

What Does It Mean?

Reappropriating Lutheran
Theological Heritage Today



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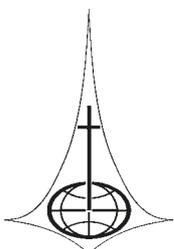
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Ottmar Hörl, “Martin Luther: Here I stand, 2010,” a sculpture of Martin Luther displayed at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva.
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Rev. Dr Musa Panti Filibus © LWF/H. Putsman Penet

The Christian faith asks questions in order to understand, but it is also always confronted with subjects that need clarification. For example, when the people gathered at Pentecost heard the apostles speak the Word of God in their own language, they asked: (Acts 2:12) “What does this mean”? Similarly, Martin Luther structured his Small Catechism with the same question as a prelude to expounding and helping listeners understand the Word of God.

This aspect of asking questions, researching and discussing is what is called “theology.” It is much needed in order to deepen our understanding of the Bible and Christian tradition in today’s contexts, and to live out our faith.

Today’s changing global and local realities—in part driven by the fast-growing communication technologies—raise questions about the type of content, learning infrastructure and pedagogical approaches that will help nurture ongoing reformation in the church and inspire renewal in the life of the local congregations. How can the gospel be articulated in a way that makes it relevant?

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its member churches are committed to facing these challenges in different ways. The LWF convened a global consultation that discussed the future of theological education in anticipation of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The venue of the consultation

was symbolic, Wittenberg, Germany, where in the 16th century, Martin Luther began the initial impulses for the reformation of the Church.

The 18-22 October gathering hosted by the Evangelical Church in Central Germany and the LWF German National Committee brought together 50 theologians, church leaders, educators and students from the LWF member churches and theological institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America, and LWF staff. The theme, “Secure foundations of the past and aspirations for the future: Lutheran Theological Education for Communion Building towards 2017,” guided deliberations at the consultation jointly organized by the LWF Departments for Mission and Development (DMD) and Theology and Public Witness (DTPW).

The consultation highlighted the need to reappropriate the Lutheran heritage in light of today’s local and contextual theologies. Solid theological training for pastors and basic formation for lay church members was particularly emphasized as requiring churches’ urgent attention.

Public theology and the role of church leaders in advocating for just societies was discussed, and the delegates felt that public engagement gives the Church the chance to offer Christian insights and also learn from the public domain, but without losing the very identity of being church.

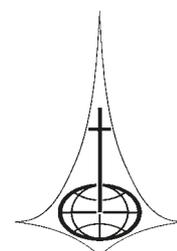
Strengthening and expanding the women’s theological network was underlined as a priority, with requests to facilitate and promote the influence of such networks in the LWF regions.

A formal statement or message was not anticipated from the global consultation. However, a “listeners’ group” summarized the recurring themes, which helped envision the way forward. Four practical steps were recommended:

- set up regional and global networks to share experiences and resources
- build relationships between teachers / educators and the church leadership
- establish a forum to facilitate meaningful dialogue and exchange between theological institutions and congregations
- maintain an interactive directory for theological resources and volunteers to facilitate faculty and student exchange.

This special edition of *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* brings you excerpts from the presentations and discussions at the global consultation on theological education. We hope these insights trigger further conversation among theological educators, church leadership including women and young people and other congregation members, and in the wider ecumenical circles.

Rev. Dr Musa Panti Filibus
DMD Director



Call for Greater Role of Diakonia and Advocacy in Theological Education

In his keynote address to the global consultation on theological education, LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge reminded participants that the Lutheran Reformation did not stop with the events in 1517, but continues today in a world shaped by global transformation and social and economic upheavals. Therefore Lutheran church leaders should speak out against injustices, he stressed.

these discussions at all levels: locally and globally?"

The general secretary outlined the three LWF cornerstones for the anniversary:

- Lutheran Reformation is a global citizen
- ecumenical accountability
- churches of the Reformation are in an ongoing process of reform and renewal.

[diakonia] and advocacy) and emphasized the need to adapt this comprehensive approach to theological training. "My observation is that this concept needs an urgent translation into current processes of education and formation, particularly when it comes to the dimensions of diakonia and advocacy, which I still see as rather underdeveloped and underrepresented in curricula and programs."



LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge at the Wittenberg consultation.
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Junge said it was important for Lutherans to engage with the wider society at both local and global levels in providing a theological education that takes into account a fast-changing world.

"Why aren't the Lutheran churches much more on the forefront?" he asked, referring to the current financial and ecological crises. "I have been asking myself, when the Lutheran concept of freedom in the public space, which finds its boundaries in the suffering neighbor is such a strong contribution to move beyond the predicament in which the human family finds itself today?" He continued, "How are leaders in our churches equipped to contribute, so that they participate in a spirit of interdisciplinarity, into

Junge's address mainly elaborated Lutheran Reformation as a polycentric construction, in which there is not one center or a few centers, but many. He urged that the Reformation anniversary should be approached in its global context.

"Reformation history needs probably to be written in plural form: reformation histories. The challenge, also for this consultation, is to learn to approach the LWF in such polycentricity and to develop both the processes and the methodologies so that interaction, dialogue and learning can take place across contexts," he said.

Junge underlined LWF's understanding of mission as holistic (encompassing proclamation, service

Global Citizen

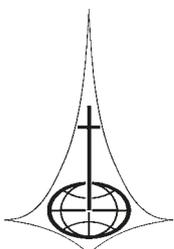
He said the consultation's venue—Wittenberg, where Martin Luther lived and worked—was an expression of "our desire to grasp what went out from this historic center of Reformation and how this has become today a global citizen. ... But equally important is our eagerness to understand what is coming back from such extended travel and how conversations are organized that assist the reception of these gifts in a spirit of mutuality."

During the ensuing discussion, Junge told delegates that from the experience of his own church in Chile under dictatorship, there is a saying that "A people without a memory is a people without a future." The same applies to a church, meaning that this is not about getting stuck in history but to empower us to continue walking into the future."

