

# **THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**

Meeting of the LWF Council

Geneva, Switzerland

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**Report of the General Secretary**

**Rev. Martin Junge**

**Exhibit 9**



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION



# **Report of the General Secretary**

## **Rev. Martin Junge**

### **1. A rich year behind us**

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#### **1.1 Since we last met**

*“The lines between those giving and those receiving were wonderfully blurred.”*  
These were the words of a Council member reflecting on her experience in Bogotá, Colombia, where the Council of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) met last year.

This insight is substantiated by communication from our member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) and the repeated references to the encouragement, impulses and the spiritual uplifting that the LWF Council brought to its life. Interestingly, this insight is also substantiated in similar ways by the feedback we hear from Council members. Many of you have mentioned the value of the exposure to our member church in Colombia, and how IELCO’s witness has created new awareness among many of you: what it is to live and serve in contexts of violence and poverty; what it is to be church in a fragile minority situation; and what it takes to uphold the commitment to ecumenical relations out of this situation.

Along the lines of the powerful anthropology of Lutheran theology, according to which we are both sinners and sanctified at the same time (the *“simul”*), we seem to be grasping with renewed strength the simultaneity of being both givers and receivers as we journey together as a communion of churches. Definitely: it is not a matter of age, size or the amount of resources that enables such simultaneity; rather it is the humbling awareness of being called into relationships of mutuality through the gift of communion.

## **1.2 Visits to LWF member churches and regional gatherings**

In the following paragraphs I want to give a quick chronological overview of travel undertaken on behalf of the communion. I am referring to specific observations and insights, which have been important for our discussions in the Communion Office as we continue to reflect about the best ways to give expression to the three priority areas identified in the LWF Strategy.

### ***Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), Za'atri refugee camp and Mount of Olives***

Together with the LWF President Bishop Munib Younan, I was able to witness last September the important work of the LWF in the Holy Land.

I understood again the importance of educational institutions run by churches. In the case of the ELCJHL, it is a way to interact in a relevant way with society and develop a public profile based on the very important values that undergird the ELCJHL educational work towards the upbringing of a new generation. The power of that witness and contribution, more so in the specific context of the Holy Land, should never be underestimated.

We also visited the Za'atri refugee camp in northern Jordan, a new LWF operation in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Jordanian government, which allows us to support Syrians fleeing the civil war in their country. At the time of our visit, the camp had more than 30,000 refugees, a figure which has now increased to nearly 148,000, according to the UN refugee agency. Extreme conditions, traumatized people—these two characteristics describe the challenge of the work undertaken by the LWF in this and other refugee camps in the world.

Altogether during 2012 the LWF worked with approximately 1.5 million refugees and displaced persons. This is a considerably high number, yet it may seem like only a small percentage when one looks at the estimated 10.4 million refugees (UNHCR 2012) of concern to the UN refugee agency globally, and the 28.8 million civilians who are internally displaced due to conflict within their own countries. We are

grateful for the ongoing support received in order to carry out this foundational vocation of the LWF: to be there for refugees and displaced people.

My visit to the Mount of Olives helped me to become familiarized with the outstanding work undertaken by the Augusta Victoria Hospital, and with the various dimensions related to the plans to develop an Elder Care Pavilion and a housing project on the Mount of Olives. The LWF is committed to these plans.

### ***Church of Sweden, “Världens Fest”***

At the Church of Sweden mission festival in September, I was encouraged to see the church witnessing to faith, hope and love in the public square, thus also taking further the important process of redefining the place of the church within the Swedish context in view of changed relationships with the State. I spoke on the notion of the church as a “citizen,” which defines its citizenship on the basis of its participation in God’s mission, and which shares citizenship with other actors (religious and secular) in the public space.

### ***United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD)***

I participated in the VELKD General Synod last November, and was offered an opportunity to speak about “Reformation and Inculturation.” It was a special privilege to be able to expand on the first of the three lines that define our approach to the Reformation anniversary (“Reformation is a global citizen”) and refer to concrete examples of inculturation processes that enrich Lutheran Reformation today. The challenge ahead of us: how do we get these different expressions of inculturation into a dialogue and exchange? What are the methodologies and the venues that secure symmetry so that such a dialogue and exchange can actually take place?

