



ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY  
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION  
2023 • KRAKÓW, POLAND

ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE  
REPORT OF THE  
THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY



# ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE

## REPORT OF THE THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY

LWF Thirteenth Assembly  
Kraków, Poland  
13-19 September 2023



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# FOREWORD

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) held its Thirteenth Assembly from 13 to 19 September 2023 under the theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland hosted the highest decision-making body of the Lutheran communion in the city of Kraków.

Meeting just one year after the LWF celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Assembly gave delegates from all LWF regions space for mutual enrichment through joint reflection and discernment about churches’ proclamation and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in their specific contexts.

More than 1,300 women, men and youth, including 327 delegates from the 150 LWF member churches attended. This report is a compilation of the speeches and reports, sermons, messages and greetings that were presented at the Thirteenth Assembly as well as highlights from worship and Bible study. It also includes the key outcomes: a message, public statements and resolutions.

The Assembly Message affirms the Lutheran communion’s commitment to strive for unity in diversity, and the unwavering call to serve the neighbor. “As One Body, called by the One Spirit, in One Hope, we go from Kraków to all corners of the world, to proclaim the gospel that we are liberated by God’s grace and sent to serve our neighbor.”

As the LWF looks to the future, the journey has begun toward 2030, the year marking the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the major confessional writing in the Lutheran tradition. LWF is a confessional but not an inward-looking confessionalist body. LWF’s ecumenical identity was clearly visible at the Kraków assembly. We were reminded that the



**Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt.**

“ecumenical potential of our confession” is “a plea for unity, intended to hold the body of Christ, the church, together.”

Being churches in communion is a gift and a task. I therefore invite you to read this report with a perspective on the commitments churches have made together, and how they apply to the witness of the Lutheran communion at the local church level and globally.

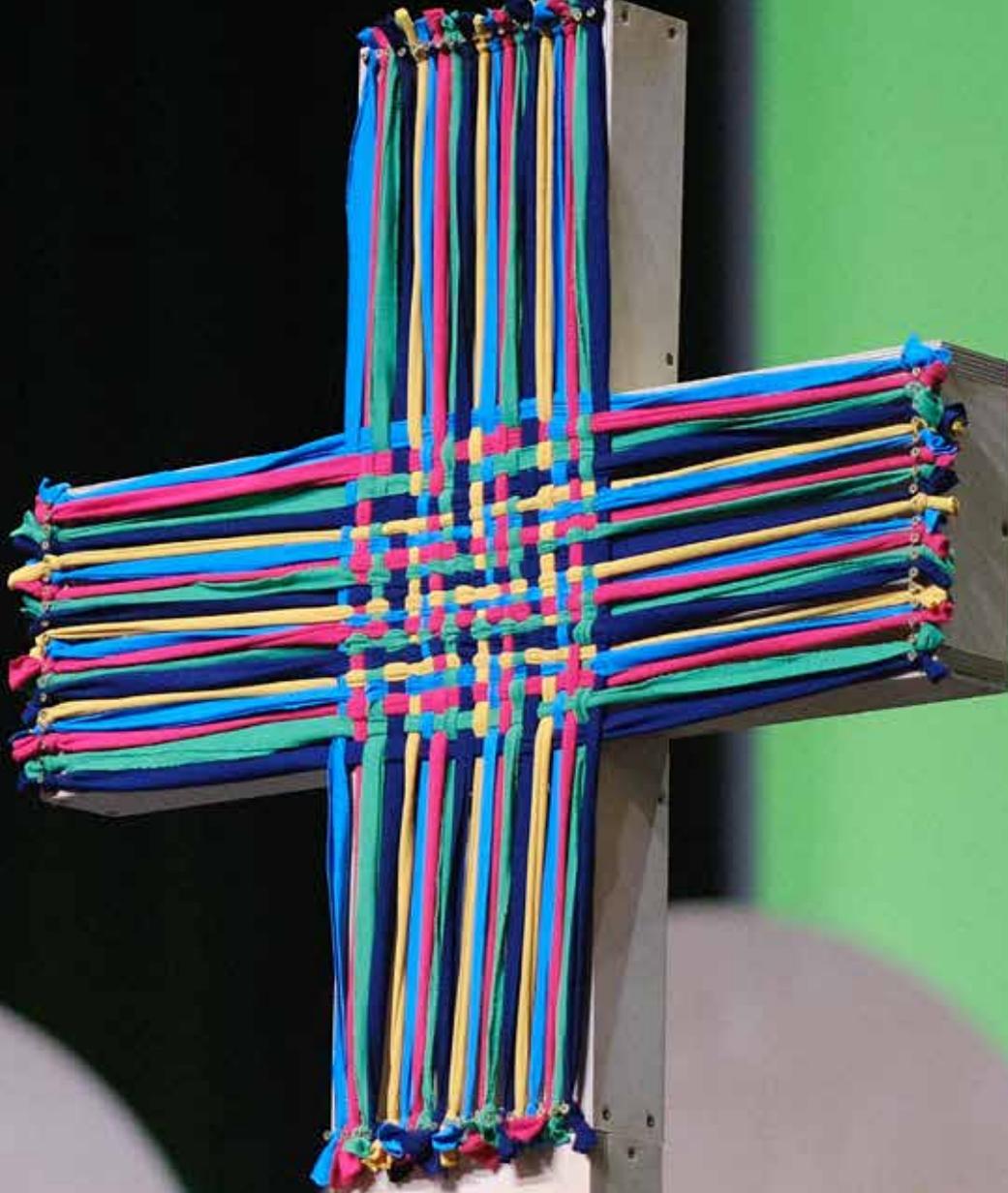
This report is also an opportunity to give thanks to God for our ongoing journey as a communion in Christ, that is called to live and work together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

*Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt  
General Secretary  
The Lutheran World Federation*

# ASSEMBLY OUTCOMES

Assembly outcomes highlight the main issues discussed and agreed upon by LWF member church delegates at the organization's highest decision-making body. These include the main message from the Assembly itself, public statements and resolutions, and messages from the regional and international Pre-Assemblies.





Multi-colored cloth strands woven together by Assembly participants onto a cross, a reminder of the Lutheran communion's unity and accountability to one another.

# MESSAGE

As delegates to the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we gathered in Kraków, Poland, from 13 to 19 September 2023, to worship, reflect, discuss, and discern the way forward for our global communion of churches, inspired by the theme of “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” (Ephesians 4:4).

Before we came here, we gathered in our regions and we gathered in Poland, as youth, women, and for the first time as men, for our Pre-Assemblies.

We are deeply grateful to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, its leaders, congregations, and volunteers, for their generous hospitality. A minority church in the country, witnessing in an often-challenging context, the Polish Lutheran church has truly shown us that every church has gifts to share with the rest of the communion.

Together we affirm that we are One in the body of Christ, empowered by the One Spirit and called to proclaim the One Hope of the Risen Christ.

During this Assembly, we were reminded of the urgency of providing a coherent, credible, and united witness to the gospel amid the many crises which afflict our polarized and fragmented world today.

Looking ahead to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030, we remember the call of the reformers of the sixteenth century, recalled by our keynote speaker, to be “an ever-reforming church,” working for Christian unity, but also striving to unite into One Body all of humanity, together with all of creation, as we witness to the gospel in words and actions.

## ONE BODY

In worship, we reflected on the incarnation, when God became a baby in a manger, a vulnerable body of flesh and blood. The incarnation challenges us to recognize God in every person and in all of creation, acknowledging our deep-down unity.

But we live in a divided world, where bodies are hurting, rejected, excluded, and the earth, our shared home, is suffering from the effects of growing environmental and climate emergencies.

The relentless rise in global temperatures, with this year, already now ranking as the hottest on record, has meant loss of biodiversity, lives, livelihoods, and whole communities. We hear and acknowledge the urgent call to action. We are a part of God’s creation. Led by young people, we pledge to be more effective advocates for economic and climate justice, safeguarding the planet and its resources for future generations. Together we reaffirm that creation is not for sale.

We gathered in a region where Russia’s war against Ukraine has left hundreds of thousands dead and injured, with millions more displaced by the fighting. Across the globe, we hear the cries of bodies maimed, killed or displaced by war and conflict. We remember Ethiopia, Haiti, Manipur, Myanmar, Nigeria, Palestine, Sudan, Venezuela, Yemen, and many other places where violence claims lives and disrupts whole communities. Our faith calls us to be messengers of justice, peace and reconciliation, standing alongside those who are most vulnerable.

This year has seen the highest number of refugees and internally displaced people, with official figures surpassing 108 million. Our faith calls us to welcome the stranger and we are grateful to those who offer shelter and support, recalling Christ’s words, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35).



At the Assembly, members of the Lutheran communion celebrate the gift of unity in diversity, knowing that the center is always Christ.

We reject all forms of violence and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, age, disability, xenophobia, caste, or social background. All people are created in the image of God, with equal dignity that cannot be compromised.

On the tenth anniversary of the LWF *Gender Justice Policy*, we celebrate the progress we have made and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the empowerment of women and to an end to sexual and gender-based violence, which saw a sharp increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. We call for stronger partnerships between women and men to combat patriarchy and we affirm an understanding of masculinity that is characterized by caring, nurturing, and serving.

We reiterate the call of the LWF, first made almost four decades ago, to affirm the full participation of women in the ordained ministry. There should be no distinction between the ordained ministry of women and men.

We are crying with women who are still denied their equal dignity and suffer oppression on racial, cultural or religious pretexts. We call for theological reflection and education around gender justice and the continuous empowerment of women and girls, ensuring that they can enjoy a future that is fair and just and full of opportunities.

We are stronger because of diverse participation in the life of the communion. We commit ourselves to working for increased intergenerational justice. While some progress has been made, we do not take this for granted. We must do better to ensure meaningful participation of youth in all areas of church life, including governance and decision-making.

We are called to recognize Christ in one another, and to combat dehumanizing hate speech that leads to harmful actions against individuals or communities. We are all united in the body of Christ and we know that when one part of the body hurts, the whole body suffers.



**More than 1,300 people from all over the world, including 327 LWF member church delegates participated in the Thirteenth Assembly, held at the ICE Congress Center in Kraków.**

As the Apostle Paul reminds us: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Just as our faith compels us to care for the physical well-being of others, so we must also prioritize mental, spiritual, and emotional health. As a global faith community, we are called to combat stigma and isolation, creating spaces of acceptance, accessibility and inclusion to which people can turn in times of need. We have observed an increase in mental health concerns, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing climate emergency, as well as violence, discrimination, and polarization. This requires urgent practical action, alongside theological reflection.

The LWF is a communion of churches proclaiming the gospel in different ways, across all seasons, cultures, economies, and political contexts, as we seek to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We celebrate the gift of unity in diversity, knowing that the center is always Christ.

Our member churches differ significantly between countries and regions. Mutual accountability is a mark of the church as we seek to share one another’s burdens. Through conversation we discern what it means to be the one body of Christ in 99 countries and be enriched by our diversity. We need each other’s experiences, insights, and critique. We are reminded and encouraged by Christ who holds all things together (Col 1:17).

The LWF is confessional communion, but it is not an inward-looking confessionalist body. Since its foundation, working for Christian unity has been one of LWF’s core tasks. We see ourselves as part of the broad ecumenical movement, with close connections to our partners and a shared commitment to heed Christ’s call “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).

To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical. The Lord calls us to recognize that the church is One Body in Christ in humility. We have been engaged in fruitful ecumenical dialogues for decades and we seek for deeper and wider understanding among all Christians.

We are well aware of the disagreements and divisions that have torn Christian churches apart over the centuries and continue to cause tensions in our own churches, within our global Lutheran communion and among Christians worldwide. But we also know that there is more that unites us than separates us, and we pledge to walk forward together.

## ONE SPIRIT

In worship we confessed our broken hearts and prayed that God create in us a clean heart. We heard the promise that God’s Spirit has renewed and reconciled us, moving and inspiring us to live the closeness to God already present, and closer to one another.

We live in a world of increasing polarization where misleading theologies create exclusive or escapist communities, accumulating power and wealth in the hands of a few, while sowing fear and fragmentation within churches and communities. We acknowledged that to overcome this, we need to ground our teaching and preaching on responsible theologies, as a global communion and in the member churches.

Responsible theology is grounded in the Bible. It heals wounds, creates unity, and strengthens communion. Responsible theology is holistic, uses inclusive language and diverse and accessible means of communication. Responsible theology builds inclusive communities, daring to renew its language and ways of reaching out to people on the margins. Responsible theology gives space for the renewing and reforming power of the one Spirit.

We underline the importance of stronger theological education and leadership formation for the sustainability of our churches, equipping people to engage with complex issues without resorting to simplistic answers.

Constructive interfaith engagement should be a special focus of theological education, both through high-level dialogue, as well as emphasizing the importance of harmonious daily life encounters with people of other faiths.

We are committed to being good neighbors in religiously diverse societies.

At the 1984 Assembly in Budapest, the LWF repudiated Martin Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of

his later writings against the Jews, declaring antisemitism a contradiction and affront to the gospel. We reaffirm that and express our continued commitment to live out our Lutheran heritage in the Christian faith with love and respect for the Jewish people.

*We walked through the camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau.  
They were transported as cattle and sent to die.  
We went there to face the truth.  
They were lied to, humiliated and murdered.  
We lamented.*

*Walking through Auschwitz-Birkenau.  
We remembered also other places of unspeakable evil.  
We remember that there is one humanity.  
That all have the same dignity given by God.  
We pledge never to be indifferent.  
We pledge to stand against hate speech, lies, atrocities.  
We pray, never again.*

As a communion of churches, we are called to discern the one Spirit from the many spirits of our time (1 Cor 12:10) in order to explore what the Triune God is calling us to do in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages. As we unite in prayer and common worship, in joint studies of Scripture and the Lutheran confessional writings, we discern and act upon God's divine calling in our world today.

The Assembly theme reminds us that Body and Spirit belong together, urging us to speak out against all forms of oppression, spiritual and physical. We are called to combat the racism, violence, abuse, inequality and exploitation that are still found in both church and society today.

In some parts of the world, churches suffer from restrictive laws or government policies, limiting their freedom of speech and even subjecting them to persecution if they raise their voices on behalf of justice and human rights. We deplore the discrimination and oppression of our Christian sisters and brothers, wherever it takes place and regardless of their faith or denomination. We ask member churches to pray for them and urge the communion to address this problem.

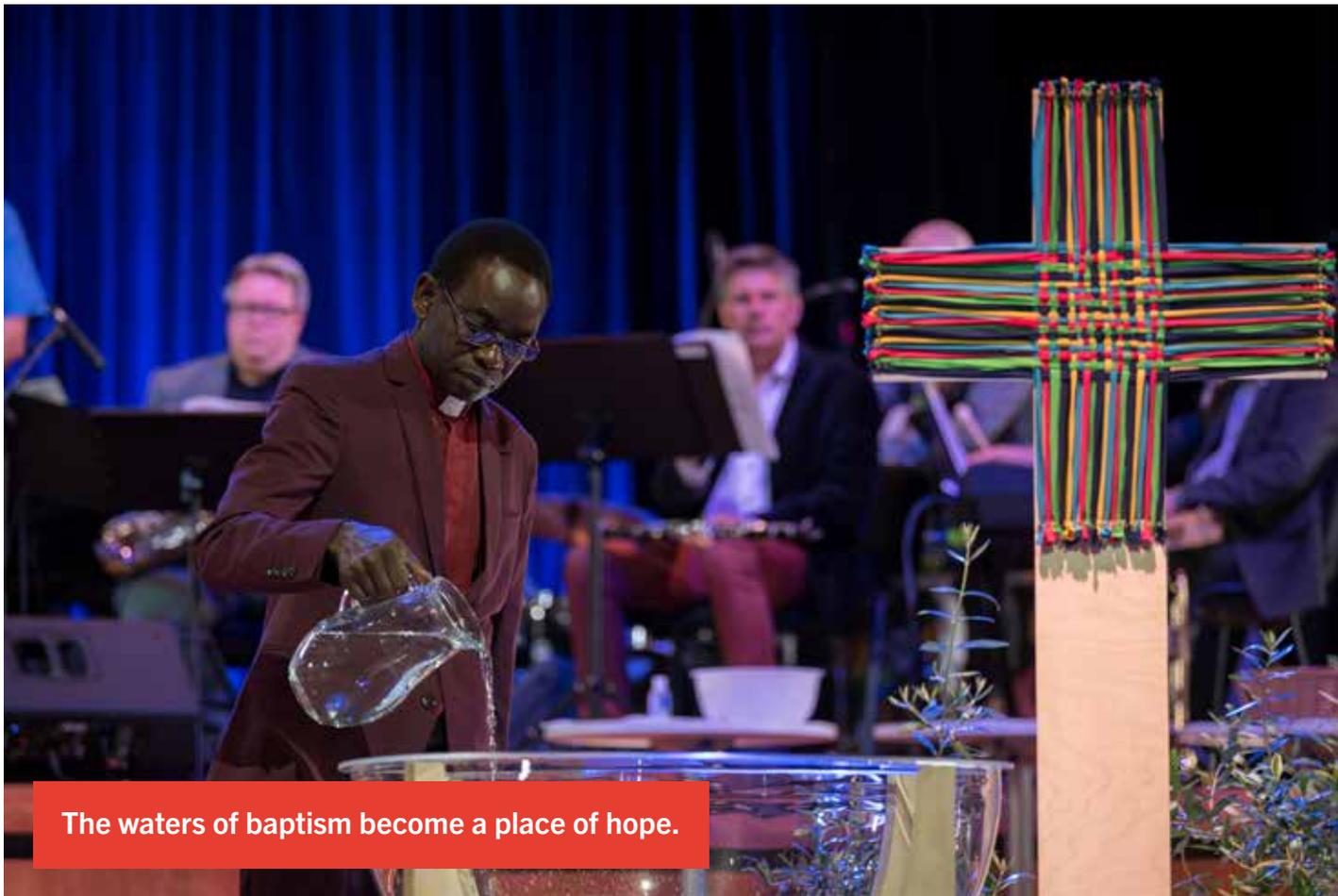
## ONE HOPE

In worship, we remembered that we are one human family and though the storms are rough, Christ is in the boat with us.

Faced with intersecting crises and a push-back on hard-won human rights, we may feel that the challenges ahead of us are overwhelming and insurmountable. During this assembly, we have heard the Risen Christ telling us, "Do not be afraid!"

The One Spirit shows us that another world is possible. The gospel invites us to hope, learning to read the signs of God's promise everywhere in the world because our hope is built upon Jesus Christ.

