



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Department for Planning
and Operations

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HISTORY OF THE LWF ASSEMBLIES SINCE 1947

1. 1947 Lund, Sweden



The Signing of the LWF Constitution

Place: Lund, Sweden

Dates: 30 June -6 July 1947

Theme: "The Lutheran Church in the World Today"

Member churches: 47 churches from 26 countries

Highlights: There were 200 voting delegates and 400 visitors. Archbishop Erling Eidem from Uppsala, Sweden presided in his capacity as retiring president of the Lutheran World Convention. Professor Anders Nygren of Lund was elected the first President of the LWF and Dr Sylvester C. Michelfelder of the USA who had served as acting executive secretary was confirmed as the first Executive Secretary of the LWF. **The sub-themes** were: the Faith in which she lives today (the Word, the Sacraments, the Church), the Mission she should fulfill (Evangelism, Foreign mission, helping one another), the Problems she must face (relations to other churches, relations to the state, secularism). The principal addresses: the place of the Lutheran World Federation today,

the testimony of the Lutheran Church, we must work while it is day, the Lutheran Church and its tasks in the work, Christ the hope of the world.

The main decision was the adoption of a constitution for the LWF which comprised thirteen articles, the first three stating the name, the doctrinal basis and the nature and purposes. Although official delegates were mostly coming from Germany, the Nordic countries and the United States, among the participants were the Chinese theologian P'eng Fu who made noteworthy contributions to the Assembly and the Indian theologian Joel Lakra who was elected a member of the first executive committee of the LWF.

The Lund Assembly elected an Executive Committee of sixteen persons, four each from Germany, the Nordic Countries, the United States and other countries. Groups met in sessions around the sub-themes of "The Lutheran Church in the World Today": the Faith by which she lives, the Mission she should fulfil and the Problems she must face.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, Anders Nygren, by Jens Holger Schjorring, p. 354-360.

2. 1952 Hanover, Germany



Memorial Service for the victims of war in all the world, held in the ruins of the Aegidienkirche

Place: Hanover, Federal Republic of Germany

Dates: 25 July – 3 August, 1952

Theme: "The living Word in a responsible church"

Highlights: There were 227 delegates, 207 alternates, 801 visitors. Landesbischof Hanns Lilje of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover was elected the second LWF President and Dr Carl E. Lund-Quist, Executive Secretary from the USA.

The main addresses were: our Church service, Lutheran ethics and missionary practice, Lutheran theology and world missions, state and Church today, Lutheran World Service, Service to refugees.

The main decisions were to have a constitutional amendment that at least four members of the Executive Committee have to be laypersons, the Assembly established a Department of Theology, a Department of World Service (merger of Interchurch Aid and Service to Refugees) and a Department on World Missions, the publication of a Lutheran world encyclopedia, the inclusion of youth in future assemblies, the creation of the LWF Archives. The Assembly was overshadowed by East-West conflict and only a few delegates from the GDR and the Eastern States could take part. They were more delegates from Latin America and Asia, and especially present were several Lutheran churches from the now independent India. There were however no African church delegates present at all, individuals African participated as official visitors of mission boards. The organizational changes introduced, the Federation gained enough efficiency to retain its importance in the coming years and this Assembly gave new impulses for the further work of the LWF.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Hans Otte, p. 361-369.

3. 1957, Minneapolis, USA



Place: Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Dates: 15-25 August, 1957

Theme: "Christ frees and unites"

Highlights: The Assembly met on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the LWF. Although many difficulties of the postwar situation had been overcome, Lutherans and other Christians still faced various problems around the world. Newly emerging nations in Africa struggled with political and socioeconomic issues in their attempt to overcome the burden of colonialism. Christianity in China as well as in other Asian regions faced political opposition from communist and nationalist ideologies. The cold war between

East and West kept Lutherans divided in Europe. Bishop Lajos Ordass's opening sermon was a moving testimony to spiritual freedom in Christ.

Principal addresses were: the Freedom we have in Christ, the unity of the Church in Christ, the freedom to reform the Church, free for service in the world, free and united in hope. Voices also testified how difficult it was in many parts of the world to be free.

