

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC VOICE

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY THE COUNCIL

1. Resolution - Standing with Refugees

1 Refugees may lose many things when they flee, but never their human rights. In the words
2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the
3 equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of
4 freedom, justice and peace in the world.” In our Christian understanding, each refugee or
5 migrant—just like every other human being—is a child of God, created in God’s image, with
6 equal dignity and worth.

7
8 In our all-too-violent world, an unprecedented number of people have been forced to flee—
9 some 60 million women, children, and men. 20 million of them are refugees, outside their
10 own country. 40 million of them are internally displaced, refugees within their own
11 countries, unable to return home in safety. The refugee situation attracted dramatic media
12 attention in 2015 when more than a million people fled to Europe. But that meant that
13 there were still 59 million refugees and internally displaced persons outside Europe, most
14 of them in protracted situations. On average, a refugee is now in exile for more than 17
15 years.

16
17 There are some signs of hope. Most of the internally displaced persons in northeastern
18 Nigeria, including those welcomed so generously into the homes of members of the
19 Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, have been able to return home. In Colombia, where
20 one out of every ten persons has been forced from their homes, an accord is in sight to end
21 the decades-long civil war and allow the internally displaced to return. In Germany,
22 Sweden, Hungary, Canada, and other countries, there have been heart-warming examples
23 of churches and everyday citizens welcoming the refugees and helping them to begin
24 integrating into their new communities. So often, they discover that refugees are not
25 burdens but gifts, soon bringing important contributions to their new societies.

26
27 Yet the situation remains dire. The High Commissioner for Refugees warns that the
28 refugee issue has never been as politicized as it is in today’s world. In many countries,
29 xenophobia and negative public opinion are rising to alarming levels. Some countries are
30 closing their borders. Too many refugees are living in fear in abysmal conditions.
31 Assistance for refugees is falling far short—halfway through 2016, the UNHCR’s budget is
32 only 32% funded. Desperate people continue to risk their lives at sea, with often heart-
33 rending consequences. And to make matters worse, some politicians are even beginning
34 to challenge the Refugee Convention itself, the hard-won global commitment that the
35 victims of persecution and war should be protected.

36
37 Meeting again on World Refugee Day, June 20, the Council of the Lutheran World
38 Federation:

- 39
40 • Reaffirms the Lutheran World Federation’s profound concern for the refugees and
41 other forced migrants in our world and, in response, our deeply-rooted commitment to
42 live out Jesus’ call to “welcome the stranger.”

- 43 • Gives thanks to God for the Lutheran churches and members, as well as those of other
44 churches and faiths, who are reaching out a loving hand of welcome and help to
45 refugees and migrants in need.
- 46 • Gives thanks to God for the staff and supporters of LWF World Service, who make it
47 possible for the LWF today to provide assistance for some 2.3 million refugees and
48 other forcibly displaced persons across the world.
- 49 • Urges the nations of the world to use the 19 September 2016 United Nations Summit
50 on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants to reaffirm that refugees
51 are a matter of international concern, to recommit to protecting the rights of all
52 refugees and migrants, to uphold the United Nations Refugee Convention and all
53 instruments of international humanitarian law, and to more generously support the
54 welcome and care for people in need.
- 55 • Urges that Lutherans around the world join the UN High Commissioner for Refugees'
56 #WithRefugees Campaign by signing the petition at www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/petition
57 and calling upon world leaders to show solidarity and find solutions for people
58 displaced by war or persecution.

2. Public Statement – Women in Ordained Ministry: Our Shared Goal

59 Called by the liberating grace of God in Christ to speak truth out of love for one another,
60 the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), meeting in Lutherstadt Wittenberg,
61 Germany, June 15-21, 2016, is deeply saddened and concerned by the June 3 decision of
62 the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia (ELCL).

63
64 The ELCL, which started women's ordination in 1975, has by constitutional change now
65 restricted the ordained ministry to men and thus has excluded women from full participation
66 in the life of the church. We see this action by the ELCL as a step backward on the
67 common path the LWF has followed for the past 32 years.