### ***Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)***

In the aftermath of the violent riots in October 2012, I paid a solidarity visit to our member church in February. It was painful to see the ELCT building in Mbagala parish that was burned during the violence, yet at the same time it was encouraging to talk to the church leadership. Their commitment was firm: never again should this happen. Hence, they want to address what they have identified to be the breeding

ground for such violence: abject poverty and absence of relevant and viable perspectives, particularly for young people. It is the alienation generated by this situation, together with targeted instrumentalization, which ends up undermining healthy and peaceful neighborhood relationships between (religious) communities.

### ***Asian Church Leadership Conference***

During my visit with the leadership of LWF member churches in Asia at their April meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, it was a joy for me to see the vitality of our churches engaged in missionary undertakings, and how they do this in collaborative ways, such as the Mekong Mission Forum. LWF's role of accompaniment and capacity development will remain key in the years to come.

But I could also grasp the challenges that result from overall changes that in some cases seem to come at too quick a pace for churches in the region. Here too, the issue of neighboring with other religions in view of some challenging experiences was a recurrent topic of reflection. Similarly, the challenges of theological education and Lutheran identity, and how they are being addressed by regional programs were extensively analyzed.

### ***Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation***

Only a few weeks ago in May, I was also able to meet the leadership of African LWF member churches as they gathered for their regional consultation in Nairobi, Kenya. There was a rich and deep discussion about the challenges posed by a changing religious landscape and the ways in which churches would relate to these changes. The adoption of the document "Confronting Poverty in Africa: Action Plan for 2014 – 2017," is an important step forward in focusing the churches' response to the challenge of poverty. The action plan will address the following four areas:

- Food security and environmental justice
- Institutional sustainability
- Gender justice
- Leadership competence and good governance

It is particularly encouraging to see how these areas of action have strong connection with some of the programs of the LWF Communion Office, thus pointing at promising perspectives for good synergies in the years to come.

### **1.3 Special ecumenical representation**

The many ecumenical interactions, visits and meetings during the year are a reflection of both the strong ecumenical vocation of the LWF, and the vitality of its engagements at various levels. This is expressed in various ways through the work of the Office of the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations. It would be impossible to refer to each of the interactions and the many events and meetings that express this ecumenical commitment of the LWF. There were two particular events which I want to mention here, in which I was grateful to be able to represent the LWF communion of churches:

#### ***The inauguration of the pontificate of Pope Francis***

Together with the LWF President, I was able to participate in this memorable liturgy. A private audience scheduled later this year will provide for deeper conversation about the 50 years of bilateral dialogues between Lutherans and Catholics in 2017, which coincides with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lutheran Reformation.

#### ***Enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby***

The close links between the Anglican Communion and the LWF were reaffirmed during the various activities and discussions in the context of the enthronement ceremony. Progress has been made in the establishment of the bilateral commission that will look into the implementation of the dialogue report received during the 2012 Council meeting.

My participation in the leadership conference of African LWF member churches served as a confirmation of both the *importance* of the dialogue with Pentecostals, and the *approach* that we want to follow: we are attempting to identify relevant interactions between Lutherans and Pentecostals at a regional level, from which we would draw in order to bring the dialogue to the international level. "Reception" is the

big challenge for ecumenical dialogues. We believe that a way to address this challenge is to already carefully include the perspective of reception during the *inception* of ecumenical dialogues and a deliberate attempt to secure strong links between the local and global dimensions.

## **1.4 From the Communion Office**

For the first time, the Communion Office (CO) is submitting a comprehensive report of the operation plans implemented during the year (Exhibit 9.1). With the new Department for Planning and Operations (DPO) structure in place, the ground has been laid to continue improving management tools and processes to carry out the CO mandate and to support the Council in its governance role.

The Communion Office Operational Plan (COOP) 2012 report offers details of the outcome of the programs implemented by the CO and of the many achievements during the past year. See the COOP 2012 (Exhibit 9.1) report for a detailed analysis.

