

Report of the General Secretary

Rev. Dr Martin Junge

Introductory remarks

Gratitude to our hosts

- (1) We thank the German National Committee (GNC) and the local church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Middle Germany, for receiving and hosting us with so much kindness here in Wittenberg. The generous offer to invite us to a pilgrimage connects us to historic places of the Reformation, and invites us to explore the meaning and significance of the three “not-for-sale” sub themes of our reformation anniversary. The leadership of ecumenical guests in this process is a solid expression of our pledge to approach the reformation anniversary with ecumenical accountability. We receive with thanksgiving all that the GNC and the local church has done, and will be doing, to welcome us and help us to feel at home.

They know us here in Wittenberg

- (2) The LWF is well known in Wittenberg. Through the LWF Centre that was established by the GNC some years ago, the LWF has developed a strong profile in this historic city: the centre has helped connect with EKD processes and with local authorities. The “Luthergarten”, consisting of trees planted by churches from all over the world; the two annual international seminaries at which representatives from LWF member churches study theological topics and deepen relationships among themselves; and the offer to facilitate the LWF’s presence at the World Exhibition to be launched next year are just some of the examples of the profile of the LWF in Wittenberg.

The future breaking into the present times of the communion

- (3) In all of this, the LWF has become known because of the global constituency it brings together, the themes and issues it cares for, and the ethos and values it stands for. In Wittenberg, where fewer than 20% of people identify themselves as Christian, the LWF has become a witness of the beauty and power of faith in the Triune God.
- (4) I was very encouraged to hear recently that among the staff of the conference center of the city, in which this Council meets, the meeting of the Global Young Reformers Network in August last year is remembered as the most outstanding meeting they have witnessed. “The people that came together, the issues they discussed, the commitment and passion in their interaction, their prayer and singing, their gentleness and helpfulness, to see all these young people living their faith – it was all unique.”
- (5) This powerful statement reminds us that youth *already* represents the LWF in full. By investing in youth, we are not planting for a future still to come. We are seeing the future breaking into this communion.

Reformation is a global citizen; the LWF is a polycentric communion

- (6) There is indeed a beauty in the body language that the communion will be expressing while moving from one place to the other in the months to come.
- Here we have come to Wittenberg, birthplace of the Reformation. We needed to be here in order to connect to these meaningful sites and extensive history.
 - From here we will be moving to Lund in October this year – hence, exactly as the Reformation did in its early decades: northward (although it also moved to East and West).
 - And from there we will move to Windhoek, Namibia, next May–tracing the routes into which the power of God’s liberating grace took churches, mission agencies and believers in the centuries that followed: southwards, among others.
 - And then, on the very day of the anniversary on October 31, 2017, the LWF member churches in their respective places will underline in powerful ways that indeed, the Reformation is today a global citizen, and the communion is polycentric in its nature.
- (7) You will remember that the Task Force that helped us plan for the Reformation anniversary considered that polycentric approach so that the LWF would not interfere with local activities and programs. This will be particularly important for this historic place in Wittenberg, where our member churches in Germany, with the EKD, are investing so much.

Since we last met**Remembering Bishop emeritus Niels Henrik Arendt**

- (8) With all the joy and excitement that this represents, we will be acutely aware of a painful absence from within our midst when we meet in Wittenberg. Bishop emeritus Niels Henrik Arendt passed away in late August 2015. We remember with gratitude his gifts and contributions, his “smiling wisdom” with which he presented his views, and his amazing commitment to the LWF.
- (9) Niels Henrik didn’t live to see the result of one of his big personal projects as LWF Council member: to have his church pay full membership fee to the LWF. He argued, lobbied, explained and brought leaders on board. And, with others, he succeeded. A few weeks after his demise, we received the news that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark managed to secure the budget that would allow the church to come up with its fair share of membership contributions to the LWF.
- (10) While coping with the painful side of this belated achievement, we are strengthened in that basic conviction of faith: without always knowing about the harvest, we know that our calling is to plant (Mt 13:1-9). We give thanks to God for the life of Niels Henrik Arendt and for his ceaseless planting in the Committee for Mission and Development, the Meeting of Officers and this Council.
- (11) We are grateful to Deacon Magnea Sverisdottir for accepting the responsibility of chairing the Committee for Mission and Development, and for the ways she has done so ad-interim. The Council is asked to confirm her appointment (EXHIBIT 7.1).

Membership statistics: Largest member churches of the LWF now in Global South

- (12) As we do every second year, the LWF has compiled the membership statistics of LWF member churches around the world. Globally, the LWF churches now bring together more than 73 million members. In 2013 that number was 71 million. The detailed picture shows a growth of membership in the global South and a decrease in the global North, although there are exceptions. For the first time, the largest member churches in the LWF are in the global South, namely Ethiopia and Tanzania.
- (13) Both the growth and the decrease of membership come with their own challenges and tasks. The LWF is repositioning itself as a space for joint reflection and learning, for mutual support and encouragement in mission. For that purpose a global mission consultation will be held in November 2016 (see below, Reformation anniversary).