68
69 Recalling five consecutive LWF Assemblies - from the 7th Assembly in Budapest in 1984 to
70 the 11th Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010 – the communion has urged its member churches to
71 prayerfully discern and affirm women's theological training, their leadership, their ministry,
72 and their full inclusion in the church, both lay and ordained:

73
74 "We call on member churches to set appropriate legislation and regulatory policies that
75 enable and ensure women in leadership positions - ordained and lay - and the
76 opportunities to pursue theological education." (LWF Assembly, Stuttgart, 2010)

77
78 While acknowledging that ordination is not a right, but rather a call, we also acknowledge
79 that the restriction and exclusion of women's gifts in and for the church serves to devalue
80 all women and increases their discrimination in both church and society.

81
82 While also acknowledging that not all member churches are at the same point on the
83 journey towards women in ordained ministry - that some member churches are still moving
84 toward full inclusion and participation of women - we are convinced that the scriptural
85 witness, in its breadth and scope, honors the equality of all created in God's image and
86 recognizes the gifts of all in the same Spirit to those baptized into the new creation.

87

88 Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and economic differences: “There is no longer Jew
89 nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians
90 3:28). One crucial aspect of this practical expression of the scriptural witness is the full
91 unity of women and men in Christ. In the church the equality of women and men is
92 expressed and lived out as a sign of God’s reign in this world. Therefore, no discrimination
93 of women and men is conceivable in the life of the church. Any kind of discrimination in the
94 way women participate in the ministry of the church (including ordination) harms the
95 fulfilment of the mission of the church in the world, as it is contrary to the nature of God’s
96 reign.

97
98 We share in the pain and sadness of our sisters and brothers in the ELCL caused by the
99 restriction of ordained ministry to men only. We believe the whole church, and our whole
100 communion, suffers when the gifts of women’s ministry are not valued and given full
101 expression.

102
103 While we grieve the wound of division within the LWF communion and within the ELCL, we
104 also commit ourselves to accompany our member church through continued bilateral
105 dialogue and relationship, even when it is difficult and disagreement is present. To be in
106 dialogue is a genuine expression of love for one another. We continue to walk in solidarity
107 with our sisters and brothers of the ELCL, to listen to the voices of the women already
108 ordained in the ELCL, and to the Association of Women Theologians of Latvia.

109
110 We recall the resolution at our last Assembly in Stuttgart for our member churches to
111 commit “...to genuine, practical, and effective implementation of LWF policies and
112 decisions regarding the full participation of women in the life of the church – and the LWF
113 communion – as well as in society.”

114
115 Therefore, we urge the ELCL to reconsider their decision so that, together, we may walk
116 again the path toward our shared goal of women in ordained ministry.

117
118 As we move toward our commemorations of 500 years of the church being reformed for the
119 sake of the gospel of Christ, we anticipate and would welcome the on-going commitment
120 and re-affirmation of the LWF’s long-standing position on women in ordained ministry at the
121 12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, 2017.

3. Resolution: Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

122 On September 25, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 17 “Sustainable
123 Development Goals” (UN Resolution A/RES70/1).



124 The SDGs are a detailed aspiration of a life where most people in the world will realize a
125 life abundant. We read in Christian Scriptures where God will “wipe every tear from their
126 eyes”, where there “will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of
127 things has passed” (Revelation 21:4) so “all may have life and have it abundantly” (John
128 10:10).

129 As a faith-based organization within civil society, the LWF brings added value to the
130 implementation and realization of these goals. For example:

- 131 o As a communion of churches, the LWF works as a connector, bringing local voices to
132 global UN forums in Geneva and New York. For example, churches and country
133 programs in Colombia, Mozambique and Myanmar offered parallel reports to their
134 respective Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanisms.
- 135 o In 2015, the landmark Paris Climate Agreement was reached. Since 2011, the LWF
136 has engaged the Conference of Parties through collaboration with other faith-based
137 groups of goodwill, with youth participation and leadership as a key motivating factor.
- 138 o The LWF values working in inter-faith partnership. In a world where religion is too often
139 seen as a force for division, we see the power of inter-faith work in peace-building and
140 development. In 2014, the LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide entered into a
141 Memorandum of Understanding on humanitarian and refugee matters and issues of
142 faith and culture related to gender justice. They continue to collaborate on “Welcoming
143 the Stranger” with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

144 The LWF affirms the new participatory process used to develop the SDGs, which included
145 regional meetings and consultations with civil society and governments alike. The LWF
146 also affirms the universal applicability of the SDGs to all member states, not only poor
147 countries.