Responding to Junge's address, Rev. Dr. Sven Hillert from the Church of Sweden said, "As Lutherans we have to ask: What can we do today to have the same effect that Martin Luther had in his time?"

Rev. Lilana Kasper from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa noted that the LWF general secretary had "reminded us that the upcoming celebrations should not be a once-off event and then be forgotten, but it should be a spark for renewal."

(Written for LWI by Berlin-based journalist Anli Serfontein)



Taiwan: Efforts to Affirm Lutheran Identity

In Taiwan (Republic of China), Christians are a minority, representing 3.5 percent of the population of 23 million people. At the LWF global consultation on theological education, Lutheran Church of Taiwan pastor **Rev. Chen Shu-Chen (Selma)**, spoke about the important contributions Christianity has made in her country, and the challenges facing churches.

Chen pointed out that Christians' had a pioneering role in education especially in schools for girls, in health services including hospitals and in the media. However, today, Christian churches including the six Lutheran churches face challenges in reaching out to people in society. Most Lutherans are middle class and it is difficult for them to talk to people from different social strata and to migrants from other countries.



*Rev. Chen-Shu Chen (Selma) from Taiwan
© LWF/Anli Serfontein*

Traditional beliefs are strong in the country and the China Lutheran Seminary, which serves as a joint

seminary for the Lutheran bodies has established a "Traditional Beliefs and Emerging Religions Studies Center."

Chen also outlined the context in which churches must make efforts to claim and affirm their Lutheran identity. The norm of standard operating procedures in society—controllable, predictable and quantifiable—has permeated the church, she said. People therefore expect church work and their religious experiences to follow this pattern and to be evaluated accordingly.

In this context, Chen said she considers Luther's teaching as very timely. She however noted that only 50 percent of the pastors have a Lutheran background, and there is a shortage of theological teachers.

Contribution of Liberation Theology in Latin America

In his presentation, **Dr José D. Rodríguez**, president of ISEDET, the ecumenical theological institute in Buenos Aires, Argentina, explored how the teaching authority of Jesus could be reclaimed by theological education today.

Rodríguez said he considered the 1969 merger of two theological institutions in Argentina into the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET) as relevant in establishing authoritative Latin American theology. He noted that a fundamental document authored by Methodist minister and a pioneer of Latin American liberation theology, the late Dr José Míguez Bonino,

provided the rationale for engaging in this project. There were not only significant changes in the social and religious contexts of the times, but also the need to adapt theological work to these challenges. In the document Míguez Bonino stated that a fundamental task of combining both institutions had to do with the articulation of a proper Latin American perspective—"A new and original Latin American paradigm to replace the one that informed the missionary work of the oldest Protestant communities in the land."

But, the contribution of liberation theology according to Rodríguez needs to take up the challenge of

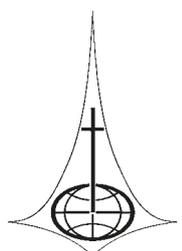
the paradigm of interculturality. Referring to Spanish theologian Prof. Juan José Tamayo, he noted, "Latin American liberation theology is opening itself to new horizons, taking as a focus new faces, emerging subjects, novel levels of consciousness, and fresh challenges brought about by our present reality: nature, land, women, Afro-Latin Americans, indigenous people, peasants, the excluded—always more numerous—by neo-liberalist policies, etc. This condition generates deep changes in the paradigm that began to develop four decades ago."

Two Trends in Latvian Society

Archbishop Janis Vanags of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia spoke about discussions on theological education in his context. He said he perceives two trends in Latvian society, following the end of the Soviet Union.

Many people consider religion as belonging to the private sphere and have the impression that everybody can freely contribute theological discussions without prior education or specialized knowledge.

While there is still a theological department at the state-run university, these societal presuppositions have had consequences: The state faculty is not connected to a specific confession and cannot primarily educate future pastors.



Vanags emphasized that classic Lutheran understanding of theological education is not compatible with this view. Therefore, the church in Latvia needs to start its own academy.

In Vanags' understanding, theology is a science that is different from other sciences. Unlike in the natural sciences whereby the observer does not influence the object of research,

in theology the object of research, God, influences the researcher, he said.

The Latvian archbishop noted that outside the church, there is growing resistance towards claims about truth. What people are interested in is a guide that leads to security. Thus, for many, the pastor has become a candidate to hire in

competition with gurus and fitness trainers, he noted.

In this "competition" a good heritage and tradition is an asset, Vanags emphasized. Therefore, theological education has to enable pastors to accompany others in their spiritual journey. This requires a strong practical theology that affirms the use of the ancient disciplines of spirituality.

Germany: Paradigm Shift to Transcontextual Education

Ms Catharina Covolo, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, Germany, and a theology student, reflected on the impact of modern communication technology on theological education. This is nothing new, she noted. "Martin Luther, as well as other reformers, made extensive use of these tools to disseminate their writings and to educate the population in questions of theology."

While new communication mediums like the internet offer possibilities, they also pose challenges. "Sometimes it seems to be easier to be in contact with someone from the other end of the world, instead

of our neighbor across the street. The electronic tools give us the illusion that meaningful encounters and communication are possible only via the internet and that dialogue and partnership in personal encounters is less important," she noted.

Covolo said theological education, therefore, must enable pastors to both nourish local communities and also facilitate active citizenship in a globalized world. "I did not learn at the theological faculties [in Germany] how Lutheran theology looks like in different parts of the world and what its contexts are within the Lutheran world communion. In order to understand why Lutheran theology in

Germany, in Brazil or in Indonesia is shaped in a certain way, students of theology need to understand the contexts that influence local Lutheran theologies," she said.

Covolo emphasized the need for a paradigm shift towards transcontextual education. "In order to meet the current challenges for the churches, future pastors and deacons need to be able to encourage faith in their congregations and at the same time build bridges between communities in the neighborhood and between Lutheran churches in different countries," she added.

Ethiopia: Interfaith Collaboration

Rev. Ebise Ayana, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), reflected on the major global shifts impacting local communities. "All around us, people of various religio-cultural opinions are coming closer to each other and this interaction already serves as an unpublicized and informal conversation. In such situations, distances are now being narrowed and, in certain areas, compromises are replacing confrontations," she said.