They were 241 delegates (145 from Europe, 60 from the USA and Canada, 16 from Asia, 7 from Latin America, and 5 from Africa), 146 official visitors from member churches, 125 visitors from non member churches. Dr Franklin Clark Fry was elected the new President, as he was presiding the United Lutheran Church in the United States.

The main decisions were a constitutional change regarding new member churches (acceptance by LWF in assembly, or in the interim by the Executive Committee), acceptance of 4 new member churches and seven congregations, approval of a study of the Commission on theology on the significance of the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the church today, focusing on "justification". The final theses of the theme, called the "Minneapolis Confession" explicate the five subtitles: the freedom we have in Christ, the unity of the Church in Christ, the freedom to reform the Church, free for service in the world, free and united in hope. The credential committee approved three new member churches (Germany, Hong Kong and Mexico) and seven LWF recognized congregations all from Latin America.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Eric W. Gritsch, p. 369-374.

4. 1963 Helsinki, Finland



Members of the Lutheran Assembly moving in a procession

Place: Helsinki, Finland
Dates: 30 July-11 August 1963
Theme: "Christ Today"

Highlights: There were 267 delegates (61 from North America, 59 from Germany, 58 from Northern Europe, 37 from the small diaspora church in Europe, and 52 from Latin America, Asia and Africa and Australia) and 413 other participants. There was an increasing number of churches from the southern hemisphere joining the LWF and which were subsequently represented at the Assembly. Bishop David from India, Bishop Fosseus from South Africa, Dr Lumbantobing from Indonesia and Bishop Moshi from Tanzania played important roles. Dr Fredrick A. Schiotz, president of the American Lutheran Church was elected to be the new President of the LWF.

The principal addresses: Grace for the world, faith without works? Divided humanity – United in Christ, the new song of praise, the one Church and the Lutheran churches.

The main decision was that the document on justification was not accepted. The main attention of the assembly was given indeed to a discussion of the doctrine of justification and the ultimate failure of the final vote on Document 75: Justification although a solemn statement on the subject was expected. An important decision was made though when the Lutheran Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research was established, later to become the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. Proposals had been presented for constitutional and structural changes, especially a reform of the structure and working styles of the LWF: the Committee on Latin America, on Student Work, the Commission on International Affairs, on Inner Missions and on women's work within the

commission on Stewardship were dissolved and the work done in different structures. In Helsinki, technical progress were praised. The postwar period had overcome and new challenges had to be tackled. LWF had installed a broadcasting service, Radio Voice of the Gospel in Addis Ababa inaugurated by a solemn celebration in February 1963, an initiative emphatically welcome by the Assembly. The growth of the LWF since 1957 and up to Helsinki: 21 member churches had joined was also part of the context. Some LWF member churches still allowed no pulpit and altar fellowship.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Reinhard Brandt, p. 375-381.

5. 1970, Evian, France



Youth delegates congratulating Christian Kempf elected first youth delegate at the LWF Executive Committee

Place: Evian, France

Dates: 14-24 July 1970

Theme: “Sent into the world”

Highlights: In the context of two assembly postponements in Weimar, GDR and in Porte Alegre, Brazil one of the most important products of the Fifth Assembly was its resolution on human rights. There were 216 voting delegates, because of disappointment only 11 Latin Americans were present, 113 came from Europe, 164 official visitors, advisors and observers-consultants were registered in addition to staff and press. It was a young assembly as thirty of the delegates were between 18 and 35 year old, with full voting rights. The Executive Committee had decided to invite the member churches to send youth representatives to a preassembly youth conference. Prof. Mikko Juva from Finland was elected LWF President.