Let me offer a few high-level highlights:

### ***Department for Theology and Public Witness***

- The Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW) is operational now and the interaction of its various dimensions is already proving to be bearing fruits. An increased (yet not sufficient) staff capacity for the year 2013 and onwards is a hopeful sign as it seems to indicate that we are being able to halt the ongoing trend of staff reduction in this very important area of our work.
- The department is taking the lead in three of the four cross-cutting issues of the strategy, with good results already (gender justice, theological education and formation, advocacy and public voice). Structures and processes are being created to this effect.
- The department has produced or has supported the process / drafting of important documents for Council action: Special Committee 2017 (Exhibit 11), Gender Justice Policy (Exhibit 9.6) and Welcoming the Stranger (Exhibit 9.5).

- Alongside the ongoing work in ecumenical dialogues, the new phase of bilateral dialogues of the Lutheran – Orthodox Joint Commission is being prepared with a focus on the theme of “ministry.”

#### ***Department for Mission and Development***

- The Department for Mission and Development (DMD) has done considerable work in order to break down the LWF Strategy into 10 programs.
- The alignment of DMD project work into the 10 programs represents a very important step towards a more strategic approach, and better synergy between programs and projects. The department is currently supporting 118 projects in 42 countries.
- DMD has been pioneering the LWF CO into the methodology of virtual conferences (Internet-based conferences). The first one on eco-justice brought together around 400 participants and supported in significant ways the participation of the LWF delegation at the Doha Climate Change Conference in 2012. The message from the participants is shared with this Council as Exhibit 9.8.
- In close interaction with DTPW, a global consultation on theological education was held in Wittenberg, Germany, and is currently being followed up.

#### ***Department for World Service***

- The implementation of the new global emergency strategy of the Department for World Service (DWS) has considerably improved the capacity of the LWF to act in a proactive manner during emergency situations, thus considerably reducing the time to initiate response.
- The LWF/DWS Strategy has undergone a process of revision. The revised strategy, approved by the Committee for World Service in January runs until 2018, thus providing for synchronized processes regarding the preparation of the LWF Strategy and the DWS Strategy after the Assembly. I will be proposing during the review process of the LWF Strategy that its period be extended to 2018 as well, so that the input from the 2017 Assembly can be taken into account during the preparation of a strategy.

- The LWF has been able to engage in new operations, thus retaining its pivotal role to both express the vocation of the LWF communion of churches to serve people, and to support the consolidation of ecumenical structures such as the ACT Alliance. In addition, LWF continues to play a key role in several UN-related forums and processes related to humanitarian action.

### ***Department for Planning and Operations***

- After an audit in December 2012, the LWF Gender Equal Salary Certification has been maintained.
- The Office for Resource Mobilization has been established, and is undertaking important work to set the ground for proactive resource mobilization (relationships' mapping, fundraising strategy).
- The financial performance has resulted positively at year end. Finances have been thoroughly monitored and mitigation measures applied to avoid financial risks. The transfer of the Staff Welfare Plan to Abendrot Foundation has been completed, thus securing long-term financial viability of the LWF Pension Plan.
- The LWF Communication Strategy was developed and approved (Exhibit 9.9), as well as the new visual identity. During the LWF Council meeting the new LWF Web site will be launched.

## **2. Some key issues and reflections for the attention of the LWF Council**

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In the following paragraphs I intend to refer to some key issues and offer some reflections of strategic nature for the attention of the LWF Council. There would indeed be many of them, and each of the ones listed below would actually call for more than a short paragraph. It is my hope that discussions during the Council sessions would provide for deeper conversation and exchange.

### **2.1 Emmaus conversation:**

I have heard a lot of affirmation across the communion, and also among ecumenical partners regarding the important step that this Council took last year on behalf of the 143 LWF member churches. The five important insights, later on communicated to

member churches through a joint letter with the LWF President, have been taken up locally by several member churches, but also in regional meetings.

As we in the Communion Office continue to design processes and input that will facilitate further conversation, new elements have come into the picture. Through various letters, I have brought to the attention of this Council information about the severing of ties that involves three of our member churches, and the resulting implications for the communion. Because of the sensitivity of the issues at hand, this Council will have a confidential session dedicated to the important discussions it needs to take up (Exhibit 9.0.1).