With a growing number of people living in interfaith contexts, "What then should be our theological orientation towards this plurality of religious faiths; and, how do we interpret all the non-Christian experiences which our increasingly pluralistic culture provides?" she remarked.

Ayana, who teaches at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Addis Ababa, is aware of instances

in which religion is used to separate

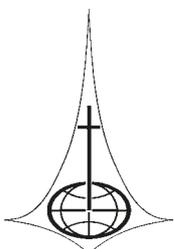


EECMY pastor Rev. Ebise Ayana
© LWF/Anli Serfontein

people. "It is not uncommon that oppressive powers use the 'divide-and-rule-method' and divide people according to their religions and the

followers of other religions become victims. This can result in fear of the other religion or [people become] angry about it, and life becomes worse," she noted.

She shared a vision of interfaith collaboration that can help counter potentially divisive perceptions. "Interreligious contact needs to be understood as the sharing of life at all levels among believers of different faiths. In a multicultural and multireligious environment, dialogue becomes necessary as a means of promoting understanding and acquaintance with our neighbors. As a result, people of different religions learn from each other, cooperate, live peacefully, serve one another and develop mutual respect," she argued.



South Africa: An Economy of Solidarity

Bishop Dr Ndanganeni P. Phaswana of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) recalled the massive differences in education levels in his country that are a legacy of apartheid. “Mathematics and science were forbidden subjects in many black and government schools after the nationalization of private schools even if they were owned by churches,” he said.

In South Africa today, job security for manual and low-skilled workers is continually threatened. “It will not be surprising in the near future to have machines working in the mines, thus requiring few hands that will be highly remunerated than employing tens of thousands of workers who

demand adequate compensation for their labor,” he said. The argument for such changes can be explained in the “morally indefensible gap” between the take-home package of a manual worker and a chief executive officer, Phaswana noted.

He said the fight against economic injustice requires strong advocacy by the churches towards governments. Every government “can minimize or attempt to narrow the wage gap by enacting laws that compel multinational companies to pay a minimum wage to their employees and also to pay higher taxes to the government so as to enable the latter to provide social security to the unemployed members of society.”

Networking Globally

Rev. Dr Dietrich Werner, representing the Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education (of the World Council of Churches (WCC)), introduced the context of networking in theological education.

According to Werner, theological educators worldwide experience similar challenges. There are transformation processes and crisis symptoms in theological education regarding financial instability, changes in the modes of delivering education and the pluralization of institutional providers of higher education.

The WCC program executive noted there is a new vitality among regional associations of theological schools and continental forums for quality improvement, resource sharing and common theological faculty development programs. Also, denominational networks are being established.

He said there are other important factors besides structural strengthening. For example, several settings question the full-time residency model of theological education and instead propose hybrid models with times of residence, work in congregations, mentoring and electronic learning. In addition, there

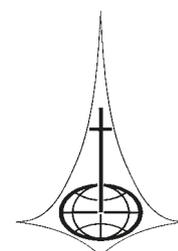
are various networks responding to the needs of pastoral leaders who support migrant communities in the diaspora. Important recognition is also growing about multilingual theological training and intercultural counseling, conflict resolution and cross-boundary mediation in theological education.

As a root cause of the economic injustices, the ELCSA bishop identified a culture of greed that is the basis of the capitalist economic system. While socialism does not provide a solution, he said, an economy of solidarity should be created. “The development of a solidarity economy may present an alternative to the two systems and it deserves an audience. This system is people-oriented rather than profit-oriented. It does accord the employer an opportunity to make a profit but not at the expense of the employees. [...] Economy should serve the needs not the wants of the people,” he concluded.

Werner highlighted as a new model of knowledge sharing, the Globethics.net, a global network of persons and institutions interested in different fields of applied ethics. Its global digital libraries, which include a Lutheran collection, provide access to resources on ethics and thousands of theological texts and documents.



[Left to right] Oberlandeskirchenrat Thomas Hofer (Germany) and Rev. Dr Robin J. Steinke (USA) during a panel presentation at the LWF global consultation on theological education.
© LWF/Anli Serfontein



United States: Strategies on Sharing Transcontextual Wisdom

Rev. Dr Robin J. Steinke, dean and associate professor of ethics and public life at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, USA, reflected on the challenges of the North American context for global theological learning.

She noted that economic globalization does not only affect the poor in all parts of the world but also makes theological education in the US more

difficult. “Market forces are driving institutional planning and resource development. Institutions focus on building the endowment, capturing as many students as possible, and imposing unsustainable levels of debt on students, who are then only able to serve in contexts that can pay a salary which allows them to repay the debt.”

As an alternative against these forces, Steinke, a pastor of the Evan-

gelical Lutheran Church in America, proposed the sharing of “transcontextual wisdom,” which would have consequences both for the content and methods of delivery.

“Let us think together about concrete strategies for sharing transcontextual wisdom that contributes to the flourishing of theological education,” she emphasized.

Malaysia: Liberate and Contextualize Theological Education

Rev. Dr Thu En Yu, principal of the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, discussed theological education in his country, while also questioning some approaches by churches in Asia.

“The missiology and ecclesiology of the churches in Asia generally lack very much the understanding on social awareness. The missiological norm is church-centric in nature with emphasis on soul-saving at the expense of physical and socio-cultural life,” he said.

En Yu, a former bishop of the Basel Christian Church of Malay-

sia, emphasized that the churches should not only look after their own flock and at winning souls. “The churches must uphold Jesus as their example—identifying with the poor, the oppressed and the humble, and facilitating their deliverance from spiritual as well as physical predicament.”

Such an approach has direct consequences on the work of theological institutions, he said. “There is a need to liberate and contextualize theological education so that a holistic training can be given to theological students and not just an exposure

to the traditional disciplines. There is a need to recover the doctrine and concept of the church with all its implications, so that the church could fulfil its reason for being—both ecclesiological and missiological.”

