

Dear President and Vice-Presidents of the Lutheran World Federation;  
Dear General secretary, dear members of the council, advisors, responsible persons, dear guests;  
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all here in Wittenberg at the opening session of the council meeting of the Lutheran World Federation. I welcome you as president of the German national council of the LWF and as presiding bishop of the United Lutheran Church in Germany.

We are here right at the place where the reformation started – our home city so to say. You have come from more than 90 countries all over the world, delegations of 145 member churches: it seems to be something like a family-meeting. As a family with this worldwide context it is helpful to come back again and again to the starting point of our pilgrimage through world and time.

As a communion, we are journeying towards the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017 and towards the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Namibia as well. I am glad that we can be together here in Wittenberg being a place not only of great historical significance. It is also a place that continues to contribute to the ongoing reformation of Christ's Church.

Following Martin Luther's underlining, that faith, liberty and responsibility for the world belong together, the Lutheran World Federation brings together Theological studies and help for people in need all over the world. We are empowered by God's grace to work for the world.

In the library of the university in Columbus City/Ohio is written on the wall a saying from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the strongest weapon to make the world a better place to live in". Studying the scripture we discover: we are as churches in the world, but we are not from the world; studying the scripture leads us in the direction of justice and liberation: "creation not for sale; human beings not for sale; salvation not for sale!" The world is longing for hope and new beginnings, stopping hate and violence.

And last but not least: being here together from all over God's world we experience: God's grace overcomes borders of cultures, languages, social classes – and, as we can experience in these days: he brings together on the ecumenical way those who have been separated from each other. That is a gift of God's grace too.. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, Jesus starts to build his community by tearing down the fences which are between human beings. That is, what the Lord wants to strengthen us to do. We experience the reconciled diversity, which makes us rich.

I do wish you a blessed conference here in Wittenberg! God bless you all!