## **2.2 Neighboring with other religions – issues of religious freedom**

The religious landscape is changing. And the public perception about religions and their role in society is changing too. Unfortunately, tensions and conflicts are often perceived and communicated as religious, while in fact the issues are normally far more complex than that. And what about the positive and encouraging stories? Where are they communicated? Indeed, there is such an amazing wealth of uplifting stories involving our member churches, which insist in bridge-building even amidst tensions, as well as the LWF World Service work in upholding the rights and dignity of refugees and internally displaced people regardless of their faith.

An encouraging development in inter-religious cooperation has been the UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection, which brought together religious leaders from the major faiths to express their common humanitarian commitment to protection for refugees.

Yet, tensions and conflicts that have religious connotations cannot be denied either. Some of our member churches find themselves in that very fault line of such tensions. The common denominator of most of these tensions is the control over the public space—the public expression of faith, religious buildings and legislation that supports (or curtails) the free expression of faith. Religious freedom and the “citizenship” of religious expressions in today’s world seem to be the key topics also for the time ahead, which the LWF CO intends to continue taking up through the

office for Interreligious Relations in DTPW. Here again, the new DTPW structure proves its value, as it holds closer together the theological work with its public dimension (advocacy) and is able to reflect theologically on experiences of both member churches and World Service.

### **2.3 A next step in the journey - gender justice policy**

It is a significant moment for us in the CO to be able to bring the Gender Justice Policy for decision making to this Council (Exhibit 9.6). A long journey lies behind the LWF member churches with significant landmarks that have been reached during decades: a consultation on the role of women in church and society in the 1950s; the quota decision in 1984; the document "Churches Say 'No' to Violence Against Women," just to name a few. In the office, we begin to look ahead already and discern ways in which this policy will come into life in the LWF, thus transforming relationships between genders with a view on justice. Quotas are not enough, as long as there are no tools to secure and enhance participation. This is the significant direction that the LWF Council will be able to set through its action on the gender justice policy.

### **2.4 Growing gaps between rich and poor**

The gap between rich and poor does not cease to grow around the globe. Vulnerabilities of sections of society and of entire regions are growing steadily. Churches are confronted with immense challenges regarding their participation in each dimension of holistic mission: proclamation, diakonia and advocacy. In many cases, this task becomes even harder because churches themselves, much like their members, are in processes of impoverishment and social marginalization.

We are concerned in the CO about the growing gap of resources, capacities and relationships among churches. This trend of reduced support to churches weakens their capacity and ability to offer holistic ministry in their respective societies. The result of country and thematic prioritization by most churches and church related agencies is that several churches are increasingly finding themselves isolated from both accompaniment and support. The increased presence of related agencies,

some of them with implementing roles, cuts off churches from potential local funding through development funding schemes. Even ecumenical structures for development cooperation seem to become hardly accessible because of capacity and membership criteria.

As a communion of churches, we have a special calling to counter this risk of fragmentation and be intentional about including churches. LWF World Service and DMD have initiated a program to support capacity development of some selected member churches for emergency response—indeed a step in the right direction.

## **2.5 Generational gap:**

The world is facing a worsening youth unemployment crisis: young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and over 75 million youth worldwide are looking for work. The International Labour Organization has warned of a “scarred” generation of young workers facing a dangerous mix of high unemployment, increased inactivity and precarious work in “developed” countries, as well as persistently high working poverty in the “developing” world.

I want to encourage member churches to scale up their efforts to address this dangerous development. This would also require critical and prophetic engagement with current ideologies and lifestyles. Let’s face it: the gluttony of certain lifestyles among some and the prevailing economic system at a global level can no longer be satisfied with the voracious appetite for natural resources. It threatens to gobble up the present and future of young people. However: if youth do not have a future, our common household doesn’t have one either.