En Yu called for theological education programs that are flexible enough to train people for ministry and the functions of ministry. “Theological institutions must be made available through traditional as well as non-traditional means in order that the impact of Christians may be felt at all levels of society,” he said.

Canada: Pastoral Leadership That Responds to Global Forces

Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer, principal dean of the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Canada, encouraged religious people to react to negative consequences of the process of globalization.

“Religion, in its offer of transcendence, is a major alternative to the two totalizing forces with which people have to contend today: global capitalism, and the global cultural signifiers coming largely out of the United States. Religion can function both as a means of resistance to these totalizing forces and the means for construction of an alternative world view,” he said, quoting Prof. Robert J. Schreiter, past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

Pfrimmer asked how pastors today can be prepared to respond to



Canadian theologian Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer © LWF/Anli Serfontein

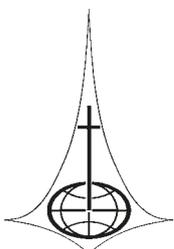
- ability to recognize and identify diverse local, national and global publics
- capacity to develop pastoral strategies to cross the new and emerging cultural borders.

These new competencies require also a new model of pastoral leadership, according to Pfrimmer, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. He argued that the metaphor of a “shepherd” is no longer intuitive in the Canadian context, and suggested rather talking about an “adventure guide.”

“Theological formation in the exciting global variety of forms will need to prepare pastoral leaders that are willing to guide the faithful in this adventure,” he added.

the global forces. He suggested three different but necessary competencies.

- theological formation for intra-cultural, cross-cultural and trans-cultural bridge-building



Theological Education in Secularizing Societies

All speakers at the LWF consultation on theological education could subscribe to the notion that the global religious landscape is changing. They differed, however, on the implications when they described the realities in their home countries. Conversation about the understanding of secularization and the declining importance of religion in modern societies was particularly vivid.

Pastors Must Be Ready to Also Impact Society

Rev. Dr Sven Hillert from the Church of Sweden expressed skepticism about an oversimplified understanding of secularization. “Secularization to a certain extent may have forced religion into the private sphere of life. But it certainly has not moved Christian faith out of people’s lives. Many people who do not go to church very often are in fact believers. And this is even more so when you realize that faith is not only in our heads, but also in our hearts and our hands. It is expressed not only through our thoughts but also through our feelings and actions.”

Explaining what is expected from the church, he said, “People want their children to be baptized and ‘to belong’ as they describe it. They pay quite a high fee to be members of the church [of Sweden] and they trust the church to use the money to do important social work both at home and abroad. In general, they want the church to make a difference, either alone or together with society.”

For Hillert, such an understanding raises questions about pastors’ education in the Church of Sweden. The church ministers have to be ready



*[Left to right] Delegates Jin-Seop Eom (Korea) and Rev. Dr Sven Hillert (Sweden)
© LWF/Anli Serfontein*

to not only work with people who are in the church but they also need to be prepared and able to impact society.

“At the Pastoral Institute in Uppsala we often tell our students that the closer you are to Jesus the closer you must be to the people of your own time, because Jesus himself stood up for those who, in his time, needed

support or protection. By his way of living, Jesus showed us his view of God. And through his parables about the Kingdom of God he defended his way of living together with the poor, and eating together with those who were considered sinners. And he inspired his disciples to follow his example,” Hillert added.

Serving in a Society Where Faith Is an Option

Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer from the University of Augsburg, Germany, said he was not convinced that the German context will become secular simply because of its modernity. “Obviously, the idea that we move forward to a world without religion has been disproved by reality. [...] The European way of secular modernity does not appear any longer as a prototype for the ongoing processes in other parts of the world.”

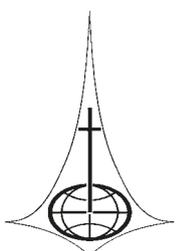
Oberdorfer argued that even the European form of modernity will not simply be secular. “Europe is not

and—as far we can see—will never be a continent without religion, without Christianity.” On the different dimensions of secularization, he noted that debate on this subject does not necessarily mean that “we now live in a non-religious society. It rather means that religion has become an option among other options which have the same right to express themselves in public.”

Nonetheless, churches have a remarkable impact on the political and social life, he said. “And although the number of church members has significantly decreased in the last

decades, still about two thirds of the German population belong to the two large Christian churches [Protestant or Roman Catholic], and it has been said that every weekend still more people go to church than to the football stadiums.”

Reflecting on the consequences of secularization on theological education, Oberdorfer noted there are those who subscribe to the school of thought that academic formation of church pastors does not belong in state-owned and financed universities. He said he differs from this perception, as he considers it the right choice for



theology to stay in public universities in Germany, both from the point of view of the state and the church.

The state, Oberdorfer explained, has an interest in well trained pastors and teachers who represent a still important aspect of public life. It is also good for the church, because the university provides the context in which “faith seeking understanding” can be exercised on a high intellectual quality and it provides the necessary contextualization for pastors.

“It is recommendable to train students to reflect on their own doubts, to get to know the alternative ‘options’, to experience dialogues with people of different convictions, in order to help them develop a mature faith which qualifies them to serve as pastors and teachers in a society where faith is an ‘option,’” Oberdorfer stressed.



[Left to right] Prof. Leila Ortiz (USA) and Prof. Bernd Oberdorfer (Germany) follow a presentation at the Wittenberg consultation. © LWF/Anli Serfontein

Opportunity and Challenge for Christian Identity

Rev. Dr Jonathan P. Strandjord, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), said secularization has distinct consequences for theological education directed both at full-time pastors and also at lay leaders.

The first one is the secularization of time. This implies that there are no special times in American life anymore that are clearly reserved for the church. There are always other

options and this makes it difficult to provide deep theological formation in the congregations.

“This weakness in theological education of the laity is greatly limiting and, over time, could negate the effectiveness of the theological education of pastors and other leaders who graduate from our seminaries,” said Strandjord.

