



# With eyes of mercy and grace

## New Year's greeting from the LWF General Secretary

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

After a turbulent year, we stand at the threshold of the year 2023. The previous one marked the end of COVID-19-related restrictions in most parts of the world. It was also a year of new conflicts and wars with global impact.

Predicting what the future entails and what the new year will bring is difficult. However, we know that we are called to be steadfast in mutual love and hope. Therefore, in our concerns and anxiety, but also in what we celebrate and rejoice in, it is good to be reminded that God is not indifferent to what is happening in the world and with us.

The Moravian watchword for 2023 says: "You are God who sees" (Gen 16:13). God, whose incarnation in Jesus Christ we just celebrated, sees things that are done but also things that are left undone. Therefore, God calls us not to



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be indifferent but to speak and act wherever we see how human brokenness is sowing seeds of hatred, disunity, oppression, and disrespect for God's creation.

In September 2023, the LWF will hold its Assembly in Krakow, Poland. The theme of the Assembly is: "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." It is a theme full of hope, that draws us towards the unity that God intended for God's creation. It is inspired by Paul's letter to the Ephesians where the apostle writes: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling" (Eph 4:4). Paul most probably quotes here from a baptismal liturgy, celebrated by early Christians. He refers to the Church as the mystical body of Christ that unites people coming from different cultural contexts, different genders, and different social and political backgrounds.

When we put Christ at the center, we will find unity, despite all our differences. When we, on the contrary, focus on the differences between us, there will be separation. Our baptismal calling is a calling for unity. For unity with Christ and with our sisters and brothers in Christ, but ultimately with humanity and God's creation, as God is the Creator of the whole world. Unity does not mean uniformity, but true unity always embraces diversity, as long as it is carried by love and respect.

Unity is a precious gift and a task at the same time. Sometimes this task may seem quite challenging. Yet wherever we are challenged, we are also assured by the Holy Spirit: Christ and the gospel cannot be "undone." The spirits of separation and hatred, greed, and misuse of power will not prevail.

Our calling is not only to proclaim but also to live out the gospel, to let God's Kingdom break into our reality, to be a "yeast" that brings hope to the world. So, we must not remain indifferent when we see hatred and destruction being sown, when God's love and grace toward human beings are questioned.

When God looks at the world, God sees with eyes full of mercy and grace. May we have the same eyesight in 2023, and may we have the same steadfastness and hope as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a famous Lutheran theologian and martyr, who was arrested by the Nazis and wrote from prison in 1944: "So wonderfully surrounded by good powers, we await with hope, come what may! God is with us at eve and morning hours, and goes with us into each new day".

May God bless you with the presence of the Holy Spirit so that you may be a blessing to others.

Yours in Christ

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