

**Report of the General Secretary
Rev. Martin Junge**

1. The LWF – a vibrant communion

- (1) Yet another year has gone. Our meeting in Medan looks as if it was just short time ago, and yet here we are, gathering again to look into the journey of the communion and its witness in this world. It is exciting to share so many good and positive developments, which all show that the title of the LWF Strategy actually captures very well what the focus of this journey of 144 member churches has been throughout this year: it is characterized by the “passion for the church and for the world” (LWF Strategy).
- (2) I could sense in my extensive travel during the last year how this passion interprets in amazing ways who we understand we are as a communion of churches: we are committed to the church, to its coherence with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to its unity as a telling message about the power of the Gospel. And we are inspired by compassionate love for the world, for its people and the whole of God’s creation, thus attempting to express through our witness that the bottom line of God’s approach to the world is love (John 3:16).
- (3) There would be so many stories to tell and to share from my travel (information on my travel during the year is annexed to this report). Let me share only two moments, which moved me in special ways: in September I visited our member churches in Russia. In St. Petersburg I heard the story about a Lutheran church that was made out of wood – the St. Mary’s church. During the siege of St. Petersburg during Second World War, in the midst of the winter, the eyes of desperate people turned to that church and its wood – enough to provide fire for thousands of people not to die because of cold. The church leaders allowed it: the church was dismantled, bit after bit, for neighbors to use its wood and lit small fires to keep them alive. What a symbol and what a powerful story! It speaks to what it could be to be a servant church, giving up itself (the “*kenosis*” as described in Philippians 2:7) for the sake of the life of the people. At the end of the siege nothing was left from that church – a small plaque reminds today where it stood once. But thousands of people managed to survive because of that church that gave itself away. I left St. Petersburg with a deeper conviction than ever before that, indeed, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about life, life in abundance (John 10:10).
- (4) The other moving moment was the fact that within two weeks I participated in the European Leadership Consultation in Trondheim (Norway), and in the joyful celebration of the 60 years of Marangu in Moshi (Tanzania). In both meetings, the issue of refugees and migrants and their fate in the Mediterranean Sea was addressed extensively. Discussions acquired a different dimension for me once I heard that for some of the participants in Marangu the issue was not about an abstract, conceptual discussion. It was about neighbors who left months and years ago without any further news until today. And the despair of their families not knowing where to begin to search for them. I always knew that our advocacy for refugees was about people with concrete names, faces and relationships. But it hit me in different ways to be reminded in so concrete ways about it as I listened to delegates at the Marangu conference.

2. Rejoicing over abundant fruits

2.1. COOP Report 2014 – 2015 (EXHIBIT 9.1)

- (5) During the past four years we have been working consistently on the planning and reporting systems of the LWF Communion Office. At this time, we submit our two-year report to the Council with a deep sense of gratitude to colleagues who have supported this important development and to churches and related agencies that fund our programs for their critical solidarity enabling us to work with and for churches and people at large. This report is fully aligned with the Communion Office Operation Plan (COOP) 2013 – 2014, and therefore will assist the Council in assessing whether progress has been made in the attainment of the objectives, and to a larger extent, in view of the strategic priorities of the LWF Strategy.
- (6) I believe that the development of these instruments is a worthwhile investment: it strengthens our accountability to the churches and the people we serve, to you, the Council, and to those churches and related organizations that are funding our programs. It equips us to more confidently offer our programs and engage in funding relationships. The presentation of the COOP 2013 – 2014 report is a milestone in the organizational development of the LWF, which I hope you will be able to affirm.

2.2. A communion strengthened in worship, ongoing theological discernment, ecumenical dialogue, and interfaith collaboration

2.2.1. Self-understanding: a study guide leading us into deeper relationships

- (7) The study document “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion” (Exhibit 9.2) explores what it implies for churches to be part of the Lutheran communion. At the heart of the document we find the affirmation that communion is a gift, given to us by the Triune God. This gift calls us actively to engage in relationships of mutual accountability and provides fresh insights into how we envisage the interconnectedness between the autonomy and accountability of the LWF’s member churches. Based on the biblical notion of *koinonia*, we affirm that in our sharing bread and wine we partake in the body of Christ. As indicated in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, this oneness in Christ is lived out in unity and diversity.
- (8) The study document develops a theologically grounded approach to living out the gift of communion in unity and diversity, affirms our shared convictions and tackles issues that require further conversation. It helps us together to discern how to deal with differences and addresses the question of which differences are legitimate and an important part of the richness of the gospel message and which constitute an obstacle to our shared life in the communion. Five theological resources for accountable decision making are identified: the gospel, Word and sacraments, the message of the cross, the Bible as the Word of God, and an ethic of freedom and mutual respect based on the gospel.
- (9) The annotated agenda proposes a process of further study and reception among the LWF member churches. I believe this process to be of great importance as it enhances ownership and shared understanding in view of our journeying together as a communion of churches.