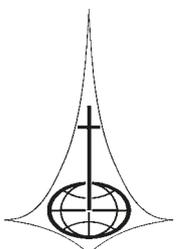
The ELCA director for theological education said he sees both

opportunity and challenge in the fact that Christian identity is no longer something that is taken for granted. “Opportunity: because the long-dominant, now fading American religious consensus has long made it difficult for the distinctive Lutheran theological notes to gain a wider hearing. Challenge: because as a theological tradition that in North America has been concerned predominantly about our own theological purity and/or our ethnic continuity, we are much more accustomed to talking theology inside the Lutheran circle than trying to share our theological witness in ways that could actually gain a hearing and perhaps find some resonance in the broader cultural mix.”

There is, in Strandjord’s analysis, also a secularizing trend in the understanding of economy with direct consequences for theology students. “While theological education used to function in an intergenerational gift economy (and still does to a considerable degree), we have been drifting toward an economy in which individual student debt funds the education of pastors (our frontline theological educators) and in which lay theological education beyond (and



*Marktkirche in Wittenberg, Germany
© LWF/Anli Serfontein*



sometimes even within) the congregation is expected to be paid for by individual learners.”

On this basis, Strandjord suggested three theses for a possible common agenda for theological education towards the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

- The development of a stronger theological education network that

provides more opportunities in a variety of modes for significant theological education targeting more persons serving the church and living out their vocation as lay persons.

- The development of forms of catechesis that enable laity to be (a) biblically fluent, (b) able to speak a Lutheran witness that can be

heard by others, and (c) theologically equipped for ecumenical and interfaith life and cooperative service to the neighbor.

- The renewal of a gift economy of theological education in which those who have received then in turn give forward rather than pay back.

Sharing Different Gifts in the Lutheran Communion

Rev. Dr Vitor Westhelle from the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil did not delve into the discussion on secularism, but instead elaborated how the communion of Lutheran churches could work together in various contexts.

for Luther happens in the midst of and includes *Anfechtung*—being taken over by trial and tribulation, which includes the cross and suffering. This is experience. The rest are perceptions, opinions, appraisals, or sensations, but not experiences

experience? Sharing experiences in communion is one thing, receiving them as gifts is another,” he stressed.

Westhelle noted that context is important in speaking about the ability to communicate experiences. “A context is the ensemble of experiences shared by a given group, race, class, cast in a given social location (geographical, politico-economic, or ‘ideological’), which is demarcated by the gamut of experiences shared. So contexts are overlapping and all of us participate in different contexts simultaneously. But no one participates in all contexts,” he explained.

The inability for one person to participate in all contexts provides a philosophical safeguard against universalism, he said. “Contextuality militates against universalism, and any universalism (as in naturalism, positivism, humanism and so forth), if at all defensible, surrenders irreducible particularity and contextual relevance.”

For Westhelle, contextuality has direct consequences for the understanding of the LWF communion of Lutheran churches. If Lutheranism is understood in a purely universal way, it can at best be a teaching communion. If it is able to also receive gifts from others, it becomes a learning communion. “The task ahead is to level the ground of the [communion] so that those gifts can be shared around in this spirit—what was given to me and rooted in my experience and context I also give to you. This is me and I give it to you. It is in this giving and accepting that we know that we are at the leveled table of Christ,” he concluded.



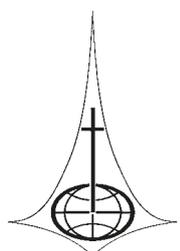
[Left to right] Panelists Rev. Dr Vitor Westhelle (Brazil), Angela Trejo (Mexico) and Rev. Dr Peter Amana Bartimawus (Nigeria) and moderator Bishop Dr Ndanganeni Petrus Phaswana (South Africa) at the LWF global consultation on Lutheran theological education. © LWF/Anli Serfontein

Westhelle, who teaches systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA, based his reflections on the Lutheran understanding of experience. Referring to *Martin Luther’s Table Talks* citation, “Experience alone makes a theologian,” Westhelle emphasized that this does not constitute normative theology but merely the contribution of one particular theologian.

Luther understood experience in a very existential way. “‘Experience’

in the sense Luther used the term,” Westhelle argued.

Examining “experience” from a philosophical tradition, the Brazilian theologian focused on a more pedagogical question. “Pedagogically speaking, how do we pass on information that might be relevant to others who cannot harvest [it] from the gardens of their own experiences? Or, how do we receive the communication of a gift that will enrich me even if it does not resonate with my



Theological Education in Minority Situations

Lutheran Christians live in diverse contexts. Several speakers at the LWF consultation on theological education spoke about the current situation in their home churches.

Poland: Relative Stability in a Predominant Christian Confession

Ms Marta Zachraj from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland gave the impression of relative stability in a religious landscape dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. In Poland, around 90 percent of the population of 38 million people is affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and around 70 percent of the people consider themselves religious. With one in every five persons (around 20 percent) claiming deep engagement in religious affairs, it can be argued

that religion constitutes a rather significant element of everyday life.

Citing local surveys, she said a majority of the people (more than 70 percent) consider religious significance as important whereas only one out of every eight people claims it has no personal importance.

In a broader context, faith as a value appears to be slightly less important. The issues that Poles deemed more important include health and family, but also honesty, work, respect for others and peace. To a large extent they equate religious-

ness with “churchness”—participating in religious practices. In most cases, those who often attend church mass, worship services and other religious meetings more than once a week define themselves as very religious, while those attending church once a month indicate “moderate religiousness.” Persons who rarely participated in religious practices (a few times a year) mostly defined their religiousness as indifferent, and those not practicing at all rated their religiousness as total or moderate non-religiousness, Zachraj explained.

She however noted that the image of Polish religiousness “is developing cracks.” A significant minority—23 percent—of the population have the impression that the role of religion in Poland and the world is decreasing. “And that is a position overwhelmingly held by younger and better educated Poles,” she said.

Zachraj said that the laws governing religious freedom in the country are upheld, and the status of the small Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland is stable. In everyday life, however, it faces the dominance of people who consider the Roman Catholic Church as the religious standard, she added.



*Ms Marta Zachraj, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland
© LWF/Anli Serfontein*

Korea: Appropriation of Lutheran Heritage Is Urgent

Rev. Dr Jin-Seop Eom from the Lutheran Church in Korea said the appropriation of the Lutheran heritage is most pressing for his context as a young and small church “in a sea of other Protestant churches as well as traditional religions.”