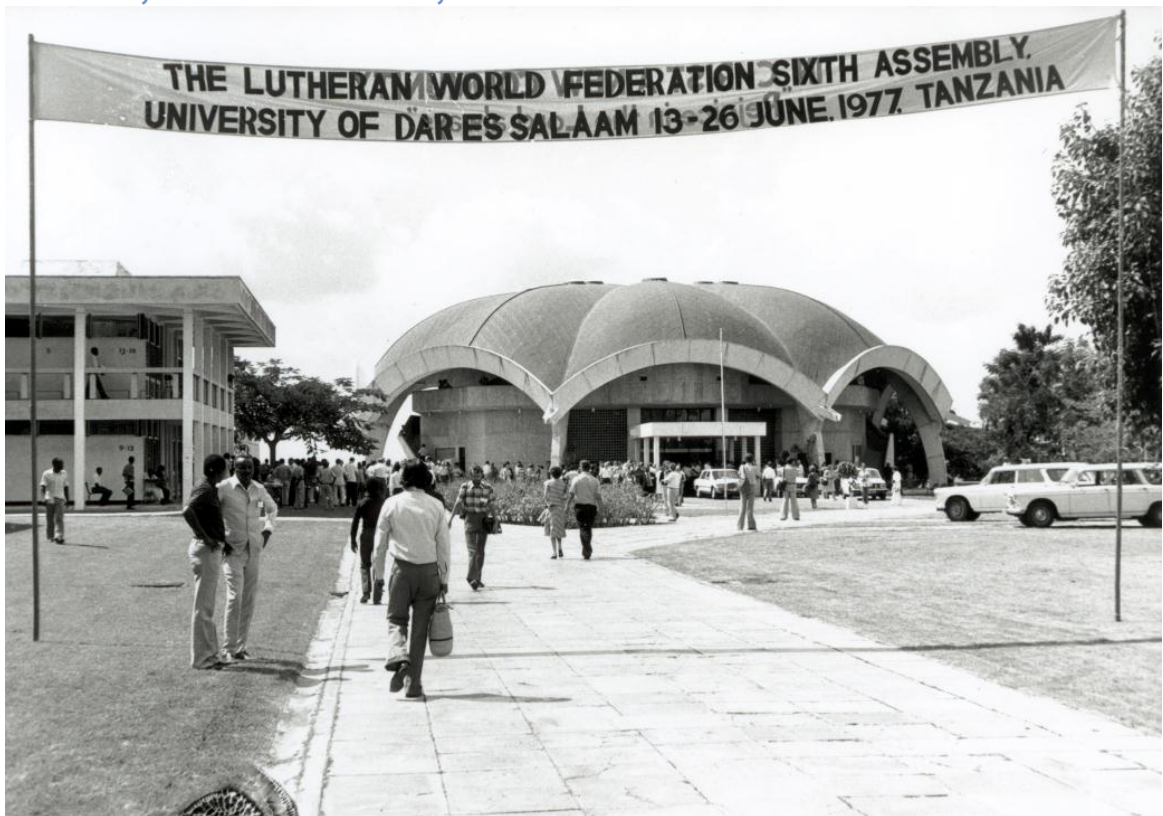
The principal addresses were on creative discipleship in the contemporary world crisis, sent into the world, the response of the Lutheran churches to the Roman Catholic Church and theology today.

The main decisions were the adoption of a new LWF structure, the resolution on human rights, recommendation of pulpit and altar fellowship between LWF member

churches. The final decision of the LWF leadership to hold the Fifth Assembly in Evian, France was made only five weeks before it took place. The fact that there was no local church added a special touch as services were held in the local Roman Catholic parish church which became a sign of ecumenical progress, an important legacy of the Assembly. In the wake of Vatican II, two keynote addresses dealt with relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. Cardinal Willebrand's lecture was a "unique and important step toward a deeper and more far-reaching understanding between our churches". Ecumenical commitment was also a highlight "we must not insist upon uniformity in theological formulations and in practice for Christian unity but use the variations rooted in the Scriptures to help bring together divided groups into one body with many members". It was crucial for the subsequent development of the Federation that the member churches were reminded that "the goal of altar and pulpit fellowship should always be kept in mind". Section 3 dealt with the "responsible participation in today's society" and created deep divisions among the delegates due to different background. Economic justice and human rights were key issues. Furthermore there were discussions both of education as the only tenable way of creating new structures in society and of servanthood and peace. The Fifth Assembly is a milestone in the LWF history as it was the culmination of what had been implicit in the first decades, in others it provided a new direction by introducing a number of concerns that were to become key issues, such as the inclusive participation of churches from the southern hemisphere, of women and of youth and a new focus on social ethics and human rights. The relationship between Lutheran identity and new concerns became evident such as the strong emphasis on ecumenical relations and the search for church unity including among Lutheran churches, the striving toward full altar and pulpit fellowship. One of the paradoxical overtones of the Assembly was the growing number of resolutions which were then organised by priorities by the forthcoming Executive Committee.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Jens Holger Schjorring, p. 382-396.