As Lutherans, we participate in God's holistic mission: proclamation, advocacy, diakonia, at international level, as well as locally in our individual churches. We are called through baptism and sent out to proclaim the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. The Spirit calls us to be instruments of justice, peace and reconciliation, healing wounds within our churches and in our common world.



**The waters of baptism become a place of hope.**

Equipped by the Holy Spirit, we are encouraged to build communities of hope wherever the gospel is shared and lived across the globe.

When we speak about hope, we must not be confused by worldly prospects, by false hopes and desires, but must remain focused on a concrete hope for this world and the next. We affirm that it is hope that holds the LWF together as a communion. It inspires us to stand in solidarity with each other, while addressing together the rapid changes and challenges our world is facing.

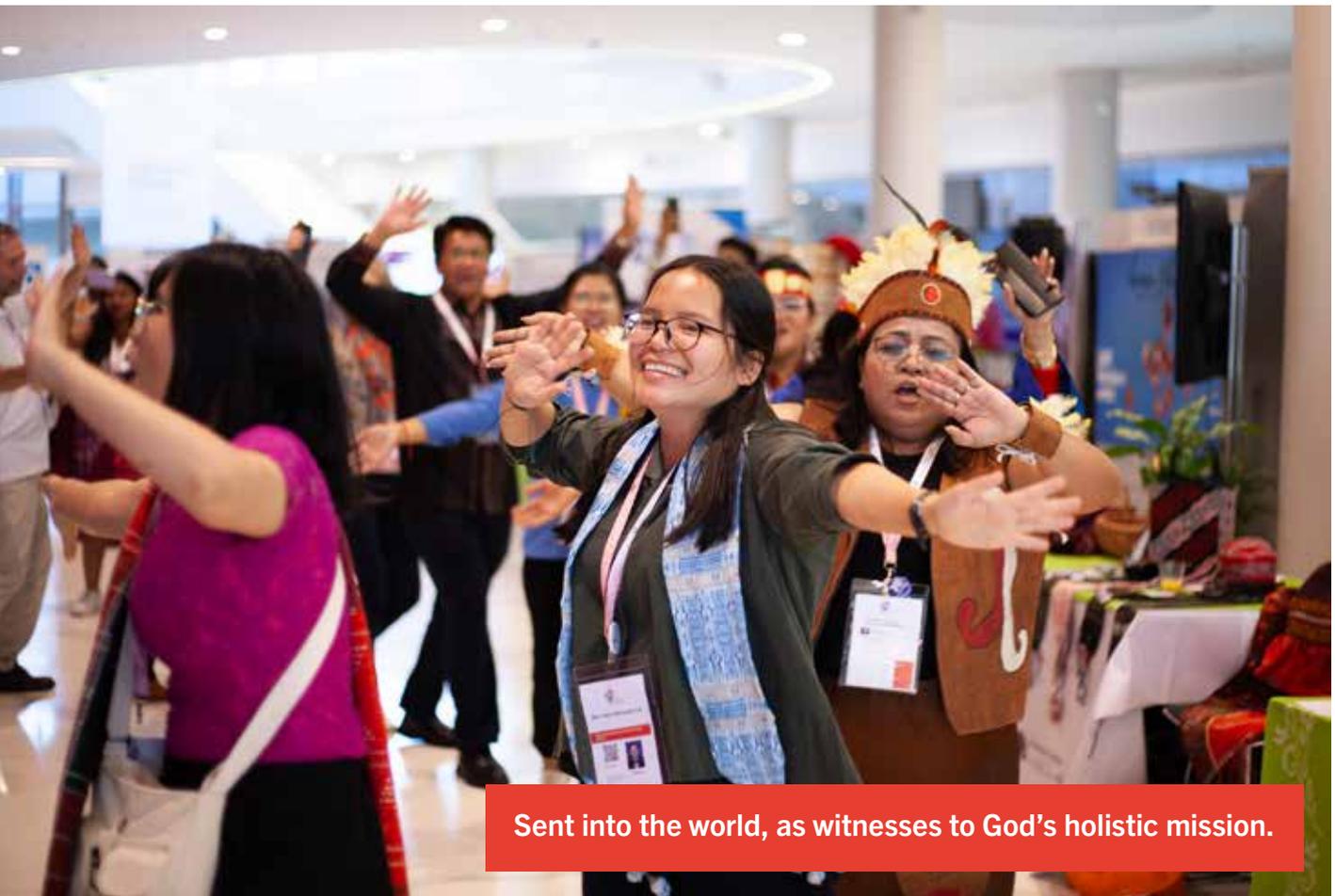
Hope reminds us that we are one humanity, with no distinction between us. In the waters of baptism, we become aware of the vast communion of saints with us and around us. It is a place of hope, and we give thanks to God for all those who have walked the road of reconciliation before us.

As we reflect on our work as churches in communion, we must find new ways of offering

hope to all people. Not an empty hope, but bold hope that is inspired by our faith in God and followed by our actions to serve people who are poor, in need, migrants, refugees and those affected by crises. Hope empowers us to speak out in the public space for justice and human rights. This hope must manifest itself in more tangible ways in the church through its work, worship, and mission.

As Lutherans we are churches in ongoing reformation. In Christ, we experience the joys and sufferings in this world, and we are called to name and respond to the challenges within the LWF communion and the world around us. We commit ourselves to learn from our past.

Diakonia is hope in action. We affirm the LWF's humanitarian and development work, its global engagement, its work with member churches, and partners, offering people in need hope and a future. Working together with people of all faiths, we seek to promote a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.



**Sent into the world, as witnesses to God's holistic mission.**

Growing awareness of the human-made climate emergency and actions to tackle it within our member churches are signs of hope. The LWF must continue to play a crucial role, connecting the work of local churches and communities to global advocacy.

Hope is the lens through which we look at the world, as followers of Christ, journeying together into the future.

## SENT INTO THE WORLD

We return to our home countries with a deeper sense of what it means to be churches in communion and with a stronger commitment to strengthen the bonds between us. We walk together as churches in an ecclesial and confessing communion, witnessing to our faith, in God's holistic mission. We heed the call to live into the gift of reconciliation and unity with all neighbors.

As we journey towards 2030 and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, we rejoice in the ecumenical potential of our confession, which is a plea for unity, intended to hold the body of Christ, the church, together.

As churches in ongoing reformation, we are called to work for peace in the world, between people, countries, and with the whole of creation.

As one Body, called by the one Spirit, in one Hope, we go from Kraków to all corners of the world, to proclaim the gospel that we are liberated by God's grace and sent to serve our neighbor.

# PUBLIC STATEMENTS

- The War Against Ukraine
- Christian Presence and Life in the Holy Land
- Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Asia
- Tax Justice



## THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

As the Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation meets in the city of Kraków, Poland, it is keenly aware that there is a war going on in the neighboring country, Ukraine.

The LWF Assembly condemns the brutal attack of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is contrary to international law. We are appalled by the destructive power the aggressor is exerting to achieve its imperial goals.

Thousands of men, women and children have lost their lives; many more suffer physically and mentally because of the horrors of the war. Cities, towns and villages have become uninhabitable, environmental damages are incalculable and it will take decades to rebuild them. Once again, the sexual violence against women, children and men has become a weapon of war. This war, moreover, does not have only a local dimension, but has global impact as it is conducted by a nuclear superpower and has huge economic and food security consequences for many people all over the world.

We strongly condemn the imperialist ideology that the aggressor uses to justify its attack. We oppose all attitudes that consider some states entitled to include others into their “spheres of influence,” be it in Africa, South and Central America, Asia or Eastern Europe. We are shocked by the fact that some Christian churches adopt this ideology and misuse their authority to justify aggression.

Once again, there is an existential threat of nuclear war. We are alarmed by the intimidations coming from the government representatives of the Russian Federation, while keeping in mind that, in this case, there are no “two sides escalating the conflict,” but only an aggressor that threatens and a victim.

We therefore ask the LWF member churches to continue to pray for peace – not only a ceasefire, but a peace that would be just. We recall the Statement on Peace and Justice from the LWF 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. We ask the LWF member churches

to include in their prayers also those living in Russia and Belarus who are being persecuted for their anti-war and anti-imperialist stances. There can be peace only if all the neighboring countries, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, are free and democratic, respecting human rights.

We stand in solidarity with all who suffer from the war, including our sisters and brothers from the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine. We support the LWF member churches who are helping the people of Ukraine and who have opened their hearts for all those who had to flee the war, not forgetting the refugees from other parts of the world.

We, at the same time, do not forget the vast suffering caused by wars and conflicts all over the world. The same mechanisms of evil are at work there as in the case of the war against Ukraine. We, therefore, as an LWF Assembly stand in solidarity and pray for the victims of all armed conflict in the world.

The LWF Assembly calls on:

- Russia to end its war against Ukraine and to cease weaponizing the food supply chains, especially to countries in the Global South;
- the international community to invest more in developing and supporting just and peaceful means, including mediation, to prevent and overcome conflicts;
- the international community for bolder efforts to address conflicts and crises in other parts of the world, including through concerted humanitarian aid and peacebuilding processes;
- the LWF member churches to pray and work for peace and justice in all communities, regions and in the world.

## CHRISTIAN PRESENCE AND LIFE IN THE HOLY LAND

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF is deeply concerned by the continuing violence, hatred

and loss of lives in the Holy Land. 2023 is already one of the most violent and deadly years in the last two decades on the West Bank, fueled by extremist policies violating human rights and human dignity for all affected. According to the United Nations, there have been over 200 Palestinian and nearly 30 Israeli fatalities in the West Bank and Israel thus far this year, already surpassing 2022 annual figures, and the highest figure since 2005.

The situation for Christians in the Holy Land has significantly deteriorated over the past years. There has been an increase in anti-Christian attacks by Jewish extremists and militant groups, including harassment of clergy and vandalizing of church property. Access to holy sites have repeatedly been restricted for both Christian and Muslim Palestinians.

As the Government of Israel continues to support the expansion of settlements which are illegal under international law, an ever-increasing number in the Palestinian community see their houses demolished, and their access to land, housing, employment, and basic services such as health and education restricted or denied. The LWF Assembly condemns such

actions and would like to recall the Statement on Peace and Justice from the LWF 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. The policies and actions of the recent Israeli governments have diminished the possibility of a Palestinian state. An increasing number of human rights organizations and some of Israel's own politicians and former heads of internal security have described the reality of the situation today. This should be a matter of concern to all of us.

The Church leaders in Jerusalem have been appealing to their sister churches and to the international community for solidarity and support. There is a growing fear that the already diminished Christian presence could disappear altogether from the Holy Land.

The LWF Assembly stands in solidarity with its Member Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), and affirms its ministry and witness in these challenging times. Further, the LWF Assembly expresses solidarity with other Christians, people of other faiths and Palestinians who are affected by the escalation of violence, occupation, and lack of access to holy sites. The LWF realizes that there are churches that are



**Jarmark workshops, such as one on “Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations in a Polarized World,” enabled Assembly participants to hear the stories from partners and members of the LWF communion.**

complicit in the injustice that the Palestinians and Palestinian Christians suffer, through colonial theologies of superiority and power.

The LWF Assembly also affirms its commitment to the LWF-owned and operated Augusta Victoria Hospital as a sign of its commitment to the Palestinian community and a symbol of hope in these extremely troubled times.

That the LWF Assembly calls on:

- The international community and the Government of Israel to respect and ensure the access to Holy Sites for believers of all three religions.
- The Government of Israel to end its occupation and settlement expansion activities and immediately ensure equal rights for all.
- The international community to urgently address the Israel/Palestine situation, given the recent and ongoing escalation of violence and occupation, hold the State of Israel accountable for their violations of human rights and the international law, and

find a lasting solution which would end of the half-century-long illegal occupation of Palestinian Territories and ensure peace, justice and equal rights for all.

- The LWF member churches to examine, discuss, discern and respond to the implications of the recent reports by international human rights organizations, which describe the discrimination against Palestinians living under occupation or as citizens of Israel, as overt and systemic, and find that the occupation continues to ignore the equal human dignity and human rights of Palestinians living under this system of control.

## RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ASIA

The Lutheran World Federation Assembly expresses its solidarity with LWF member churches and other communities who are living as minorities, especially in the Asia Region.



Many LWF member churches in Asia live in a Christian minority context.

The LWF Assembly stands in solidarity and expresses its deep concern to all the suffering and violence the Christian minorities in their own countries are facing. As an example, we recognize the situation of indigenous peoples, tribal people, the Dalits, and Adivasis, some of whom are members of our own churches, who have long been marginalized and oppressed under structural systems that have been designed to exclude them.

Like many other marginalized groups, Christians in minority settings in Asia are disproportionately affected by numerous challenges including violations of their human rights and dignity, environmental disasters, and poverty, among others. We note particularly that their freedom of religion or belief has, in the recent past, been severely diminished.

Apart from their struggles, these minority communities offer rich cultures and traditions that we can all learn from including sustainable living, especially in these ecologically challenging times.

The LWF Assembly calls:

- On LWF member churches to continue standing in solidarity and act upon any injustices happening to any member church facing any kind of violence due to its minority situation.
- On the Government of India and other governments to ensure the protection of the human rights, justice and dignity for all.
- On the LWF member churches to stand in solidarity and support Dalits and Adivasis sisters and brothers in their ministries, including through continued advocacy at all levels.

## TAX JUSTICE

In a world that suffers from multiple crises: the climate crisis, a push-back on human rights and gender justice, forced migration and economic inequality, the need for financial resources is crucial. But the current international economic and tax system

exacerbates inequalities and causes depletion of the creation, for the sake of generating profit. According to the Tax Justice Network's The State of Tax Justice 2023, countries are losing a total of over USD 480 billion in tax revenues each year to international corporate tax abuse and private tax evasion. This has a direct impact on the ability of countries to address poverty and provide basic services for their citizens.

The Lutheran World Federation affirms the discussions and process toward the development of an international legally binding tax convention that was mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in 2022. The prospects of a multi-lateral convention to stop tax abuse is a sign of hope in these times of multi-crises.

We reiterate LWF Assembly's call from 2017, for churches and related organizations everywhere to stand up and demand fair redistribution of wealth and social protection, as a matter of justice and human rights. The Lutheran World Federation remains committed and will continue advocating for economic justice and tax justice together with ecumenical, interfaith and civil society partners.

We further call on LWF member churches to embody hope in the public space, through calling for a new international financial and economic architecture through demanding an inclusive, democratic and legally binding global tax convention.

As the world's leaders are gathered in New York for the 2023 UN General Assembly and the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the Lutheran World Federation Assembly calls on the Member States of the United Nations to:

- Expedite the process of developing the proposed legally binding UN Convention on Tax, ensuring that it is fair, just and equitable.
- Ensure the meaningful participation and contribution of civil society, including churches and other faith communities, in the process of drafting the proposed tax convention.

# RESOLUTIONS

- Affirming the Continuation of Work Interrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Strengthening Theological Education
- Study Processes on Theology
- Inclusivity and Participation
- An Intergenerational Justice Policy
- Moving Forward on Gender Justice in Polarized Times
- Gender-Based Violence
- Reaffirming the Youth Quota
- Reaffirming the Lay Quota
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Indigenous Peoples
- Jewish-Christian Relations
- Affirming Humanitarian Response on Behalf of Those Affected by Disasters in Libya, Morocco and Other Humanitarian Crises
- The Climate Emergency
- Serving with People on the Move
- The Church in the Public Space
- Strengthening Ecumenical Commitment and Ecumenical Commemoration of 500th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession

e to the  
of Sweden!



A Church of Sweden stand at the Jarmark exhibition. The Assembly affirmed the solidarity of LWF's member churches during crises and in strengthening theological education.

## AFFIRMING THE CONTINUATION OF WORK INTERRUPTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the entire world and marked a turning point for the churches, affecting all of our communities in multiple ways. Hundreds of millions of people, including some within our own communities, lost their lives and livelihoods. The LWF Communion Office and LWF member churches were challenged to learn rapidly new means of communication and being together. Churches were quickly required to create new programs and other means of swift response to the pandemic. The Assembly recognizes that much of the crucial work of the LWF and its LWF member churches was interrupted or delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To affirm the solidarity with which the LWF responded to the pandemic, particularly through the Rapid Response Fund, theological reflection, and advocacy.
- To call upon the LWF Communion Office to identify and continue to implement those commitments that were made at the Twelfth Assembly (2017) and provide a report to the Council by 2024.
- To encourage LWF member churches to implement the resolutions that will be identified in the report.

## STRENGTHENING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Joint efforts in theology belong to the pillars of the LWF and constitutional functions. All

regional, as well as women, youth and men, Pre-Assemblies prior to the Thirteenth LWF Assembly have emphasized the importance of theological education. Quality education, pastoral formation and leadership training for lay and ordained members are key factors in strengthening the sustainability of our churches. Lack of resources makes the field of theological education vulnerable. Investing in theological education should be prioritized among LWF member churches and needs to be supported through the sharing of resources.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on LWF member churches to prioritize investing in theological education and the sharing of resources to support the sustainability of theological institutions;
- To encourage LWF member churches and their theological institutions to improve their curricula with content that addresses misleading theologies and promotes responsible theologies as defined in the message of the Thirteenth LWF Assembly;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to enhance its networking role with LWF member churches and theological institutions, to further strengthen and improve the theological education and formation network, the LWF Learning Platform, and the LWF scholarships program; and
- To call for the creation of transformative Lutheran theologies that address gender justice with the aim of including them in the core curriculum of theological studies at universities and Bible colleges and ensuring that they are an integral part of the education of ministers, Sunday school teachers and others carrying faith formation responsibilities within our churches.

## STUDY PROCESSES ON THEOLOGY

Joint theological discernment belongs to the pillars of the LWF and constitutional functions. The Assembly discussed the need to explore various theologies of the cross with resources which can be shared with LWF member churches so that as a communion of churches we may together “call a thing what it is.” Furthermore, questions were raised in the Pre-Assemblies and the Assembly on the relevance of the Augsburg Confession concerning proclaiming the gospel for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in various contextual realities of LWF member churches, including aspects of gender justice. The current debate on the reality of war challenges LWF member churches to reflect their theological understanding on peace and conflict in the time of war. The Men’s Pre-Assembly reflected on their identity as men in the church. The Assembly also saw the need to develop more awareness of the issues around disability inclusion in the church.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Council to initiate, and the LWF Communion Office to develop and implement, the following study processes, and for these processes to include ecumenical and interreligious engagement:
  - Theologies of the cross for the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
  - The relevance of the Augsburg Confession for contextual realities of LWF member churches – emphasis on gender justice and ecumenical approach;
  - Peace and reconciliation in contexts of conflict and in times of war;
  - The identity and participation of men in the life of the church and society with particular attention to power relations, gender relations, and masculinities;
  - The theological framework in the context of persons with disabilities; and

- The meaning of holistic mission for the LWF in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to ensure that LWF publications and materials are accessible to the LWF member churches, followed by an intentional process of reception and wider use.

## INCLUSIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has a long and cherished history of calling for inclusivity within its global community, dating back to its inception in 1947. LWF Assembly and Council decisions have consistently recognized the imperative of advancing inclusiveness and have affirmed the importance of this commitment in various contexts. These include, for example, the 2003 Winnipeg Assembly resolution affirming God’s call to include all people and to “create an action plan to address the stigmatization and exclusion of specific groups of people, including women, youth, those who are physically and/or mentally challenged, those infected with HIV and AIDS, those who lack financial resources, and those who are discriminated against based on ethnicity or caste.” Commitment to inclusivity was reaffirmed at the Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010 focusing specifically on balanced representation and quotas.

Inclusiveness remains today a central tenet of the LWF’s mission to promote a sense of belonging and full, meaningful participation locally, regionally and globally. This commitment was strengthened in the 2023 Assembly decision to amend the LWF Constitution to define “the practice of just relationships with no one being discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, or gender” as one of the purposes of LWF (LWF Constitution 3 b).

Over the past years, exacerbated by such factors as the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency, mental health has become



a concern in many of our churches and awareness-raising is vital.

We recognize that inclusion as a principle needs to be translated into action. We affirm, specifically, the need for accessible spaces and accessible materials, including the use of contemporary theological and liturgical language and means of communication. The church needs to continue to work towards identifying and challenging areas of exclusion and stereotypical thinking.

Therefore, the Assembly should reaffirm its unwavering commitment to inclusiveness as a fundamental principle guiding its mission, recognizing the rich heritage and history of this commitment in previous Councils and Assemblies.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to prepare a process of evaluating LWF events, such as Assemblies, Council meetings and other similar events with an emphasis on inclusion, full and active participation, and representation;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to support LWF member churches in the development of accessible liturgical resources, such as music and prayers, as well as other resources. This inclusive approach should incorporate sign language interpreters, Braille materials, assistive technologies where needed, and any other necessary approaches for full and active participation;

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to encourage LWF member churches to foster a culture of understanding and acceptance for any who face mental health challenges, encouraging an environment of solidarity and support;
- To call on the LWF at all levels to recognize the importance of youth involvement in decision-making processes, presentations, and planning committees to ensure that the voices and perspectives of young people are heard and valued; and
- To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the Men's Pre-Assembly continues in the future, and to explore ways and opportunities for men to gather and continue the conversations that have arisen in this Assembly and from regional expressions.

## AN INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE POLICY

Since its inception in 1947 the LWF has grown not only in the number of LWF member churches but also in its understanding of what it means to fully participate in the life of the church and the global Lutheran fellowship.

The LWF has, on several occasions, emphasized the pivotal role of young people for the LWF member churches and the LWF. Already at the Seventh Assembly held in Budapest in 1984, the LWF committed to supporting the full participation of youth in LWF member churches and in the life of the LWF (7.2). This commitment was articulated in terms of a youth quota, which calls for at least 20% of participants at the Assemblies, the LWF Council and Council committees to be under the age of 30. This standing resolution is reflected in the LWF By-Laws (3.2.2)

Irrespective of this commitment, we as the LWF have been compelled to renew our commitment to full and meaningful participation of young people at all levels of the LWF and its LWF member churches. In 2009, the LWF Council, meeting in Geneva,

asked the General Secretary to prepare a draft document on gender and youth participation in the LWF structures in fulfillment of the resolution on gender balance adopted by the LWF Assembly held in Winnipeg in 2003. In 2010, the Eleventh Assembly held in Stuttgart adopted a resolution on inclusiveness in the LWF and on generational balance. We call upon the LWF member churches, the LWF Communion Office, and the LWF Council to advance full and meaningful participation of people of all ages at all levels of the life of the LWF member churches and the LWF, including leadership, with specific emphasis on youth leadership within all levels of the LWF decision-making structures (regional, global and local). Following the example set in the Gender Justice Policy (2013), this work should be guided by an intergenerational approach.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Council to develop an Intergenerational Justice Policy;
- To call on the LWF Council to make sure that the Intergenerational Justice Policy includes a framework for advancing the leadership of young people alongside all generations and includes examining the generational balance of the Vice-Presidents, the Executive Committee and the Delegates to the Assembly within the regions;
- To call of the LWF Council to convene a task force to develop the policy and to follow the progress of this task force annually;
- To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the task force will honor the LWF gender quotas, be representative of the regions and be made up of at least 50% people under 30 at the time of convening, and request the task force to propose policy recommendations which consider contextual realities, meaningful participation for young people in faith communities, and consider the ways in which intergenerational justice is vital to people of faith;

- To call on the LWF Council to request the task force to recommend a policy for adoption by the Council by 2026.

## MOVING FORWARD ON GENDER JUSTICE IN POLARIZED TIMES

We are witnessing a time of increased polarization and push-back on human dignity and human rights, especially as it relates to gender justice. In churches this is reflected in misleading theologies that offer easy and simplified answers to complex questions. LWF member churches are not immune to this push-back, polarization and irresponsible, divisive theologies. As we find ourselves in an increasingly polarized world, the art of listening to one another is being challenged. Our need for concrete tools and methodologies to create spaces for complex conversation and critical collective engagement is now even more important.

In 2023, the LWF celebrates the 10-year anniversary of the Gender Justice Policy (GJP). The GJP testifies to the LWF's continuous commitment to support its LWF member churches toward being more inclusive communities and to advocate for gender justice. The GJP is a unique achievement as it confirms the LWF's theological commitment to just relations between genders and confirms access to all spheres of church life, including the ordained ministry and leadership. As the LWF continues to strengthen its LWF member churches' engagement in gender justice and human rights we must find new strategic ways to handle internal differences and offer accompaniment.

The Emmaus Conversation on family, marriage and sexuality (1995-2013) was an expression of the LWF's commitment to find ways to better discuss potentially dividing issues on these same topics within the Communion. In 2007, the Emmaus task force proposed a series of guidelines and processes for respectful dialogue that are still relevant. These guidelines need to be taken forward and put into concrete action.

Moving forward on potentially divisive issues relating to gender justice is difficult unless we have robust and contextually sensitive tools, methodologies and resources to enable us to dialogue respectfully and responsibly. Many of these tools and methodologies already exist among the LWF member churches or in LWF's extensive diaconal work, for example, programs supported by the Department for World Service (DWS).

Taking stock and utilizing these tools will help us to find ways to accompany each other and move forward in unity in reconciled diversity.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Council to initiate a strategic process on the next steps in the concrete implementation and development of the Gender Justice Policy (2013), and also the Emmaus Conversation, regionally;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to gather good practices and concrete tools that exist within LWF member churches of successful dialogue on potentially divisive issues and urge LWF member churches to share their contextually relevant tools and practices;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to develop and strengthen platforms and strategies for sharing of such resources, practical tools and strategies to enable capacity building and resource development within various contexts and urge LWF member churches to engage in such capacity building;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office and the LWF member churches and regions to prioritize funding or at least to secure minimally the same percentage to advance and support gender justice and women's empowerment;
- To call on the LWF Council to ensure that the Accountability Framework now under



**The Assembly reiterated its call on churches to focus on the elimination of gender-based violence.**

development itself be gender just and to have a specific element to support gender justice; and

- To urge the LWF Communion Office to continue accompanying LWF member churches in supporting women in the ordained ministry and women in leadership.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Twelfth LWF Assembly in Windhoek in 2017 adopted several relevant resolutions for gender justice. Since then, the reality of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) has been further re-actualized. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, global reports mark a sharp increase in SGBV that has mainly affected women and girls. Called the “shadow

pandemic,” UN statistics show an increase of 30% in gender-based violence. Actual numbers are even higher. The wake of the pandemic not only led to increased violence, but that violence has taken even more brutal and newer forms. The financial stress linked to patriarchal structures and increased social isolation have contributed to escalating violence. The economic pressures many people live under have led to desperate survival strategies and worsening mental health. Larger proportions of children are forced into work to combat these economic pressures. The number of child marriages has grown as the protective structures of school have been unavailable. These are some examples of the consequences of this “shadow pandemic.”

Since the Assembly in 2017, the world also experienced the “MeToo” movement which brought to public discussion the amount of

sexual harassment and violence occurring in all spheres of life, including in churches. Stories shared from women within the church during the “MeToo” movement have taught us much about sexual harassment and violence related to gender, power, and age within churches.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to revisit the resolution on Sex Education and Elimination on Sexual and Gender-based Violence from Windhoek 2017 “To encourage LWF member churches to focus on sex education and the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual coercion, and sexual harassment within our churches. This focus is to be ethically and theologically comprehensive in cooperation with civil society. These efforts should include collecting the testimony of those who have survived violence, so that their story is told, and the silence is broken.”;
- To require that all LWF activities have safe-guarding mechanisms against sexual harassment and gender-based violence including on digital platforms; and
- That the LWF Communion Office support LWF member churches in creating and utilizing a Code of Conduct and other relevant policies and training materials to end sexual harassment and gender-based violence in LWF member churches.

## REAFFIRMING THE YOUTH QUOTA

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF was reminded about the decisions made at the Seventh Assembly in Budapest in 1984 on youth participation to ensure full participation of youth in LWF decision-making. In 2010, the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart adopted

a resolution on inclusiveness in the LWF and resolution regarding LWF principles of inclusivity including generational balance. These are considered standing resolutions which govern the LWF.

We celebrate that in many regions the youth quota is met with even more than 20% of the delegates being youth. However, in other regions the youth quota is still below the minimum. Oftentimes, the youth quota is being met at the global level but not at the regional level. Twenty-six years after the adoption of the Budapest resolution, it has not yet been fully implemented.

The Youth Pre-Assembly message indicates this in its calls to action: “We call on the Assembly to take action with regards to the youth quota and ensure that the requirement of at least 20% of youth representation in official delegations is met by each LWF region no later than the next Assembly.”

We acknowledge that the LWF youth programs, such as Global Young Reformers Network, Peace Messengers training and COP delegations, have been building leadership capacity for youth from all of the LWF member churches and this capacity-building has intensified over the last six years. However, there has been a lack of continuity between participants of these programs at the leadership level.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call upon the LWF member churches to implement the youth quota, so that youth are fully engaged through participation and voting in decision-making structures and processes;
- To call upon the LWF Council and the LWF member churches to develop a transparent and accountable mechanism to ensure that the youth quota will be met with official delegates who have the right to vote (not stewards, advisors etc.) by all regions at future Assemblies; and

- To call upon the LWF member churches to continue preparing youth in their leadership, strengthening youth networks through activities that empower their members for mutual cooperation in local and global contexts and, in so doing, nominate youth delegates who are familiar with the church's work.

Council, Officers and all other committees and task forces, including at all regional levels shall be composed of at least forty percent lay persons. Gender and regional balance among the non-ordained members shall be respected.” These are considered as Standing Resolutions which govern the LWF. However, this principle has not been fully implemented.

## REAFFIRMING THE LAY QUOTA

The LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010 adopted the *Resolution regarding inclusiveness in the Lutheran World Federation*. Among principles of inclusivity defined in connection with this resolution is the balance of laity and clergy defined as following: “The LWF Assembly,

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To urge the LWF Council to implement a lay quota of forty percent in all bodies of the LWF as stated in the resolution; and
- To call upon the LWF Council, the regions, and the LWF member churches to develop



God has made all human beings in God's image and likeness without distinction.

a transparent and accountable mechanism to ensure that the lay quota will be met at future Assemblies.

## THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

God has made all human beings in God's image and likeness without distinction. This faith conviction has not become a reality for all. Persons with visible or invisible disabilities face various obstacles and discrimination in all areas of life. For persons with disabilities the risk of poverty, homelessness and even death is significantly higher than on average for those without a disability. Persons with disabilities also face multiple discrimination if they belong to several disadvantaged or oppressed groups at the same time. One of the root causes for structural discrimination of people with disabilities is their exclusion from decision-making.

Persons with disabilities are too often forgotten or actively excluded also within churches. This

means that the full inclusion and realization of human rights is not realized for persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have the right to be included in our churches and in our societies. Everyone should have the chance to meaningful living. Excluding persons with disabilities means leaving many behind.

Disability inclusion requires measures to be taken and resources to be allocated. Strategies and resources are urgently needed.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to ensure accessibility in all its events and of services it provides;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office develop strategies to improve and mainstream disability inclusion, in LWF policies, in LWF advocacy work and within



LWF's programs and all activities, including Assemblies;

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to acquire and analyze disaggregated data on the participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the LWF member churches;
- To call on the LWF to work together in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities to access relevant expertise; and
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to advocate actively for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous people's rights and the Lutheran World Federation.

The historic and ongoing oppression and non-realization of human rights for indigenous populations is a matter of great urgency for many LWF member churches in the communion. The recognition of and respect for indigenous spirituality, religious traditions, languages, and culture, the respect of indigenous rights to land and traditional livelihoods as well as the recognition that climate change is already disproportionately adversely affecting indigenous peoples are some examples of ongoing injustices.

Many LWF member churches, for example, in the Arctic regions, are already engaging in processes aimed at admitting the wrongdoings committed by the church and working for reconciliation and justice. Some of the human rights concerns relating to indigenous peoples include recognition of indigenous spiritualities, language and culture, the repatriation of human remains from museums and universities for reburial and recognition that the forestry practices of the church need to respect indigenous rights to land and traditional livelihood. Within already ongoing processes of reconciliation, many learnings across the Communion can be shared.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To reaffirm the resolution from Winnipeg 2003 which called on the LWF to initiate a specific program for Indigenous Peoples, initiate theological study processes and support a process at the national, regional and international levels for protecting human rights of Indigenous peoples, including land rights;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to ensure that work on indigenous people is included in the new strategy for indigenous work;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to collaborate and share learnings with the WCC central office conducting this work;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to support LWF member churches to commit to investigating their own truth and reconciliation processes together with indigenous populations within their own contexts and to support indigenous people to acquire contacts across national borders that separate the indigenous population from each other and others; and
- To call on the LWF to offer a dedicated space in conjunction with the Assemblies for delegates for indigenous peoples in the form of, for example, a Pre-Assembly.

## JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

At the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek in 2017, the *Resolution on Interreligious Relations* defines the LWF's commitments within interfaith dialogue. One of the principal elements of this engagement on the global and regional level of the LWF are Jewish-Christian relations.

With the Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków, the LWF returns to the region of the Seventh

Assembly in Budapest in 1984, wherein the LWF made significant steps in our relations with our Jewish neighbors, declaring as follows: “We Lutherans take our name and much of our understanding of Christianity from Martin Luther. But we cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. [...] Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther’s utterances on the Jews. We hope we have learned from the tragedies of the recent past. We are responsible for seeing that we do not now nor in the future leave any doubt about our position on racial and religious prejudice and that we afford to all the human dignity, freedom and friendship that are the right of all the Father’s children.”

This Assembly was reminded of atrocities arising out of antisemitic prejudice during the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. We remember that in Budapest we confirmed our joint declaration with our Jewish partners: “We welcome this historic encounter, which we prayerfully hope will mark a new chapter, with trust replacing suspicion and with reciprocal respect replacing prejudice. To this end, we commit ourselves to periodic consultations and joint activities that will strengthen our common bonds in service to humanity.” These commitments were reiterated and deepened by the recommendations found in the study document, *Hope for the Future: Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations*.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call upon LWF member churches and theological institutions to develop further theological reflection on Jewish-Christian relations from a Lutheran perspective in a global context;
- To encourage LWF member churches to explore the possibility of beginning or furthering dialogues with Jewish partners both at the academic and grassroots level to foster a deeper understanding of each other’s communities; and

- To call upon the LWF Communion Office to further dialogue, engagement and collaboration with Jewish partners such as the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) on topics of mutual interest by the next Assembly.

## AFFIRMING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF THOSE AFFECTED BY DISASTERS IN LIBYA, MOROCCO AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The Lutheran World Federation continues to be deeply concerned about humanitarian disasters all around the world, which according to current figures have increased in numbers and intensity. As the Assembly was underway, disasters hit Libya and Morocco, leaving thousands of people dead, many more injured and entire communities have lost their livelihoods. Our churches, communities and nations are affected by violent conflicts, the climate crisis and natural disasters.

The Assembly expresses its solidarity the affected and prays that God comforts and accompanies all those that are suffering. The Assembly further affirms and acknowledges the roles of LWF World Service and LWF member churches, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, in responding to emergencies and humanitarian crises around the world.

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF member churches to continue praying and standing in solidarity with the many people and communities around the world that are affected by humanitarian disasters; and

- To call on the LWF World Service to continue, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, its humanitarian assistance, livelihoods and advocacy on behalf of the LWF member churches in order to support people and communities affected by disasters.

## THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The Lutheran World Federation continues to be deeply concerned about the global climate and environmental emergencies and their impact on people and the planet. The most recent scientific report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that much more needs to be done to avoid the worst and irreversible impacts.

The LWF acknowledges that the environmental and climate emergencies are linked to justice, equity, and ethics, as it is driven by unsustainable human activities that exploit the

Earth's resources without consideration for future generations or the well-being of all living beings. We are concerned that the collective global action to address climate change is far below what is required to prevent irreversible catastrophic impacts.

We reaffirm our commitment to climate and environmental justice and stand in solidarity with our churches, indigenous peoples, marginalized groups, and all individuals and communities affected by adverse impacts, including climate-induced migration. We particularly acknowledge impacts on the people and communities, in developing countries, who often bear the brunt of the crises and lack the resources to support themselves.

We are encouraged by and affirm the leadership role of the youth in the LWF, particularly in advocating for climate justice and action at all levels.



**Youth advocacy for climate justice featured visibly at the Assembly.**



**LWF continues to be deeply concerned about humanitarian disasters around the world.**

## ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF to continue with its efforts to encourage, support and accompany LWF member churches and other people affected by climate change through appropriate programs; and sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to strengthen its advocacy for climate justice at all levels, including by encouraging LWF member churches to incorporate climate justice campaigns into their activities;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to support, as appropriate, the protection of the rights and dignity of environmental defenders and people displaced by climate change impacts, including by the provision of the necessary humanitarian and livelihoods assistance;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to intensify the LWF's efforts toward reducing emissions and pollution by putting in place a Paris Agreement-aligned viable plan of action, with the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030;
- To encourage LWF member churches to reduce their emissions to contribute to the action plan mentioned above, within their contexts;
- To encourage LWF member churches to emphasize the importance of eco-theology as a framework for integrating spiritual and ethical values into environmental stewardship, articulating our theological basis for the care of creation, sharing technical knowledge, and advocating for climate justice; and
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to develop a climate justice policy and materials on the relationship between the climate emergency and human rights.