2.2.2. Theological reflection as foundation for our programmatic work

- (10) The communion self-understanding project has also been key in informing the general discernments within the LWF and has become one of the overarching themes informing the various programs, including ecumenical relations, gender justice and religion in the public space. Furthermore, the project has helped us reflect through the hermeneutics process on the sensitivity

of Lutheran theology to the Bible, the confessional writings and the signs of the time. It is our conviction that to be Lutheran is to be biblical and confessional, with a deep sense of ecumenical accountability, and that the hope that we are called to share in the world today is rooted in that belief. Through this understanding, we have been able to create an even stronger link between theology and public witness, a fundamental link that points to the need to pay even stronger attention to issues of gender or climate justice, and advocacy. The LWF commitment and assets offered to the latter have been recognised by the international community and has given us a visible, recognizable role in UN organisations. All these areas are captured by and relate to the themes of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to be marked in 2017, which member churches are being called to reflect on through resources such as the thematic booklets, one of the very important joint ventures of the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW).

2.2.3. The Public Voice of the LWF

- (11) During the previous Council meeting members asked that the Council be made aware in advance about statements it would be issuing during sessions. While acknowledging the importance of advance information, which helps equip Council members to resource themselves, it is at the same time evident that the Communion Office cannot and should not pre-empt what the Council, out of its own process of discussions and deliberations, may choose to address in a public statement. As in the past, proposals for statements will be considered and statements drafted through the Council's Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice.
- (12) That having been said, several items have arisen out of LWF's ongoing commitments and program involvements. These include:
- (13) Climate Justice: Building on the extensive LWF Assembly and Council resolutions, the LWF is engaged in intensive advocacy leading up to the December 2015 UN Climate Change conference in Paris. Religious voices play an important role in advocating for ambitious commitments from all parties. The Council may consider asking member churches to advocate with their governments to help shape their commitments for the Paris conference. The Council may also consider divestment from fossil fuels, first by the Communion Office, secondly by encouraging member churches and their institutions and members to do likewise.
- (14) Let me, while addressing this issue, mention that the Fast for the Climate initiative is growing at an amazing pace. The LWF was invited to participate in an interfaith UN panel in September 2014 in New York (we were represented by the Vice-President for Asia), and thorough preparatory work is currently being undertaken for the decisive UN meeting in December 2015 in Paris.
- (15) Another item that is very close to our work relates to the failure of the international community, and especially the United Nations Security Council, to resolve protracted conflicts that prolong civilian suffering and strain the humanitarian system, limiting its ability to properly respond.
- (16) Not since the Second World War has the world seen the levels of refugees and internally displaced persons as we have today. More than 50 million people have had to flee their homes and are seeking refuge. I want to thank all the European churches who have been a bold, clear voice in view of the unacceptable situation of refugees at European borders, notably in the Mediterranean Sea. I want also to recognize the admirable hospitality of countries such as Kenya, Lebanon and Jordan, who have received large numbers of refugees over extended periods of time.
- (17) As a result of protracted conflicts, our capacities for humanitarian response through LWF World Service are stretched to the limits as is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

- (18) It is time to look into the underlying causes. One of them is the painful inability of the international community to address and contain conflicts through its structures, such as the UN Security Council. Veto powers have blocked any negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria, causing incommensurable pain among the civilian population. There are proposals to limit the veto power when the conflict at stake implies a severe humanitarian crisis for the overall population. It is proposed to back this proposal, which is very much in line with our overall commitment to humanitarian issues.
- (19) The Council may consider issues relating to the escalation of violence in the Middle East, the vulnerability of religious and other minorities, and the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