6. 1977, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



Place: Dar es Salaam

Dates: 13 - 25 June, 1977

Theme: "In Christ – a new community"

Highlights: The first third-world Assembly comprised 250 delegates, 437 advisors, observers, staff and visitors. The share of the delegates coming from the third world was now 40 percent while at Evian it had been 30 percent and at Lund only 8 percent. In addition the proportion of women delegates increased to closed to the targeted 25 percent. The number of youth delegates however was less than at Evian. The absence of delegates from Taiwan and South Korea meant that the matter of criteria for assembly sites would continue to be part of future LWF agendas. Bishop Josiah Kibira of Tanzania was elected the new LWF President.

The principal addresses: the Mission of the Church and its obligation to evangelism, the Lutheran Church and the unity of the Church, development and self-reliance.

The main decision were the statement on "Southern Africa: confessional integrity" which declared that the racial separation of the church in compliance with apartheid in Southern Africa constitutes a status confessionis. The Evian Assembly had already debated the same issue and voted on a clear resolution rejecting racial division at the Communion table. There was a mounting impatience about the implementation of the Evian statement, but after seven years none was insight. Other major issues was the recognition of women as equals to men at all levels of the life of the church, the endorsement of "reconciled diversity" as the lead theme of the ecumenical engagement of Lutherans, the study o "root causes" of social and economic injustice. The sense of welcome by the Tanzanian host church and the local community overwhelmed the international participants and influenced profoundly the mood of the whole Assembly, the impact of this African context was conspicuous and made the Dar es Salaam Assembly different from earlier LWF world gatherings. The context had also many other consequences. Meeting on the African continent was for the African churches a sign of

recognition of their full membership into the worldwide Lutheran communion. The topics taken up were no longer determined exclusively by the theologians of the North, the issues faced by African churches on their own continent came to the fore. Coming to Africa made a lasting contribution to the LWF as a whole. It was no longer wrapped only in the culture of Northern Europe and North America, it was at home as much in Africa as on any other continent. The Dar es Salaam Assembly brought to the foreground the necessity of the LWF and its member churches to intensify their involvements in contemporary social-ethical issues and in the advocacy of human rights on the basis of the Lutheran Confessional Heritage. Another set of issues received almost equal attention: the ecumenical task and vision of the LWF. The statement “Models of unity” summed up the consensus of the Assembly by endorsing as its key concept the notion of “reconciled diversity”, presented as a complement to the concept of “conciliar fellowship” which according to the statement “seems to take insufficiently into account the legitimacy of confessional differences”. The Dar es Salaam Assembly made an effort to give a boost to the concerns for global missions after the low point experienced at the Evian Assembly with the statement: “a challenge to the churches” and endorsed the establishment of a Youth Desk and a Youth Advisory Committee. The LWF Executive Committee as asked to also establish a full-time Women’s desk. The election of a Tanzanian president was a particularly significant event for the Tanzanians and the African churches.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Risto Lehtonen, p. 397-402.

7. 1984, Budapest, Hungary



Place: Budapest Hungary
Dates: 22 July – 5 August 1984
Theme: “In Christ – Hope for the world”

Highlights: There were 315 voting delegates from 97 member churches, 300 youth participants, 50 members of LWF staff, 270 press and media representatives, 1500 advisers, observers and official guests from more than 100 countries in five continents.

