



INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

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Greetings to the Council of the Lutheran World Federation June 13 – 18, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

in the name of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) I express my thanks to you for your friendly invitation to attend the council meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). I am grateful that the Rev. Dr. Charles Evanson is able to be present in my behalf. I recall with appreciation the presence of Dr. Musa Filibus at the member assembly of the ILC in Niagara Falls, Canada last year. I thank him and all of you for this sign of solidarity.

For this year's meeting you have chosen as your theme: "Called to be Disciples in Today's World."

There I extend to you my greetings with the words of Christ from his high priestly prayer (John 17:16-21):

(16) "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (17) Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (18) As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (20) I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, (21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Christ here already points out the tension in which we stand to this very day: as his disciples we stand in the world with all its challenges common to our churches – secularization and thus the necessary task of the *missio Dei*, the ever increasing medial overload and thus the required concentration on the word of God, and certainly the ethical problems posed in our time with the challenge to speak pastorally responsible answers from God's word to the people of our day.

The member churches of the LWF and those in the ILC have in part given differing answers and tensions seem unavoidable. This points us all the more to the second part of Christ's words; he wants those who believe in him "that they may all be one."

The foundational Sacrament of Holy Baptism has incorporated us all into the Body of Christ. This is the basis for being church and being one in Christ. It is my considered opinion that there has not been sufficient theological reflection about the significance of our baptismal ties when and where theological differences arise. It would seem to me that we should address this question together.

Thoughts that go in this direction lead directly to the cradle of the Reformation, which began with the 95 Theses as a reform of the sacrament of penance and confession. The words of Christ, "that they may all be one," lead us by way of each individual's change and forgiveness back to our Baptism. The common commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 would offer the opportunity to rediscover basic insights of Lutheran theology and to build on them possible common steps of the LWF and the ILC.

With my words of greeting I want to reiterate our support for the "Memorandum of Understanding" between the LWF and the ILC arrived at in 2005. Regular contacts are what are needed. There I look forward to our meeting in Wittenberg November 12 to 14 of this year.

May your Council meeting be a fruitful one. May the Holy Spirit endow you with his wisdom and with his peace.

Yours in Christ,

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Hans-Jörg Voigt, Bishop

Chairman, International Lutheran Council