Follow up to Council actions

- (14) From among the actions taken by the LWF Council in 2015, I want to highlight the following:

Self-understanding of the LWF Communion

- (15) In the course of the year, we came to understand that the timeline offered to member churches to respond to the document was too tight, and that many member churches wanted to contribute and have their opinions included. Based on this, we have communicated a revised process and timeline. This revised timeline allows us to include the Pre-Assemblies in the process. The plan is to include the regional feedback to the Assembly Study Book. It will feature in a chapter that will offer substance on the three callings of LWF member churches: the call to mission, the call into communion, and the call into the public space.

Decisions of the Swiss National Bank and their impact on the LWF Communion Office

- (16) Without wanting to preempt what the Chairperson of the LWF Finance Committee will report in view of the financial situation of the LWF, I want to register the LWF's gratitude for the great support from related organizations and churches in managing the critical and unexpected scenario resulting from the SNB's decision to remove the cap on the Swiss Franc. Equally, my appreciation goes to LWF staff who were willing to step in and share the burden resulting from the losses due to this dramatically deteriorated exchange rate. This convergence of their positive attitude and commitment helped us reach the end of the year in financial health and strength.
- (17) While the immediate and unexpected situation was under control, the overarching and underlying questions regarding the sustainability of the LWF remain and need to be addressed. I refer to this aspect later in my report.

Augusta Victoria Hospital: a strong institution in a volatile context

- (18) The Augusta Victoria Hospital continues to offer specialized medical services to the Palestinian population and to develop projects and programs that further consolidate both its presence and service. During the last year, reserves have grown further, thereby creating a better situation to deal with any delay in the payment of receivables. The LWF Board of Trustees has taken actions on a series of measures to mitigate and control risks for the LWF.

Survey completed: participation of women in the church

- (19) On your desks you will find the results of the “Survey on the Participation of Women in the Ordained Ministry and Leadership in the LWF Member Churches”. I want to thank the more than 80 churches that took the time to respond to the questionnaire. The survey was to follow up on the commitments of the LWF regarding women’s participation, assess the way in which the Gender Justice Policy is developing traction in member churches, and better understand the issues and discussions that will be required in the future as the communion continues striving to fully include women in the life of the church, including the ordained ministry.

Women’s ordination: a journey of the communion in mutuality and solidarity

- (20) By the time the Council meets, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia (ELCL) will have decided on a motion to amend the church constitution, restricting participation in the ordained ministry to men alone.
- (21) An LWF delegation led by our Central Eastern European Vice-President, Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny, visited the ELCL. During the visit, the LWF’s commitment to women’s participation in ordained ministry resulting from decisions of five consecutive Assemblies was stated. It was also reiterated that while the full participation of women in the ordained ministry is stated as a goal, member churches will bring up mutual understanding and solidarity in view of different timings and processes that each would need to observe, either to wait for the other, or to take up the issue, yet never excluding each other. In addition to expressing pain and sadness over the possible departure of the ELCL from this shared commitment, the implications and risks for bilateral and multilateral relations were addressed.

LWF at work – highlights and key issues**Annual reports and COOP**

- (22) The LWF Annual Report 2015, which you will find on your tables, gives an overview of the many developments, processes, results and achievements of the work undertaken on behalf of and with LWF member churches around the globe. The departmental Annual Reports go deeper and give more detail. The “Report on the Implementation of the LWF Communion Office Operational Plan 2015” (EXHIBIT 9.1) gives deeper insight into the program work of the last year.
- (23) I believe these reports give concise and sharp overview of the work during the year 2015 and how the LWF is progressing, in view of the objectives and indicators it has set for the period under review.

The times in which we live: a lot of confusion, fear and violence

- (24) I sense we are living in a world that is particularly confused, with people increasingly afraid of their future and of their neighbors. Possibly as a result of this fear, we find we are living in a world with frightening levels of violence in households, among communities and between nations. The three keywords of our vision statement regarding the commitments we want to uphold while living together as a communion in Christ – peace, justice and reconciliation – have never been more pertinent than today. We see mistrust, fragmentation, radicalization and breakdown of relationships. Cooperation on the basis of a sense of solidarity can no longer be taken for granted. One can see this among communities

that used to live and work together, nations, regional political structures, such as the European Union, and even globally, in the context of the United Nations.

- (25) In extreme situations like this, it is easy for churches to get caught up in these trends - replicating, amplifying and serving those negative manifestations.
- (26) During this last year I wrote several letters of support to member churches around the world, which either witnessed violence in their midst, or were targeted by it. It has given me great encouragement to realize the steadfastness of these churches, which did not allow these experiences to derail them from their faith in Christ, and from faith's inherent love of peace, justice and reconciliation. Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, Indonesia, Bangladesh, the USA, France, the Holy Land, Honduras. I have deep respect for each of the churches in these countries and for many other churches elsewhere for their resilience and prophetic courage to hold fast to the vision of God's future. They have given amazing witness to the power of faith in their own context, but also to the entire communion.