2.3. Member churches growing in capacity for holistic mission and deepening relationships with each other

- (20) With its new programmatic foci adopted by the 2014 Council for the work of the Department for Mission and Development, the LWF has been able to work in a better way fulfilling the objective of assisting member churches to grow in capacity for holistic mission.
- (21) From the model of a center which transfers knowledge and resources to different regions, LWF has shifted its approach and today programs and projects emphasize accompaniment and coordination among member churches as key to supporting creative actions, development of capacities and mutual learning. It does so through three programmatic areas: Church Growth and Sustainability, Capacity for Diakonia, and Communion Building.
- (22) The LWF facilitated leadership workshops for 100 leaders in the communion in 2014. Conflict resolution, as well as project and resource management were among the issues covered.
- (23) Leadership meetings were held in 4 LWF regions in 2014, giving church leaders the possibility to come together and reflect on joys and challenges particular to their region and on the gifts they bring to and receive from the Communion. In Europe, the focus of discussions was on the church's changing role in society. In Africa, advocacy for land rights and discussions on sectarian violence were on the agenda. In both Asia and Africa, the regions' approach to the Reformation anniversary were discussed and in Asia, reflections also included contextual Lutheran identity. In both Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, theological formation were discussed.
- (24) The virtual conferences on diakonia connected 312 church leaders, pastors, volunteers, diaconal workers and other actors, deepening their theological understanding and strengthening their cross-regional experience while sharing around *diakonia*.
- (25) Discussions between DMD and DTPW on common themes and work have resulted in a clearer understanding and redefinition of the divisions of labor around the cross-cutting issue of theological reflection and formation. Collaboration with DWS has been frequent in areas of common concern, such as accompaniment and solidarity visit in periods in crisis; advocacy, in particular integrating the local church in overall advocacy work in places such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); developing the capacity of member churches on emergency preparedness and response (114 leaders trained) and integrating them in country DWS programs; and climate change and climate justice.
- (26) Project Work has been envisioned anew, introducing fresh approaches with clearer selection criteria and guidance for integration of projects and programs. During the year under review the LWF supported project work in 54 member churches.

2.3.1. Theological education and formation

- (27) By visiting member churches, talking to their leaders, listening to Communion Office colleagues who travel widely, I have discerned that our member churches face a significant challenge regarding theological education of their members and leaders. The challenges are diverse and distinct, but they are there for all churches. They relate to structural issues but also to the theological identity of the curricula that are being offered. The reality of lay involvement in evangelism and catechism compels institutions to adapt their programs. Such changing realities allow for innovative approaches to pastoral ministry.
- (28) We in the LWF Communion Office understand that we need to pull together our resources to build on several important programs, including theological education and formation, the Lutheran Theological Education Network (LUTEN), scholarships, faculty development and Wittenberg College, to name some, so that we can more relevantly and more comprehensively support our member churches as they address challenges regarding theological education. We are seeking partnership and support in this endeavor, very much in line with the new thinking expressed in the vision for a sustainable LWF (EXHIBIT 9.3). We are hoping to build momentum towards supporting a theological education that is solid in terms of its confessional identity that is biblically based, ecumenically committed, gender sensitive, equipped for interfaith relations and empowered for trans-cultural engagement.

2.4. Effective and empowering diakonia addressing human suffering, injustice, and emergencies

- (29) The LWF continued to work in humanitarian aid and long-term development in the past year, succeeding in responding to all the Level-3 emergencies in 2014 in South Sudan, Syria, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Iraq. New emergency responses were set up in northern Iraq and Cameroon. Overall, our work reached more than two million people globally, representing an increase of 80% compared to 2012. The LWF was the fourth largest implementing partner of UNHCR during the year, and funding from the organization has more than doubled since 2012.
- (30) On the development side, World Service worked closely with other LWF departments and related agencies to make an impact by linking our local community-level action for change to national and international advocacy. Two global initiatives brought attention and additional resources to this. In Mozambique, we focused on land rights, where women were helped to secure access to land, backed by national level advocacy and LWF influence in Geneva. The other initiative focused on using the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, and alternative reports were submitted for Nepal and Myanmar. At the same time, World Service is building its capacity and producing materials in order to strengthen the rights-based approach in the mainstream of our work.

2.4.1. Memorandum of Understanding with Islamic Relief Worldwide

- (31) A global memorandum was signed with Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) in 2014, committing both organizations to closer collaboration among faith-based actors in emergency response. Two pilot projects have already been implemented successfully and new plans are being developed together.
- (32) While engaging in interfaith cooperation in the field of humanitarian relief, we are, of course, aware of the situation on the ground, which can be such a different state of affairs when it comes to faith communities relating to each other. I was very concerned when I saw the level of alienation in Nigeria, for instance, where extremist, militant actions have eroded the common basis for

Christians and Muslims to relate to each other as they have in previous times. We were shocked with the attacks in Kenya, taking the lives of young people at Garissa University College. We know that the conflict on the Bahasa Bible and its reference to God as “Allah”, which has been objected to by the Malaysian government, is unresolved. It is our conviction that steadfastness in Christ needs to be expressed today by the determination to not allow ourselves to be derailed by extremism, and to not allow extremism to claim space and religious, social and political narrative. We are convinced that to connect and work together where possible is the best contribution to moving away from imposed interreligious conflict. Our Memorandum of Understanding with IRW is our humble contribution to provide alternatives, which will eventually lead to transformation of those realities.

