

**REPORT TO THE LWF COUNCIL FROM
THE INSTITUTE FOR ECUMENICAL RESEARCH
IN STRASBOURG
(2014–2015)**

I. Reflections on the Institute's situation at 50 years

On April 22, 2015, the Institute for Ecumenical Research celebrated its 50th anniversary with the presence of important representatives of churches, Christian World Communions, and academics, including guests speakers from the LWF, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, the University of Saloniki, the Global Christian Forum, the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine, the Swiss Evangelical Church Federation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, Fuller Theological Seminary, and the University of Heidelberg. In addition, many other friends of the Institute were present, including former Institute and LWF staff, local clergy and scholars, and the Institute board.

The remarks formed a stirring testimony to the role that the IER has played in the reconciliation of the churches in the past five decades. It is fitting to include some of the statements here.

A. From Martin Junge, General Secretary of the LWF:

"[T]he list of noteworthy accomplishments and valuable contributions that were supported and shaped by the Institute's commendable work is long and impressive. The ecumenical vision of "unity in reconciled diversity" stems from research and discussions at this Institute and the notion of "differentiated consensus" as a methodological approach to ecumenical dialogues clearly bears its signature. Outstanding support has been provided to all the LWF's bilateral dialogues and some impressive milestones were achieved thanks to the Institute's active and committed support. These include: the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* in 1999; the so-called Mennonite Action in 2010 and its foundational document *Healing of Memories—Reconciliation in Christ*; and, more recently, the crucial role in preparing the Lutheran–Roman Catholic document, *From Conflict to Communion*, which significantly shapes today the LWF's ecumenical approach to the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. Furthermore, the LWF is building on the valuable groundwork that the Institute has provided for the dialogue with the Pentecostals as we set up the commission that will engage in this highly promising dialogue. The Institute's invaluable support during the long preparation process with the Orthodox churches, which eventually led to the formal dialogues, must not be forgotten, nor must its active role in the dialogues with the Reformed, just to mention some of the Institute's concrete contributions. There are many good reasons for celebrating the Institute's 50th Anniversary today...

"[T]he initial intention to establish a Foundation for Interconfessional Research stemmed from the LWF's desire to express what from its inception and until today has remained a key theological precept, namely, that confessional theology does not stand in opposition to, or contradict the quest for unity in the body of Christ, but that it actually constitutes the foundation and the *raison d'être* of Lutheran ecumenical engagement...

"The Helsinki Assembly's decision to establish an institute for interconfessional research represented an important transition... The LWF understood that ongoing ecumenical reflection also needed to

include direct ecumenical engagement on the part of the LWF. In all likelihood this is the reason why it is in the Institute for Ecumenical Research's very DNA to care so passionately for the theological rootedness and accountability of ecumenical dialogues, and why, from the LWF's perspective, the Institute is so firmly linked both to the ecumenical vocation of its member churches, as well as to the actual theological dialogues that give expression to the ecumenical engagement. In theological terms: for the LWF, the Institute with its research capacity and its support of the communion's ecumenical relations is not an *adiaphoron*, a "could be," but a necessity, a must be...

"The quest for unity requires patience, long-term vision and sustained efforts as well as the recognition that winter is never simultaneously in all parts of the world. Therefore talk about an alleged "ecumenical winter" will never make sense to us in the LWF because due to our global constituency we know only too well how God's Spirit works in different ways in different parts of this world, yet at the same time...

"Our world has so much evolved since 1963. We are living in an era where there is no longer one center, but where there are many centers—sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating, sometimes very well connected, sometimes in a total disconnect, if not in painful communication breakdown. This reality is also true for the church with its shifting centers of gravity and the development of a variety of theological discourses, including also in the field of confessional theology... Thinking ahead now and looking at the next fifty years of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, I believe these questions are of the utmost relevance for the Institute. What does this mean for the LWF's perennial, ongoing ecumenical vocation and the strong and commendable role that the Institute has played thus far? How do we envision the ecumenical undertakings and what are possible structures and methodologies that would relate to the current phenomenon of polycentricism and a variety, sometimes conflicting, cultural patterns in which the Christian faith is being understood and lived out? How do we continue to equip ourselves for greater awareness, for greater resources to think trans-contextually and trans-culturally in view of how things are set up today, and in view of the gift of unity that we know ahead of us?' ...I come with an invitation to the Institute of Ecumenical Research, namely to work together on these larger questions, particularly when it comes to how we envisage upholding our ecumenical vocation in the years to come. Our ecumenical vocation remains unchanged and steadfast. And it is because of this that it wants to relate to changed contexts and changed realities among our member churches and dialogue partners, and the emergence of new actors with their own questions onto the ecumenical scene."