The theme had three **sub-themes**: In Christ: Hope for Creation, in Christ: Hope for humankind, in Christ: Hope for the Church. The Assembly theme proved to have been well selected in light both of the serious tensions that dominated world politics in that time of the cold war and of the pressures, both external and internal, that marked the daily living conditions of many of the LWF member churches. After much controversy, Bishop Zoltan Kaldy was elected President of the LWF, defeating Ms Bodil Solling – the first woman from Denmark standing as a candidate for presidency, by 136 against 124. The themes assigned to working groups ranged broadly: mission and evangelism today, worship and Christian life, enabling ministry, ecumenical commitment and Lutheran identity, relating to the information age, partnership of women and men, youth in church and society, toward economic and social justice, caring for God’s endangered creation, racism in church and society, promoting human rights, Christian life in different social systems, and our responsibilities for peace and justice. Any account of the Seventh Assembly would be incomplete without due attention to ecumenical participation at the Assembly of ecumenical church leaders, especially Cardinal Willebrands president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and Dr Lukas Vischer, ecumenical officer for the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland.

The main decisions were the suspension of membership in the LWF of two white churches from Southern Africa on the basis of their continued support of the system of apartheid and their failure to end the division of their churches on racial grounds, a constitutional statement declaring that all member churches understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship, the agreement that at least 40 percent of the delegates to the Eighth Assembly be women, and that at least 50 percent of the delegates to subsequent assemblies be women. The Seventh Assembly of the LWF convened in Budapest was held in most sensitive circumstances. For the host church it was an occasion for exchange with sisters and brothers from parts of the world with which there had been no substantive contact for decades. For the LWF itself it was an opportunity to manifest its presence in the framework of a Marxist state. Precisely these circumstances brought a number of sensitive topics to the surface at the Assembly: broad issues concerning the church and socialism, questions concerning human rights and strategies regarding the rights of the church in society. The Assembly statement entitled “The self-understanding and task of the LWF” went far to illuminate the Federation’s growing awareness of itself as communion, a global communion of Lutheran churches and not simply a voluntary association of churches. The Seventh Assembly’s action to amend the Constitution article on “Nature, functions and Scope” by adding the sentence: “the members churches of the LW understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other” has proven to be a decision of considerable ecclesiological importance. The participation of a delegation of the World Jewish Congress need to be noted as well.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Jens Holger Schjorring, p. 403-411.

8. 1990, Curitiba, Brazil



Place: Curitiba, Brazil

Dates: 29 January – 8 February 1990

Theme: "I have heard the cry of my people"

Highlights: It is noteworthy that the theme of the Eighth Assembly moved for almost the first time in LWF Assembly themes, away from the boundaries of the second article of the creed. The context of the Assembly cries of suffering people and nations, the third world, as well as the cries of a violated creation was seen by those who prepared for the assembly to be of greater importance than perhaps had been the case at previous gatherings. There were 376 voting delegates (43% were women, 15.6% of voting delegates were youth) from approximately 110 member churches, 192 official guest, 60 stewards, 211 staff. Landesbishop Dr Johannes Hanselmann, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria presided as LWF president. The Rev. Dr Gottfried Brakemeier, president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil was elected the new LWF President at Curitiba. Rev. Dr Gunnar Staalseth was LWF General Secretary.

The sub-themes were: For life in communion, For salvation, for peace with justice, for a liberated creation.