Refugees: gratitude for the witness of LWF member churches

- (27) By the time of the Council meeting last year, the Council raised its concern about the unprecedented number of people on the move, seeking refuge from either conflict or violence, or from unbearable inequalities. The Council drew attention to the diminished commitment of the international community to respond to this challenge. The situation developed dramatically in Europe during the summer of 2015. It was not so much the numbers of people seeking refuge (LWF knows of countries shouldering much larger numbers, for instance, Kenya), but the lack of political will to adequately respond, which resulted in the death of many in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as despair of large groups of stranded refugees. Much of this could have been prevented.
- (28) LWF member churches in Europe offered a powerful witness in this time of trial. Many of them stood firmly and unequivocally on the side of those needing protection and support. We heard inspiring stories from many places: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, France, Poland, Finland, Norway. But we also received stories from elsewhere: Brazil, Canada, South Africa, the USA, Argentina... Stories of service and powerful advocacy. Stories of steadfastness in view of the Lord's call to welcome the stranger.
- (29) Churches have a pivotal role to serve refugees, but also in providing a moral compass to the political and societal debate that has so easily gone astray lately. What is at stake today is the life of human beings. Refugees may lose many things as they flee, but never their human rights. What is at stake today is the ongoing validity of instruments that hitherto helped the community of States to accountably and jointly respond to meet the rights of refugees, that is, the Geneva Refugee Convention. There is a duty to protect. What is at stake today is the set of values on which the human family intends to base its shared life on this one place we have – planet Earth.

Refugees: the growing response of the LWF

- (30) As member churches have responded on the ground, the LWF has expanded globally its service to the unprecedented 2.3 million refugees and other forcibly displaced persons directly touched by the operations of LWF World Service.

- (31) This growth should make us, first of all, sad. It tells the story of violence unfolding globally, displacing people from their homelands. It says something about inequality reaching levels that make millions lose hope for their lives and their future in their own countries.
- (32) Yet, this growth also gives us a sense of gratitude and accomplishment. Because the call that was there in 1947 when the LWF was founded, when there were 50 million refugees in the world, remains strong today – unbroken and fully owned – when the number of refugees in the world is estimated to be over 60 million. God’s calling has not changed, and neither has the responsiveness of the LWF.
- (33) Naturally, the growth in service to people turning to the LWF for support is reflected in the growth in financial resources that the communion has invested for this purpose. It is therefore a positive growth. It reveals in unequivocal ways who we are as a communion of churches. It is growth that is not at the expense of the other two strategic priorities, nor does it divert resources and attention from them. Our investments in the other priority areas have grown too, and the financial decline to sustain LWF’s work on communion building and accompaniment in mission was halted in 2015.
- (34) My predecessor, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko coined the sentence: “To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical.” That sentence stands. In these convoluted times with so much suffering let me add a further identity marker: “To be Lutheran is to be diaconal.”

Climate justice: reinforced engagement in the LWF

- (35) The leadership of LWF Youth has been commendable as it has slowly and steadily taken the communion to deeper theological and practical engagement on issues around climate justice. The Council’s statement in 2015 with the decision not to invest in fossil fuels was a milestone, which, by the way, drove the LWF’s name deep into social and traditional media.
- (36) The LWF had a solid presence at the Conference of Parties 21 (COP 21) meeting in December 2015 in Paris. I have vivid memories of very active ecumenical cooperation, a model for future cooperation with ACT and the WCC, whereby we built on each other’s strength as we advocated for a fair agreement. I remember the “public stunt” at Fast for the Climate, an interreligious undertaking that attracted strong public attention and helped transport some of the key demands promoted by the ecumenical movement. I remember our Guyanese LWF delegation member, Ms Tamesha Watson, talking to the Chief Ambassador of the G77+China group, and the Ambassador just wanting to hear more and more from her in view of what climate change means in Guyana, a country that, on the coastal area, is below sea level, and why she wanted COP 21 to reach agreement. And she of all people could tell them!
- (37) Despite critique of some aspects of the Paris Agreement, I want to underline the importance of the fact that eventually a common ground was laid for joint action on issues of climate justice.

Climate justice: what comes after COP 21?

- (38) But now action needs to follow. Given the importance of climate change for this world and the dimension of inter-generational justice it entails, and in response to the sustained commitment of LWF and its member churches throughout the years on this issue, the Strategic Priority Areas for the year 2017 – 2018 include Climate Justice as a cross-cutting issue.

- (39) I believe the LWF and its member churches, as well as the LWF globally, have a lot to offer: in view of the conversion of hearts and minds, in view of individuals, congregations and churches and communities becoming greener, in view of diaconal projects promoting ecological sustainability, or in view of policy making at local, national and global level.

Faith Based Organizations: a welcomed agent in the public space

- (40) A fundamental shift has taken place in recent years, one which we in the LWF Communion Office have noticed clearly. It relates to the expectation of so-called Faith Based Organizations to join multi-stakeholder efforts to address challenges and issues in today's world.
- (41) This is new. When going to UN offices a few years ago, it was better for us in the LWF not to profile our faith based identity. Too little was known and understood about Faith Based Organizations and too great at times was the suspicion.
- (42) Times have changed and now the awareness is there that faith and Faith Based Organizations have a lot to contribute – for good or for bad – when it comes to some of the challenges of today's world, including violence and peace-building, reconciliation processes, climate change, eradication of poverty and gender justice. We as LWF have experienced this new interest and eagerness, for instance by the invitation to support UNHCR to organize its High Commissioner's Dialogue on "Faith and Protection" in 2012, which resulted in the widely used statement "Welcoming the Stranger", endorsed by this Council.