B. From Bp. Brian Farrell, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican:

"Since its establishment the Institute has played an indispensable role in *Lutheran-Catholic relations*. And none of the ten agreed documents published in these fifty years – in particular the *Joint Declaration on Justification* and, most recently, *From Conflict to Communion* – a text of huge potential at this point of the Catholic-Lutheran relationship – would be what they are without the scholarly input of the Institute's distinguished theologians... From a Catholic perspective, we are especially grateful to the Institute's scholars, who practice Seneca's maxim: *audiatur et altera pars* – let the other side be heard. We greatly appreciate their constant effort to reach a shared vision by means of an ever deeper understanding of their partner's views, as well as of their own... We need our theological centers of research in order to think ecumenism *in the long term*, in order for *growth in communion* to be received and preserved and built upon. And we need such centers to hand on to each *succeeding generation* what has been achieved. Books and publications are not sufficient; real persons, knowledgeable and competent in educating the next generation, are required; witnesses burning with the passion for unity in truth and love are indispensable. The present and past leadership of the Strasbourg Institute is an exemplary case in point: men and women capable of rising above changing intellectual fashions in

order to save the ecumenical movement from the subjectivism that undermines God's intentions and his design for the Church."

C. From Rev. Dr. Larry Miller, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum (former General Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference):

"It is privilege and an honour on this historic occasion to offer greetings and thanks to the Institute for Ecumenical Research, and to do so on behalf of two communities, the Global Christian Forum and the Mennonite Church. In the Global Christian Forum, we encounter one of the widest expressions of world Christianity in existence today. In the Mennonite community of churches, we meet one of the smallest Christian World Communions. Something these two communities have in common is a deep debt of gratitude to the Institute and, above all, to the people of the Institute. To one of these communities, you have contributed healing. To the other, you have given a home...

"The story of Lutheran and Mennonite relationships is an old one. We know that for centuries this story was a troubled story—a story marked by tension, conflict, and separation. We know also that recently this story is an exemplary story—a story of confession, forgiveness, and healing. What may be less known is that the Institute for Ecumenical Research has been a primary instrument of this transformation... Without the close and careful debate of that Lutheran and Mennonite hermeneutical community, nourished in the space and by the spirit of the Institute, there would have been no consensus about the 16th century story...

"Since 2012 the Institute has provided a home for the Global Christian Forum. It has provided physical and inspirational space within a house whose history and culture is entirely appropriate as the home of the Forum. It is a history and culture rooted in the classical ecumenical search to overcome the fragmentation of the body of Christ. At the same time, it is a house where the householders seek conversation with the new expressions of Christianity as they multiply, grow, and dramatically change the face of world Christianity... What is no wonder is that the message today from the people of the Global Christian Forum to the people of the Institute for Ecumenical Research is simple and deeply heart-felt: Thank you. Thank you for the gift of a home."

D. From Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel of the University of Heidelberg, Germany:

"The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg has played a fundamental role in the development of dialogue ecumenism. Since its founding it has accompanied on the one hand the multilateral process of the Faith and Order movement and the efforts toward mutual understanding between churches of Reformation heritage, as seen in the formation of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. On the other hand the Institute has accompanied the numerous bilateral dialogues on the world level between the LWF and the Catholic church, the Anglican communion, the Orthodox churches, the Reformed churches, the Pentecostal churches, and the Mennonites. Of vital importance is how the Institute does this as a research organization... In order to be able to deal with differences in doctrine, one must first of all understand one's own doctrine and make it intelligible to the dialogue partner. As an organization of the LWF it is thus the task of the Institute to strive in a special way for the interpretation of Lutheran doctrine. That cannot happen without Luther research on a scholarly level, which the Institute's academic staff is devoted to and since its inception has always numbered many renowned Luther scholars among its company.