## SERVING WITH PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Migration has become one of the major challenges of today's world. People migrate for different reasons and the experiences of people on the move vary greatly. There are those who are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, violence or human rights abuses in their home countries and due to the climate crisis. Others are compelled to migrate because of poverty and a lack of prospects for the future. In contexts of politicized narratives around migrants and refugees, churches can build upon their moral authority and credibility to speak up for justice, speak out against hate speech, xenophobia and racism as well as for welcoming the stranger.

At the Thirteenth LWF Assembly, delegates were reminded of our task as Christians is not only to discuss, but also to act as messengers of hope. Christians should not lock themselves within their own circles, but to go out to society with the gospel and exert influence to achieve positive changes. As Lutherans, we emphasize our responsibility for our way of life, for our relationship with our Savior and with our entire environment, including our countries, our continent and the whole global community. Recognizing that we are part of the interconnected human family, it is impossible and irresponsible to ignore any of the world's problems or treat them in isolation.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on LWF member churches to unite and reaffirm their commitment in advocacy and action to serve people on the move due the climate crisis, conflicts, wars and violations of human rights; and
- To encourage LWF member churches to show solidarity and act together strongly and work with like-minded networks to influence public opinion and all governments on issues of migration, refugees and internally

displaced persons and to stand up for the human rights of all in society.

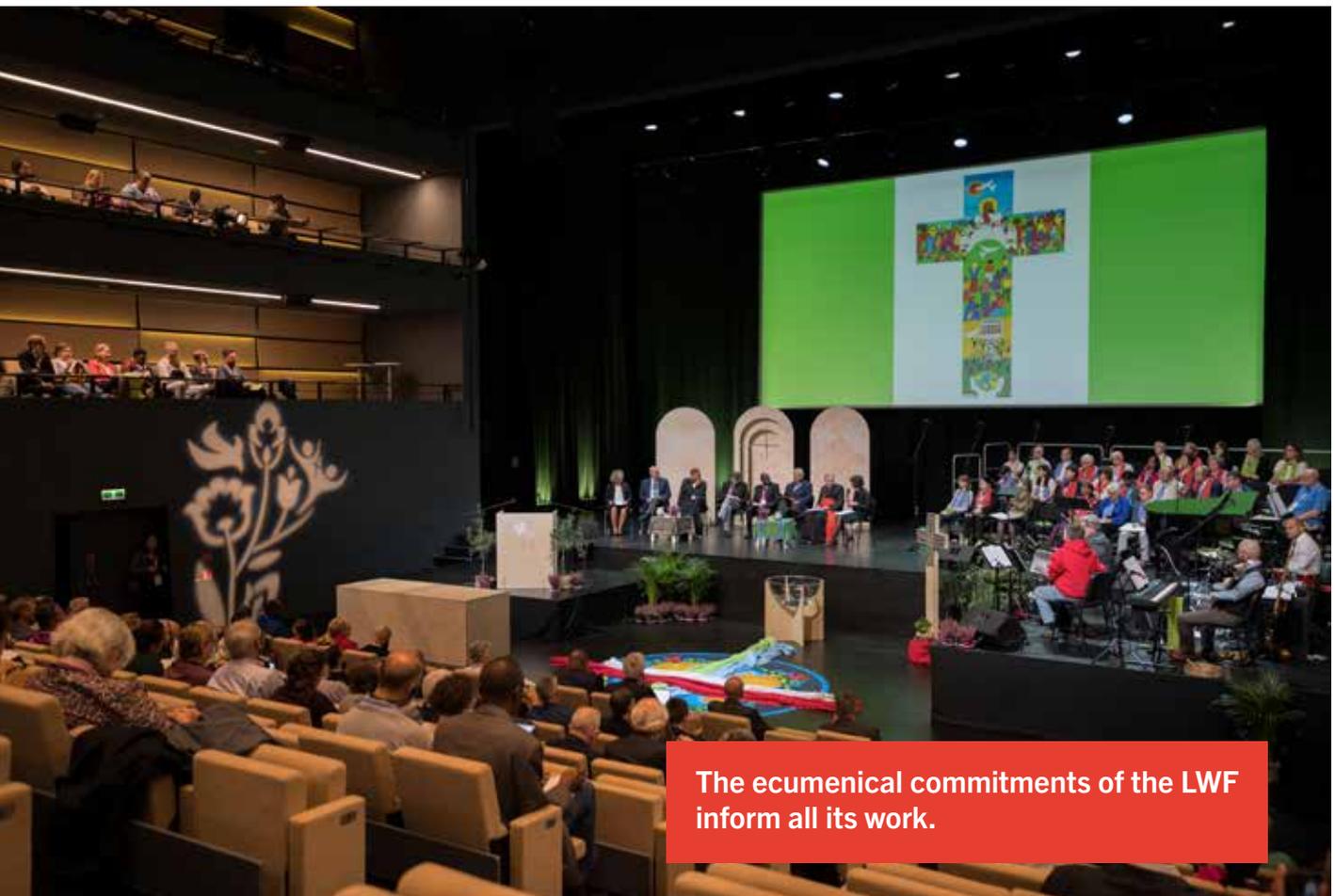
## THE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

In the current global social, economic, ecological and political contexts, where push-back on human rights, inequalities, violent conflicts, the climate emergency, forced migration, gender injustices and polarization occur, the role of the church in public space – its advocacy and prophetic voice – is critical.

### ACTION

The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To affirm the crucial role of LWF member churches in their public voice in their contexts, recognizing that some of them are faced with risks and restrictions;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to strengthen its efforts and programs to support LWF member churches in theological reflection and in their advocacy at the local and national levels, particularly through capacity building and provision of relevant advocacy tools;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to continue to amplify the advocacy work of LWF member churches at regional and global levels – including through supporting the engagement of LWF member churches with the United Nations and regional intergovernmental bodies;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to continue enhancing theological underpinning for LWF advocacy to ensure that thematic work, including those related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to invest in and enhance advocacy capacity-building for young people.



The ecumenical commitments of the LWF inform all its work.

## STRENGTHENING ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT AND ECUMENICAL COMMEMORATION OF 500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

The Lutheran World Federation has engaged in ecumenical dialogues for decades. Advancing Christian unity and fostering ecumenical relations is part of LWF identity to the degree that we say: “to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical.” LWF’s ecumenical commitments inform all LWF’s work. Fulfilling LWF’s continuous commitment to ecumenism and advancing Christian unity includes engagement on all levels of the Communion. This engagement has been supported in various ways by the LWF Communion Office

and by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg.

2030 will mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. Drawing inspiration from the ecumenical commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Reformation in 2016 we recognize that commemorating the foundational reformation is to be done with an ecumenical consciousness.

### ACTION

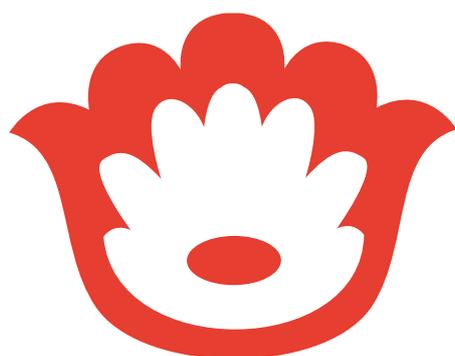
The LWF Assembly resolves as follows:

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to prepare for the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in conversation with ecumenical partners;
- To call on the LWF Communion Office to utilize the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of the Augsburg Confession to engage with the Augsburg Confession in ongoing ecumenical dialogues; and

- To call on the LWF Communion Office to engage in strengthening the reception

process of ecumenical study documents in accordance with the LWF Council decision 2023, including facilitating a global network of ecumenical experts.



# MESSAGES FROM PRE-ASSEMBLIES

## EUROPE PRE-ASSEMBLY

OXFORD, GREAT BRITAIN, 21–24 MARCH 2023

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” (Rom 12:12)

We met in Mansfield College, Oxford, from 21 to 24 March 2023 as participants in a joint Pre-Assembly of the three LWF European regions. Together, as a communion representing all of the LWF churches on our continent, we have been preparing for the Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków in September, reflecting on its theme of ‘One Body, One Spirit, One Hope’. Together, we have worshipped, shared our joys and sorrows on the road from Windhoek to Kraków and jointly discerned issues affecting us in our various contexts.

We expect the discussions in Kraków to focus on witnessing to hope in the midst of a suffering world. Hope is the affirmation that God is faithful and will complete what God has begun. Hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but also a task for us all. With the climate crisis, environmental degradation, war and conflicts, forced migration, economic inequality, populism, authoritarianism and rising nationalism, we find ourselves searching for credible and transformative hope. We need to find a clearer understanding of what Christian discipleship means in this context.

The war against Ukraine, the refugee crisis and other ongoing conflicts are increasingly challenging the churches and our Christian theology. We continue to support a just peace in Ukraine. Many moral and ethical questions are provoked and inequalities revealed. There is a need to work on our theology of peace and self-defense, questioning how we can be peacemakers in our time. At a practical level,

LWF responded as one body to the Ukraine crisis and this, for us, is an expression of hope.

We recognize the damage we are doing to our ecosystems, worsening the climate crisis. This is a sin against God’s creation. We know that we have not done enough to battle environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity. The imbalance between those polluting and those suffering its consequences continues to grow. At its core, this is about power and preserving life. Much needs to change, including our own lifestyles and our commitment to addressing inequalities. Climate justice needs to be at the core of all of our considerations. There is a need to work on our ecotheology, to accelerate efforts toward reaching carbon neutrality by 2030 and to advocate more strongly for climate refugees.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point for the churches, affecting all of our communities in multiple ways. We were challenged by rapid learning of new means of communication and being together. While we need to ask if there were losses beyond repair, we also need to identify the gains on which we can build.

As a consequence of these multiple crises, people are increasingly struggling to find meaning in their life or searching for a community where they can belong and feel fully valued. There is more awareness of mental health issues, yet stigma and isolation continue to prevent people from speaking about their needs. As a Communion, we need to work on our theology of mental health and play our role in building reciprocity and mutual care in our localities.



**Participants in the Europe Pre-Assembly, held at Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom.**

At the same time, these crises have also made us more aware of our call to become a more diaconal church. As European churches, we have been engaged in a fruitful process of Conviviality, learning how to serve our neighbors as we live out our Baptismal vocation.

In a context of declining membership, where we are challenged to remain relevant in responding to people's spiritual needs, we must find new ways of being church. This includes new and more accessible language for our worship and theology, as well as a more effective presence in social media. Our sharing of the gospel needs to make better use of the gifts present among our youth and lay members, enabling us to reach out and engage with diverse audiences.

In light of the deepening economic crisis affecting our churches, the priorities and role of

the LWF needs to be re-evaluated to ensure its sustainability into the future. This is not simply a question of financial resources. We note the introduction of a new mutual accountability process to better define relationships between our churches.

Globally, we witness a push-back on human rights and gender justice. Religion is too often used as an argument to justify the push-back. We also know that the pandemic led to a sharp rise in gender-based violence. As we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of LWF's *Gender Justice Policy*, we recognize that we have made progress in expressing and accepting diversity as a sign of God's good creation. At the same time, we recognize that there continues to be a great need to talk about human sexuality and act for gender justice within our own midst.

We want to be more inclusive and accessible churches. This means that we need to examine our past and present, dealing more honestly with issues of racism, exclusion and violence. No one should be discriminated against, particularly on the basis of their race, ethnicity or gender. We need to strengthen our own democratic structures and participatory approaches, empowering women, youth and lay leaders and offering more opportunities for intergenerational cooperation.

Rooted in one hope, we are united in one body by one Spirit. We acknowledge the rich

diversity within the Communion. For us unity does not mean uniformity. At the same time, it is important to understand the practical implications of living as a communion of Lutheran churches. We need to continue to listen to each other carefully and not to give up on one another for convenience or for indifference. We must find ways of dealing with questions which could be Communion-dividing in courageous and respectful ways. With Christ in our center, we believe that unity in reconciled diversity is possible.

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, AND NORTH AMERICA PRE-ASSEMBLY

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA, 17–21 APRIL 2023

“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” (Eph 4:4)

Delegates, advisors, and ex officio councilors of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathered for the Pre-Assembly of the Latin America and Caribbean, and North America regions, 17-21 April 2023, in Bogotá D.C., Colombia. We were welcomed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia – IELCO, recognizing the theme that summons us, “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” The rich discussions allowed us to understand the Kingdom of God in unity, a unity that must be intentional, committed, and practiced.

Referring to the “Sulas”

A Sula is a place where rapid and heavy water streams collide together against rocks and uneven ground. It is a very beautiful but also dangerous place to be. Anyone standing near a Sula will tell you about the enormous sound it makes. The combination of water smashing into rocks and water falling into itself creates an overwhelming sound that (depending on where one is) can be experienced as restful or terrifying. I imagine the cries and groans

emanating from our context like a Sula, a beautiful and dangerous place. (Rev. Danielle Dokman, Suriname)

The member churches present at the Pre-Assembly reflected on the contextual challenges, “Sulas” that we experience as a region. For example, polarization; governmental corruption; false information circulating in the media with co-opted journalism and on social networks, which advance with uncontrollable speed; the structural discrimination suffered by vulnerable groups, which we refer to as the cries of a people crying out for justice.

We also identified the role of the economic systems that underlie all these problems, in which patriarchy and fundamentalism are manifested. These systems generate a scandalous level of inequality in our regions, causing a depletion of the creation, for the sake of generating profit. Fundamentalism, in turn, instrumentalizes the fear of change, inclusion, diversity, and equity, and consequently divides our society.

At the same time, we know that the “Sulas” are also beautiful places. In them, encounters of



**Participants in the the Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America Pre-Assembly, held in Bogotá, Colombia.**

solidarity take place. The Pre-Assembly was an expression of the realities and actions we can all carry out in unity.

While progress has been made, there are still challenges to be addressed. We are aware of our asymmetrical realities between North and South, in the face of which we express possibilities for change. We gather the voices of our churches who cry out for just communities to respond holistically to all kinds of injustices. We commit to creating and transforming ourselves into safe spaces where we can be authentic and dialogue about gender justice, power relations, diversity, sexuality, and faith identity.

Considering just communities and safe spaces, we commit ourselves to promoting intergenerational dialogues and call on the LWF to develop, adopt and implement an intergenerational justice policy to promote youth leadership in communion with the wisdom of other generations.

As we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of LWF's *Gender Justice Policy*, we recognize that much work still needs to be done. In response to the high growth of fundamentalist narratives in our region and situations of violence experienced in our churches, there remains a great need to continue to push for gender justice in our midst. Likewise, the testimonies heard during the Pre-Assembly from Afro-descendant, rural women, and indigenous women from Colombia were a clear example of the different forms of gender violence that compel us to promote gender justice in our societies.

As churches, we must recognize all the diverse parts of the body that form it—women, men, youth, indigenous peoples, migrants, and nature itself—and connect them in an organic way, deepening and broadening the discussions and actions.

We affirm the importance of theological formation in coordination with the centers of theological education and the network of

institutions, so that they may incorporate and/or update reflections from diverse contextual perspectives. We propose to this network to develop studies on gender, the context of indigenous peoples, climate change, and migration challenges that affect the churches in the regions, taking into account the different languages spoken. Likewise, we recommend engaging in a contextual interpretation of the Augsburg Confession on the occasion of its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in order to better understand our confessional roots.

We commit to continue striving to be a Communion that goes out and acts on the margins of society, offering a radical welcome to all, as Jesus taught us. We invite the Thirteenth LWF Assembly to reflect, and not just remain in reflection, but move forward into action in which “the Sulas,” the groans of this Communion, are taken into account to provoke a transformation into one body, one spirit, and one living and active hope.

## AFRICA PRE-ASSEMBLY

NAIROBI, KENYA, 8–13 MAY 2023

“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” (Eph 4:4)

We, representatives of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Africa, met under the theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” to prepare for the Thirteenth LWF Assembly from 8-13 May in the Desmond Tutu Conference Center of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

We express our appreciation for the leadership of LWF President Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt, and LWF Vice-President for Africa Rev. Dr Jeannette Ada Maina.

We were equally blessed and appreciated the presence of Zofia Niemczyk of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, the host church of the Thirteenth Assembly, staff of the LWF Communion Office and ecumenical guests, including Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki, General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

We listened to insightful presentations and reflections on the Assembly theme: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” We also received compelling messages from the women and youth delegates to the Pre-Assembly.

We are grateful for the fellowship at our meeting and for the spiritual nourishment received through worship with Holy Communion, morning and evening devotions, biblical reflections, songs, and prayers, where we felt the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We were inspired by the message of the LWF General Secretary who reminded us that:

Hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the message of hope is awareness that God creator, redeemer, and sustainer knows and loves all creation. Hope liberates from powers and principalities of this world and encourages us to move ahead despite many obstacles surrounding us.

## ON THE ASSEMBLY THEME

Unity in reconciled diversity is underlying all parts of the theme and can serve as inspiration for the joint work and witness of the member churches in Africa.

Based on presentations and conversations on “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” we urge the member churches to work together for conflict resolution, peace, and reconciliation, to stand with churches exposed to violence and terrorism or internal challenges, always addressing the

root causes of conflict and violence. God's Spirit leads and strengthens us, as we focus on what unites us, not what divides us.

