REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC VOICE

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY THE COUNCIL

1. Resolution - Standing with Refugees

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

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

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

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

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

• Reaffirms the Lutheran World Federation’s profound concern for the refugees and other forced migrants in our world and, in response, our deeply-rooted commitment to live out Jesus’ call to “welcome the stranger.”
• Gives thanks to God for the Lutheran churches and members, as well as those of other churches and faiths, who are reaching out a loving hand of welcome and help to refugees and migrants in need.

• Gives thanks to God for the staff and supporters of LWF World Service, who make it possible for the LWF today to provide assistance for some 2.3 million refugees and other forcibly displaced persons across the world.

• Urges the nations of the world to use the 19 September 2016 United Nations Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants to reaffirm that refugees are a matter of international concern, to recommit to protecting the rights of all refugees and migrants, to uphold the United Nations Refugee Convention and all instruments of international humanitarian law, and to more generously support the welcome and care for people in need.

• Urges that Lutherans around the world join the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ #WithRefugees Campaign by signing the petition at www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/petition and calling upon world leaders to show solidarity and find solutions for people displaced by war or persecution.

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

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

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

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

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

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

While also acknowledging that not all member churches are at the same point on the journey towards women in ordained ministry - that some member churches are still moving toward full inclusion and participation of women - we are convinced that the scriptural witness, in its breadth and scope, honors the equality of all created in God’s image and recognizes the gifts of all in the same Spirit to those baptized into the new creation.
Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and economic differences: “There is no longer Jew
nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians
3:28). One crucial aspect of this practical expression of the scriptural witness is the full
unity of women and men in Christ. In the church the equality of women and men is
expressed and lived out as a sign of God’s reign in this world. Therefore, no discrimination
of women and men is conceivable in the life of the church. Any kind of discrimination in the
way women participate in the ministry of the church (including ordination) harms the
fulfilment of the mission of the church in the world, as it is contrary to the nature of God’s
reign.

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

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

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

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

As we move toward our commemorations of 500 years of the church being reformed for the
sake of the gospel of Christ, we anticipate and would welcome the on-going commitment
and re-affirmation of the LWF’s long-standing position on women in ordained ministry at the
12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, 2017.
3. Resolution: Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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

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

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

- As a communion of churches, the LWF works as a connector, bringing local voices to global UN forums in Geneva and New York. For example, churches and country programs in Colombia, Mozambique and Myanmar offered parallel reports to their respective Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanisms.

- In 2015, the landmark Paris Climate Agreement was reached. Since 2011, the LWF has engaged the Conference of Parties through collaboration with other faith-based groups of goodwill, with youth participation and leadership as a key motivating factor.

- The LWF values working in inter-faith partnership. In a world where religion is too often seen as a force for division, we see the power of inter-faith work in peace-building and development. In 2014, the LWF and Islamic Relief Worldwide entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on humanitarian and refugee matters and issues of faith and culture related to gender justice. They continue to collaborate on “Welcoming the Stranger” with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

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

The LWF Council, meeting 15-21 June 2016 in Wittenberg, Germany, calls on member churches to:
• Commit to awareness raising on the SDGs throughout the member churches and their communities, and
• Encourage and advocate for relevant stakeholders (i.e., nation states and private partners) to mobilize resources toward full funding of the SDGs, and
• Encourage and empower member churches to be practically involved in SDGs implementation strategies and processes in their own countries, and
• Continue active capacity building for participation in the monitoring of the implementation and reporting mechanisms of the SDGs, including Voluntary National Reviews, and
• Encourage the fostering of stakeholder partnerships, especially with UN agencies, governments and civil society, in collaboration and support of the above activities.

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

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

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

5. Resolution - Israel-Palestine
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains, regrettably, one of the world’s most intractable political conflicts and the central problem of the Middle East. After nearly 50 years of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land (beyond the 1967 de facto borders), the LWF Council,
meeting in Wittenberg, Germany, 15-21 June 2016, continues -- with many people of good will -- to seek out signs of “hope in a hopeless situation”.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bearing in mind the dramatic situation suffered by Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s, during which constitutional laws were violated and coups d’état perpetrated, we call upon you to be attentive (Mark 13:33) and to call upon your governments to ensure respect for democratic processes and the rule of law.
In the name of the communion of the Lutheran World Federation we urge the churches of Latin America and the Caribbean to never stop defending peace and justice, in particular by:

- Continuing to proclaim the love and mercy of God, especially calling for respect among persons who think differently in a context of polarization;
- Inviting the churches of the region to renew their engagement with love, justice and peace, reconciliation and the vision of building a better world; and
- Promoting fundamental respect for human rights in order to foster the democratic process.

You will be in our prayers as you witness for justice, peace and reconciliation. We trust our 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

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God, he created them.” (Genesis 1:27, NRSV).

All too often, in this broken world, we fail to see the image of God in the other. While the LWF Council met in Lutherstadt Wittenberg 15-21 June 2016, we were reminded again of the persistence of sin, in situations named and unnamed, such as the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, USA.

In the early morning hours of June 12, 2016 a man, later identified as a Muslim American, entered a club known as a place of gathering for the LGBT community in Orlando, killing 49 people and wounding more than 50 others.

So many issues come together in this one horrific incident – hate crime, gun violence, and marginalization of people because of sexual orientation or religious identification. Sadly, the tragedy is compounded by uncivil discourse that manipulates fear and divides people.

We live in an increasingly divided and polarized world. Too often we separate ourselves into like-minded groups and sort others out. It is a short distance from division to demonization. On June 12th we witnessed the tragic consequences of this rift in the human family.

There is another way. God’s deep and gracious love, demonstrated by the death and resurrection of Christ, has reconciled the world to God’s self. God invites us into this reconciling work. It is the love that binds us all together. All of humanity is connected by this love. In God’s love there is no “other”, only children created in the image of God.

As members of the Lutheran World Federation we must examine ourselves, individually and as a communion, to acknowledge the ways we have divided and been divided. We must stand with people who have been “othered”. We must speak justice, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation into the cacophony of hatred and division. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).
We stand against acts of retaliation against the Muslim community now and in days to come. And we must continue to communicate God’s love even to those who are compelled by hate and fear.

We continue to pray for the families of the slain and of the shooter, for the wounded, for the LGBT community, and for the Muslim community that faces the threat of retaliation. And we 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

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

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

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