2.4.2. Strategic Partnership Agreement with the UNHCR

- (33) In October, the LWF also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership with the UNHCR. The LWF is UNHCR’s biggest faith-based implementing partner and the MoU is a tremendous recognition of the work of the LWF. The partnership also underlines the added value of the LWF working with the UNHCR on issues of faith and protection and it speaks to an awareness in the UN on the value and role of faith-based organisations in the area of humanitarian work. I consider this to be a very positive development, which commits us to express this role programatically in the future.
- (34) Again, as I travel, visit and see LWF member churches and speak about the LWF and its amazing witness, it always strikes me how church leaders and members identify themselves with what we do together internationally through the Department for World Service. It speaks to the heart of people when we are out there among the first, for instance recently in Nepal. I always hear strong affirmation to the witness the communion offers to the world, as it indeed interprets in powerful ways the diaconal vocation we share as Lutherans, and which in fact constituted one of the driving forces for the LWF to come together. Increasingly, I have come to understand the role of the Communion Office as both an *instrument* and a *steward* of that vocation, which we couldn’t express otherwise, and without which the LWF would become irrecognizable.

2.5. Organizational Effectiveness

- (35) After initiating the new planning system, in 2014 we began with working plans and budgets that guided operations for the year. This has brought about a more comprehensive and intentional way to synergize, collaborate and integrate our directions and actions based on the LWF Strategy.
- (36) We have now a more integrated and efficient financial management and control system. Income, funding and financial performance are better coordinated, monitored and reported.
- (37) Our efforts to engage churches to pay their full membership fees continue, including discussions with member churches not meeting their fair share. With well managed treasury funds, we have increased investment income for the year under review.
- (38) Our Human Resources office continues to respond to the high demand for staff recruitment. The Human Resources policies and guidelines have been updated and aligned to current practice and Swiss legal requirements. An improved version of the staff appraisal process is now being used. With the final transfer of the staff pension fund management to the Abendrot Foundation, updated pension plan rules are now in place. It was a timely transfer: if the Swiss National Bank decisions (see below) had found us with the pension fund still under the LWF’s structure we would be facing serious challenges today.

- (39) We continue to demonstrate good compliance around accountability and contractual requirements with all funding partners. Our continuous engagement with related organizations and other funding partners has resulted in strong support of and solidarity with the various LWF programs.
- (40) In 2014 more LWF regions adopted a regional logo that ensures wider visibility of the LWF as a communion of churches. In communications, energy has been invested in developing social media platforms and regional web sites, and in training regional communicators to share the vibrant life and work of the Lutheran communion across the regions.

3. Coping with Challenges

- (41) We rejoice over the many achievements in the past years and over the work the LWF has been able to carry out for and with people in need, for and with member churches. At the same time, the LWF also has faced challenges, both financially and in terms of relationships. I am confident that we are on a constructive path as I share with you how we have dealt with these challenges and how we continue to do so.

3.1. Augusta Victoria Hospital

- (42) During the last year's Council meeting I reported on the critical financial situation at Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) due to outstanding payments for patient fees. Challenging as the situation has been, it revealed also how deeply rooted AVH is among LWF's global constituency, and how much good will and support it enjoys. Both the Board of Trustees and the Finance Committee will receive detailed information about the developments since last year, which shows that the receivables were reduced from around Euro 23 Million to Euro 13 Million by the end of 2014. Projections and additional firm pledges allow us to predict that by the end of 2015 this amount will be further reduced. In view of this, and bearing in mind the level of AVH reserves, the acute financial risk for the LWF is now under control. However, the systemic risk resulting from the overall volatility of the political situation in the Holy Land remains. This calls for ongoing monitoring and a proactive approach in terms of advocacy and fundraising. I want to thank all churches, related organizations and individuals who supported our efforts to mitigate the financial risk for LWF.
- (43) Indeed, the good will and the support that the AVH enjoys internationally is very much linked to the visionary leadership provided by the late Dr Tawfiq Nasser, who served as the Chief Executive Officer of AVH for 14 years. His untimely death in May 2015 is a significant loss for the hospital, the Palestinian people and the international community supporting the AVH. At the same time, structures, systems and staff are in place to continue the operation of AVH with the usual level of professionalism and commitment.