An opportunity to engage: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

- (43) This demand for churches to engage in the public space and to contribute to the discourse and practice has been particularly strong regarding the processes around the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with its 17 sustainable development goals. It is a demanding and comprehensive agenda.
- (44) For the LWF and its member churches, not much new is needed in order to contribute towards the achievement of some of these goals. Out of faith, member churches and the LWF have historically been there, seeking to end poverty and hunger, providing health services and access to education, standing with the vulnerable. Out of faith convictions we combat climate change, which is one of the sustainable development goals, as is the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Particularly on the goal of gender equality, the LWF is uniquely well positioned, since there is no other Christian World Communion that has a Gender Justice Policy, now translated into 19 languages, and adapted and implemented contextually.
- (45) In the development of our programs for the coming years we are intentionally seeking partnership to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and to contribute to the achievement of its goals. Several of these goals fit very well with priority areas 2 and 3 of the LWF Strategy, allowing us to align – where applicable – the SDGs to what we have identified as strategic priorities for the LWF.
- (46) Next to the passion to serve as an expression of faith, I think such engagement is also important so that member churches claim their space locally in what they have always done, or may be doing in the future, while governments develop their own implementation plans. In times of shrinking space for civil

society, it is key that churches keep this space vital and open, and remain positioned as relevant and important agents within that space.

- (47) For that to happen, we will aim to support churches as they learn, understand and connect to the SDG processes, but also enhance their own capacity to develop partnership and mobilize resources that will help both member churches and the LWF to play an active role in the process of implementation of the SDG strategy.

On the Council's agenda

- (48) An overview to the Council's agenda was provided as part of the second mailing you received during the month of May. I want to bring the following documents and issues to your attention:

Study document on the Bible in the life of Lutheran churches

- (49) For the last four years intensive work has been undertaken to develop a study document on biblical hermeneutics. We are grateful to the internationally composed group that has come up with a document that reminds us of the key tenets of hermeneutics in the Lutheran theological tradition. EXHIBIT 9.2 presents the full document, while EXHIBIT 9.2.1 offers a summary, thereby responding to a request of the Council to help members process some of the more voluminous documents in better ways.

- (50) The study document is timely. It will offer strong support in our ongoing dialogues about the Bible we all read, the theological entry points we chose, the texts to which we give centrality, and the ways in which we understand them and why. It will support LWF member churches across contexts to better understand the differences they may find among themselves in view of diverging interpretation of biblical texts. At the same time, the study document will be an important tool for member churches to remind and affirm each other of the particular approaches Lutheran theology has developed in view of biblical hermeneutics.

Study document on the Church in the Public Space

- (51) The second study document offers the reflections of an international study group on the role of the church in the public space, and how to describe this role theologically, particularly in view of the Lutheran theology of the two realms. Helpful also are the concrete recommendations for the churches' public engagement. The study document can be found under EXHIBIT 9.3, the summary under EXHIBIT 9.3.1.

- (52) Given the great demands on churches and faith based organizations to offer their voice and perspective in times of turmoil and shifting paradigms (see above), I want to propose that the summary (EXHIBIT 9.3.1) is taken as the basis for a public statement of this council, which would underline both the calling and the claim of public engagement by LWF member churches and the LWF as a global communion of churches.

The Mid-term review of the LWF Strategy

- (53) I want to express gratitude to all who participated in the Mid-Term review of the LWF Strategy, which was undertaken by the consultant Ms Lyla Rogan (EXHIBIT 9.5).

- (54) While a mid-term review is normally a stand-alone process related to the strategy of an organization to identify key learning and to inform the development of a next strategy, the mid-term review of the LWF Strategy had its own specificity as it connected to the larger discussion about the sustainability of the LWF.
- (55) While some insights and findings of the report will have to be taken up in the context of the development of a new strategy, there are other aspects that can be taken up immediately, in view of ongoing planning processes.
- (56) Those issues taken up already relate to LWF program plans, and to governance processes and structure. The latter urgently needed follow up because of the possible constitutional implications of these changes. The changes would need to be acted upon at this Council meeting so that the possible amendments could still be presented to the Twelfth Assembly.

LWF Sustainability

- (57) In view of the many aspects related to the sustainability of the LWF and the complexity of issues, I have opted to offer a separate exhibit that allows more detailed information. (Towards a sustainable projection of the LWF and its Communion Office, EXHIBIT 9.6).

Building on our strengths: a new presentation of what the Communion Office does

- (58) The progress report gives more detail about the changes introduced in the way of conceptualizing programs and priorities, and in view of their content. Basically, the strategic alignment of priorities and their indicators to the LWF Strategy is increased. Strategic Priority Areas have been identified. They present, on a more general level, the priorities for our work, and how we want to measure progress through indicators.
- (59) This new presentation helps break up a compartmentalized approach to programs and activities, and makes best use of the uniqueness of the LWF, in which the communion office holds together the three strategic priorities with all the potential to leverage increased cooperation and cross-fertilization. It serves to better present the work of the LWF Communion Office and to possibly fundraise for it. It also assists the Council in exerting its governance role without getting involved in operational details, thereby focusing on the strategic alignment of the work, priorities and indicators of the communion office.
- (60) Still, it has to be noted that this development needs further work, in view of practical implications, such as planning, reporting and accountability systems, management lines, and budgeting processes. We won't forget either that the different structures in the LWF Communion Office carry their own mandates and specificities, which shouldn't be blurred or confused by such presentation.