There are a number of particularly important Lutheran theological thoughts that need to be introduced in the Korean context, according to the director of the Luther Study Institute at Luther University and Seminary in Korea. He cited as an example the distinction between two kinds of righteousness; one that brings recognition

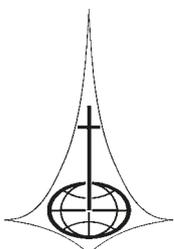
among people and one that counts before God and can only be attained through faith by grace alone.

For Jin-Seop the Lutheran interpretation of faith towards creation remains central. He said the passage in the Apostles’ Creed that speaks of God the creator, is highly significant in the dialogue with other religions. It presents Lutheran theology as an ally of the best intentions of other religions, but also as a challenge and tool of reformation.

The understanding of justification by faith alone is equally relevant, Jin-Seop said. “Living only on the basis of Christ’s

righteousness involves the recognition that God’s judgment contradicts the judgment that others make about us as well as the judgment we render on ourselves. The righteousness of Christ ‘frees me from pronouncing final judgment on myself’. It also frees me from what others say about me, for what they say is not ‘final judgment, but always provisional.’ This is the message many people who are vulnerable to the opinions of others need to hear,” he explained.

The concerns for Korean society include the country’s suicide rate, considered to be the highest among the Or-



ganization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries; a booming plastic surgery industry; victims of bullying and harassment in schools and in workplaces; and victims of cyber-bullying, Jin-Seop said.

The Lutheran distinction between the two realms of the world and of the church, and Luther's insistence that both belong to God, is also very useful in the Korean context, he said.

"Christians may regard one realm of existence as superior to the other, as

happened in the Middle Ages when many elevated the realm of grace (*regnum gratiae*) over the realm of nature (*regnum naturae*). Practically speaking, this happens when Christians regard questions related to salvation as the only really important matter that deserves their attention. This is the case with Korean Christians who are taught that evangelization is the only Great Commission. Neighbors are regarded as objects of evangelization, instead of love," Jin-Seop noted.

The seminary director said he hoped for a clearer understanding of Lutheran theological education in the Korean context that also takes into account the Lutheran understanding of what makes a theologian: "According to Luther, every person, whether ordained or lay, theologian or student, whose identity is grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the God-man, is a theologian of the cross," he emphasized.

Russia: Independent from State Ideology but Suppressed by Society

Rev. Dr Elena Bondarenko from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS) spoke about a difficult minority situation for her church.

Before the Russian revolution in 1917, the Lutheran Church was also small, but had important support among the country's elite. Large church buildings were constructed in important Russian cities. However, after the complete destruction of church life in the former Soviet Union, the church could not claim the privileges of pre-1917 era. "Therefore the Evangelical Lutheran Church is on the one hand independent from the state and its ideology, but on the other hand it is heavily suppressed by the society in which it exists, since values of the Lutheran church differ from the values of society," said Bondarenko, a lecturer at the ELCROS Theological Seminary near St Petersburg.

She noted that several church buildings were returned to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, after the fall of the Soviet Union. But



[Left to right] Rev. Dr Elena Bondarenko (Russian Federation) and Rev. Anne Burghardt (Estonia) during one of the plenary sessions at the Wittenberg consultation. © LWF/Anli Serfontein

there are also cases in which the state refused to release the former property of the church. Furthermore, it is very difficult for pastors who are not able to feed their families on a meager church income to find additional work.

Despite these difficulties, Bondarenko highlighted several achievements of the Lutheran church. As

one of few Christian denominations within Russia, ELCROS has fully democratic structures with very active and influential lay leaders. It is also one of the few churches that has maintained women's ordination and has women in important leadership positions.

An Interfaith Platform to Promote Mutual Understanding in Malaysia

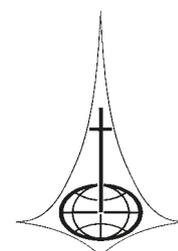
Rev. Dr Thu En Yu, principal of the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, said the history of Christianity in his country was closely linked to Western colonialism. "Since 1511, Christianity has been present in the Peninsular Malay [Western Malaysia]—for about 500 years. Now Christians constitute only about eight per cent of the population, and about half of these are Catholics."

The colonial powers gave space to churches in prominent places, and

belonging to a church was seen as helpful in advancing one's career, he said. "The trademark of Christians in Malaysian history is the milieu of magnificent church premises, mission schools with high academic standards and a middle class intellectual community. The stately church buildings stand out prominently in urban centers as renowned landmarks of their respective townships. They are not found in rural areas. This is evidence

of the fact that missionaries targeted the middle and upper classes."

The churches even reinforced ethnic differences, he said. "Colonial churches adopted the policy of segregation of races. Their worshippers were identified by race and economic status," which suited the agenda of colonial interests. "The British colonial administration deliberately alienated the Malays from the other ethnic communities, a political tactic of 'divide and rule'. Malays



were not integrated into the colonial economic development. They were the forgotten lot; economically, educationally and culturally they lagged far behind. [...] The immigrant Chinese and Indian communities were accorded due attention by the colonial administration. Owing to their Christian adherence, they were at that time identified more with colonial interests,” said the former bishop of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia.

Against this background, En Yu attributed the failure of the pre-independence churches to the lack of three aspects: indigenization, universal outlook and multiracial sensitivity.

Upon independence in 1957, there was a reshuffling of relationships, En Yu explained. “Malay Muslims evolved from being ruled to being the rulers with exalted status. Such a change reversed the respective roles between the master and the servant. The Malays could not forget overnight the wounds of their past history, feeling that the shadow of their past oppression was still cast over them.” This resulted in serious tensions between the different ethnic groups after independence. While the churches initially struggled with the changes too, their “worst mistake had been that they had not formulated appropriate



Rev. Dr. Thu En Yu (Malaysia) presenting his paper. © LWF/Anli Serfontein

strategies toward the development of indigenization over time,” he argued.