Lately, I have come across what it means for many of our young Council members to participate at the Council meetings: it puts their precarious jobs at risk when they apply for such absence, or they need to take their annual leave for it. Holidays with Council members enjoying daylong meetings! This challenge also goes for most of the lay Council members, and adds a further dimension to the question of the long-term viability of current governance processes in the LWF (see below).

## **2.6 Sustainability of the church – an increasingly important topic**

It is within this context of changing legislations, secularization, impoverishment and marginalization, the painful decrease of members (or explosive growth!), financial turmoil and ecological challenges and precarious employment that member churches are struggling with questions of their own sustainability, and looking for strategies to respond. The quest for sustainable churches can't be dissociated from the quest for sustainable societies within the one household. It is part of it, and it supports it.

Many of the LWF programs particularly in DMD but also DTPW contribute significantly to addressing the challenge of sustainability, with many good practices and processes being developed around the communion. The new position for Comprehensive Capacity Development in DMD to be filled later this year will become a significant focal point in enhancing synergies and increasing the sharing of learning across the communion. This focus on church sustainability and the development and sharing of capacities will become a very important area of joint work in the years ahead, and it will call for cooperation among member churches and their related agencies.

## **2.7 Theological education and Lutheran identity**

In the CO, we hear these two concepts quite often, in many cases, with a note of alarm and concern or as an urgent task to take up, for instance through regional and ecumenical cooperation. Again, there are questions of (financial) sustainability that raise concern. But there are also questions regarding the adequacy of curricula and teaching materials, and the strategic audiences for theological education and formation.

One concrete example: the teaching of theology still reaches (normally) the ordained, but those in regular contact with the people are mostly others—evangelists, catechists, deacons and lay preachers. Their passionate service often happens in the context of an important vacuum of training and formation, which is filled by the “software” offered by vocal and quite appealing expressions of the church today. This often goes to the detriment of theological substance. During the

Africa church leadership meeting, there was much discussion about the so-called “prosperity gospel” and what this theology does to the core Lutheran conviction: that it is not because of who we are, and what we do, but because of who God is and what God does that new life is achieved and made available to humankind (justification by faith alone).

Several of these questions and issues were taken up during the 2012 global consultation on theological education in Wittenberg, and a working group has been providing the follow up towards better coordination and joint work among theological institutions. It will require concerted effort by the entire communion to take this networking a step further so that substantial contributions can be offered in the coming years of journeying towards the Reformation anniversary in the field of theological education and theological identity.

## **2.8 A faith-based organization doing rights-based approach?**

The LWF has a strong history of commitment to human rights. One such expression is the Communion Office interactions with the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The CO has supported several alternative reports (so called “shadow reports”) from civil society (including churches and LWF World Service programs) that offer perspectives through the Universal Periodic Review platform, which reviews human rights practices of all UN member states. This commitment is also expressed by the so-called rights-based approach, which is applied in many of the diaconal programs and projects run by LWF member churches around the world, as well as by all World Service country programs.

During 2012, there was meaningful interaction between DTPW and World Service regarding the topic “Religion and Development.” It was the beginning of a process, through which the CO is addressing questions regarding the role of faith, and faith-based organizations in processes of development, and how they contribute by also framing and defining development through their witness.

This work will become increasingly important, as we are becoming aware that the rights-based approach has often lacked a theological interpretation that would help

churches to understand its importance and embrace it. The LWF needs to continue building on the theological framework for the understanding and promotion of human rights.

### **3. Perspectives**

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The preceding chapter has already indicated where we see and identify some of the challenges, and where some of the emphasis and focus needs to be developed as we continue journeying together as a communion of churches.

This journey will be increasingly informed by the Reformation anniversary in 2017. It is very encouraging to see how LWF member churches around the globe have begun to take up this anniversary. Regional leadership conferences are discussing it and have set up working groups. Only recently, the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI) launched a series of events inviting young people to reflection, because indeed, it is about “*semper reformanda*” – the church in an ongoing reform process.