"But Luther research is only one research area. Alongside of it the Institute pursues cross-confessional research, which is indispensable for understanding the dialogue partner.

“Finally, there is a third major area of research work that the Institute examines, namely ecumenical methodology. The Institute has played a fundamental role not only in the development of the method of differentiated consensus but also in the more precise formulation of differentiating consensus. In this way, ecumenical methodology is not divorced from the question of the ultimate ecumenical objective. And here also has the Institute contributed essentially to the creation of a clear identity for Lutheran ecumenism, in that it developed it with an eye to the ecumenical objective of unity in reconciled diversity while also opening up systematically the ecumenical potential of the Reformation understanding of the church for the creation of church fellowship through the dialogues.

“One could give many examples of the tireless research work of the directors and professors of the Institute... But there is also an invisible side to all this. The staff of the Institute has not only accompanied many dialogues but also produces through these dialogues foundational work in the form of lectures and preparatory studies. This work is only apparent to those who actually participate in the dialogues. The dialogue documents are shared labor such that it is no longer possible to say who wrote or contributed what. This is a good and sensible approach. But the anniversary today gives us an opportunity for once to refer to this invisible and selfless work of the Institute. Without the preparatory studies that are produced by the coworkers in the dialogues, many of our dialogues would not have been so successful or even possible.

“This kind of work cannot be done by ecumenical institutes in the universities, due to their academic obligations and teaching and testing responsibilities. In its institutional formation it was granted to the Institute up to now to pursue research without always having to worry about the visibility of its research in publications and external funding, which university organizations must always do more and more. Such pressure is not always good for research. For results are not always reached quickly, and the danger is always there that self-presentation will gain the upper hand over against the actual pursuit of the research goal. But self-presentation cannot be the goal! For theological research that is especially the case—if we want to take our teaching on justification seriously in this context, too. In this sense, I wish for ecumenical research and the ecumenical movement that the Institute may continue onward its important service and may be able to accompany ecumenical encounters and dialogues between the churches with ongoing foundational research.”

E. The Decision of the LWF Assembly in Helsinki in 1963 to establish the Institute

The Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki, Finland (July 30–August 11, 1963) established the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research and adopted its constitution that is still valid (with amendments) to this day. The Preamble states that the Foundation is “an ecclesiastical foundation for theological research which shall be independent and have legal status.” The LWF Assembly defined the IER’s purpose as follows:

“The purpose of this Foundation shall be to contribute to the fulfillment by the Lutheran churches of their ecumenical responsibility in the area of theology. The Foundation shall carry out its work by:

- (1) *Appropriate and critical theological research, both historical and systematic, in areas where Christian churches are divided in matters of doctrine and church order, and where theological questions are matters of controversy. To this end it shall be empowered to appoint research professors.*
- (2) *The holding of theological seminars and conferences of a scholarly nature.*
- (3) *Contacts and conversation with theologians from other churches, in order*
 - (a) *to obtain direct knowledge of their doctrinal convictions and theological methods,*

- (b) *to communicate the understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church as rediscovered in the Lutheran Reformation,*
- (c) *to deepen comprehension of Christian truth by means of such theological encounter.*
- (4) *Publication of the results and of such conferences and conversations.”*

In the discussion about the decision on the establishment of this Foundation, Bishop Dietzfelbinger (Munich, Germany) stated: “I believe it is a moment of no small importance in the history of the Lutheran World Federation if this step is now taken. It is a matter of fulfilling the ecumenical responsibility of the Reformation, a responsibility which the LWF will perhaps be taking over anew in this matter. We should be taking a step which would show the Lutheran church how wide her responsibility is. Without detracting in any way from her clear task, she will be able to bear witness in a new way in the whole Christian world. The fact that it is a ‘foundation’ may serve as evidence both of its commitment to the doctrinal basis of the LWF and of the freedom and ecumenical breadth of the task.”

