



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

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New Year Message 2014 from the LWF General Secretary

“But as for me, it is good to be near God.” (Psalm 73:28)

Dear sisters, dear brothers in Christ,

It is with joy that I greet you in this new year that lies ahead of us with all the opportunities to continue witnessing to God’s love and care for every human being and the entire creation.

“It is good to be near God,” reads the watchword for the year 2014. Yes, indeed, this is good!

Yet, we know how easily we can lose track of God’s presence in our world and in our own lives, particularly when things seem to prevail in life that do not seem to be in line with what we know God is bringing to the world: justice, peace and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

This Christ-centered focus, however, helps us to continue trusting that nearness to God is not our doing, but God’s doing. It is God who approaches us – constantly, relentlessly, insistently – and creates that closeness for which we can only rejoice. May this promise carry all of us as we journey into the year 2014!

In the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Communion Office we look back at 2013 with gratitude. We are grateful for the support member churches and partners have shown in so many ways to enable the LWF to continue working and witnessing together as a communion of churches. There is indeed good reason to celebrate, with thanksgiving to God, what we have been able to achieve as we have journeyed together:

- We work together: LWF leaders from around the world convened for numerous local, regional and global consultations and meetings on capacity building in

member churches, Lutheran identity, sustainability, theological education, diakonia and many other issues. The mere fact of coming together and working together is to me a powerful witness in times during which fragmentation and withdrawal seem to be the prevailing patterns.

- We are committed to nourishing theological identity: The Lutheran Theological Education Network (LUTEN) was launched in 2013 to support collaboration in theological education across the communion.
- We opt for dialogue: LWF member churches continue their discernment on local, national and regional levels on issues that are potentially dividing them. I am grateful that as a communion of churches, we can look back at a year in which - even as we continue grappling with differences and differing theological perspectives – we remain committed not to dismiss each other but to continue discerning *jointly* the Word of God as fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ.
- We believe that religion is about bridge-building: The LWF Council endorsed the document “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders,” a code of conduct for religious leaders for work with and on behalf of refugees. The document is co-authored by the LWF under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Later in the year, the LWF’s Department for World Service held a joint workshop with international Muslim humanitarian organizations in Amman, Jordan, exploring how people of faith can work together for people in need.
- We continue serving those who are suffering: In September, I, together with a group of LWF vice-presidents and Council members, visited people in northern Namibia and southern Angola, who are severely affected by drought. It had a great impact on us all to see the desperate situation in the region and the response of our member churches there. At the same time, we were grateful to see how LWF member churches responded to the appeal for Namibia and Angola where their considerable donations are now helping us meet people’s basic needs.
- We uphold our ecumenical commitment: The Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity published “From Conflict to Communion – Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017,” which the LWF Council received unanimously. It is the first ever attempt by the two traditions to describe the history of Reformation at a global level, tracing developments since the Reformation and looking at how theological issues are framed today. The report is already offering a solid basis for joint preparations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at the local and global levels.
- We intentionally include youth: The Young Reformers Network was launched. The program will bring together young people from across the communion in the lead-up to the Reformation anniversary. Young people offer us unique perspectives as we begin to reflect on how our Lutheran church is always being reformed, always reforming. Can Lutheran churches engage in such a reflection without intentionally involving youth? In the LWF, we say, “No!” and thus have launched this network with the potential of bringing together up to 10,000 youth around the world!

- We care about justice in relationships: The LWF Gender Justice Policy was adopted, as a continuation of the LWF's ongoing commitment to issues of justice, including justice in relationships between men and women. The Gender Justice Policy is offered as a tool to support member churches to address issues of gender justice in their own contexts.
- We value the expressions that the Reformation has taken around the world: The LWF Council accepted the invitation of the LWF member churches in Namibia to hold its 2017 Assembly in Windhoek. With this decision, the LWF Council wanted to underline that the Reformation is indeed a global citizen today and that it has many centers and expressions around the world. The Assembly will be a historic, yet forward-looking, celebration that will coincide with the Reformation anniversary. We have much to look forward to.

I could list many more examples, yet they all would just lead us back to the same fundamental insight: thanks be to God who was so near and so life-giving, that our journey as a communion was sustained, inspired and guided. Thanks be to God, who through his nearness to us has made possible closeness among us as churches, as well as with our suffering neighbors and the groaning creation.

We look forward to the year 2014 with the hope of God's ongoing presence in our journeys. We are eager to discover what God will continue doing in our midst and in this world. Indeed, it is good to be so near to God!



Rev. Martin Junge
LWF General Secretary