Through the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) the churches in the country became increasingly involved in civic affairs, but the CCM recommendations were not followed and the new constitution declared Islam to be the official religion. “The federal constitution affirmed the right of all people to profess, practice and propagate their religion, while the propagation of non-Muslim religions among the Muslims was expressly prohibited,” En Yu said.

As a consequence of a stronger interest within the Muslim community to propagate its faith, the Christian churches proposed a more intense interfaith dialogue, which resulted in the formation of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST). Since its establishment in 1983, MCCBCHST “has become a vehicle for interreligious consultation and mutual understanding as well as an organized channel that reflects public opinions on religious affairs to the government authorities,” En Yu added.

A Second Reformation? Promise and Challenge of Charismatic Movements

Many Christians influenced by charismatic movements claim that a second reformation of the church is needed. They argue that the classic 16th century Lutheran reformation has run out of steam and the Holy Spirit has to transform individuals and churches anew. Two speakers at the LWF global consultation on theological education reflected on this assertion with particular experiences in their contexts.

In Tanzania “Uamsho” Has Strengthened Church Outreach

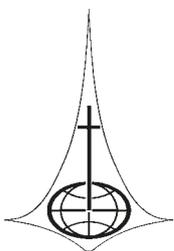
Rev. Nehemia Moshi, registrar of the Tumaini University Makumira (TUMA) in Arusha, Tanzania, discussed the impact of the charismatic movement on the church and theological education in his home country. “What is happening in Tanzania and specifically within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) can rightly be branded as charismatic

renewal. This renewal referred to as *uamsho* (awakening in Kiswahili) traces its roots to the East African revival movement that began in the 1920s.”

This particular movement is not only about forming new churches as predominantly done by similar networks across the world. The ELCT, according to Moshi, has managed to integrate the movement into the

broader church, an initiative that is mainly perceived as positive. “There is a general consensus that the movement is the work of the Holy Spirit to awaken the sleeping church. It is intended to maintain orthodox beliefs,” he said.

The goal of the revival movement is to encourage Christians to live out their faith. It is a response to an



ecclesial spiritual crisis, he noted, and went on to explain how it functions in Tanzania. “Congregation members will normally attend the regular Sunday morning services. They will, however, in addition, attend a fellowship in the afternoon—meeting of prayers, praise, Bible reading, sharing of testimonies etc. There is also usually a special meeting time on weekdays. The ecumenical—interdenominational character—of the movement is exhibited in the nationwide network of groups such as New Life Crusade.”

As an in-church movement, “charismatic renewal is beneficial [and] it is a blessing in the church,” Moshi noted. Citing some attributes of the *uamsho* movement, he said it results in strengthened outreach, involves lay members at its core, is able to organize support to the church, and encourages its participants to apply the Bible to their everyday lives.

But theology should not stop at describing the charismatic movement phenomenon, it must engage it critically, the TUMA registrar argued. “The practices within the church should be our concern. Can we dictate anything? By no means—that would be imposition. But probing



Rev. Nebemia Moshi (Tanzania)
© LWF/Anli Serfontein

and looking for approaches to make practices within Christianity address the essence of the Church, we must.”

When one examines the movement critically, one indeed discovers several critical aspects, according to Moshi. “It must also be admitted, on the other hand, that the movement with all its benefits is prone to breed problems in the church—and has indeed bred problems. Among the problems is the creeping in of alien teachings.”

The Lutheran pastor expressed concern about the notion of a pros-

perity gospel that is finding its way into the Lutheran church alongside the belief that generous tithing will guarantee wealth for the giver. He said such perceptions call for more urgent efforts towards a theology that is relevant to the respective local contexts.

“Faith is doomed to die at some point no matter how successful or long it lasts unless faith has become fully indigenous. Our task is to contextualize or present the tradition in a manner that addresses contextual needs. Good teachings emanate from contextual theology. If we are to survive the threats brought by unbridled teachings in the name of spiritual awakening, we have to be a teaching church. Christians should be well nurtured and encouraged to practice the unity of the church,” he said, citing Dr Douglas W. Waruta, associate professor in philosophy and religious studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

To address these challenges, Moshi proposed a distinct theological education that engages both full-time students and clergy and includes “education that is less academic but empowers the laity.”

India: A Claim That Renewal of the Entire Community Is Possible

Ms Jane Aboorvanthan from the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, said Asian and Indian Christians live under the influence of a strong charismatic movement. It is “an international and interdenominational movement that [has] stirred up the institutionalized church. This movement has now changed the face of Christianity around the world to a new era of Christian spirituality claiming a restoration in the churches,” she said.

Aboorvanthan said she interprets the charismatic movement as a reaction of the failures of Christianity. “Despite the churches’ work, painful realities prevail in the abiding poverty of the poor, the feeble and unheard voice of the marginalized, the aggravation of the misery of neglected ones and continuous suffering of the underprivileged.”

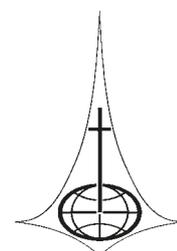
In such a context, the aspiration of the charismatic movement is nothing short of creating a “new reformation,” she argued. “The claim



Ms Jane Aboorvanthan (India)
© LWF/Anli Serfontein

of the charismatic movement is that through the rebirth and renewal of persons come the renewal of the entire community, without which the church is inoperative and evangelism is ineffective.”

Aboorvanthan acknowledged important contributions from the charismatic movement such as renewing worship and radical inclusiveness despite social divisions. But like Moshi, she also highlighted shortcomings, which include a focus only on saving souls while ignoring people’s daily needs. “The life after death is stressed more and the prosperity gospel is preached everywhere. Sacrificing and giving tithes are given more importance [in the problematic belief that] people can prosper,” she added.



Worship Life

Participants at the global consultation on theological education shared a common worship life including devotions, Bible studies and prayers. On Sunday, 21 October, they attended a church service in the Castle Church in

Wittenberg where Martin Luther on 31 October 1517 nailed his 95 theses against the door, considered as the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation.