Revised governance structure

- (61) EXHIBIT 9.6.2 gives more detail of the rationale and proposals for a reorganized structure and methodology of Council meetings. Here again, the valuable feedback received from Council members through their evaluation, as well as the insights from the mid-term review, helped give direction to the proposed changes.

- (62) These changes relate to the size of the Council, following the Thirteenth Assembly, and the structure of the Committees and their mandate. Changes are also proposed to the working procedures of the Council.
- (63) While some of the proposals may look challenging in view of ongoing practices and routines in the LWF, it is important for me to remind you that the context within which these proposals for change are being presented is sustainability. It should all be about thinking ahead of time in order to envision possible ways the LWF will continue in future. We want to anticipate some of the most likely scenarios that need to be addressed by taking a proactive attitude. It should be approached – to go back to the late Bishop em. Niels Henrik Arendt – as planting today so that both our present generation and future generations can harvest the fruits, allowing them to express their call into communion.
- (64) I look forward to discussing in more detail, so that the Council feels equipped to take action on these important proposals.

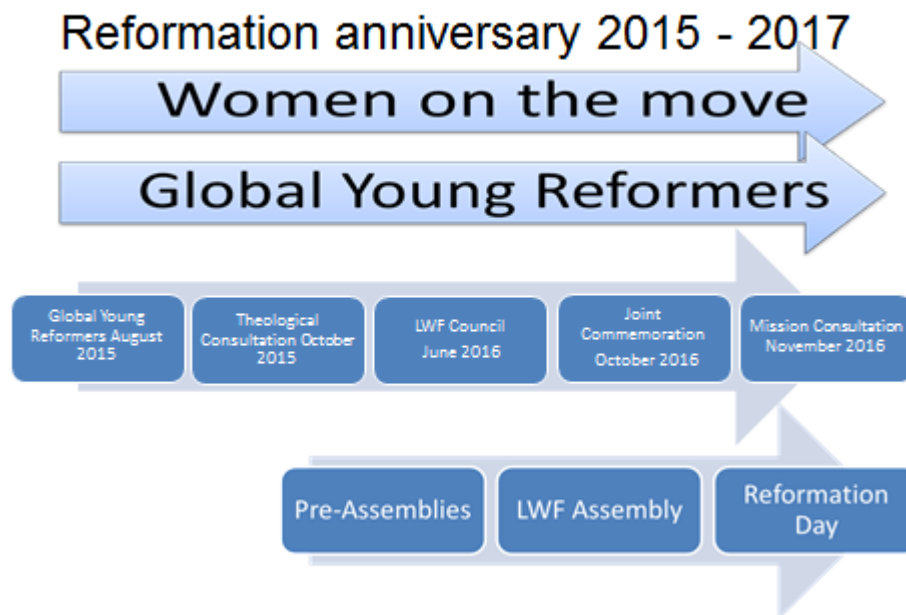
Assessment of the ideal location of the Communion Office

- (65) You will see from the EXHIBIT 9.6 that after further consultation, I am proposing a slight change to the unavoidable process to assess the ideal location for the LWF Communion Office. Instead of asking this Council to set up the process and initiate first steps, it seemed to be more prudent to have the present Council only recommend the process, and to let the new Council take the decisions about the process and to implement it. This would lead to greater ownership of the process. The new Council would feel better equipped and would be able to take the responsibility for bringing the process to a conclusion in 2019.
- (66) EXHIBIT 9.6.1, which still reflects earlier stages of thinking and was approved as presented by the Meeting of Officers, would have to be modified accordingly, if the Council follows the new thinking that has emerged.

Reformation anniversary

It's flourishing: projects, processes and events towards the 500th Reformation anniversary

- (67) We are seeing increasing dynamism in the activities that are developing among member churches as they approach the reformation anniversary. It has been good to see how the LWF's theme and sub-themes have become rooted in the life of several member churches. The "not-for-sale" themes have developed strong traction in many churches and the emphasis on salvation, human beings and creation connects well with issues that people are experiencing.
- (68) Looking at the LWF's contributions towards the Reformation anniversary, the following schematic gives a succinct overview of our processes and activities:



(69) Let me give some specific detail to the graphics:

- The Global Young Reformers met in August 2015 in Wittenberg. Currently, they are working in cross-regional teams on several projects that they have chosen to work on together. It is amazing to see the creativity of these projects. As they are maturing, we will increase communication through the LWI.
- The process “Women on the Move” is developing strong traction. It was launched in early 2015. “Herstories” – the stories of women shaping the ongoing reformation over five centuries is becoming strong.
- A theological consultation was held in October 2015 in Windhoek, exploring the implications of Lutheran theology as it interacts with economy and politics.
- A small project fund of EUR 100,000 was set up, which is supporting projects of member churches that relate to the reformation anniversary. We are seeking to offer that support during the year 2017.
- The four booklets reflecting on the theme and sub-themes of the Reformation anniversary have been completed and published. Translations have been provided and the material is being offered as preparation to the Twelfth Assembly.
- Preaching contest: Luther was 33 years when he became a public figure because of his theological discoveries. So will be the preacher at the closing worship of the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek. A process has been launched to invite people under 33 to participate in a contest to choose the sermon and its preacher to offer God’s living word for the journey into the next 500 years.
- A global mission consultation has been included in the program towards the reformation anniversary. This new initiative of great importance, to take place this November, reopens both a space and a process for LWF member churches to jointly reflect on opportunities, challenges and new concepts for mission. Changed contexts, exponential growth of churches or steady

decline of them, societies becoming religiously more heterogeneous or secular, postmodern features of “multiple belonging” and detachment of institutions – there are many issues to be taken up as churches continue hearing God’s call into mission. We will look at how to include the insights and directions resulting from this consultation in the process of the Twelfth Assembly.

500th anniversary of Reformation: ecumenical accountability

- (70) As early as last year I offered an overview of the processes in which the LWF is engaged globally to mark the 500th anniversary with a spirit of ecumenical accountability. Since then, we have remained blessed by the commitment of our dialogue partners to actually support us in that approach.

Joint Commemoration of the Reformation with the Catholic Church in Lund 2016

- (71) It is indeed a historic step that Catholics and Lutherans will soon be jointly commemorating the Reformation anniversary in the Cathedral of Lund on October 31. Co-hosted by the LWF President and the General Secretary, from the Lutheran side, and Pope Francis, from the Catholic side, the joint commemoration represents indeed a historic turning point in our relationships in view of the clear commitment to leave conflict behind and open up to the communion that God invites us for and holds prepared for us, while dealing with differences that remain.
- (72) The detailed planning for the day is still ongoing. As announced already, there will be a common prayer in the Cathedral in Lund. It is developed on the basis of the study report “From Conflict to Communion” and its liturgy. In the context of the prayer a statement between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation will be signed. Next to the LWF President and the General Secretary, we have included the Meeting of Officers in the common prayer in the Cathedral, so that the global nature of the LWF becomes visible, as well as our understanding of leadership that includes women and youth, lay and ordained. We have also included ecumenical relationships that Catholics and Lutherans have with other global Christian World Communions.
- (73) The limited space of the Cathedral is a challenge, particularly since that space needs to hold invitees from Catholics and Lutherans globally and locally. We have been able to secure additional space to enlarge the representation of the LWF, always following the principles explained above.
- (74) At the time the Council meets we will be able to give more detail regarding a public event that will follow the prayer in the Cathedral, which will allow much greater participation and put the focus on the joint witness to which we are already called to offer in a world suffering from conflict, lack of hope and poverty. Caritas Internationalis and LWF World Service will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding to deepen and enlarge their existing good relationship of cooperation as they serve people in need.
- (75) I am excited about these two steps within the one day of commemoration: prayer and public witness. In the analogy of Matthew 17, we are safeguarding the fact that our intended move from conflict to communion doesn’t remain with us as Catholics and Lutherans, but that it becomes a source of encouragement and hope in a world torn apart by conflict.

- (76) The Joint Commemoration will be live-streamed so that many more will be able to follow it and participate. It will also be communicated in social media. I want to express my hope that congregations in member churches all over the world will take this opportunity to host their own events using the liturgy of the Common Prayer. This could be done as a joint venture with Catholic neighbors. That would be a powerful expression of communion and a beautiful extension of the Joint Commemoration.
- (77) The LWF is immensely grateful to the Church of Sweden, which has accepted to co-host this commemoration locally with the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm. Church of Sweden has deployed staff to help in the planning and implementation, and has also set aside a budget to help cover local costs.
- (78) Let me also express gratitude to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ELCA, which was willing to support a fundraising campaign for this event among its constituency and networks. This confluence of goodwill and support, this desire to see the LWF succeeding in this historic event is a true blessing.

World Communion of Reformed Churches: process to join the JDDJ and to envision unity

- (79) The process of the World Communion of Reformed Churches regarding their possible signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) is ongoing. An internal consultation process has been concluded in this regard. We hope to be able to still manage to conclude the process prior to the WCRC's Assembly in June 2017 in Leipzig / Wittenberg.
- (80) Next to the signature of the JDDJ we are discussing the signature of a statement that would build on the outcomes of our last bilateral dialogue, and which would commit us to further, recognizable steps to express the common theological ground that has been secured through these dialogues.

Anglican Communion: Affirmation of the JDDJ, encouragement to join commemoration

- (81) In April we received the news that the Anglican Consultative Council, one of the instruments of the Anglican Communion, adopted the resolution to "welcome and affirm the substance" of the JDDJ. It furthermore called for Anglicans to commemorate the Reformation anniversary. The thematic approach of the LWF was received with great interest, particularly in view of the three sub-themes.
- (82) These important developments involving the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion in upholding the significance of the theological substance that is captured in the ecumenical document of the JDDJ, teach us an important lesson of both patience and perseverance when it comes to ecumenical dialogues. The JDDJ, in fact, continues bearing fruit even after almost 20 years of its signing.

