC noted that the overall concept and methodology serves well as a framework for further implementation of both the Assembly and its preparatory process.

   The APC affirms the undergirding structure of the concept which understands the Assembly as a milestone of a journey that begins prior to the Assembly, and doesn’t end there. The preparatory process builds on existing “resources”: LWF booklets currently being printed on the Reformation Anniversary along the
themes of the anniversary / the Assembly, the Pre-Assemblies, and which includes also the gifts that Namibian churches and context will offer.

The internal coherence and flow of the Assembly process, the emphasis on distinctive spaces for distinctive forms of interaction and of activities that express the different facets of the Assembly life will help participants to better understand the overall process.

The APC affirmed the proposal of a development of the Assembly message in stages. It delineates in clear ways what the role of the Communion Office is in view of the preparation of the message is, and how the Assembly will speak its mind using the preparation process as a starting point.

Overall, the APC is aware that the concept and methodology may require further testing on some of its aspects and that the feasibility of its implementation depends on many factors and ongoing processes. This may require modifications and further decisions to be taken at a later stage. As it stands now, and with this note, the Assembly Planning Committee is confident with the proposal and submits it for approval by the Council.

It is:

RECOMMENDED: to approve the Overall Concept and Methodology of the Twelfth Assembly (Exhibit 11.1.3) as the document that serves as the basis for further developing the program and methodology of the Assembly and its related processes.

4. **Criteria for selecting a keynote speaker (Exhibit 11.1.4)**

The Assembly Planning Committee affirmed the need for the Assembly to be addressed by a keynote speaker. The profile as presented in the exhibit will support the Communion Office in the choice to approach possible keynote speakers to find out about their interest and availability to address the Assembly.

It is

RECOMMENDED: to approve the criteria for selecting a keynote speaker as presented in Exhibit 11.1.4.

5. **Draft Assembly Program (Exhibit 11.1.5)**

A draft program that reflects the principles, the concept and the methodologies outlined in other exhibits (see above) was thoroughly discussed. While aware of the unique opportunity for the global communion to physically gather together in one place during the Assembly, the Assembly Planning Committee cautioned against a too ambitious program schedule. Passing times from one Assembly venue to another, for instance from the worship tent to the plenary hall, need to be included, once these aspects are clearer.
The Assembly Planning Committee understood that the schedule will still develop further and that elements not known yet need to be taken into consideration in the further planning process. The Assembly Planning Committee presents the draft program for decision to the Council in the understanding that changes may still have to be introduced. At this point, the Council's concurrence is sought in view of the question as to whether the draft program, with the available information, adequately expresses the concepts and methodologies presented in the Exhibit 11.1.3 – Overall Concept and Methodology of the Twelfth Assembly.

It is

RECOMMENDED: to approve the draft of the Assembly program (Exhibit 11.1.5) as a basis on which further revisions and improvements could be made until a new draft is presented to the Council at its meeting in 2016.

6. Worship, devotion and prayer

The International Worship Planning Committee reports to the LWF Council but in the interest of ensuring comprehensive planning of the Assembly, Rev. Dr Stephen Larson, Chairperson of the IWPC was invited to the meeting of the APC in order to share the outcomes of their meeting which took place only two weeks before the APC meeting in Windhoek. The IWPC is offering the following considerations mindful that these are preliminary and will have to be seen in light of the overall flow of the programme as well as logistical and resource possibilities.

Currently, the IWPC is working on the Bible study / worship texts, but need to focus on a few more soon. The IWPC understands that daily worship will be held in a tent (to be specifically put up for this purpose) on a parking lot next to the assembly hall. A simple order of Midday Prayer is expected to take place in the assembly hall or sub-groups. Opening and closing worship services are planned to take place in the worship tent. The IWPC hopes that local choirs would be included in the worship, singing music that would connect to the sub-themes. For the Sunday commemoration of the Reformation’s 500th Anniversary the IWPC is working on the feasibility of organizing the event in a stadium.

The APC offered its own thoughts, based on the overall concept of the Assembly. It proposed having a daily Eucharist at the end of each day as a way to close the day.