Ms Danielle Dokman (Suriname) led one of the evening devotions at the LWF global consultation.
© LWF/Anli Serfontein



Sunday worship at the Castle Church in Wittenberg © GNC/LWF/Cornelia Kirsch

Tree Planting at Luther Garden

On Sunday afternoon LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge and representatives from the LWF German National Committee led the consultation participants

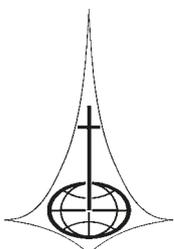
and other invited guests in a tree-planting ceremony at the Luther Garden.

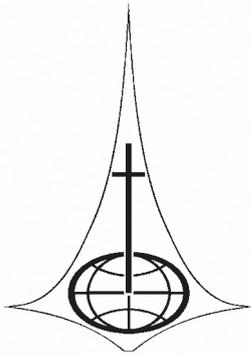


During the tree planting ceremony at the Luther Garden in Wittenberg, Germany.
© LWF Center, Wittenberg



VELKD Presiding Bishop Gerhard Ulrich waters a tree planted at the Luther Garden.
© LWF Center, Wittenberg





Liturgical Material

Reappropriating Lutheran heritage
in today's theological contexts



© LWF/H. Martinussen

This liturgy is adapted from the opening worship of the October 2012 LWF global consultation on theological education in Wittenberg, Germany. Alternative Bible readings, hymns and prayers can be used in the respective contexts.

Opening and Invocation

- Leader: In the beginning, God made the world
- All: God's is the hand that created you.*
- Women: Made it and mothered it,*
Men: Made it and fathered it,
Women: Filled it with seeds and signs of fertility,
Men: Filled it with love and its folk with ability.
- Leader: All that speaks, sings, cries, laughs or keeps silent,
- All: God's is the hand that created you.*
- Leader: All that is green, blue, deep and growing,
- Leader: All that suffers, lacks limbs or longs for an end,
- All: God's is the hand that created you.*
- Leader: All that is tender, firm, fragrant and curious,
- Leader: The world belongs to the Lord,
- All: God's is the hand that created you.*
- All: The earth and all its people are his.*
- Leader: All that crawls, flies, swims, walks or is motionless,
- (Opening Responses from: Sinfonia Oecumenica. Worship with the churches in the world, hg. Dietrich Werner u.a. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus), S. 56-58)*

Call to Confession

- Leader: We see the richness and beauty of the world.
 Yet we also see its brokenness and sinfulness.
 We hear many empty words and empty promises.
 Let us pause
 and in the light of God's Word confess our sin.
- Leader: Empty promises haunt our relationships in public and private life.
 We are in deep need of reliability and trust.
 We have learned to exclude in order to cover our own vulnerability.
 God, we are in deep need of your grace.
- All: God, have mercy on us.*

Prayer of Confession

- Leader: Gracious God, have mercy on us.
 We confess that we have turned away from you.
 We listen to empty words and noisy slogans.
 We speak when we should listen.
 We are silent when we should speak.
 God, we are in deep need of your life-giving word.
- Leader: Empty stomachs cry out and reveal the world's injustice.
 We accommodate with how things are in order live our lives.
 We secure our own position rather than giving space for the other.
 God, we are in deep need of your justice.
- All: God, have mercy on us.*
- Kyrie: "Señor, ten piedad de nosotros," *Agape, Songs of Hope and Reconciliation*, 84
- All: God, have mercy on us.*

Pronouncement of Forgiveness

Leader: For as the rain and the snow come
down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have
watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to
the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from
my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty, but it
shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I
sent it.
For you shall go out in joy, and be led
back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap
their hands. (*Isaiah 55:10-12*)

God who is rich in mercy, loved us
Even when we were dead in sin,
And made us alive together with Christ.
By grace you have been saved.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Your sins are forgiven.
Almighty God
Strengthen you with power
Through the Holy Spirit,
That Christ may live in your hearts
through faith.

(*Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress),
S. 118*)

All: Amen.

Gloria: "Gloria a Dios," *Agape, Songs of Hope and
Reconciliation*, 26

The Meal

(*from LWF Eleventh Assembly Worship Material*)

Peace

Leader: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

All: And also with you.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Leader: You breathed and a whole universe
began to move.
You spoke one vowel and light pierced
the darkness.
You sang a note and a cosmic symphony
unfolded into stars, planets, trees,
flowers, grains, animals, waters, wind,
colors, air.
You smiled and shaped clay in your
image, making women and men just
like you.
When we went astray, you sent your
son to call us back,
offering us the Bread of Life, so we
would never be hungry again.
And so, with the people of every time
and place, with farmers and bakers,
and all who work so bread can reach
people's homes, we sing the song of
praise.

Sanctus: "Santo, santo, santo," *Agape, Songs of Hope
and Reconciliation*, 81

IV

Eucharistic Prayer

Leader: Blessed is the One who comes offering himself as Bread for all, blessed the body nourishing life, blessed the word healing the soul, blessed the look of hope, strengthening minds, blessed the feet leading the dance in the great Feast of Life.

(Leader pronounces Words of Institution)

At this table we remember the Bread in our heart and soul, the Bread crucified, risen, speaking peace to make all people whole.

All: Amen.

Lord's Prayer

At this table, we pray the Spirit to breathe over these gifts and over our lives transforming lack into abundance, hunger into nourishment, sadness into joy, doubt into confidence, exclusion into welcome, isolation into company. Come Holy Spirit, lead us to the eternal cosmic dance of your love. Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, all glory is yours, now and forever.

Communion

Leader: Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Communion

Prayer after Communion

Leader: God of abundance, with this bread of life and cup of salvation You have united us with Christ, Making us one with all your people. Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit, That we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world And continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

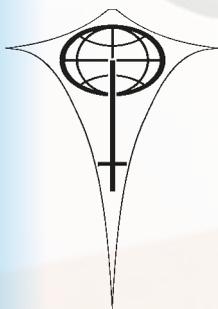
All: Amen.

Blessing

(to be spoken in the mother tongue of the leader)

Leader: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

All: Amen.



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