Mennonites: Report on claiming the implications of the "Mennonite Action" completed

- (83) EXHIBIT 9.4 offers a summary of a comprehensive and solid report of the Mennonite – Lutheran Task Force that was asked to look into the concrete implications of the 2010 reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites/Anabaptists.
- (84) We are grateful for the thorough follow-up by the Task Force, which makes sure that we follow through our commitments expressed in the Mennonite Action.

The Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation

- (85) EXHIBIT 11 gives a more detailed account of the progress in the preparations of the Twelfth Assembly. The process is moving and dynamism around the Assembly is increasing. We remain inspired by the vision of a joyful, transformative, forward-looking and outward-looking Assembly. We rejoice in anticipation of the moment when representatives from the 145 member churches gather in Windhoek and engage in six days of worship and prayer, reflection and envisioning the future, listening and speaking, decision-making and learning from each other.

Communion: treasures in jars of clay

- (86) If the Assembly was today, the EECMY, CoS and ELCA would still be in a situation in which they were unable to express relationships of communion while meeting bilaterally. Fractured as they are in their direct relations, they continue holding fast to, and gathering around the larger table that the LWF represents and provides for them as members of the communion. We shouldn't underestimate how this larger table remains both a sign of hope and an encouragement for these three churches, but also for LWF member churches in general. The LWF remains that resource and that space of prayerful longing for healing and restoration. It continues offering mutual support in God's mission, a space for prayerful dialogue and for solidarity, and an expression of joint witness and service in the world. If not in the LWF, where else would member churches go to express and experience all this?
- (87) Hence, if the Assembly was today the LWF communion would continue feeling the pain of this open wound. No, it didn't bleed us out, as some predicted or even wanted to see happen. God's calling into communion is too powerful, the resulting communion relationships are too deep and vital; the linkages of solidarity and mutuality that inform them are too strong.
- (88) Yet, the wound has not healed either, despite all the prayers, the work and the hope to see such healing happen. Too little have we as LWF been able to generate the much needed discussions on the difficult topics that cause division and generate alienation among members. A powerful foundation was laid at the Council meeting in Bogotá (2012) to take up this conversation. But we couldn't take the discussion much further; rather, we needed to tend to alienation that meanwhile turned into a wound.
- (89) But the need for that discussion has not decreased. Several churches are discerning their position on issues related to human sexuality - issues they inextricably understand require their stance. And the stances churches are taking continue putting churches in the LWF communion in opposite positions.
- (90) I have been reminded recently that only bodies can sustain wounds. Hence, even while admitting the pain, the LWF shouldn't feel diminished in its calling and identity, because of this wound. Nor should it concede to a model of impaired or selective communion, which is alien to how we understand and describe the LWF.
- (91) The Apostle Paul put this simultaneous fragility and powerfulness into a letter to the Corinthians:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

- (92) Without knowing it, and by sometimes even trying to make sense of the fact of severed ties, we seem to have been witnesses of how this unresolved situation has quietly added yet another degree of ecclesial density to our global journey as a communion of churches. The Self-Understanding document, which is being studied with diligence by several churches, is such a sign of deepened commitment, ongoing care and unbroken hope.
- (93) We have grasped something of God's powerfulness in these years. God didn't stop calling us, God didn't stop speaking to us. And God will say more. Because God's last word – this we know as people who follow the risen Lord – is a word of life and of wholeness.

Envisioning our journey after the Assembly

Dealing with our past - trusting in the future that is in God's hands

- (94) There is a November 1, 2017 that, God-willing, will follow October 31, 2017. The overall approach to the Reformation anniversary adopted by the LWF has focused on the *ongoing reformation*. It has precisely invited this openness towards the future. It has protected the LWF communion from becoming locked-in, backward-looking and, more importantly, experiencing a sense of emptiness and lack of direction that could possibly result from such centeredness after 2017. We do have a rich history. But we shouldn't deal with it as if there was no future for us. Remembering God's faithfulness in history encourages us on a faithful and joyful journey towards the future.

500th anniversaries: there is more to come

- (95) We are expecting strong input from the Assembly in view of the issues it identifies as important for the ongoing journey of the communion. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of a new strategic planning process is to turn this input into priorities and help give overall direction as we move on with our journey as a communion.
- (96) At the same time, we need to be aware that the 500th anniversary of the reformation will be followed by several other 500th anniversaries in the years to come: 2021 will mark the 500 years of the Diet of Worms. 2022 will mark the 500 years since the New Testament translation in the German language was published. 2030 will mark the 500 years of the Augsburg Confession. These events, and others, will undoubtedly be observed by member churches. As such, they call for a communion-wide framework and process, as it is offered by the LWF for the reformation anniversary in 2017.

Here we journey: proposals for a theological and ecumenical process until 2021

- (97) I will propose that after the Assembly, the LWF focuses on the year 2021 as the next milestone on our journey. I could imagine that the 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms with its strong memory of "here I stand" would be interpreted in a dynamic way, as inspiration for the ongoing work of God in the world and the church. We could take the theme "*Here we journey*" as our theme for the years up to 2021. "*Here we journey*" as a communion in Christ that lives and works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

There are two important projects I would suggest.