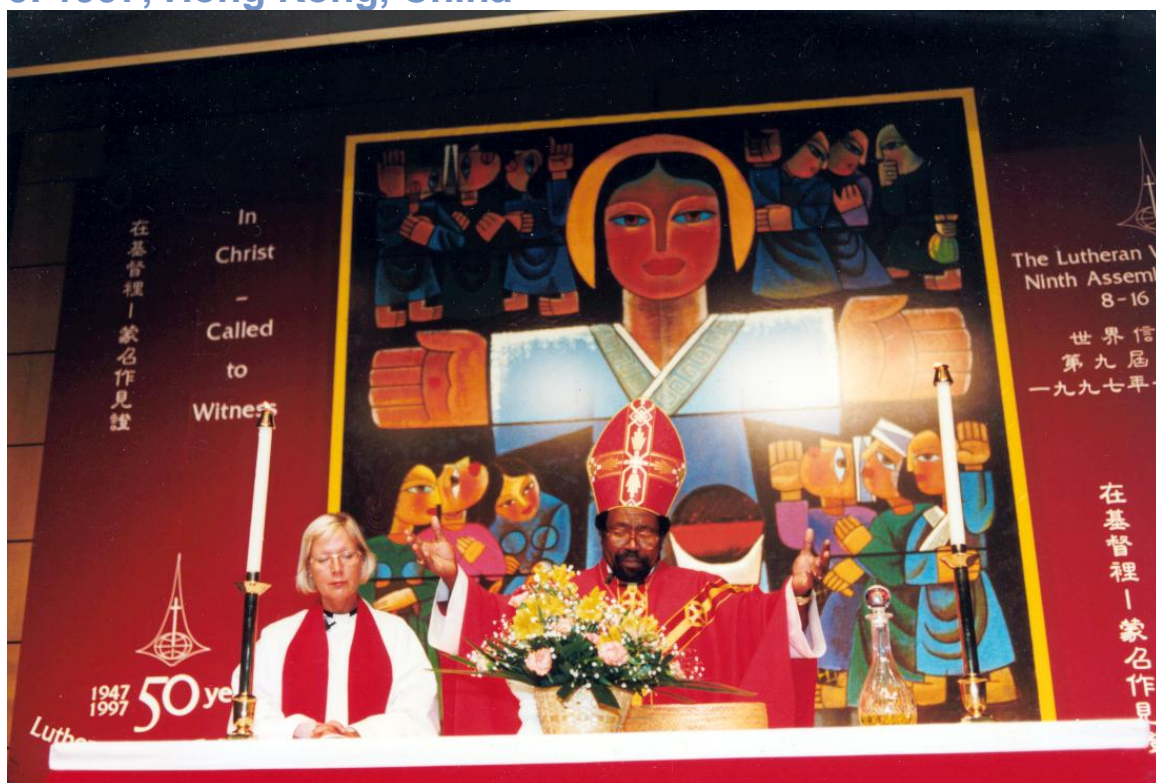
The principal addresses were on Justification – Freedom – Liberation theology, discerning the call of God in the cries of God's people, our common responsibility, I have heard the cry of my people, for life in communion, for salvation, for peace with justice, for a liberated creation. This was the second assembly to take place in the southern hemisphere and the first assembly to take place after the fall of the Berlin wall, and both North-South and East-West tensions had played major roles in the Federation since its founding in 1947. The problems were not the same in 1990 than in the 1970s, the Federation gathered in a country decimated by international debt, by continued human

rights abuses against its own people, by extraordinary contrasts between rich and poor, by rain forests being destroyed by pollution and greed.

The main decisions: Curitiba was preoccupied with restructuring which created tensions in the Assembly debates. While the Eighth Assembly will be remembered largely as an assembly devoted to internal considerations of structure, other decisions were made. Resolutions were passed in which the LWF expressed its solidarity with member churches and regions where life was seriously affected by socio-political change and conflict in Brazil, in the Baltic States, in Central America, in Palestine. The Assembly reviewed positively the substantial progress made in Anglican-Lutheran relationships and resolved that the LWF renew its commitment to the goal of full communion with the churches of the Anglican Communion and that it urge LWF member churches to take appropriate steps toward its realization. Another action was to call for the inclusion of 20 percent youth among the voting delegates to the Ninth Assembly.

More to read in the book: *From Federation to Communion: the history of the Lutheran World Federation*, by Norman A. Hjelm, p. 412-420.

9. 1997, Hong Kong, China



Place: Hong Kong, China

Dates: 8 - 16 July 1997

Theme: "In Christ, called to witness" :

Highlights: One week after the territory's transfer of sovereignty by British authorities back to Chinese rule, the first Lutheran global meeting in Asia focused on the celebration of the LWF's fiftieth anniversary. Delegates from 122 Lutheran member churches around the world gathered in Hong Kong and it was an historic assembly, the last of the XX century. For the first time, close to half of the delegates were women. The Assembly reaffirmed the communion's commitment to women's ordination but acknowledged member churches' varying views on the practice by urging reflection and dialogue.

The main addresses were on In Christ – called to witness: the Lutheran communion witnessing to Christian unity: Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, towards a just society, Mission and dialogue: witnessing in a multifaith and multicultural setting, the LWF 2000 and beyond.