## OUR REGIONAL CONTEXT

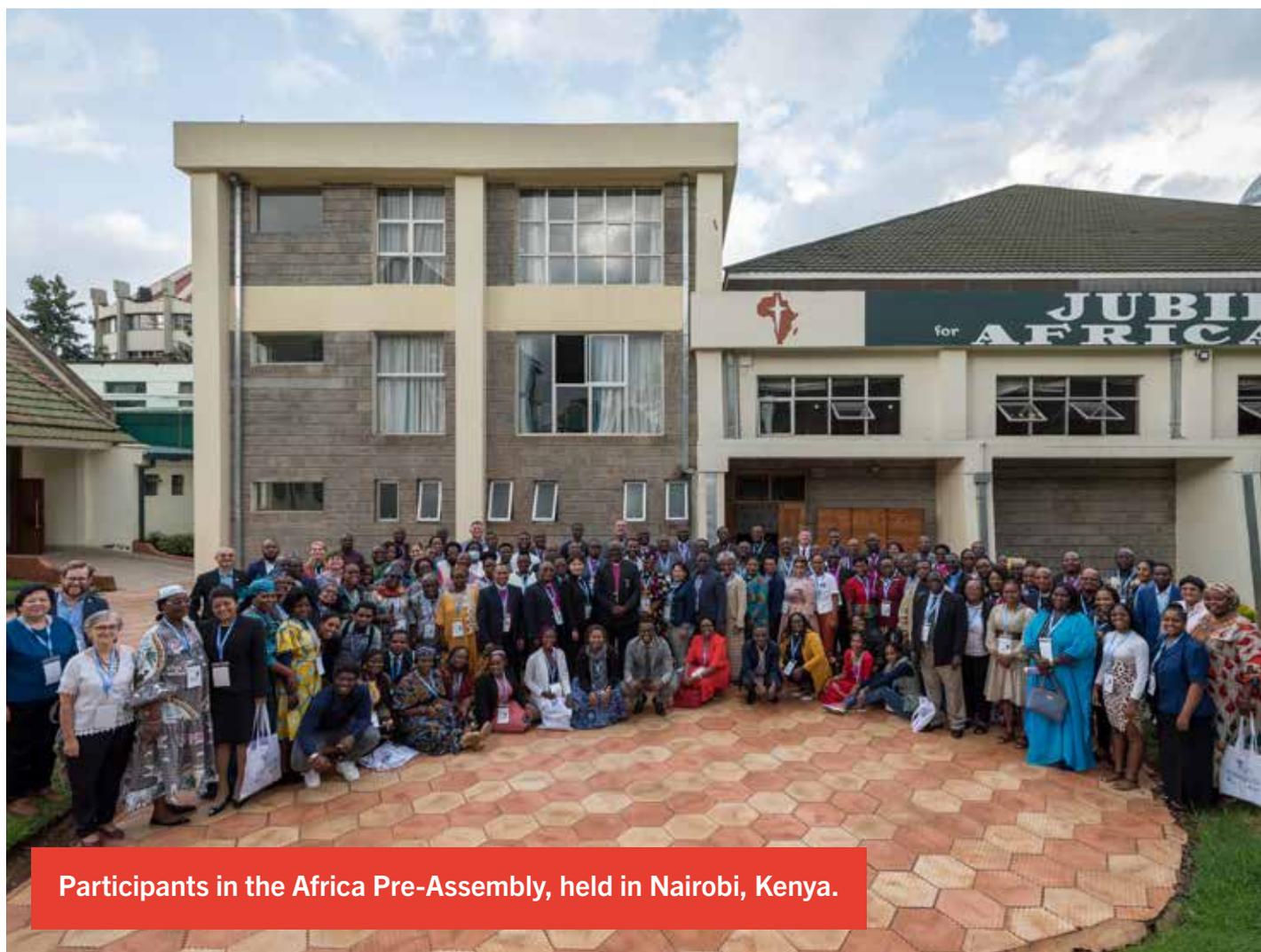
Africa is a religious continent and more than 85% identify as religious and belong to religious organizations. For this reason, religion is integral to Africa's self-understanding and the moral orientation of its peoples.

The continent is blessed with human and natural resources and has made significant progress across different spheres of life and society.

The continent faces many challenges, including misuse of religious texts and

teachings, economic and political crisis, bad governance, manifest abuse of power, inadequate education, failing health services, decaying infrastructure, harmful traditional practices, sexual and gender-based violence, irregular migration and trafficking, insecurity and terrorism, climate change induced disasters, human rights abuse, and inequality.

Africa is rising to meet these challenges through the implementation of the African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Religious leaders and faith communities have contributed to its development and implementation in many countries on the continent.



Participants in the Africa Pre-Assembly, held in Nairobi, Kenya.

## WE OBSERVE

- the increase of division between ethnic groups and tribes, leading to social fragmentation with devastating effects for people's mental health
- misleading theologies where religion and faith are used to justify oppression, exploitation, division, and abuse
- the destruction of life including the commercialization of religion and the spirits of our times that seeks to divide communities and hold them captive. Recent events in Kenya are revealing and show how abuse of power in the name of so-called 'revelations' led to thousands of people following a false prophet who asked them to fast to death.
- the challenges in reduced global funding for the local development work of the churches. At the same time, we see possibilities for new funding through the "localization agenda" accessible to churches for aid and development
- the many painful situations and experiences of women in everyday life, in leadership positions, and in the ordained ministry
- common challenges shared by youth, including but not limited to high rates of unemployment, climate change, gender injustice, lack of support for youth leadership and development from church structures, and social injustices experienced by youth members



**The Assembly provides space for regional meetings, such as this session including participants from Africa.**

## WE CALL ON MEMBER CHURCHES TO

- reflect on and develop mechanisms to support theological and pastoral education
- reflect on insecurity and terrorism and offer a Christian response that emphasizes God's justice and mercy, and helps us understand that God is actively involved in reconciling a broken world
- pray for an end to violent conflicts in our region, that peace may prevail and abound. We name specially the people and churches of Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Central Africa Republic, Mozambique, and others
- Encourage churches to accompany each other and foster the exchange of expertise within the member churches in Africa, e.g., through a council of respected leaders and experts, irrespective of age or gender
- Strengthen the Lutheran Development Agency in Africa (LUDAA) to fundraise and mobilize local resources to support the mission and diakonia programs of member churches
- increase joint work in the field of mission, capacity building, and leadership undergirded by the ideals of Ubuntu
- require theological institutions to include gender justice studies in theological training, provide a platform for exchange of materials, and allocate funds to support the capacity building for women in the region
- create intentional spaces for mutual learning among women and youth, especially around the areas of gender justice and digital literacy
- support to the Gender Justice and Women Empowerment Network and contextualize the Gender Justice Policy as well as open up women leadership positions and training in financial management

- commit to work for health and wellness, for gender and economic justice, and request funding support for Women Human Rights Advocacy training with a strong biblical and theological foundation
- integrate in their policies and implement in practice a 40/40/20 quota of men, women, and youth, to ensure balanced representation across all structures of the churches
- Encourage youth to study theology and invest in the leadership of youth by removing barriers and actively seeking their participation in church leadership

## WE CALL ON THE LWF AND ITS COMMUNION OFFICE TO

- Facilitate the establishment of a network of theological institutions within the Communion to enable exchange and sharing of resources
- Advocate for financing of climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives by member churches and call on those responsible for pollution to keep to the promise they made in the "Paris Agreement" and for the operationalization of the "Loss and Damage Fund"
- Create policies for climate justice and intergenerational justice and encourage the member churches to adopt such policies for their own contexts
- Encourage member churches to deliberately implement the 40/40/20 quotas for equal participation across all structures
- Support entrepreneurship through the establishment of vocational training centers and mentorship programs for skills acquisition, including incubation, and to maintain a database of such opportunities

## WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENTS IN AFRICA TO

- Embrace and deepen a culture of governance where resources are equitably distributed for national transformation
- Ensure freedom of religion, so that citizens can safely and securely practice their religion of choice
- Empower religious communities to self-regulate against religious merchants

We **commit** ourselves to the implementation of these proposals in partnership with governments, ecumenical partners, other civil society organizations, and the global communion of Lutheran churches.

## ASIA PRE-ASSEMBLY

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA, 13–19 JUNE 2023

“[Make] every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:3)

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Pre-Assembly of the Asia region was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 13 to 19 June 2023, hosted by the Lutheran Church in Malaysia (LCM) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM). This gathering comprised 119 participants from 42 member churches representing 13 countries and supported by the LWF staff. We worshiped together, listened, heard concerns and shared priorities from churches around Asia. Despite Asia being a large continent with numerous contexts and realities, we thank God that this has not been an obstacle to cooperation but rather a dynamic point of convergence.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

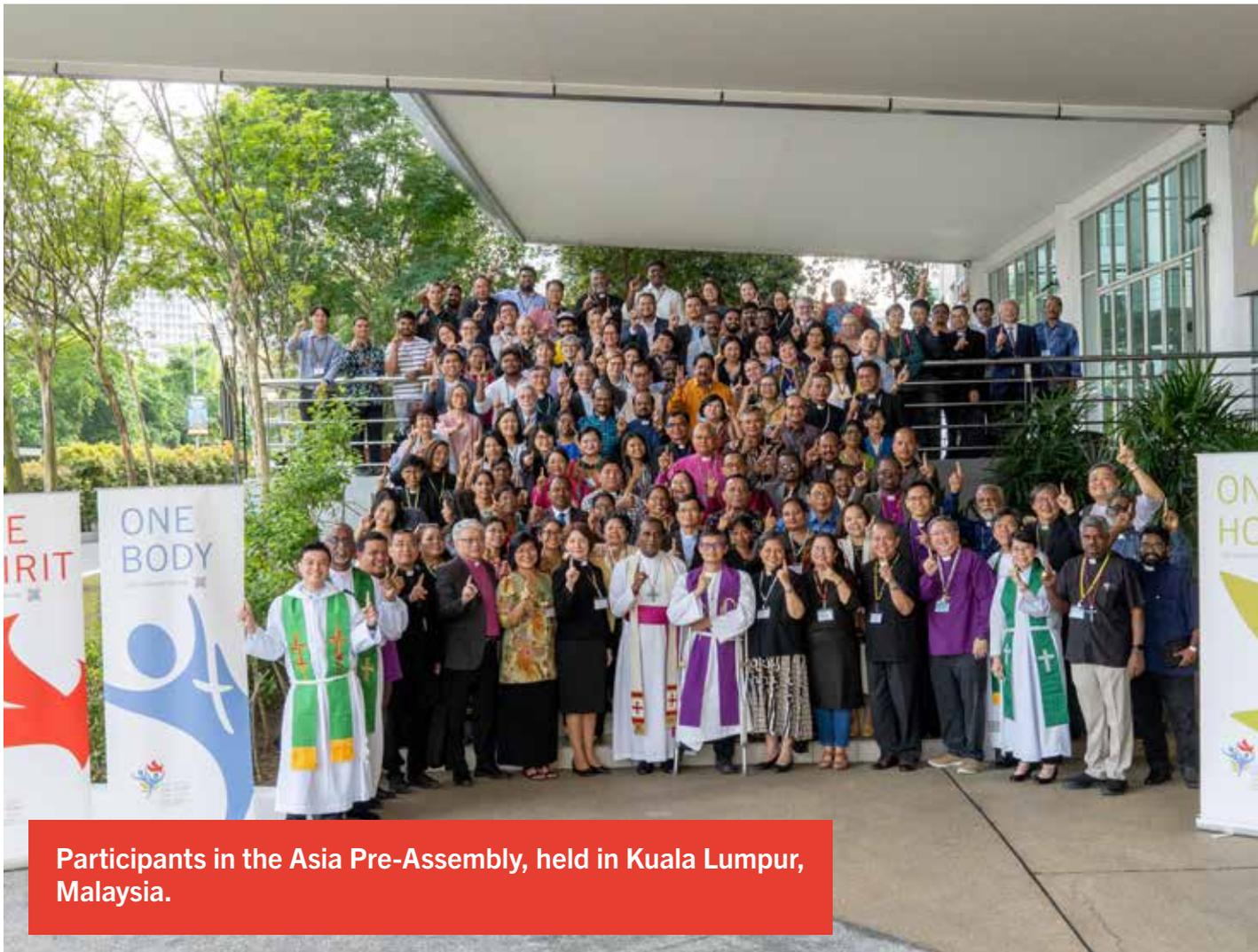
We express our appreciation to the LWF Communion Office for its support and accompaniment in organizing this Pre-Assembly. We express our appreciation for the stewards who have volunteered to help make this Pre-Assembly a success.

We thank the planning committee who prepared the Pre-Assembly.

We express our appreciation for the care and hospitality extended to us by the two host churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, and the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, as well as the leadership of AACC and the management and staff of Desmond Tutu Conference Center.

We envisage remaining One Body, in One Spirit, and with One Hope as we entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit and call upon him to help us remain firm in our faith in Christ and the care, healing and reconciliation of the whole of creation.

Looking forward to Thirteenth Assembly in Poland, participants at the pre-assembly discussed the three aspects of the Assembly theme – “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” We realize that just as the human body comprises many parts, the church in the Asian region has a diversity of gifts, which engender a focus on similarities in God’s calling and mission. With a strong spirit of fellowship, commitment to diakonia and peace, our hearts come together for the future of the local and global communion. We are called to work toward justice, peace and reconciliation among people divided by religion, gender, age, ethnicity, language, and culture.



**Participants in the Asia Pre-Assembly, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**

## LIVING AS A RELIGIOUS MINORITY

One of the major concerns we share as a region is living as adherents of a minority religion. This affects the lives and church work of many, leading to the issue of how Christians can engage more with those from the majority religion. Throughout the many discussions, a recurring theme was how we could work together in the fields of theological education, interfaith relations, gender justice and eco-theology.

We recognize that many within the Lutheran communion in Asia face different degrees of oppression. Many expressed that they are not able to voice their concerns openly, due to risk of imprisonment, disappearances, and other consequences. Restrictive government policies

limit freedom of speech, increase oppression, and attempt to eliminate opposing voices who raise legitimate concerns affecting society. These policies and pressure from radical groups prevent us from living our faith freely, and violate human rights. Many countries in Asia, where LWF member churches are present are affected by restrictive policies, laws and practices. The spaces to publicly discuss these concerns are severely limited and can be sensitive with implications for the safety and security of the citizens of some countries and areas in which we live and serve.

We also considered other minorities, including the differently-abled, who often experience difficulties in daily lives that need to be alleviated and accorded greater inclusion in congregational life.

We call upon the LWF Assembly and member churches to accompany the Asian region in

prioritizing dialogue and cooperation between different communities, continuing work already underway in the various programs of serving our neighbor as well as promoting human dignity, justice and peace.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

We acknowledge that there are obstacles hindering equal opportunities for women in formal theological education. We commit ourselves to focus on strategic areas such as theological teaching at all levels including the congregational level and promoting wider cooperation in theological institutions.

Constructive interfaith engagement should be a special focus of theological education that both continues high level dialogue and features the importance of harmonious daily life encounters with people of other faiths. Youth and adults, women and men should all be involved and equipped to be good neighbors in religiously diverse societies.

On the worsening climate crisis, we urge a greater emphasis on eco-theology at congregational level aimed at building knowledge and enabling actions. We see caring for creation as a common concern, we encourage local churches to incorporate climate justice campaigns in their daily activities.

## STRENGTHENING GENDER JUSTICE, YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND INTERGENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

As church leaders in Asia, we are grateful for the growing gender equality in our churches, while acknowledging that discrimination against women remains a challenge which must not be ignored. Additionally, there is still discrimination against people of specific ethnicities, and young people are in general viewed as incapable for leadership positions. We urge member churches to act against



Participants in the Women's Pre-Assembly, held in Wrocław, Poland.

cultural and societal constraints that prevent equal rights and opportunities for all.

In the Pre-Assembly, we witnessed the vision, commitment and ability of youth and women, which can enrich the communion. Therefore, we ask the Assembly and the member churches to prioritize and actualize our commitment to involve men, women and youth in all levels of decision making and actions, and as well accompany and support member churches in the journey of justice, equality and unity.

In this respect, we encourage the further development of human resources in different areas, through engagement with member churches, in order to enhance understanding and awareness of our mission. Similarly, we encourage member churches to strengthen support to the LWF, by involving members to participate more in regional partnerships, as well as fundraising efforts.

## CONCLUSION

We give thanks to God that the Assembly theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” inspires us to deeper theological reflection and involvement in God’s holistic mission. Our region truly reflects unity in diversity as we work toward building our spirit of oneness. Therefore, our hope is to continue to work together strongly as a region on strengthening theological education, improving interfaith relations, promoting gender justice and youth leadership, addressing political challenges and the climate crisis theologically and becoming good partners in the global Lutheran communion. We look forward to the Assembly where we are able to share our concerns and priorities as well as together commit ourselves to our common mission both locally and globally.

## WOMEN’S PRE-ASSEMBLY

WROCŁAW, POLAND, 8–11 SEPTEMBER 2023

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.” (Eph 4:4)

### ONE BODY

We, 113 women representing the global communion, gathered under the theme of the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF derived from Eph 4:4. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.” The Women’s Pre-Assembly in Wrocław began with a joyful worship service. We celebrated coming together in all diversity and yet one in Christ. The Rev. Halina Radacz, one of the first women ordained in Poland last year, drew from the theme and delivered a sermon inspired by Gal 3:28. “There is no longer Jew nor Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in

Christ Jesus.” Pastor Radacz called us to gender justice and boldly proclaimed, “(t)he profound sentiments about family and the unique role of women hold no significance unless we view them as equal partners in the life and service of the church and society.” In this sacred space we heard the gospel proclaimed and experienced the diversity within the body of Christ embodied by different people, languages and rhythms. Thanks be to God!

We give thanks to Parafia Ewangelicko-Augsburska Opatrzności Bożej of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland for organizing and hosting such a momentous occasion.

The Pre-Assembly began with testimonies of Polish women, most of whom are newly ordained since May 2022. We experienced the strength of our sisters as they shared with us

their joys and struggles on their journey toward ordination and gladly received the book *Called by God: The path of Lutheran women in Poland to ordination* (Bielsko-Biala 2023).

In commemorating 10 years of the Gender Justice Policy, we recognized the steps member churches and women networks have taken thus far. To name a few:

- The Gender Justice Policy has been translated into over 20 languages, making it accessible and relatable in many different contexts
- A significant number of LWF member churches ordain women and
- Advocacy against sexual and gender-based violence has been implemented in several regions.

As Christians, part of the one body of Christ, we all have much more work to do, to serve neighbors with the Christian love of gender justice especially in regard to institutional and systemic, particularly to sexual and gender-based violence.

## ONE SPIRIT

In our time together we listened to and witnessed each other's testimonies of strength and pain; we experienced the woundedness of the members of the body of Christ. We also listened to reports from our Polish sisters about the current realities of women in Poland. We note especially the restrictive policies in regard to reproductive health, which mirrors a wave of global restrictions. As women representing member churches of the LWF, we stand together in solidarity trusting that in our laments the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom 8:26).

As a communion of churches, the theology of the cross is central to our faith. As such, we name a thing what it is and therefore are called to constructively criticize the culture of patriarchy which drives church structures that victimize women. The culture of patriarchy

threatens to overshadow the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is calling us to confront this challenge for the sake of liberation, transformation, and reconciliation.

As women representatives of LWF member churches, we present the following needs to the full communion for consideration before turning to our calls for action in Section 3:

We recognize the intersectionality of gender justice as it is interconnected with economic, social, generational, racial, and climate justice. We need more reflection and action in this regard.

We need to become more proactive in our advocacy and resource development for all people in our social and faith communities that endure sexual and gender-based violence, especially given how the COVID-19 pandemic, war, migration and poverty have exacerbated the problem. We need ongoing education on gender justice in all spheres, including all generations and genders. This also includes reflection and discussion on gender diversity, positive femininity and masculinity and inclusion.