7. Guidelines for Council Membership (Exhibit 11.1.6)

The APC affirms the importance of these guidelines that articulate the expectations and responsibilities of Council members and in this regard support member churches in their task of nominating candidates for the Council. The guidelines will help clarify from the outset the roles and expectations, particularly also in view of the commitments resulting for a church that nominates a Council member. Noting that such guidelines are developed for the first time, the Assembly Planning Committee strongly endorsed their
importance as a tool supporting churches in their choices and providing for a Council that includes the
different expressions of leadership, as well as of expertise in its midst.

It is

RECOMMENDED: to adopt the Guidelines for Council Membership (Exhibit 11.1.6) to be sent to
LWF member churches when approached to propose nominations for the
Council to be elected during the Twelfth Assembly.

8. **Twelfth Assembly Fundraising strategy (Exhibit 11.1.7)**

The Twelfth Assembly Fundraising Strategy acknowledges that a core component is directed to ensuring
that the Assembly fees which constitute 83% of the Assembly budget are received. Yet, at the same time
not all the funds will be raised only from the member churches and this underscores the importance of
finding other channels of support. There is need to explore the potential for seeking bilateral funding
especially as this involves some of the components of the Assembly programme (e.g. the Omatala) as well
as processes linked to the Assembly (e.g. the Reformation anniversary). There could, potentially, be
interest in supporting certain aspects of the preparatory work in Namibia (e.g. the Launch of the Assembly)
and this needs to be explored with the Local Assembly Planning Committee, the Lutheran member
churches in the country and its partners. The Assembly Planning Committee would like to emphasize the
importance of the LWF ethical guidelines for fundraising need which could be used to guide global and
Namibia fundraising for the Assembly.

It is

RECOMMENDED: to approve the Twelfth Assembly Fundraising Strategy (Exhibit 11.1.7) and
support the main lines of action presented in the fundraising strategy

9. **Policy on Subsidizing Costs of Delegates to the Twelfth Assembly (Exhibit 11.1.8)**

A Policy on Subsidizing Costs of Assembly Delegates for the Twelfth Assembly is being tabled for the first
time to Council. The policy affirms the constitutional right of member churches to participate in the
Assembly and their responsibility to help finance its costs. It also recognizes “mutuality” as defined in the
LWF Strategy and which is “expressed in the readiness to share and to receive and to exchange gifts and
responsibilities…”.

The APC affirms the need for such a policy. It is an important tool that will help to avoid misunderstanding
and guide decision-making. It underlines the responsibility of churches as members of the LWF. It provides
an objective basis for Communion Office staff dealing with requests of subsidies to take decisions on these
requests.

It is
RECOMMENDED: to approve the Policy for Subsidizing Costs of Delegates to the Twelfth Assembly (Exhibit 11.1.8).

Conclusion

The Assembly Planning Committee expresses its gratitude for having been entrusted by the Council with the mandate to support the planning process of the Twelfth Assembly. Despite the short period of joint work, joy, confidence and openness characterized the interactions. The Assembly Planning Committee considered it particularly helpful that consultants were included in their process that had direct responsibilities in the implementation of the Eleventh Assembly. As expressed above, the Assembly Planning Committee trusts that with its decisions at the present Council meeting, the Council will provide a clear enough basis for the work that needs to be done until the delegates, guests and visitors begin to arrive in Windhoek in May 2017. As the Assembly Planning Committee concludes its assignment, it pledges its ongoing prayers for a joyful, transformative, outward and forward looking Assembly.

This report is respectfully submitted to the LWF Council by:

Assembly Planning Committee
Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, Church of Norway, Chairperson
Ms Mami Brunah Aro Sandaniaina, Malagasy Lutheran Church
Superintended Olivier Dantine, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria
Ms Kinga Pap, Lutheran Church in Hungary
Bishop (Emeritus) Dr Zephania Kameeta, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
Ms Mikka McCracken, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Bishop Dr Nicholas Tai, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong
Rev Dr Gloria Rojas Vargas (apologies), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile

Consultants
Rev. Dr Chandran Paul Martin (apologies), Assembly Planning Coordinator, Communion Office, Eleventh LWF Assembly in Stuttgart
Rev. Klaus Rieth, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Assembly Planning Coordinator for the Host Church, Eleventh LWF Assembly in Stuttgart)