148 The LWF Council, meeting 15-21 June 2016 in Wittenberg, Germany, calls on member
149 churches to:

- 150 • Commit to awareness raising on the SDGs throughout the member churches and their
151 communities, and
- 152 • Encourage and advocate for relevant stakeholders (i.e., nation states and private
153 partners) to mobilize resources toward full funding of the SDGs, and
- 154 • Encourage and empower member churches to be practically involved in SDGs
155 implementation strategies and processes in their own countries, and
- 156 • Continue active capacity building for participation in the monitoring of the
157 implementation and reporting mechanisms of the SDGs, including Voluntary National
158 Reviews, and
- 159 • Encourage the fostering of stakeholder partnerships, especially with UN agencies,
160 governments and civil society, in collaboration and support of the above activities.

4. Resolution - Supporting Arab Christians in the Middle East

161 The LWF Council supports the on-going efforts by the Fellowship of Middle East Council of
162 Churches (FMECC) to sustain the Christian presence in the Middle East as a witness for
163 the gospel of love and the sake of moderation. Being aware that these churches, including
164 our member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, are
165 witnessing in very difficult circumstances, we pledge our support, financial and otherwise,
166 as they develop an indigenous theology of mission and vision in the Middle East and
167 continue their witness through educational and social programs. We also support them for
168 the role they play in building a modern civil society that respects internationally-recognized
169 human rights, including freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and promotes gender
170 justice.

171 We support:

- 172 1) religious speech that respects “the other” and recognizes them as they wish to be
173 understood;
- 174 2) changes in educational curricula that call on everyone to respect different religious
175 traditions;
- 176 3) the promotion of an understanding that the Christian presence in the Middle East is
177 integral to those societies and that they are bridge-builders;
- 178 4) the promotion of an understanding that regional conflicts are at their roots not primarily
179 religious but political, historical and economic, among others.

180 The LWF Council calls also on the nation states to guarantee equal citizenship -- with
181 equal rights and responsibilities -- grounded in law that respects all ethnicities and religions
182 and embraces diversity. It also reiterates its support for the building of Christian-Muslim-
183 Jewish relations that promote mutual understanding and respect and actively overcome
184 any kind of extremism.

5. Resolution - Israel-Palestine

185 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains, regrettably, one of the world’s most intractable
186 political conflicts and the central problem of the Middle East. After nearly 50 years of
187 Israeli occupation of Palestinian land (beyond the 1967 de facto borders), the LWF Council,

188 meeting in Wittenberg, Germany, 15-21 June 2016, continues -- with many people of good
189 will -- to seek out signs of "hope in a hopeless situation".

190 We commend the recent decision of the European Union to label products from the illegal
191 Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories to create awareness that safeguards the
192 commitment to a two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders.

193 Despite a number of efforts, the well-known core issues that would be part of a final status
194 agreement are still unresolved – borders, security, settlements, movement and access,
195 refugees, mutual recognition and the status of Jerusalem.

196 The Council calls on our member churches to encourage their governments to commend
197 the recent initiative of the Government of France to hold an international conference by the
198 end of 2016 to discuss a plan, based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as
199 well as on the Arab Peace Initiative (API). The API commits 57 Islamic and Arab countries
200 to accept normalized diplomatic relations with the State of Israel if it allows for a Palestinian
201 state along the 1967 borders. The Council asks the churches to invest in peace in this and
202 other ways.

203 The Council calls on the international community, for the sake of the whole world as well as
204 those parties to the conflict, to redouble their efforts to reach a final status solution based
205 on peace with justice.

6. Open letter - To Member Churches and related partners in Latin America and the Caribbean on Threats to Democracy

206 The LWF Council expresses its deep concern for the difficult situations that some Latin
207 American countries are going through in their democratic processes, particularly in Brazil
208 and Venezuela. This concern has been shared through communications amongst the LWF
209 member churches in the region, communications that speak of the concern for the
210 uncertainty and vulnerability of the democratic and legal processes of the countries in the
211 region.