We commit ourselves to establishing and enhancing networks amongst women locally, regionally and globally.

## ONE HOPE

As we see the resolutions from 2017 not yet fully achieved, we remain encouraged in the work we are called to do in response to the demands of the gospel. As a communion of churches, we follow the One who is our hope and invites us to become transformed transformers for the sake of the world. As such we are compelled to call for action on the following topics:

### WOMEN IN THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

The Holy Spirit has led a significant number of LWF member churches to ordain women, to elect women to the office of bishop and



**LWF's member churches were urged to empower more women to take up leadership roles.**

support women's leadership through member churches' prayer, and engagement with Scripture and the Lutheran confessional witnesses. We therefore call upon all member churches to co-participate in this movement of the Holy Spirit. We call for member churches that ordain women to create avenues for women to bear witness and share the processes by which their ordination became reality, thereby strengthening those still working toward the ordination of women to ministry in their member church.

We encourage the ordination of women in the member churches that currently only ordain men. We reiterate that arguments against the ordination of women arise from misleading theologies and patriarchal culture, we therefore call upon the communion to criticize these theological and cultural obstacles and overcome them. We further affirm that ordination of women does not exempt women

from sexism or from sexual and gender-based violence. We therefore call upon church leadership to exercise just and equitable practices for both men and women.

## LWF STUDY PROCESS ON EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN ORDAINED MINISTRY

We highly regard the *Interim Report of the LWF Study Process on Experience of Women in Ordained Ministry*, acknowledge their stories, commit to accompany our sisters in prayer and solidarity and we call for the continuation of this study process. We acknowledge the rich theological insight among women who are theologians, lay and ordained, and want to promote the existing inventories of human and published resources (database links).

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

We honor and support women in leadership positions amongst us and we call upon member churches to empower more women to take up leadership roles across the communion, actively promoting the election of women into leadership. This entails continuous capacity building and redefining the concept of leadership in context.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

We call upon the LWF communion office to convene a study process on confessional documents with a gender justice perspective, with special consideration of the Augsburg Confession's 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2030. We encourage the discussion amongst all church members in accordance with the priesthood of all baptized.

## GENDER JUSTICE POLICY

We call for a continued review process of the Gender Justice Policy and for further contextualization and translation for the many member churches, if not yet in process.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

We need accountability as a communion of churches in all aspects of church life. The Gender Justice Policy was approved by the LWF Council in 2013, we thus call for it to also be implemented at the regional and local level.

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: ENDORSEMENT AND SUPPORT

In regard to LWF formative opportunities, we call on church leaders to support and



Participants in the Youth Pre-Assembly, held in Wisła Malinka, Poland.

endorse women's participation. We further call upon the LWF communion office to continue walking with member churches to address any obstacles that impede women's participation in these opportunities.

We especially call upon church leaders to support women who engage in the work or ministry of gender justice in their countries.

## THEOLOGICAL FORMATION

We call for the creation of transformative Lutheran theologies that address gender justice. We call for their inclusion into the core curriculum of theological studies at universities and Bible colleges. We hope this to be an integral part of the education of ministers, Sunday school teachers and others carrying faith formation responsibilities within our churches.

## FAITH FORMATION

We call upon member churches to include gender justice in the core curriculum for Sunday school, youth groups, confirmation classes, and workshops on positive parenting. This implies developing material on this topic.

## FUNDING

We call for prioritized funding for LWF gender justice programs globally and in the regions.

# YOUTH PRE-ASSEMBLY

## WISŁA MALINKA, POLAND, 8–11 SEPTEMBER 2023

“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope”

We, youth delegates to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Thirteenth Assembly, together with ex-officio Council members,

## INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

We call for continued work toward gender just structures within our churches, for example the code of conduct, the quota system in leadership and legislative bodies, and a system to report grievances.

## PUBLIC WITNESS

We call for a public witness of the church for gender justice. In this task the church needs to identify allies in civil society and amongst ecumenical and interreligious entities. We call upon all member churches to courageously respond to the call for restorative justice and reconciliation processes.

## WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Drawing from a hope beyond ourselves, as a new creation in Christ, we are compelled to engage in the ongoing process of advocating for women's human rights. This includes reproductive justice and women's health issues. We strive toward a world without sexual and gender-based violence.

We hope and pray that our embodied witness, and that of the church at large, may be honest, prophetic and faithful.

advisers and stewards, gathered for the Youth Pre-Assembly from 8 to 11 September, in Wisła Malinka, Poland. We were warmly hosted by the local parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The Youth

Pre-Assembly provided a space to discuss our different contexts and realities, and envision our future under the Assembly theme, “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.”

During the meeting, friendships were forged and in a universal language of joy, a shared laughter that transcended boundaries, and a collective spirit of youth. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them (1 Cor 12:4), and the Spirit sends us to serve like any other person in the church. In our Pre-Assembly, we entered discussions with courage and curiosity. Our shared Lutheran identity helped us engage in difficult discussions while also celebrating our unity. We hope that we continuously dare to take the next step by staying in conversations about things that threaten to divide us. The Assembly theme “One body, One spirit, One hope,” is reflected in the following common priorities that unite us as a reconciled diversity.

## INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body (1 Cor 12:12) we, as the youth of the LWF, envision our churches as welcoming places for all people, particularly those who face discrimination and marginalization. We specifically bring attention to marginalized indigenous communities.

We invite member churches to provide infrastructure for the inclusion of people with disabilities, develop accessible materials, and identify areas of exclusion. We envision theology and worship liturgy becoming more accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds, through the use of contemporary language and clearer communication.

We emphasize the vital importance of women leadership in the church, and re-affirm our support and solidarity with the LWF gender justice policy.

We call upon the LWF communion to address the need for our churches to create safe havens of reconciliation at the local, regional, and global level for people affected by all forms of violence.

Our hope is that our churches and the global communion will raise awareness around mental health concerns and fight the social stigma associated with these concerns. We ask for education on mental health, connections to networks of psychological experts, and the elaboration of a theological approach to the topic.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

We reiterate and reaffirm that we are the youth today and the church of today and of tomorrow, trusting the Lord who gives us hope and future (Jr 29:11). The youth networks should continue to be strengthened through activities that empower their members for mutual cooperation in local and global contexts.

We recall to this assembly the resolutions and statements adopted at Windhoek, recognizing the continuing need for intergenerational interfaith dialogue, especially with reference to religious persecution. We invite the assembly to reflect on what more could be done to address the ongoing situation.

We have identified common concerns with ageism between the generations. There should be mutual intergenerational respect and collaboration as all of us “are one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5).

We wish to remind the member churches about the necessity of implementing quotas. The youth should be holistically engaged through participation and voting in decision-making structures and processes.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The climate crisis requires immediate action. We understand our planet and its environment as part of God’s creation, and it is our responsibility as stewards of this world to be in solidarity with nature.

Young people are at the frontlines of the climate justice movement. They are also experiencing socio-economic injustice at alarming rates. By prioritizing sustainable communities, we can take real action on both issues.

We affirm all the actions that youth are taking today, from personal decisions to broader advocacy work, and encourage continued work

in these areas. We commend the LWF Youth for their grant programs related to climate change and peace-building, and their capacity building and scholarship programs. We seek to build capacity around sustainable resource management in all regions.

We call on the assembly to support youth entrepreneurship to address the climate crisis and youth employment challenges. Youth-led initiatives create economic opportunities rooted in local and regional knowledge. We ask for the support of the LWF to engage in cross-regional collaboration and create innovative spaces for young people.

As we commend this statement to the Assembly, we invite you to join hands with us in One Spirit and One Hope and to continue to build a communion that embodies the teachings of Christ.



**In the Pre-Assembly message, youth called for LWF’s support to engage in collaboration across regions and to create innovative spaces for young people.**

## CALL TO ACTION

Acknowledging the need for full participation of all generations in the Lutheran communion, we call on the LWF to create an intergenerational justice policy.

We call on the LWF communion to create a statement regarding the need to use inclusive

and accessible language in communication and worship.

We call on the Assembly to take action with regards to the youth quota, and ensure that the requirement of at least 20% of youth representation in official delegations is met by each LWF region no later than the next Assembly

## MEN'S PRE-ASSEMBLY

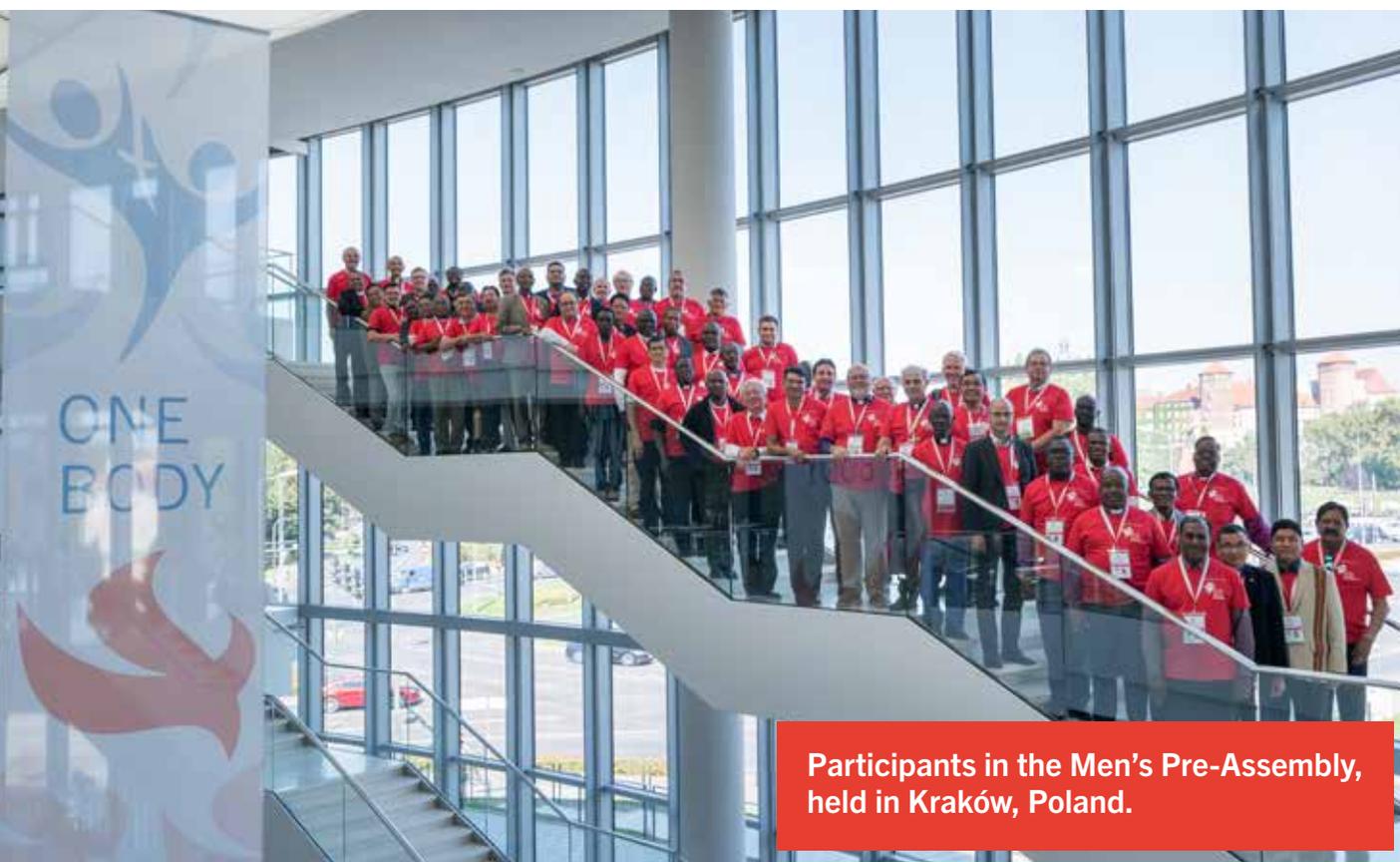
KRAKÓW, POLAND, 11–12 SEPTEMBER 2023

“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” (Eph 4:4)

Sixty-five men gathered for the inaugural LWF Men's Pre-Assembly from 11 to 12 September 2023 in Kraków, Poland, to provide the time and space for participants to explore as men how they resonate with the theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope,” through sharing life,

worship, Bible study, active listening, and conversation.

This first men's pre-assembly was an engaging, meaningful and a significant one. We are mindful that as we gathered as a communion of men from different contexts, there was among us great hope.



Participants in the Men's Pre-Assembly, held in Kraków, Poland.

## CONTEXT

Participants reflected on the question of identity exploring how we might understand our identity as men and engage in transformative hope to serve as a force for positive change in a multi-crisis context. We also named that in many of our contexts there are more women active in the church than men.

We observed that among us there were a variety of expectations of the role of men in church which calls for further understanding. Additionally, as men, we want to understand our masculinity not as one that is characterized by domination, division, and conquering, but as caring, nurturing, and serving.

We acknowledge that there is another Way, inspired by Christ's humility.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN

### IDENTITY AS MEN

As participants considered the challenge of identity, we noted that among us, some need to regain their identity while others need to reimagine their identity. For all, a recognition of service and of serving which includes the sharing of power and responsibility is key.

### EMBRACING VULNERABILITY

We discovered our deep vulnerability as men, acknowledging that we should recognize our own limitations because we depend on one another and the strengths from other parts of the body.

## POWER MODELLED BY CHRIST

We recognize and should raise the awareness that men still occupy key positions of power because of systemic and structural factors. However, the power modelled by Christ is understood as one of shared relationships and mutual collaboration. Together, we commit to engage as humble servants walking in visible unity with and beside women and youth.

## REFLECTION ON ASSEMBLY THEME: ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE

**One:** Though we are one, our unity is not homogeneous, but it is to be Christ-like and service-minded. Within the Assembly theme each element might form a concentric circle which is interchangeable within itself.

**Body:** We are one body through our baptism into Christ. We recognize that this body is wounded and together with the whole creation is suffering. It is this body which we are called to serve and love. This calling includes caring for the sick, the poor, the marginalized, the migrant, and all of creation.

**Spirit:** We are called to trust the Spirit's prompting and to be open to where the Spirit of God is leading. This necessitates active listening and significant room for silence. It requires letting go and a relinquishing of control in order to receive and nurture the gifts God has given us and others.

**Hope:** Our hope is in Christ alone. This hope energizes and inspires us. It is a hope not only for humanity, but for God's creation. We noted many ways in which people look to the church for hope today, affirming how Lutherans across the globe are working to foster peace, support refugees and migrants, create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation, speak out against injustice and oppression as well as advocating for joint action in climate justice.

## CALL TO ACTION

Appreciating the opportunity for men to gather together in a common space,

- We encourage the Assembly to continue having Men's Pre-Assemblies.
- We call on the Council to explore ways and opportunities for men to gather and continue the conversations that have arisen in this assembly and from regional expressions.
- We call on the Council to initiate a study process to analyze and theologically reflect on the role and participation of men in the

life of the church and society and share it with the global communion.

## EXPRESSION OF HOPE

We celebrate the inaugural men's pre-assembly as an important milestone in our shared journey and look forward to building upon this foundation. We pray for God's ongoing work to encourage men, women and youth to be a positive influence in the church and society.

As we each find our own place, we see that hope is the lens in which we live and walk together into the future.





The Assembly was encouraged to continue the Men's Pre-Assembly in the future.

# ASSEMBLY THEME

The Thirteenth Assembly theme — “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” — is drawn from Ephesians 4:4-6. Biblically rooted in an ecumenical dynamic, it is aimed at inspiring reflections on how the LWF communion of churches is called and equipped to be a sign of hope in the world. It is the focal point for the Assembly keynote address and responses, the presentations on each element of the theme, and one testimony.





In the midst of great change and crises in the world, the church's prophetic task is to recognize and respond to God's call in relation to these signs of the times.

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

## TOMÁŠ HALÍK

Christianity stands on the threshold of a new reformation. It will not be the first, nor the second, nor the last. The church is, in the words of St Augustine, ever reforming, “semper reformanda.” But especially in times of great change and crisis in our common world, it is the church’s prophetic task to recognize and respond to God’s call in relation to these signs of the times.

From Martin Luther, the great teacher of the paradoxical wisdom of the cross and disciple of the great German mystics, we must learn in these times to be sensitive to how God’s power is manifested – “sub contrario” – in our crises and weaknesses. “My grace is sufficient for you” – these words of Christ to the Apostle Paul apply to us too, whenever we are tempted to lose hope in the dark nights of history.

Reformation, the transformation of form, is necessary where form hinders content, where it inhibits the dynamism of the living core. The core of Christianity is the risen, living Christ, living in the faith, the hope, and the love of men and women in the church and beyond its visible boundaries. These boundaries need to be expanded, and all our outward expressions of faith need to be transformed if they stand in the way of our desire to hear and understand God’s Word.

Two parallel Reformations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Reformation, enriched, renewed, and deepened Christianity, but they also divided it. The 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the beginning of two great parallel Reformations – the global expansion of Pentecostal Christianity and the Second Vatican Council. The latter marked the transition (exodus) of the Catholic Church from “Catholicism” (confessional closedness, counter-culture to Protestantism and modernity) to Catholicity, universal ecumenical openness.

The newest, the present-day Reformation can build on both of these ongoing “unfinished revolutions” and thus take an important step toward Christian unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope. But I am deeply convinced that we will receive the gift of unity among Christians if we engage in a common journey toward an even wider and deeper ecumenism.

The ecumenism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must go much further than the ecumenism of the last century. Unity among Christians cannot be the ultimate goal of the new Reformation; it can only be a by-product of the effort to bring the whole human family together and to assume a common responsibility for its environment, the whole of creation.

The new Reformation must strengthen the consciousness of Christian co-responsibility for the whole “body” of which we are part through the mystery of the Incarnation of the word of God: for the whole human family and for our common world. We must ask not only what “the Spirit says to the churches today” but also how “the Spirit, who blows where he wills” works beyond the churches. We need to have the courage to kenotically self-transcend the current forms and boundaries of Christianity.

It is necessary to understand and accept more deeply what is the mission and essence of the church to be an effective sign (*signum efficiens*) of the unity to which all humanity is called, to be an instrument of reconciliation and healing of the wounds of our common world. We strive for unity not to make Christianity more powerful and influential in this world but to make it more credible: “so that the world might believe.”