In this sense, the LWF Assembly wished to establish an independent institution for interconfessional research, since research requires freedom, but at the same time made it clear that the theological work should be done for the sake of the Lutheran World Federation and its member churches. Thus three members of the Board of the Foundation must be members of the LWF Council, among them the Chair of the Board. The Board decided to create an Institute in order to fulfill the purpose of the Foundation, and it decided to locate this Institute in Strasbourg, France, since there is a Lutheran church there with a very rich history from the time of the Reformation, both a Protestant and a Catholic Theological Faculty at the University, and excellent libraries. In the course of its 50 years, countless ecumenical conferences and meetings took place in the Institute, so that for many it has become the symbol of Lutheran ecumenism.

F. Finances

The financial situation of the Foundation that supports the IER has cause for concern. In the year 2014, the income of € 379.000 was not adequate to cover the € 412.000 in expenses (€ 387.000 in operating expenses and € 25.000 depreciation for the building and equipment).

55% of the Foundation’s income is provided by the churches in Germany (the German National Committee of the LWF and a special contribution from the Bavarian Landeskirche), 17% from the Church of Finland, 5% from other Nordic churches, 4% from Lutheran churches on other continents, and 19% from interest on the Foundation’s capital funds. In the next few years, a large part of the Finnish contribution will come to an end, as the special contribution of this church, which began in 2005 and has lasted for 10 years, will run out. Furthermore, the habitual contribution of the Church of Sweden toward the Institute is no longer available. The budget approved by the IER board for 2016 allots an income of only € 323.000.

Expenditures, however, remain essentially the same. 60% belong to personnel costs of two research professors, one administrative assistant, and a part-time librarian, which is already the bare minimum for functionality. Expenditures for the library, seminars, and conferences amount to 15% and for the maintenance of the building, including telephone, heating, and taxes, 25%. The budget approved by the board for 2016 allots € 410.000 for expenditures.

It is important to reiterate that the LWF does not financially support the IER. The LWF undertakes technical support in the area of financial administration only, for which the IER pays a fee of € 13.000 annually to the LWF.

In the near future we will have to cope with a deficit of approximately € 90.000 per year. This can only be dealt with on an exceptional basis through withdrawal from the capital fund. Thus it is urgent to find new means to rehabilitate the financial situation of the IER.

G. Staffing Changes

In addition to the financial challenges, the IER faces significant staffing changes and needs. Prof. Wilson will return to the U.S. at the end of January 2016. She will continue as an adjunct professor, similarly to Kenneth Appold, but a full-time replacement for her position is needed.

Furthermore, Prof. Dieter will retire at the end of December 2016, thus a replacement is needed for him both as professor and director of the IER. Nevertheless, Prof. Dieter will continue to serve the Institute also after his retirement, of course on another basis.

In both cases, nominations are warmly welcomed from all member churches of the LWF, and notices of the positions will be made available in the standard channels for academic employment.

Given the financial difficulties, the IER encourages strongly that LWF churches with resources to do so should consider the possibility of seconding a pastor-scholar to the Institute for a period of time (e.g. three years). This would allow mutual benefit both to the Institute and to the scholar's home church.

Last but certainly not least, it is increasingly clear that in order to do its work responsibly, the IER needs again to have Global South representation on its staff. It is again requested that churches with sufficient resources consider funding in part or whole a position for such a scholar.

H. Ownership by LWF Constituency

Through several years now of conversation and reflection, it has become evident that much more could be done to develop the sense of ownership of the IER among all of the LWF constituency. As the aforementioned quotation from the LWF 1963 indicates, the purpose of the IER is to assist and guide all of the Lutheran churches in their interactions with other Christian bodies as well as deepening the understanding of what it means to be Lutheran.

To that end, the IER wishes to emphasize that the Institute exists for the member churches of the LWF as well as for the communion as a whole. We encourage churches, pastors, theologians, and leaders to make use of our resources, in such ways as the following:

- a) attending our annual seminars, e.g. the International Summer Seminar in Strasbourg and Studying Luther in Wittenberg*
- b) visiting our website and making use of the resources available there*
- c) inviting our staff to visit church groups and seminaries/universities to offer lectures or lead workshops*
- d) contact us about developing special study seminars at the Institute*
- e) offering financial support or seconding scholars to work at the Institute*
- f) connecting our staff to other ecumenical or academic institutions related to the member churches.*

Please also see the attached list of churches and institutions we have worked with in the past 5 years to get a sense of the range of our engagement.