3.2. Follow up on Council actions 2013 on the severing of ties.

- (44) I am of the conviction that the moment we as a communion stop feeling the pain of the fracture in the relationships between EECMY, CoS and ELCA, we have ceased being a body, and given up our vocation to live and witness together as churches in communion. Hence, although painful and difficult, that is why we have to continue "tending to the pain", as the Council message from 2013 urges us all. A federation could well afford to turn its back in apathy to three churches fractured in their mutual relationships - but not a communion.
- (45) The accompaniment that has been called for by the Council has throughout the past year specifically focused on the question of the severing of ties. I am grateful for the support received

by both ELCA and EECMY during the negotiation process, which will lead to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on project cooperation regarding ongoing diaconal projects in the context of this Council meeting. The MoU provides a basis for EECMY and ELCA to reconnect, even if only partially, around joint work in the field of Diakonia.

- (46) This Memorandum of Understanding does not restore communion relationships between the EECMY and ELCA. Hence, it does not represent the end of the LWF's efforts to continue accompanying these churches. Rather, it represents a small step, allowing the two churches to reconnect on one specific dimension of their former partnership relation, which however remains broken and requires healing. It furthermore provides space for the two churches to engage directly, without further mediation by the LWF, as they work together in service to the neighbor, which is an inalienable dimension of the churches' participation in God's holistic mission.
- (47) Next to this first step, the ground is now set for the three churches to engage in bilateral retreats to prayerfully reflect on the alienation between their churches, and to explore possible steps to take towards healing and reconciliation. These retreats will take place before the next Council meeting in 2016.
- (48) I continue to request prayers for the three churches, their leaders, and particularly those suffering personally under the current situation because of their memories of times of profound mutuality and solidarity between their churches.
- (49) On a more general note, on the basis of the study document on the self-understanding of communion, we will establish a process to develop procedural and methodological approaches to deal with differences. These approaches would give churches more options to deal with their differences without necessarily having to resort to the severing of ties. It will be a tool with the potential to support all LWF member churches to deal in a structured way with differences, both within and among them.

3.3. Towards a sustainable projection of LWF and the Communion Office

- (50) I have been informing you through written updates about the unexpected and challenging loss of income for LWF due to the decision taken by the Swiss National Bank (SNB) to remove the cap protecting the Euro (EUR) from depreciation against the Swiss Franc (CHF). As a result, the LWF lost in a matter of a few hours EUR 2.4 Million of its income to cover its expenses in CHF in 2015.
- (51) You have been informed about the various measures and decisions that have been taken in order to control the risk resulting from this unexpected development during 2015. Let me at this point express my sincere gratitude to several churches and related organizations which have responded to our communications and have found ways to offer additional financial support for 2015. It helps us to at least partially cover the losses resulting from the exchange rate. Let me also express my deep gratitude to the amazing readiness of LWF staff both in the Communion Office and in Country Programs (with international contracts), to accept two measures to reduce staff-related expenses for the year 2015, one of them of a permanent nature.
- (52) All of this, together with a slightly improved exchange rate, gives me confidence to state that the financial situation of the LWF has been stabilized for 2015, although also at the cost of cuts in program implementation.
- (53) EXHIBIT 9.3 "Towards a sustainable projection of the LWF and its Communion Office" is our attempt to move from a reactive mode imposed on us by unexpected circumstances, but that will remain beyond 2015, and shift to proactively addressing the challenges the events have brought to surface. The LWF cannot afford to ignore these challenges. Some of them are of a very complex

nature, partly due to their interconnectedness. Some of them are sensitive and difficult. Yet, in my view, it is our duty as Communion Office and as Council to tackle them and to work together to achieve this. We have a shared responsibility to take the thriving and vibrant LWF of today as a point of departure, and help make it stronger and more relevant in the years to come.

- (54) During the last few years we have been sensitized by the LWF youth to issues of intergenerational justice, such as climate change. I propose to frame our efforts around sustainability as a measure of justice toward the youth in our member churches, to our young reformers, to the LWF youth, who are present today, and will carry on with the LWF in the coming decades.
- (55) It was important for us in the Communion Office to develop a document which will lay the groundwork for LWF management, staff and governance to understand and agree upon the approach, theological basis, “mindset”, focus and direction for this process. I believe that in view of the complexity of some of the issues ahead of us and the far-reaching implications that decisions will have, we better have a solid, shared understanding of what our approach is and what we are aiming to achieve. I am seeking your endorsement of both this overall concept and the specific directions indicated in the document, so that immediately after the Council meeting we can take concrete steps towards enhanced sustainability.