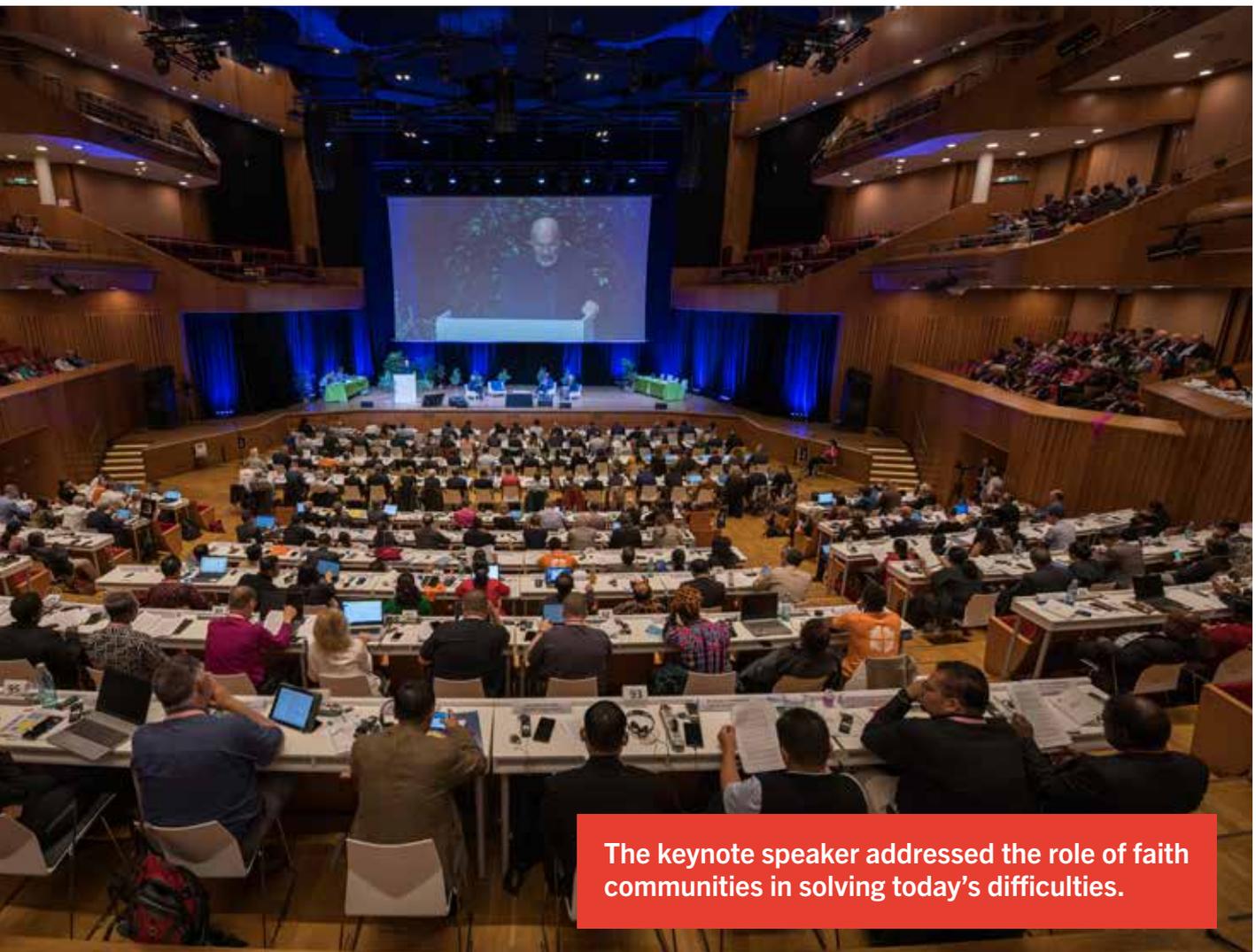
We are to communicate the message entrusted to us in a credible, intelligible, and convincing way. Tensions between Christians undermine that credibility.

St Paul calls Christians not to uniformity but to mutual respect and harmony among the



ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

**Mons. Prof. Dr Tomáš Halík.**



**The keynote speaker addressed the role of faith communities in solving today's difficulties.**

various parts of the body, irreplaceable precisely because of their diversity and uniqueness. It is this unity of Christians, unity in diversity, that is to be the beginning, the source, and the example of coexistence within the whole human family, a way of sharing, of mutual compatibility of our gifts, experiences, and perspectives.

The first Reformation arose from the courage of St Paul to lead young Christianity out of the narrow confines of one of the Jewish sects and into the broader ecumene of the world at that time. He presented it as a universal offer, transcending religious, cultural, social, and gender boundaries: it no longer matters whether one is Jew or Gentile, male or female, free or slave – we are all new creatures in Christ.

Today, too, Christianity is faced with the need to transcend existing mental and institutional, confessional, cultural, and social boundaries

in order to fulfill its universal mission. We must be more open and receptive to God's call, hidden in "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" (GS 1), of the people with whom we share the "oikumene," the common world.

Will we contribute to making our witness help to transform this world into a "civitas ecumenica," or will we be complicit, through our indifference and self-centeredness, in the tragic clash of civilizations? Will communities of faith become part of the solution to the difficulties facing us today, or will they rather be part of the problem?

The history of the world and of the church is neither a one-way progress nor a permanent decline and alienation from an idealized past, but an open drama, a constant struggle between grace and sin, faith and unbelief, waged in every human heart.

Martin Luther taught that every Christian is “simul justus et peccator.” Let us add that many people in our world today are “simul fidelis et infidelis” – a hermeneutic of trust intertwined in them with a hermeneutic of skepticism and doubt. If we can turn the conflict of faith and doubt within our minds and hearts into an honest dialogue, it will help the maturity of our faith and can contribute to a dialogue between believers and unbelievers living together in a pluralistic society. Faith without critical questions can lead to fundamentalism, bigotry, and fanaticism. Doubt that is incapable of doubting itself can lead to cynicism. Faith and critical thinking need each other.

A mature faith can live with the open questions of the time and resist the temptation of the too-simple answers offered by dangerous contemporary ideologies.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself to strive for unity among Christians, to dialogue with believers of other religions and with people of no religious faith, and to solidarity with all people, especially the poor and the needy. It professed to be a “*communio viatorum*,” a community of pilgrims who are far from the eschatological goal of full unity with Christ and in Christ. The church on earth is not the “*ecclesia triumphans*,” the victorious, perfect church of the saints in heaven. Whoever considers any form of the church and its theology in the midst of history as final and perfect, whoever confuses the earthly “*church militant*” (*ecclesia militans* – whose primary struggle is with its sins) with the victorious *ecclesia triumphans*, commits the heresy of triumphalism, the sin of idolatry.

To critics of religion such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud, we owe the recognition that many of our ideas about God were only projections of our fears and desires and our social conditions. To Friedrich Nietzsche we owe the recognition that this God of our imaginations is dead. To Dietrich Bonhoeffer we owe the knowledge that our faith can live without this god of our illusions.

Bonhoeffer, a disciple of Master Eckhart and Martin Luther, taught us that the only authentic Christian transcendence is self-transcendence toward others in solidarity and sacrificial love.

Today, not only individual Christians but also our churches, the whole of Christianity, are called to this self-transcendence (*kenosis*).

But if Christianity “steps out of itself,” will it not lose its identity? People in Martin Luther’s time were gripped by fear for the salvation of their souls. In our time, people, nations, religious communities, and churches are haunted by the fear of losing their identity. Perhaps the concept of “identity” is not too far from what the word “soul” used to express in the past – that most precious thing in us that makes us who we are. “What can one give in exchange for his life (his soul)? (Mk 8:37).

Populists, nationalists, and religious fundamentalists exploit this fear for their own power and economic interests. They exploit it in the same way that the fear for the salvation of one’s soul was exploited when indulgences were for sale. They offer as a substitute for the “soul” various kinds of collective identity in the form of nationalism and political or religious sectarianism. They also misuse Christian symbols and rhetoric; they make Christianity an identitarian political ideology.

Martin Luther along with the mystics of the Catholic Reformation, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola, recognized the way of salvation in faith, in our personal relationship to Christ, and in Christ’s self-gift to me (*pro me*).

What forms the basis of Christian identity, and what for us Christians is also the hermeneutical key to understanding history, including the signs of the times today, is the Easter event that once entered history and continues to transform it. I am convinced that Luther’s theology of the cross needs to be renewed, rethought, and deepened today.

Through the cumulative global crises of our world – climate change, environmental destruction, pandemics of contagious disease, the growth of poverty, war, and terrorism – we participate in the “*passio continua*,” the ongoing mystery of the cross. “Where sin has multiplied, grace has also multiplied,” writes St Paul. The cross is the way to resurrection.

Resurrection is not a cheap happy ending; faith in the resurrection is not cheap grace.

The resurrected Jesus came in such a changed form that at first even those closest to him could not recognize him and for a long time doubted whether or not it was he.

Christ also comes to us in many new, surprising, ambivalent forms.

He comes to us as to the apostles after the resurrection. He comes in strangers, as on the road to Emmaus; we only recognize him after the breaking of the bread. He comes through the locked doors of our fear, “legitimizes” himself with his wounds. When we ignore the wounds of our world, these wounds of Christ in the present world, we have no right to say with the apostle Thomas: My Lord and my God!

Faith in the resurrection includes the adventure of seeking the hidden, transfigured Christ. We know the true Christ, the true church, and the true faith by being wounded. A wounded Christ, a wounded church, and a wounded faith bring the gift of the Spirit, peace, and forgiveness into the world.

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Jorge Maria Bergolio, in a sermon before his election as Bishop of Rome, quoted the words of the Apocalypse: Jesus stands at the door and knocks. And he added: today Jesus knocks from the other side, from inside the church – he wants to go out and we must follow him. He wants to go first of all to all the marginalized, to those on the margins of society and the church, to the poor, the exploited, He goes where people are hurting. The church is to be a field hospital where wounds – physical, social, psychological, and spiritual – are dressed and healed.

In the midst of the pandemic and lockdown, I wrote a book, *Time of Empty Churches*. I saw this experience as a warning sign of the times: unless Christianity undergoes a radical transformation, closed and empty churches, monasteries, and seminaries will continue to multiply.

The empty and closed churches at Easter during the coronavirus pandemic at Easter

were reminiscent of Jesus’ empty tomb. “Aren’t these churches just tombs and tombstones of a dead God?” Friedrich Nietzsche asked in his famous text on the death of God.

Many churches in our part of the world that were once full are now empty. In our countries – yes, even in traditionally “Christian countries” like Poland – the number of “nones” – people who answer “none” when asked about their religious identity – is growing rapidly.

In many countries, the number of people who fully identify with and actively participate in churches is declining. The number of ex-Catholics and ex-Protestants is growing.

Among the nones – those who subscribe to no religion – there are many who have been disappointed, often scandalized, by the state of their churches. They include those who have looked to the churches for answers to their serious existential questions but have heard only stereotypical religious phrases. There are the “apatheists” who are indifferent to faith because they have never encountered a Christianity that speaks in a language they can understand and believe. There are those among them who were brought up in the faith in childhood, but when they grew up beyond the infantile form of faith, no one offered them a mature faith for adult people. When Jesus gives us children as an example, he is not calling us to infantile religiosity, but rather to be open, spontaneous, eager, uninhibited, and also able to grow and learn as children.

However, in many parts of the world – unlike Europe and North America – the number of new Christians is constantly growing. We should rejoice in this. Here in Europe, we should listen more and understand what new things the experience of Christians in Africa and Asia brings to theology, liturgy and spirituality. However, we cannot suppress the question of whether those churches which today are filled with the enthusiasm of young Christianity will not meet a similar fate in the future as Christianity in the West and North of our planet. Jesus’ parable of the sower also speaks of areas where sowing comes up quickly but then dies because it has not taken root. From our past experience, we must remember that the number of baptisms

and full churches are far from being a reliable criterion and the only sign needed to guarantee the church 's continued vitality.

The main mission of the church is evangelization. Fruitful and effective evangelization consists in inculturation – in the creative incarnation of faith in the living culture, in the way people think and live. The coming reform of the church is a response to a long-term process that is the opposite of evangelization: the process of ex-culturation of Christianity in much of our world.

We can speak of ex-culturation where the Christian faith, or its external form, the church and its ways of expression, lose credibility, clarity and fruitfulness. A certain form of the church then becomes a grain that cannot die on its own and produce a new plant. It remains unchanged and perishes without benefit.

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But let us return to the Easter story. Those who come to the “empty tomb” are not to fall into sorrow and confusion. We are not to lament the dead Christianity of the past. We should not be deaf to the voice that asks us, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? Go to Galilee, there you will see him!”

The task of Jesus’ disciples from Easter morning onwards is to seek the living but often unrecognizably changed Christ, to seek the “Galilee” where we can meet him today. Is this Galilee of today not precisely the world of “nones,” of people living outside the boundaries of religion? Is it not primarily to them that our mission should be directed?

The missionary efforts of Christianity today must first be directed inward to the church.



**Proclamation of the gospel is part of the church's holistic mission**

There we find many “valleys of dry bones” to whom the Word of the Lord must be proclaimed.

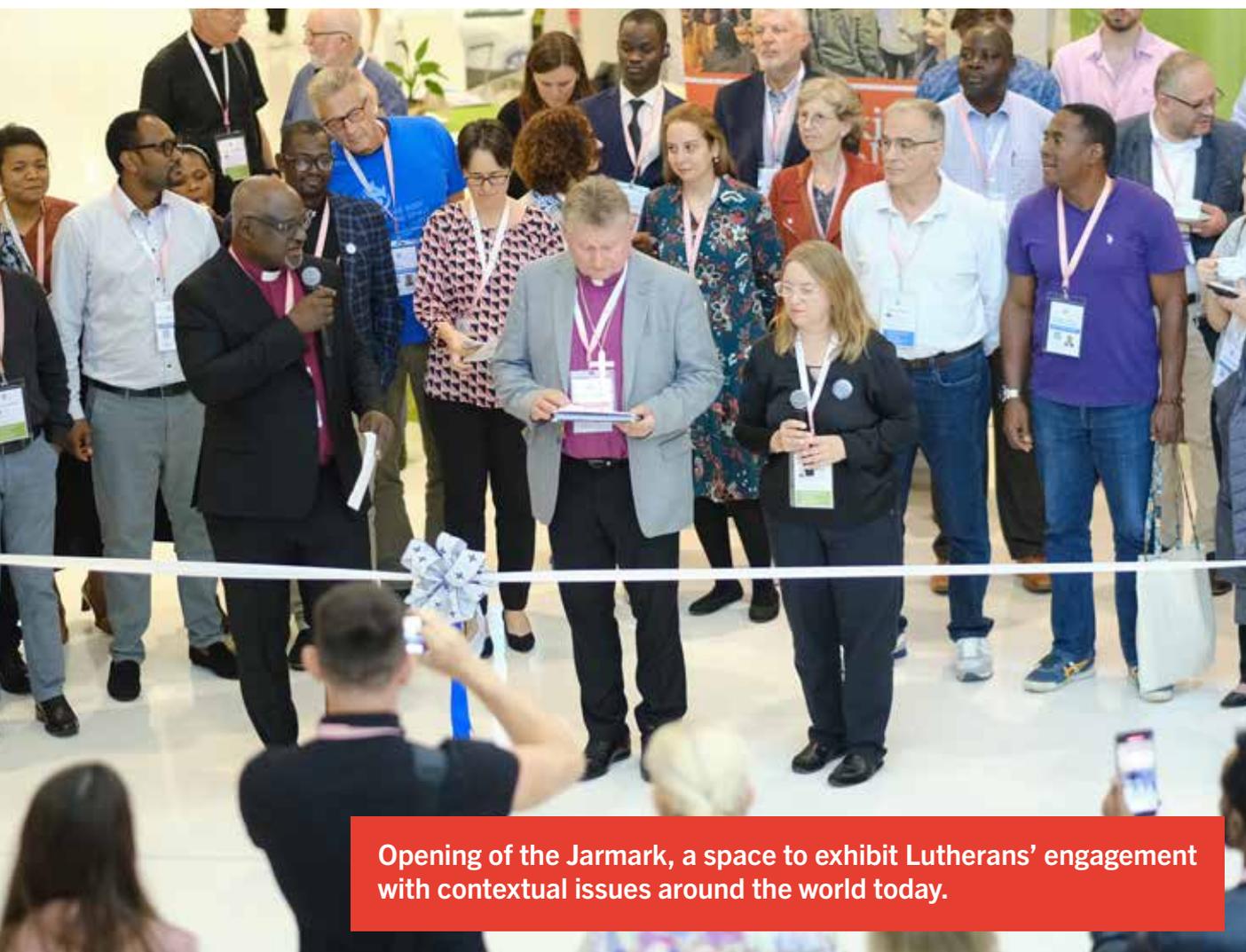
Only then can we head out into the wide world of “nones” beyond the visible boundaries of churches and religious communities. But we must first understand this world well. It would be a misunderstanding to regard those “who do not walk with us” as atheists or unbelievers. And we must distinguish well also among atheists. If many “atheists” reject a certain kind of theism, human theories about God, it does not necessarily mean that they are closed to the mystery that we designate by the word God.

We too, in the footsteps of Master Eckhart, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Paul Tillich, are to discover and proclaim a “God beyond the god of theism.”

Part of the “new Reformation,” the “new evangelization” and the ecumenism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is also a transformation of the way of mission. We cannot approach others as arrogant possessors of truth. Only Jesus can say: I am the truth. We are not Jesus; we are imperfect disciples of Jesus, on a journey of discipleship in which the Spirit gradually brings us into the fullness of truth.

The goal of this journey, the fullness of truth, is an eschatological goal. Now we see only in part, as in a mirror, as in a puzzle. This awareness of the limits of our individual and group perspectives should lead us to humility and the recognition that to expand these limits we need receptivity and respect for the experience of others.

The goal of mission is not to recruit new church members to squeeze them into the existing



**Opening of the Jarmark, a space to exhibit Lutherans' engagement with contextual issues around the world today.**

mental and institutional boundaries of our churches, but to go beyond those boundaries and together with them, in mutual respect and mutually enriching dialogue, take the next step on the journey toward a Christ who is greater than our ideas of him.

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You are meeting in a part of the world that has gone through the dark night of communist persecution. Communist oppression took very different forms in the different countries of Central and Eastern Europe and changed over the years. The great moral authority of Pope John Paul II, the former Archbishop of Kraków, contributed significantly to the fact that the solidarity of workers, intellectuals, and the church initiated here in Poland the Europe-wide collapse of the Communist dictatorship, which culminated in the non-violent revolution of 1989. The transition from communism to democracy in most of Europe at that time (with the exception of Romania) was bloodless, but not easy. Democracy is not just a certain political regime, but above all a certain culture of interpersonal relations. Democracy cannot be established and sustained merely by changing political and economic conditions; democracy presupposes a certain moral and spiritual climate.