II. The Institute's work in 2014–2015

A. Staff and Board

1. In the time since the last Council meeting in Geneva (2014), the research staff of the Institute has consisted of Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter (Director) and Prof. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, the adjunct

professors Prof. Dr. André Birmelé and Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Parmentier (both in Strasbourg), and the visiting adjunct professor Prof. Dr. Kenneth Appold (Princeton, New Jersey, USA).

2. The current LWF Council members who serve on the Board of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research, which oversees the Institute, are Bp. Dr. Frank O. July, Chair of the Board, Bp. Dr. Ndanganeni Petrus Phaswana, and Rev. Naoki Asano.

3. From June to December 2014, the IER hosted two scholars-in-residence, Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radner and Rev. Dr. Annette Brownlee. A married couple and both Anglican priests, Radner and Brownlee teach at Wycliffe College, an Anglican seminary in Toronto, Canada. Radner had spoken at a Summer Seminar several years previously and based on his positive experience inquired about spending a sabbatical in Strasbourg. Their presence and contributions were enormously enriching to the whole IER staff.

B. Research

1. The work of the study group preparing an ecumenical interpretation of Luther's 95 Theses under the leadership of Theodor Dieter and Wolfgang Thönissen (from the Catholic Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut in Paderborn, Germany) continues. The four volumes of sources, to be presented in Latin and German, are nearly finished, despite the challenges in coordinating the interpretation of six different groups of Catholic and Protestant scholars. It is expected that the first two volumes will appear in 2016.

2. As engagement with Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is a growing challenge for Lutherans around the world and a particular topic of the Institute's research focus, the IER partnered with the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) last year to translate the latter's internal dialogue with its Charismatic members from Portuguese to English. It is an important case study in sorting through the extremely controversial issues regarding baptism and rebaptism. The text can be found at the IER website: <www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/a-dialogue-on-baptism-in-brazil-2/ieclb-bautismo/>

3. The Foundation for Religious Sciences John XXIII at the University of Bologna is undertaking the publication of a history of ecumenism in 5 volumes, with between 100 and 140 articles of about 40 pages each. It will appear simultaneously in English, Italian, French, and German between 2018 and 2022. The editorial team of 15 persons has met 4 times in 2014 and 2015 to establish a list of themes and authors. Prof. Birmelé of the IER is a member of the editorial committee of 5 under the direction of Alberto Melloni and will be intensively occupied in this massive work over the next several years.

4. Directly following the 50th anniversary celebration, the IER convened its traditional gathering of experts at Klingenthal for an intensive colloquium. Its purpose is to allow working ecumenists to gather privately without pressure of drafting or publication to discuss the issues facing the task of unity. This time the IER prepared a lengthy document examining the state of ecumenism overall, the individual dialogues, and methodological issues, to which individual participants responded. This allows the IER staff the opportunity to hear the perspectives of ecumenists in other church families and gain a broader perspective on the pressing needs of the future.

C. Dialogues

1. The Institute has served the Lutheran churches and the LWF in close relationship with the Department for Theology and Public Witness and enjoys a very positive working relationship with Rev.

Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka and her colleagues. Professors of the Institute participate as consultants in the current dialogues of the LWF:

- a. Lutheran/Roman-Catholic Commission on Unity (Prof. Dieter)
- b. Lutheran/Mennonite/Catholic Trialogue (Prof. Dieter)
- c. Lutheran/Orthodox Dialogue (Prof. Wilson)
- d. Lutheran/Pentecostal Dialogue [forthcoming] (Prof. Wilson)

2. *Lutheran-Roman Catholic*. The staff continues to offer presentations on *From Conflict to Communion* in many different countries and to different audiences and also to publish articles on the text and topic in order to promote the reception of this document. Prof. Dieter of the IER and Prof. Wolfgang Thönissen from the Catholic team are preparing a theological foundation from which a joint commemorative liturgy will be developed. Meanwhile, the new topic of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on “Baptism and Growth in Communion” attempts to relate the individual aspect of a person entering into communion with God and the other Christians through baptism and growing in this communion, on the one hand, to the growth in communion between communities through baptism and other means of salvation, on the other.