4. Looking forward to two exciting years ahead of us

4.1. Assembly preparations

- (56) During this Council meeting, the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) will present its final report. You have received documentation (EXHIBITS 11.1 to 11.1.8) which presents the overall concept and more detailed ideas about how LWF member churches can prepare for the Assembly, how the Assembly will be structured, as well as other relevant documents. Among them is a document clarifying the role Council members have as LWF leaders and members of their home churches. I believe that this document provides a meaningful tool for churches nominating candidates and for regions agreeing on their slate to be presented to the Assembly. It will also help resolve issues of mutual expectations between Council members and their respective churches.
- (57) The funding of the Assembly is a challenging undertaking. We expect around 83% of the Assembly to be funded by Assembly fees but we still need to receive firm pledges from all member churches. We have reasonable hope that this goal will be reached. Other funds still need to be raised, both locally and by the Communion Office, which is why a fundraising plan is being presented to this Council.
- (58) I want to express my deep gratitude to the APC for its critical support to the Communion Office while developing the concept and the framework for the Twelfth Assembly.
- (59) Altogether, preparations are well underway. The theme and the three sub-themes are being picked up already, both locally and regionally and the publication of the four booklets will certainly give an additional boost to the preparation process. Notwithstanding this, we in the Communion Office are aware that from now until the inauguration of the Assembly every single day needs to be used diligently so as to make the Assembly the encounter of joy and transformation we are all expecting.
- (60) The three hosting churches have constituted a Local Assembly Planning Committee and are eagerly working to receive the global communion in Namibia. It is important to underline the commitment of our three hosting churches to the task of preparing for the Assembly. At the same time it is also important to note the various challenges that the Assembly brings to them. During a

meeting with the leadership of the three churches earlier this year I became aware that memories remain fresh concerning the independence struggle and how churches related to it during those years of struggle. In addition, I heard clear messages that while the churches strive towards unity, they are at the same time subject to the ethnic and racial divides that to some extent characterize Namibia today. I have invited our three host churches to help and guide us as a communion so that our global presence in Namibia in 2017 be an opportunity for further healing and reconciliation, and be an encouragement in view of the unity which the three churches are seeking.

4.2. The Reformation anniversary 2015 - 2017

- (61) As directed by the Council in 2013, we have begun LWF's activities and programs related to the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. Since October 2014 I have written twice to all LWF member churches, highlighting the launch of the LWF's exciting programs and activities to mark the occasion and inviting their participation. A special website has been developed providing detailed information about the many good programs and activities that are currently being undertaken. In addition, we have invited LWF member churches to share their resources and plans so that we can present a comprehensive picture of all that is happening around the anniversary and offer them as resources that will inspire others and be used by LWF member churches around the globe. A leaflet highlighting LWF's plans and programs in the months leading up to 2017 has also been made available.
- (62) There is a wonderful sequence of events lining up from here to 2017, helping the communion to prepare for the anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation:

4.2.1. Women on the move – from Wittenberg to Windhoek (WMWW)

- (63) This is a movement celebrating the role of women in leadership. In order to plan strategic actions and initiatives to be implemented in the women's network, a global working group, through the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) regional coordination network, is actively leading global and regional initiatives.
- (64) A toolkit/folder is available at: <http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-women-move-wittenberg-windhoek-toolkit>
- (65) This process envisages working in four main areas:
- Empowerment of women in leadership and decision making:
 - Implementation and contextualization process of the Gender Justice Policy (GJP).
Let me share in this context that the GJP has been translated into Polish, Portuguese, Korean, Japanese and Kiswahili, and is in the process of being translated into Tamil, Hindi, Shona, and many other languages.
 - Women doing theology
 - Her-stories – telling women's stories and experiences in the on-going Reformation

4.2.2. August 2015 - Global Young Reformers Network

- (66) The Global Young Reformers Network (GYRN) will meet in Wittenberg from 22 August to 4 September, 2015, bringing together more than 100 young people from around the globe. They will reflect on the theme of the Reformation anniversary, Lutheran identity and what it means to be a "church in ongoing reformation". The young reformers will also develop specific "living reformation projects" to be implemented in their local church contexts up to 2017.

- (67) GYRN is already the largest global network of young Lutherans and aspires to reach up to 10,000 youth by 2017.
- (68) I want to encourage you to follow the meaningful discussions on the questions - "What are you freed from? What are you freed for?" - which you can find on the GRYN website:

<https://youngreformers.lutheranworld.org/content/reflect> and

<https://youngreformers.lutheranworld.org/updates>

4.2.3. October 2015 - Reformation for Church and Society

- (69) A Global Theological Consultation to be held in Windhoek, 28 October – 1 November, 2015, will offer a forum for global discernment on the impact of the Reformation for church and society. We will discuss the role of theology in addressing crucial questions that relate to political and economic realities in different contexts today.

4.2.4. June 2016 – LWF Council in Wittenberg

- (70) The LWF Council meeting in Wittenberg in June 2016 will start with an exciting pre-Council program, a pilgrimage with a strong ecumenical flavor. It will include visits to historic sites related to the Reformation. The German National Committee is inviting us on this landmark journey towards the Reformation anniversary.