Each day began with worship and Bible studies, organized on regional basis, each region presented a Bible study to illustrate how the selected passage has been experienced in that particular region. The assembly could experience the cultural diversity and flavour in the Lutheran Communion.

The main decisions: It set a process in motion for the acceptance by member churches of the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church. The presence of ecumenical guests were an affirmation of the LWF as a partial expression of the church universal. Delegates discussed in ten village groups.

10. 2003, Winnipeg, Canada



Place: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Dates: 21-31 July 2003

Theme: For the healing of the world

Highlights: As was the case at the LWF Ninth Assembly, the many topical issues of content were discussed in ten village groups. Every official participant was assigned to a village. Each village provided its participants with a base from which they had an opportunity to affect the outcome of the Assembly. At the village level, participants could share with one another the life stories of their church, nation, etc...They reflected together on the theme, on presentations made in the plenaries, and on specific issues of common interest.

The principal addresses and the message of the Assembly were on the healing gift of justification, the healing gift of communion, healing the divisions within the One Church, the mission of the Church in multifaith contexts, removing barriers that exclude, the

Church's ministry of healing, justice and healing in families, overcoming violence, transforming economic globalization, healing creation.

The main decisions: delegates adopted "The Lutheran World Federation – a Communion of Churches" as the LWF's full name and affirmed regional ecumenical agreements for the first time. The Assembly theme led to commitments to transform economic globalization, strengthen ministries addressing HIV and AIDS, violence and poverty and defend the rights of indigenous peoples. The denial of entry visas for 50 delegates and stewards highlighted the deeper issue of exclusion. Delegates moved to remove any existing barriers to a fully inclusive communion. The Assembly also called on member churches to engage in study and respectful dialogue on marriage, family and human sexuality.

11. 2010, Stuttgart, Germany



Place: Stuttgart, Germany

Dates: 20-27 July 2010

Theme: Give us today our daily bread

Highlights: The Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart will be remembered not only as the second such global Lutheran event in the land of the Reformation but also as a significant symbol of a memorable ecumenical event in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. It committed itself to care for God's people and for God's creation. Bishop Munib Younan, former LWF vice-president for Asia and bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem and the Holy Land was elected as President. Rev. Dr Noko's retirement was celebrated as well as the new LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge from Chile, the first General Secretary from Latin America.

The principal addresses: Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams delivered an insightful keynote address. The defining ecumenical event during this Assembly was that of reconciliation and healing between Lutherans and Anabaptist sisters and brothers. Through a liturgical action, the Assembly asked for forgiveness from God and the Mennonites for the wrongful and unacceptable persecution and execution of these

reformers during the early days of the Reformation. Many ecumenical greetings were also conveyed from other Christian faith traditions.

Commitments were to gender and intergenerational justice, food justice, climate justice, fairness toward those suffering from HIV and AIDS, justice for migrants and relief for those who suffer under the conditions of illegitimate debt. The Eleventh Assembly committed itself to speak out boldly and prophetically across ecumenical lines and with communities of other religious faiths.

12. 2017, Windhoek, Namibia

Place: Windhoek, Namibia

Dates: 10-16 May 2017

Theme: Liberated by God's grace

Sub-themes: Salvation – not for sale
Human beings – not for sale
Creation – not for sale

Specific purposes of the LWF Twelfth Assembly: to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with special reference to its ecumenical and global contexts, to help empower the Lutheran Communion and its churches as they begin their witness and service for the next 500 years, discerning and sharing how the Lutheran Reformation continues to be alive and active in the church and in the world, to learn about and reflect upon the local context of Namibia and the regional context of Southern Africa, with special reference to reconciliation and healing and to the impact of the involvement of the Lutheran World Federation. (LWF Council 2014)

P. S. : All LWF Assembly reports are available for consultation and references.

As a former LWF General Secretary wrote: “Official reports of LWF Assemblies are not to be a record of “old” events but a living testimony of how God works among God’s people who share a common self-understanding that inspires them to common action. These are important legacy documents by and through which we give account to our spiritual posterity”. (p. 8 Stuttgart Official Report).