Looking back at a good year in 2012, and looking ahead to the coming years with their strong focus on this important event ahead of us, we in the CO see this conjuncture as a great opportunity to already reflect beyond 2017 and to envision a sustainable LWF for the years to come. We want to begin to discuss the question: how will such a sustainable LWF look like for those after us who will celebrate the 500 years of the Augsburg Confession in the year 2030? And what is it that needs to be done *today*, so that the LWF does not find itself trapped in developments, and therefore struggling to find ways to cope with them in a reactive way instead of proactively taking decisions and allowing change, so that there is a viable LWF for that generation too?

The intergenerational discussions are an attempt to take up the needed reflection process. It will be an exercise of active and critical knowledge management, which will offer important insights for the further process.

Let me share with you some of the aspects that we do see already:

## **The “pedagogy of the communion”:**

If the LWF is really to move to become a polycentric communion, we need to do something about the “pedagogy of the communion.” How is it that we intend to teach and learn, to accompany and admonish, to mutually support us towards increased maturity as we continue journeying together? The Council Committee for Mission and Development will be discussing during this meeting the document “Growing together in capacity for holistic mission – a theological framework for LWF communion learning.” It provides an important foundation for the task of developing pedagogical models for the LWF communion of churches.

## **Participation in the LWF**

Some of the new methodologies such as virtual conferences, but also the new LWF Web site, are pointing at new avenues for a wider array of people participating in the LWF, its programs and its processes. Methodologies and instruments need to be developed so that programs and processes can be more easily accessed by member churches and their congregations. The discussions around biblical hermeneutics—so meaningful and such a great learning experience for those directly involved—bring the challenge to us of granting access to the valuable work and process beyond those directly involved. How would the huge wealth of the “From Conflict to Communion” be processed, so that it unfolds its potentials as widely as possible?

## **The structures of the communion**

We do have issues when it comes to our structures. For some years now discussion has been going on about the rationale of the current setup of regions. A quite complex issue, but can an LWF with a vision to be sustainable in future afford not to take it up? What is the role and function of regional expressions? How can they become a stronger transmission belt between the local and the global, and vice versa? Are there other ways to imagine the organizational setup of the LWF when it comes to governance and its office so that the structure better sustains what the LWF wants to stand for?

## **The economy of the communion**

What are perspectives and strategies for financial sustainability, knowing that it is in this area where substantial changes are to be expected in the years to come, in view of the changing realities among those churches and agencies that have traditionally secured the financial viability of the LWF?

## **The leadership of the LWF communion**

Where and how is leadership in our churches developed in order to become leadership of the communion? This does not exclusively mean how to train future Council members or CO staff. This particularly means how to develop future generations of leadership in the churches that have both awareness of and commitment to the global communion of churches. Is there a specific formation process that could be developed in this regard?

I believe that the Reformation anniversary and its reminder of the on-going process of reformation provide an extraordinary context to begin to address these questions. I want to invite this Council to take up its role of strategic governance and support these important processes towards a sustainable LWF.

## **4. Conclusion**

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As I bring this report to the Council, my words of gratitude go to my amazing staff colleagues with their incredible commitment to LWF's mission. The important achievements of the year 2012 cannot be seen without seeing the "passion for the church and for the world," which each staff colleague expresses and which undergirds the delivery of the work.

We can see that the approval of the LWF Strategy 2012 – 2017 was a very important step that helps us to give direction, focus and perspective to our work. The ongoing development of planning and reporting tools is an important learning curve for all of us in the Communion Office, and we see its value. All these processes will be of great support as we set out to prepare the journey towards the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

Gratitude goes to the LWF President for regular interactions and discussions, for support during particularly critical moments during the year. I want to acknowledge the crucial role of Vice-Presidents who have been available for many consultations and reflections, and are of key importance in connecting the regions to the global within governance structure and communion processes.

My gratitude also to you, the Council members, who are offering your time and your wisdom and experiences to help guide this communion through your governance role. Reading the Bible, particularly the book of Acts, I have come to the conclusion that whenever congregations or churches meet beyond their own specific contexts they touch and grasp wisdom and insights which they would never access on their own. This insight from biblical times is a promise for this Council and its meeting in 2013.

Together with my colleagues, I look forward to the remaining half of the year and the years ahead until 2017, during which we continue to express our vision of a communion in Christ, liberated by God's grace, living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.