3. *Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic*. The last meeting of this triologue took place in Mennorode, the Netherlands, from February 8–14, 2015. The challenge of this new type of dialogue consists in that all three parties are committed to their respective traditions; but at the same time it has become difficult for all to communicate their traditional views on sin (original, actual, etc.) as well as on grace to modern people. The Mennonites represent the more “modern” partner in the discussion. Very basic and fundamental questions are raised, and this makes the dialogue so interesting, especially since the participants are open-minded and self-critical. There is no pressure to reach an agreement on mutual recognition of baptism, but there is the hope that better mutual understanding and also better self-understanding of the respective doctrines and practices of baptism may arise, which can in turn address the gap between self-understanding and ecclesial reality that we recognize in all three communities. Since the teams in the triologue are very small, there is a lot of work to do for every participant, but we do it in a good spirit of hope and mutual trust. Prof. Dieter of the IER serves as consultant to this triologue.

4. *Lutheran-Orthodox*. Prof. Wilson has continued as consultant to the International Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, which had its most recent plenary meeting in Rhodes, Greece, in May. It has continued its extended work on the doctrine of ministry, which did not see completion in the plenary but will continue for at least two more sessions before a common statement is issued.

In addition to this, in March the IER hosted the first gathering of the St. Athanasius Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Fellowship, a new initiative of the IER and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in Volos, Greece. It was founded by the IER’s Prof. Wilson and the Volos Academy’s director Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis in order to foster friendship and intellectual exchange between Lutheran and Orthodox theologians. Building on the great advances made by the regional and international dialogues between the two church communities, the Fellowship aims to combine the two traditions’ respective resources for a symbiotic effect in addressing the urgent questions facing both church and society in the twenty-first century. To set a firm foundation for future work, this initial meeting of the Fellowship sought to map out the themes, new directions, and areas for development in the theology of the two churches. After lively and intensive discussion, the Fellowship resolved to conclude introductory matters with a videoconference in the fall of 2016, and then to meet again in 2017 in Volos to take up the topic of “Historical Hermeneutics,” with particular attention to the various roles that the past can and does play in shaping our churches and theology in the present and future. Sessions were tentatively planned

for 2019 and 2021 on the themes of “Theological Anthropology” and “Political Theology.” Publication is anticipated of the Fellowship’s papers in due course. The Fellowship selected the patronal name of St. Athanasius in recognition of this church father’s importance to both of our communities, especially for his strong christological teaching.

5. *Lutheran-Pentecostal*. Building on the foundation laid by the proto-dialogue initiated by the Institute with Pentecostals starting in 2004 and concluding in 2010, the LWF and classical Pentecostals now have plans in place to begin a formal dialogue starting in 2016 under the leadership of Dr. Hintikka of the LWF and Pentecostal chair Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss. In the meanwhile, Prof. Wilson is working on a guide to Pentecostal and Charismatic movements intended specifically for Lutheran readers, which should be ready for distribution later in 2015.