4.2.5. Fall 2016 (Northern Hemisphere): joint Lutheran – Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation

- (71) From there LWF will move to an ecumenical event in the fall of 2016, co-hosted with the Roman Catholic Church. EXHIBIT 9.4 offers the conceptual framework for this very important and highly symbolic moment to underline our shared commitment to continue transitioning from conflict to communion between Catholics and Lutherans (see below).

4.2.6. Pre-Assemblies as a moment to engage, prepare and help shape the Assembly

- (72) The Pre-Assemblies that will take place on various continents will provide space for adequate preparation of Assembly delegates and help shape the regional contributions that will come together during the Twelfth Assembly of the LWF in Windhoek in May 2017.

4.2.7. Reformation Sunday at the Assembly

- (73) Planning is underway to prepare for the Reformation Anniversary during the Assembly in Namibia. To be held in a public space, probably a stadium, the Reformation Sunday on May 14th will be a unique moment since it will gather leadership from all over the world representing the LWF communion of churches.
- (74) Plans still need to be developed in order to then commemorate the Reformation in a de-centralized way in our 144 member churches on the very day of the 500th anniversary - 31 October 2017. The Special Committee working on the framing of the anniversary celebrations has proposed using media to have a full day of Reformation anniversary events illustrated by traveling with the sun from East to West, spanning the entire communion. The events would be accessible on the internet.
- (75) But just as church history did not begin on 31 October 1517, it also will not end on 31 October 2017. As we focus on 2017, we also need to develop a vision beyond that date. I plan to bring

some ideas to next year's Council, probably in conjunction with the mid-term review and the initial steps for the strategy development for the years from 2019 onwards.

4.3. Ecumenical relations supporting LWF's approach to reformation anniversary

(76) In 2012 the Council affirmed LWF's commitment to approach the Reformation anniversary with a sense of "ecumenical accountability". LWF is blessed by ecumenical partners that have taken up this commitment and have responded to it by engaging creatively and openly in joint reflection around the question of how to concretely give expression to this commitment. Important progress has been made until now:

- A few weeks ago, during the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission meeting, the Orthodox churches expressed their desire to celebrate the Reformation anniversary with LWF within the framework of the next plenary meeting of the commission in 2017.
- For the LWF Council meeting in 2016, we will release the report of the LWF Task Force on Mennonite Action. This report is the follow-up to the powerful reconciliation action between Mennonites and Lutherans that took place in 2010 at the LWF Assembly in Stuttgart. It addresses questions around how we read our confessional writings in the light of the Mennonite Action in Stuttgart, and where our convergences and differences are concerning just war and just peace. This report also offers some examples of best and hopefully inspiring practices of Lutheran-Mennonite cooperation.
- Building on the report "Communion: on being the church", discussions are underway with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to explore ways to make the findings of the report more accessible to our respective constituencies. I am delighted to be able to share the news of a thorough process launched within the WCRC to consult with member churches on the signing of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) by the LWF and the Vatican in 1999, and by the Methodists in 2006. Attending the WCRC Executive Committee meeting in May 2015, I was able to witness the strong political will of both the WCRC secretariat and governance to promote this process with the goal to complete it during the anniversary year.
- It is with the same determination that our counterparts in the Anglican Communion office have promoted an internal process towards the development of a "Compatibility Statement" in which the compatibility of Anglican teachings with the JDDJ would be stated. The Anglican Consultative Commission will deal with this matter at its next meeting in Zambia in 2016. I hope to be able to bring you more news about this important development during our next Council meeting.
- Finally, you have seen the important steps that have been taken jointly with the Pontifical Council to Promote Christian Unity (PCPCU) in order to build on the report "From Conflict to Communion" and take it into concrete reception processes.

Several of these processes have already taken place without the need to deploy additional efforts from our side. We are aware of 10 translations of the document, among them Japanese and Polish language versions. The LWF German National Committee has implemented together with the Catholic Church in Germany an online discussion forum "Gemeinsam unterwegs", which has attracted much participation and engagement. The ELCA has developed jointly with their Catholic partners a study guide for the report, which aims to assist congregational groups in engaging in deeper reflection and study of the report. We are grateful

to the ELCA for sharing this study guide with the LWF and allowing us to make it accessible to all interested churches and individuals.

However, in order to keep being intentional about the reception of “From Conflict to Communion”, we continue working with PCPCU on the development of a joint liturgy that is based on the document and would be offered to Lutheran and Catholic communities by 2016.