1. The articulation of our theological identity and witness of Lutheran churches

2. On the way: the continuation of our ecumenical dialogues with a focus on mutual understanding

Let's say it together: to be and to witness as Lutherans in a global perspective

- (98) I believe it will be beneficial for the LWF to engage in a cross-contextual global process that would help it reflect on its joint witness in God's mission and to jointly articulate the theological identity as it witnesses in this world. The anniversary of the Diet of Worms is an opportunity to articulate a global narrative that is firmly rooted in the life and the witness of LWF member churches.
- (99) How would we describe the "being and witnessing Lutheran" today in a global perspective? What are the key features of our identity and witness, and how do they relate to the key tenets of Lutheran theology? What has remained the same, what have we learnt that is new or different in five centuries of journey? What needs to be articulated in new ways today? What have we learnt from each other? How would all this be described in Zimbabwe, in Papua New Guinea, in Colombia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Denmark and Canada? How could we articulate a coherent, shared narrative that helps us recognize each other as Lutheran churches globally, yet remain contextually rooted?
- (100) This is a demanding and exciting project! It is an essential project that fosters coherence, mutual understanding and mutual accountability as we jointly continue proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and witness to God's love and justice in this world.

Building on our dialogues: Declaration on the Way

- (101) The second project would result from the joint commemoration in Lund and its impulse for deeper and more resolute ecumenical engagement with the Catholic Church. It would draw strongly on the excellent resources that have been developed by recent bilateral dialogues at a national level, for instance in the US with their "Declaration on the Way". I believe the time is mature to engage in a new phase of international dialogue in which we would jointly produce a document that would become a "declaration on the way" between Catholics and Lutherans globally.
- (102) Such a declaration would also be strongly informed by the resolve of Catholics and Lutherans to joint witness that would follow the joint commemoration in Lund. I am convinced that our joint witness, for instance as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding between LWF World Service and Caritas Internationalis, will offer its own encouragement to address pending theological questions.
- (103) The ground is prepared for us to jointly endeavor to declare at a global level what our dialogue has achieved in view of mutual understanding. We should be able to define in precise ways the issues once seen as dividing, yet which no longer justify division anymore, in view of ecumenical developments. We need to work with renewed resolve on the theological issues that keep us separate, namely the understanding of the church, of the ministry, and of the Eucharist.

Focusing on our eschatological hope: the Eucharist

- (104) While these three issues: church, ministry and Eucharist are related, I see a certain hierarchy and rank of priority between them. Similar to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:13 about faith, hope and love, in which he points at "love" as being the principal among these three, I believe that of the trilogy of church, ministry and Eucharist it is the Eucharist that stands out. Because it is around the Eucharist, and the

current inability to render hospitality to each other across the lines of our communions, that the pain of the division and the incompleteness of our witness as partakers in God's mission is perceived in the most disturbing ways by those living out their baptism (as well as by those who are meant to be reached by the message of Jesus Christ).

- (105) To turn it into a positive formulation: it is around the Eucharistic table that unity will materialize and become concrete in the clearest and most tangible ways to ordinary people. The ordering principle of further dialogues with the Catholic Church should therefore be the Eucharist. It should remain the focus of our ecumenical interaction, the vision of the gift we aim to receive from God's hands, while addressing the indeed important issues around the church and the ministry.
- (106) Matthew 25 has been speaking strongly to me lately. It reminds me in unequivocal ways that letting the hungry go empty is subject to strongest condemnation by our Lord Jesus Christ. If this is true for the material bread, I am asking myself, what about the spiritual bread? Christ's body and blood, given to nurture the baptized, yet offered at fragmented and separate tables remains a challenge, more so if put into the context of Matthew 25.
- (107) We are at the juncture of affirming in even stronger ways the eschatological hope that burns in our hearts, and of giving reason for this hope in bolder ways, while we engage even deeper, with more humility and with greater love in our ecumenical processes that are ahead of us. This is, indeed one of the great lessons we can take from the Mennonite Action in 2010, and the joint commemoration in 2016: time is over to deal with our past, as if there wasn't any future for us.

Conclusion

- (108) I conclude by expressing my deep gratitude to this Council for its constant support, for its wisdom and direction, for its commitment and love.
- (109) I remain grateful for amazing staff in the Communion Office and in the country programs. I'm always inspired by their commitment and their passion to live out the vision of the LWF and to support churches in their calling to express their gift of communion. In many respects, they are making that little difference that makes the big difference.
- (110) Finally, I remain grateful for the support from the Vice-Presidents and the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, for their availability for dialogue and consultation.
- (111) This pertains especially to the LWF President. If we counted the hours he has spent on the phone or Skype listening, offering advice and discussing issues, it would amount to several days. If we add to this the travels and visits he has undertaken to represent the LWF, it would amount to quite some months in a year. Thank you, Bishop Munib, for yet another year of close communication and mutual support.
- (112) With deep roots in history, we reach out to God's future.