D. Reception

1. The Institute organizes international summer seminars every year addressing challenging ecumenical problems. Usually 50 to 60 participants come from more than 20 countries and many different Christian churches. The 2014 Summer Seminar looked at “Non-Denominational and Trans-Confessional Movements.” Members of the historic Christian churches are often baffled by the new face of Christianity springing up all around them. Entirely independent congregations meeting in warehouses suddenly have ten times the weekly attendance of the long-established parishes that meet in beautiful old churches. The secularization of Europe and North America seems to mean the withering of Christianity, while at the same time immigration from other parts of the world leads to a vibrant renewal in the very same places. Confessional and structural boundaries are still major topics of discussion between Catholics, Orthodox, and Reformation-era Protestants, but otherwise unconnected Evangelicals and Pentecostals seem to have no trouble sharing altars and pulpits. The Summer Seminar attempted to make sense of the baffling landscape of twenty-first century Christianity. Lectures were offered by Prof. André Birmelé on the current ecumenical landscape, Dr. Kate Bowler on the prosperity gospel, Rev. Dr. Timothy George on the Evangelicals and Catholics Together initiative, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher on the global Evangelical movement, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Thönissen on how the Roman Catholic church sees and relates to Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and other new Christian communities, Rev. Andy Buckler on the “Fresh Expressions” movement in the Church of England, Brother Adam Strojny on Chemin Neuf, Rev. Friedrich Degenhardt on ecumenical partnerships in Hamburg, Prof. Dr. Hubert van Beek on the Global Christian Forum, Dr. Jean-Daniel Plüss on worldwide Pentecostalism, and Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radner with a concluding look at new movements and historic Christianity. We also heard three case studies of migrant churches in Strasbourg itself: Rev. Vasile Iorgulescu on the Romanian Orthodox, Rev. Bio Terrence on West African Pentecostal groups, and Rev. Zaka Habberstad on the various Malagasy Christian congregations. Lectures may be found on the IER’s website, <www.strasbourg-institute.org/en/non-denominational-and-trans-confessional-movements/>.

2. The forthcoming 2015 Summer Seminar is entitled “Ecumenism in the Arts.” We will ask whether and how art can be helpful in seeing and experiencing the unity of Christians. What does it mean that Protestant hymns can be found in Catholic hymnals and Catholic hymns in Protestant ones? In the music of Johann Sebastian Bach the Lutheran understanding of the gospel takes melodious form, and yet many Catholics treasure his music as well. Gospel music and praise songs of charismatic and Pentecostal origin are widely spread and extremely popular. Icons are an essential expression of Orthodox Christian faith that have met with warm appreciation among Western Christians in recent years. Also in modern painting and visual art Christian themes appear. Magnificent church buildings—like the Strasbourg cathedral—with lavish exteriors incorporating theological programs are valued not

only by their own members. Christian authors are read across confessional boundaries. Even the cinema is a place where Christian motifs can be recognized. We will investigate examples of this kind of border-crossing artwork and their ecumenical significance. Thus also the foundational themes of ecumenism will be taken up, such as unity and diversity, the connection between the believed, hidden, and visible church, and the perception, experience, and recognition of other Christians and other churches. There is still time to register to attend this year's Seminar!

3. In cooperation with the LWF Center in Wittenberg, the Institute annually offers a two-week course called "Studying Luther in Wittenberg" during the years leading up to 2017. This anniversary presents a special opportunity for the LWF and its member churches to deepen and develop their communion by studying together the theology of Martin Luther. The goals are: (a) to understand the focus of assorted texts of Martin Luther, (b) to experience and imagine the context in which Martin Luther lived, and finally (c) to relate the insights of Luther in a constructive way to the living circumstances of the participants. This ensures a fruitful dialogue that will strengthen the communion of the LWF. Successful participants receive a certificate. It is hoped that participants will return to their respective home churches better equipped to articulate Lutheran theology and eager to announce the Luther Decade and the events for the 500th anniversary, involving their churches in the preparations. For the home churches, these seminars will provide the opportunity to offer their pastors additional theological education.

The sixth Institute-led seminar took place in November 2014. Twenty participants gathered together from Australia, Botswana, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, the Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Africa, Taiwan, and the United States. As usual, we began in the first week with an intensive review of Luther's foundational teaching on the gospel and justification, as well as its implications for preaching and the sacraments. Together we worked carefully through the Ninety-Five Theses, the Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness, the 1518 Theses on the Remission of Sins, the Freedom of a Christian, What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, and excerpts from the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, the Large Catechism, and Concerning Rebaptism.

In the second week we turned to this year's special topic, namely "The Christian and the Government: Luther's View of Temporal Authority." Given the enormous political changes that have taken place over the past five hundred years, it was necessary to set Luther's writings within their historical context even more than is usually the case. From this perspective we turned to his treatises on Temporal Authority, Admonition to Peace, Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved, and On the War Against the Turk, to see how Luther thus creates a foundation for both obedience to the authorities as well limits to such authority, so that he can supply a theological basis for nonviolent resistance and the right to religious liberty (even though he did not follow his own best insights later in his dealings with the Anabaptists). After this we needed to address the question of the difference between the state in the early modern period and the constitutional democracies of today in order to see what, if any, meaning Luther's insights could have for Christians engaged in political issues today.