An encouraging new development that began to take shape during our most recent Council meeting involves an event to commemorate the Reformation in the fall of 2016 hosted jointly by Catholics and Lutherans.

We believe that the 500 years of Reformation in 2017, which also marks the 50 years of ecumenical dialogues between Catholics and Lutherans, represent such a unique opportunity and the event carries such historic importance that we cannot but be bold, confident and joyful while embracing this opportunity. I sense we owe this to the ecumenical vocation of our communion; we owe it to our member churches, indeed also to those churches, both Lutherans and Catholics, whose relationships have not been, or are not yet, easy. And indeed, we owe this to a world looking with despair for signs of hope in the midst of merciless conflicts and fights.

There is no doubt that this event represents an important additional challenge in terms of resources. It will require additional staff capacity to be involved in this specific project, notably to support our Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and to expand capacities in our Office for Communication Services. Fundraising for this event is underway and will require full support to be successful. It should be noted that there is an agreement with the PCPCU to share the costs of the event.

- (77) Let me, in the context of all these amazing developments, refer to the Institute for Ecumenical Research (IER) in Strasbourg, which, without any doubt, has contributed greatly to laying the groundwork for many of these important initiatives. In fact, the JDDJ and the “From Conflict to Communion” reports have been significantly shaped both by the research of the IER and by its actual involvement in the development of the reports. At its 50th anniversary, which we celebrated in April of this year, the IER indicated that it is at a crossroads, facing some important decisions in order to continue its work in view of personnel changes and challenging financial realities.
- (78) LWF has pledged constructive support as the IER board discerns its future. It remains a vital support as LWF continues giving expression to the ecumenical vocation of Lutheran churches belonging to the communion. No doubt, the similarity between their discernment process and LWF’s efforts towards sustainability will, while respecting the distinctiveness of the two processes, certainly connect them when required.

5. Conclusion

- (79) As this report shows, there is a vitality in the LWF Communion which is reason for humble gratitude for God’s nurturing presence. How else to explain the growing relations of mutuality among LWF member churches? How else to explain the joint service to refugees, displaced and marginalized? Or is there another way to explain that vocation to build bridges, to engage in transformation, healing and reconciliation?
- (80) During my travel in the past year, I have come across individuals – scholarship holders, people volunteering or working with the LWF in the regions for particular assignments, participants of

meetings and consultation – for which the encounter with the LWF has been a life-changing, faith-growing experience. Individuals, who in engaging with the global communion of churches, have been exposed to the experience of sisters and brothers from other contexts and been deeply touched and enriched to go back to their own church and share the vision of the communion. It is such transformative experiences, that help the LWF grow and thrive. Listening to all these people I have seen clearer what had been my own experience until today, and which I trust is your experience as well: the LWF adds something very fundamental to the way of being a believer, and the way of being the church. The LWF offers a dimension, which churches and people on their own wouldn't be able to see and grasp. At times, this enrichment comes as a challenge, mostly it comes as a thrilling new insight. That's what makes the LWF so valuable.

- (81) My deep appreciation goes to the strong support of LWF member churches and their related organizations, their positive attitude towards the LWF. I want to thank the Council members, particularly those that joined me in travel during the year, or those that represented the LWF in various travels and meetings. Through your readiness you have multiplied the presence of the LWF around the globe by many times, making it tangible and real by your availability to represent.
- (82) A special word of thanks goes to the LWF Chairperson of the Finance Committee as well as to our Chairperson of the Endowment Fund for their ongoing support and advice. To the LWF President for his tireless service to the communion, representing the LWF in many events, visiting LWF member churches and regional conferences. I am grateful for ongoing, regular communication, addressing issues, reflecting together, strategizing and sharing with each other both the joys and burdens of leadership.
- (83) My final word of thanks goes to staff. Their commitment to join in the response to the exchange rate crisis is a telling story that none of them is here for a job, but all of them are here for a vocation. They indeed believe in what the LWF is and does and want to carry this vocation on behalf of the LWF member churches and their shared vocation.
- (84) Ahead of us is an important process to make this gift of communion available for people to come after us. Because we are seeing and experiencing the LWF in bright, beautiful colors there is no reason for us to envision it in black and white as we look ahead. Because we are sensing the life that runs through the LWF's veins, there is no reason to envision it in a mood of maintenance. Because we have journeyed thus far and continue to grow and move dynamically every day, step by step, there is no reason to press the pause button now. And most importantly: because we are seeing millions of eyes looking at the LWF as a source of hope and empowerment there is no reason for us to turn our back on them while becoming occupied with ourselves. What we will do is to engage in change, yet always with a strong focus on that "passion for the church and for the world" and with the unbroken commitment to "live and work together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world".

Thank you!