212 We believe that as a communion it is necessary to express our deep concern, not only for
213 Brazil and Venezuela, but also for all the countries that wish to uphold democracy.

214 - In Brazil, mobilizations and demonstrations have shown disapproval of the current
215 situation, which is for many men and women a coup d'état justified through an investigation
216 for "fiscal responsibility crimes" allegedly carried out by the democratically elected first
217 woman president of Brazil.

218 - In Venezuela, the situation has become difficult and unbearable due to both internal and
219 external pressures. The lack of food, electricity and medicines affect mainly those most in
220 need. There is uncertainty and lack of trust in the proper application of the constitutional
221 tools that allow the voice of the people to be heard.

222 Bearing in mind the dramatic situation suffered by Latin American countries in the 1970s
223 and 1980s, during which constitutional laws were violated and coups d'état perpetrated, we
224 call upon you to be attentive (Mark 13:33) and to call upon your governments to ensure
225 respect for democratic processes and the rule of law.

- 226 In the name of the communion of the Lutheran World Federation we urge the churches of
227 Latin America and the Caribbean to never stop defending peace and justice, in particular
228 by:
- 229 • Continuing to proclaim the love and mercy of God, especially calling for respect among
230 persons who think differently in a context of polarization;
 - 231 • Inviting the churches of the region to renew their engagement with love, justice and
232 peace, reconciliation and the vision of building a better world; and
 - 233 • Promoting fundamental respect for human rights in order to foster the democratic
234 process.
- 235 You will be in our prayers as you witness for justice, peace and reconciliation. We trust our
236 Lord will give you the strength and hope for a renewed and better future for all.

7. Pastoral statement concerning the Mass Shooting Incident in Orlando, Florida, USA

- 237 “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God, he created them.” (Genesis
238 1:27, NRSV).
- 239 All too often, in this broken world, we fail to see the image of God in the other. While the
240 LWF Council met in Lutherstadt Wittenberg 15-21 June 2016, we were reminded again of
241 the persistence of sin, in situations named and unnamed, such as the shooting at the Pulse
242 nightclub in Orlando, Florida, USA.
- 243 In the early morning hours of June 12, 2016 a man, later identified as a Muslim American,
244 entered a club known as a place of gathering for the LGBT community in Orlando, killing 49
245 people and wounding more than 50 others.
- 246 So many issues come together in this one horrific incident – hate crime, gun violence, and
247 marginalization of people because of sexual orientation or religious identification. Sadly,
248 the tragedy is compounded by uncivil discourse that manipulates fear and divides people.
- 249 We live in an increasingly divided and polarized world. Too often we separate ourselves
250 into like-minded groups and sort others out. It is a short distance from division to
251 demonization. On June 12th we witnessed the tragic consequences of this rift in the human
252 family.
- 253 There is another way. God’s deep and gracious love, demonstrated by the death and
254 resurrection of Christ, has reconciled the world to God’s self. God invites us into this
255 reconciling work. It is the love that binds us all together. All of humanity is connected by
256 this love. In God’s love there is no “other”, only children created in the image of God.
- 257 As members of the Lutheran World Federation we must examine ourselves, individually
258 and as a communion, to acknowledge the ways we have divided and been divided. We
259 must stand with people who have been “othered”. We must speak justice, forgiveness,
260 peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. “So if anyone is in
261 Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has
262 become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has
263 given us the ministry of reconciliation,” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).
- 264

265 We stand against acts of retaliation against the Muslim community now and in days to
266 come. And we must continue to communicate God's love even to those who are compelled
267 by hate and fear.

268 We continue to pray for the families of the slain and of the shooter, for the wounded, for the
269 LGBT community, and for the Muslim community that faces the threat of retaliation. And we
270 pray that the Prince of Peace will bring us all to the day when we stop the bloodshed.

**8. Public Statement - The Church in the Public Space – A Statement of The Lutheran
World Federation**

271 The Committee recommends that the Council adopt Exhibit 9.3.1 (Revised).

II. ISSUES DISCUSSED BY THE COMMITTEE - for information to the Council

272 There were no other issues discussed by the Committee to be referred to the Council.