In addition to the intensive course of study, participants enjoyed trips to the Lutherhaus, Melanchthonhaus, Torgau, Erfurt, Eisenach, the Wartburg, and local congregations. A unique feature of this year's gathering is that it coincided with the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, so the group was able to participate in the commemorations of that event in nearby Berlin during the first weekend of the Seminar. As always we were inspired and deeply moved by the power of the response of our participants to reading Luther directly in a communal, global setting, giving us always renewed hope that our Reformation heritage still speaks potently to our challenges and hopes for today.

The 2015 topic will be "The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in Luther's Theology."

4. At the end of October 2014, Prof. Wilson spent two weeks at SALT, the 25-year-old graduate seminary of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, teaching a course for master's level students with her

husband Dr. Andrew Wilson. They offered an in-depth study of Martin Luther's writings on the ordained ministry, the priesthood of all believers, and Christian worship, with special attention to Luther's liturgical reforms. Prof. Wilson also took the opportunity to research the offices of ministry developed by the FLM to suit its particular setting and ministry needs, including catechists, evangelists, and shepherds. This was done by inviting the students to participate in a collaborative process of theological analysis which will hopefully continue.

5. The Luther Reading Challenge sponsored by the IER is now up and running. In its first two months it has already acquired more than 1500 participants from every continent, and the discussion is already lively. Please visit the site, sign up, and share it with your home church!

www.lutherreadingchallenge.org

Last but not least (since it does not fit in any of the above categories):

Prof. Parmentier participated in the international group of experts appointed by the LWF working on a study document "On the Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion." Facing new challenges of conflict in the global communion of churches, the Lutheran churches have to reflect on a set of criteria for commitment and mutual accountability, sensitive to the reality of dissent and conflict. This draft will be presented to the Council in June 2015, and if it is approved, it will be sent to the churches by October 2015. At the same time the regions will have engaged in conversation on the understanding of communion in different regional meetings. The need for such texts which are important for the whole LWF shows the necessity of a theological expertise that certainly comes from the regions, but has also to be analyzed and brought in the wider scope of hermeneutics of communion and catholicity.

Theodor Dieter (on behalf of Bishop Dr. Frank O. July, Chair of the Board of Trustees)

IER Activities with other academic institutions in the past 5 years including:

Luther Congress

Gudina Tumsa Theological Forum

Institut Théologique des Dombes, France

Centro Pro Unione, Rome, Italy

Instituto San Bernardino, Venice, Italy

Volos Academy, Volos, Greece

Tantur Institute, Jerusalem

SALT, Fianarantsoa, Madagascar

Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut, Paderborn, Germany

Institut für Ökumenische und Interreligiöse Forschung, Tübingen, Germany

Konfessionskundliche Institut, Bensheim, Germany

Europäische Melanchthonakademie, Bretten, Germany

Johannes a Lasco Akademie, Emden, Germany

European Theological Seminary, Kniebis, Germany

Protestant Theological Faculties at the Universities of: Strasbourg, Basel, Bern, Zürich, Lausanne, Geneva, Rome, Heidelberg, Leipzig, Tübingen, Bochum, Münster, Marburg, Paris, Montpellier, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Sibiu, Bratislava.

Catholic Theological Faculties at the Universities of: Strasbourg, Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Lille, Angers, Tübingen, and Munich.

US Universities: Augsburg College, Roanoke College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Gordon College, Luther Seminary

IER Activities with LWF Member Churches in the past 5 years in the following countries:

Argentina

Brazil

Cameroon

Czech Republic

Ethiopia

Finland

France

Germany

Holy Land and Jordan

Iceland

Indonesia

Italy

Latvia

Madagascar

Malaysia

Namibia

Slovakia

USA

Through the CPCE: nearly all LWF churches in Europe

Through the Studying Luther in Wittenberg program, LWF churches in these countries: Argentina, Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, the Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greenland, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Latvia,

Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, and the United States.