The collapse of communism was not an immediate transition to the promised land, but the beginning of a long exodus that is still ongoing, during which Christians in post-communist countries have been subjected to many trials and temptations. After a long period of dictatorship, society is always wounded, sick – it requires a therapeutic process. Here is an important place for the church; Christians should be experts in the process of reconciliation. The churches in countries that are yet to see the fall of communism should be prepared for this. The process of reconciliation is often difficult – guilt must be named and confessed, a path of repentance, of healing must be adopted.

In many post-communist countries, this process has been neglected. Many of the last communists became the first capitalists. Some post-communist countries are ruled by

populists and oligarchs – former communist elites, the only ones who had the capital of money, influential contacts and information after the fall of communism. ‘Wild capitalism’ in post-communist countries leads to major social problems. In Russia there is an economic, moral and demographic crisis. Putin’s dictatorial regime has nothing to offer its population except the drug of national messianism.

After the collapse of communism, there were optimistic visions that the happy ending of history, the global victory of freedom and democracy, was coming. Today, not far from where we meet, an apocalypse is unfolding that poses the real threat of a quite different ‘end of history’, nuclear war. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is not just one of its local wars; the attempted genocide of the Ukrainian people is part of Russia’s plan to re-establish its expanding empire. The main reason for the Russian invasion was the Russian regime’s fear that the example of the democratizing ‘color revolutions’ in the former Soviet republics would awaken civil society and the desire for democracy in Russia itself.

What is happening now in Ukraine is strongly reminiscent of the strategy, with which the nations in this part of the world have experience from the last century: first occupy the territories with linguistic minorities, and if the democratic world remains silent and succumbs to the illusion that agreements and compromises can be made with dictators, the expansion will continue. If the West were to betray Ukraine and give in to Moscow’s demands, as it did in the case of Czechoslovakia on the threshold of the Second World War, it would not save the peace, but would encourage dictators and aggressors not only in the Kremlin but throughout the world. To love the enemy means, in the case of an aggressor, to prevent him from doing evil, Pope Francis teaches in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*; in other words, to knock the murder weapon out of his hand.

Vladimir Putin cynically uses Russian religious messianism and the corrupt leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church to further his aims. The global ecumenical Christian community cannot be blind and indifferent to this scandal either.

Where the church enters into “registered partnerships” with political power, especially with nationalist and populist parties, it always pays a heavy price. When the church allows itself to be corrupted by a political regime, it first loses its youth and its people educated in critical thinking; nostalgia for the past, for the marriage of church and State, deprives the church of its future. When the church enters into “culture wars” with its secular environment, it always comes out of them defeated and deformed; culture wars deepen the process of ex-culturation and secularization.

The alternative to the culture wars is not conformity and cheap accommodation, but a culture of spiritual discernment. This discernment is about the distinction between the “Zeitgeist,” which is the language of “this world,” and the “signs of the times,” which are the language of God in the events of the world, society and culture. In the time of communism, the church needed most the virtue of fortitude to defend itself. Today it needs most the virtue of wisdom, the art of spiritual discernment.

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At a time of devastating religious wars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech Protestant theologian, John Amos Comenius, bishop of “Unitas fratrum,” in his writing “De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica” (General Consultation on the Rectification of Human Affairs), put forward an invitation to a common path of mutual learning, sharing, renewal, reflection and acceptance of responsibility.

Similar to what the Evangelical Bishop of Bohemia taught then, the Bishop of Rome proclaims today with his call to synodality and to strive for the unity of the whole human family, which he writes about in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.

The program of synodal reform launched by Pope Francis can have a much broader and deeper meaning than the necessary reform of the Catholic Church. I am convinced that here is the possible beginning of a new reformation of Christianity that will build on both the Second Vatican Council and the Pentecostal

revitalization of global Christianity. The reform of the church must go much deeper than the reform of the church’s institutions. The fruitfulness of reform and the future vitality of Christianity depend on a rediscovery of the relationship to the spiritual and existential dimensions of faith. A renewed and newly understood Christian spirituality can make a significant contribution to the spiritual culture of humanity today, even far beyond the churches.

When Francis of Assisi heard in a vision God calling him three times: “*Francis, go and repair my church which, as you see, is all in ruins!*” , at first he understood God to mean repairing the small ruined chapel of San Damiano in Assisi, which he did. Only later did he realize that he was called to help radically rebuild the entire ruined Roman Church. Perhaps even Pope Francis and the whole Catholic Church is only gradually realizing that synodal renewal is a process that does not concern the Catholic Church exclusively.

It is about much more than the transformation of the clerical mentality and rigid institutions of the Catholic Church, wracked by scandals and internal strife, into a dynamic network of mutual communication. Synodality (syn hodos – common way) requires solidarity, cooperation, compatibility and ecumenical communion in the broadest and deepest sense of the word. It is more than unity among Christians or the deepening of interreligious dialogue.

The process of globalization, the coalescence of the world, is in serious crisis in our time. Its many dark sides have been revealed – the rise of economic inequality, the globalization of terrorism, contagious diseases and the infectious ideologies of ethno-nationalism, populism and conspiracy theories. But the great problems of humanity cannot be solved at the national level alone. Global interconnection at the level of economics, transport and information will not create an ‘oikumene’, a common home by themselves. No ideology, not even “Christian ideology,” Christianity as an ideology, can replace the missing spiritual dimension of the globalization process.



One body, one Spirit, one hope. It is not only with all Christians, but with all human beings and all forms of life on earth that we form one body. The Spirit of God, the Spiritus Creator, is constantly creating, animating and transforming this body, the unfinished symphony of creation. It lives and works through our hope, faith and love; it is constantly transcending and breaking down all the boundary walls we have erected between us and within us.

In closing, I would like to quote a Jewish, Hasidic story. Rabbi Pinchas asked his pupils a seemingly simple question about when night ends and day begins. “It’s when it’s light enough to tell a dog from a sheep,” one suggested. “It’s when we can tell a mulberry tree from a fig tree,” argued another. “It is at that moment,” replied Rabbi Pinchas, “when we can recognize

in the face of any human being our sibling. Until we can do that, it is still night.”

Dear siblings, in parts of our world, in parts of our communities of faith and our churches, in parts of our hearts, it is still night; the darkness of prejudice, fear, and hatred reigns.

The goal of the “New Reformation” is to transform and unite Christianity in striving for the unity of the human family.

It is an eschatological goal, but in our time, we have an important step to take in here and now. It consists in recognizing and acknowledging – with all its implications – that all people are our siblings, that they have equal rights to recognition of their dignity, to our acceptance in respect, love, and solidarity.

People, nations, cultures and churches are searching for their identity and new hope in a broken world.

Your Assembly is entitled: One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.

Yes, this is our hope that we want to share with everyone.

Our hope rests in the fact that the Spirit of God is continually uniting humanity into one body.

St Paul wrote about faith acting in love. Let us be witnesses of a faith that continually awakens hope through love. Let us be witnesses to the ongoing resurrection of the Giver of hope.

I wish that your Assembly may be a convincing sign of hope that night is passing and that day is approaching.

*Czech Catholic priest and sociologist Prof. Dr Tomáš Halík, is a renowned author.*

## RESPONSES

### RESPONDING TO CHANGE AND CRISIS

#### FREDRICK SHOO

I thank the keynote speaker for a well thought, tailored and well-presented speech. The speech points to a reality we all must face, namely – change. Change is the only constant. We are here reminded of Heraclitus’ aphorism “no one ever steps in the same river twice.” Change and its associate crisis should sensitize the church to recognize and respond to God’s call to address the signs of time. Crisis (Gk *krisis* – decision) implies time for making decision. Responding to change and crisis demands a change in thinking patterns and structures meant to spread the gospel in serving God’s people – this is Reformation – the transformation of form.

The fact that this speech is anchored on biblical and historical attestation stresses the importance of handling the issues presented with utter seriousness. The challenge the speech throws to the church universal is immense. The message to the growing churches in the global south – Africa, and particularly Tanzania, included – is that growth is change that breeds crisis. Growth demands reform. New wine should not be put in old wineskins (Lk 5).

We must acknowledge something positive in the Rich Fool’s thinking – the old barns cannot accommodate the bumper harvest (Lk 12). Full churches equally challenge forms of service like empty churches. We must confess and let go of the irresponsible euphoria and triumphalism accompanying growth. Those who fill our churches are not just many, they are – and probably even more important – different. They have varied needs and expectations. And some of the expectations are, theologically speaking ‘unfounded’ – they need guidance. The question we should constantly ask ourselves is whether our systems of service meet the needs of these people. In addition, full churches do not mean that all have ‘come in’. To paraphrase Prof. Tomas Halík (the keynote speaker): we should ask ourselves, ‘what are the signs of time in this growth?’ ‘what is God calling us to respond to in this crisis?’ Stewards should not boast of results in an intermediate step of a process the end result of which they cannot determine! The church must distance itself from claiming credit for its growth. Growth remains a change – a crisis – time for making decision – time for asking God for direction and guidance.

In line with the theme of the conference and challenges put forth by the keynote speech, our churches must acknowledge and confess that poverty is to a significant degree a result of the church’s inability to express oneness with the society. The church’s alienation – its lack of unity in ‘spirit’ – with the marginalized, has

contributed to the economic and social sufferings of the masses. Jean-Marc Ela's titles *My Faith as an Africa* and *African Cry* have not found much resonance with the church's efforts in addressing the social and economic crisis besetting Africa today. Rather than being important ingredients in addressing the cries of people, the writings of this son of Africa and others like Julius Nyerere, seem to have been relegated to the talk of the past. Such writings may have sound too revolutionary to a 'peace seeking' church that does not want to engage 'peace disrupting' efforts. Such inactivity in the church overlooks the severity of poverty. Poverty has created complex, ramified and ruinous scenarios. It has on the one hand been idolized. In this, poverty has bred some kind of self-pity manifest in 'spiritualization' of ordeals – 'God is on the side of the poor'. The handling of COVID-19 pandemic by some Christians made me ask myself a lot of questions. A significant proportion of Christians tended to consider prayer

devoid of any precautionary measures enough! My word of counsel was 'do not test (tempt) God. In a slightly different but relevant context Paul says 'I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also' (1 Cor 14:15). On the other hand, poverty has been used as bait by insincere preachers who exploit those running away from it for personal gain. Both scenarios demand that the church takes up the call to oneness of the creation seriously – seeing the suffering of the masses as a result of its complacency.

The paradoxical way in which some Christians and churches in the South relate to those in the West is yet another crisis we are facing. I see in churches in Africa, especially those born of the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary work, a relational crisis between Christians in Africa and the West. On the one hand, churches in the West are considered benefactors. Their forefathers brought us the gospel message. We share

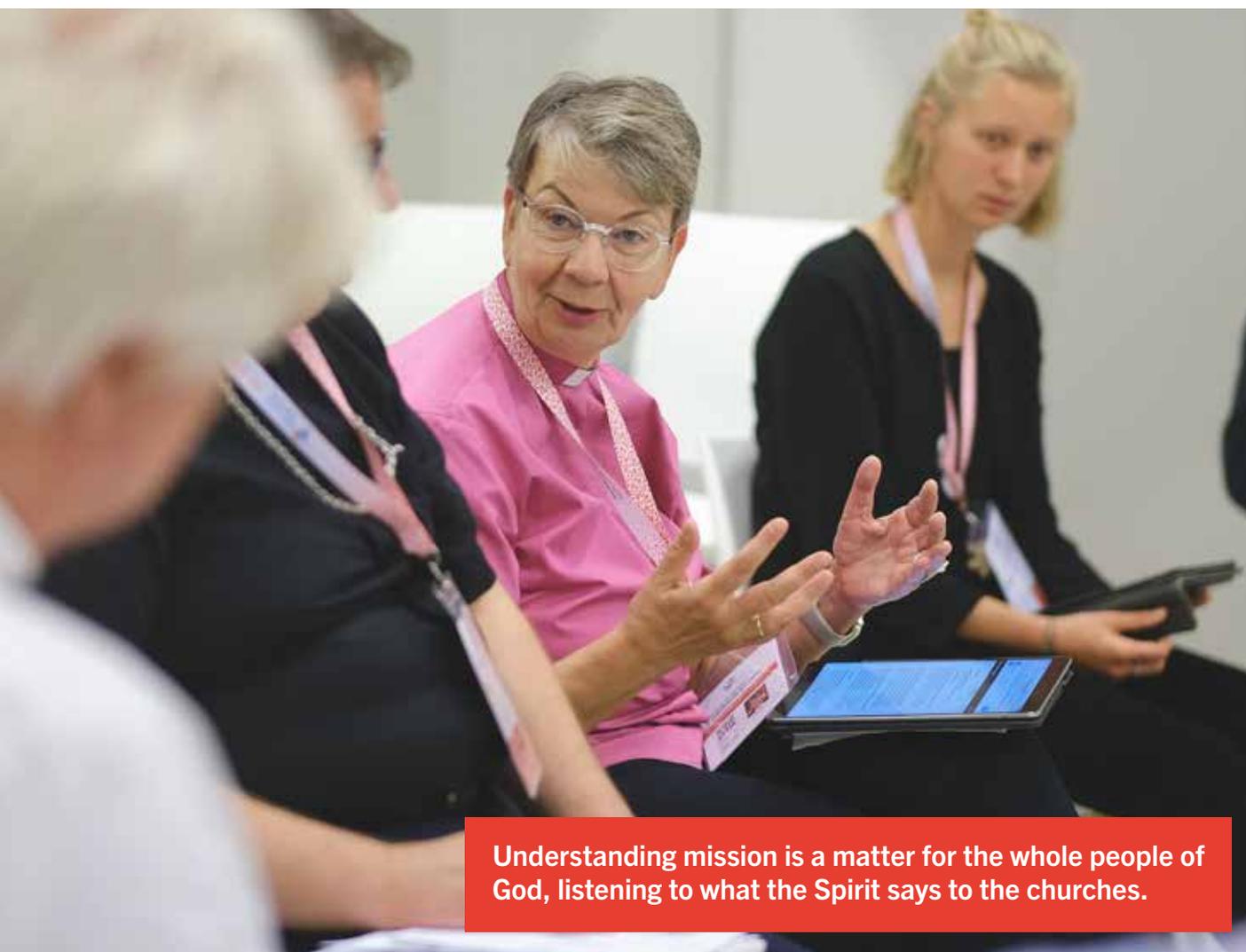


the same identity and cannot let go of the good relations with them. As benefactors the churches in the West are sometimes idolized – they are, ironically, supporters without whom we cannot manage our affairs. But perhaps hidden in such a sensitive relation is hypocrisy because on the other hand, Christians in the West are considered lost in their unbridled liberalism – they are not one with us! As a result, the church in Africa is sometimes caught in a moral crisis; how can it rebuke or correct the church in the West? Neither the churches or Christians in Africa who have parted ways with fellow Christians in the West, nor those that maintain a ‘hypocritical’ relation exhibit the spirit of oneness of the church as professed in the third article of faith.

Rather than being put off and frustrated by the crises in our context, the church in Africa needs to recognize and exploit resources

at its disposal. In the first place, the church needs to realize that the plight of Africa is not attributable to Africa alone – the big nations have a lion share in the suffering of millions of people, not only in Africa but across the globe. The church in Africa should call – and I hereby beseechingly call – sister churches in the West to raise a prophetic voice against the atrocities perpetrated by their nations. Churches in the West should rebuke their nations’ engagement in all forms of injustice like, production and trade in weapons of mass destruction, activities that contribute to environmental degradation and climate change, trade imbalance and all sorts of inhumane policies and actions. And here, while full of admiration and thanks for what churches in the West have done, I emphasize – you need to do more!

Secondly, and probably more important, the keynote speech points to hope! In the dark



**Understanding mission is a matter for the whole people of God, listening to what the Spirit says to the churches.**

nights of history – in the valley of dry bones – the Lord of the church says “my grace is sufficient” – “my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Probably weary of the idealism and unfruitfulness of the notion of mission as movement from center to periphery, from positions of power to positions of weakness; missiologists today see reality in ‘mission from the margins’. Rather than succumbing to sanctimony, the church is called to recognize the presence of Christ in its weaknesses. The church must stand and face critical remarks that even question its relevance in the society. The church must acknowledge where it has become anti-mission – where due to the illusion that things must remain the same – it has resisted change. Andrew Kirk sees in mission – the

act of listening and hearing. According to him, “Understanding ‘What is Mission’ is a matter for the whole people of God, listening to what the Spirit of Jesus says to the churches, hearing the sorrows and joys of people’s daily lives and listening to one another: In part, ‘I am, because you are.’” (Kirk 1999). ‘I am, because you are’ – ‘I am thought of, therefore I am’. This is the oneness we should all cherish. I see in the keynote address a tonic for renewed thinking and practice of mission. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

*Presiding Bishop Dr Fredrick Onaeli Shoo served as head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania from 2015 until January 2024.*

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## THE “SIGNS OF OUR TIMES”

### KATHRYN LOHRE

Prof. Halík, you have declared the imminence of a new reformation, one that demands our discernment, reflection, and response to the “signs of our times.” We are encouraged by your emphasis on Luther’s theology of the cross as the lens for the church’s discernment. As we bear witness to the sufferings of this world, we begin to see God’s redemptive purposes for the whole of creation. *We are standing at the foot of the cross.*

But are we willing to “touch the wounds” as your latest book urges us to do? Are we willing to touch the wounds of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the endemics of gender-based violence, economic injustice, racism and white supremacy, polarization, and ethnonationalism it laid bare? Are we willing to touch the wounds of Palestinians, who cry out for solidarity and liberation while living under occupation, violence, and the unabated expansion of settlements on their land? Are we willing to touch the wounds of Dalits, wounds

salted by the Hindu nationalist destruction of houses of worship and gender-based violence? Are we willing to touch the wounds of Indigenous people, whose identities have been erased through violence and repression, and whose lands and livelihoods have been stolen with the church’s blessing? Are we willing to touch the wounds of people living amid armed conflicts – whether in Sudan or in the Ukraine, or elsewhere? Are we willing to touch the wounds of the generations to come, whose common home we are destroying by our greed as a climate crisis looms larger than any other threat?

This Assembly is an opportunity to touch each other’s wounds. Even – perhaps especially – when it is too much for us to bear. You have reminded us that the unbearable intimacy we experience at the foot of the cross is also the crossroads of the entire cosmos. The place where Christ’s suffering elicits sighs too deep for words is also where we can hear, if we listen closely, the groans of God’s good creation, of life emanating from death. We must look up and move out beyond ourselves: to follow Christ beyond the cross to the grave, to the tomb, and beyond until we find ourselves on the Road to Emmaus, unable to recognize the

living Christ in our midst, but confident it is *Emanuel* – God with us – always.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis extols all people – not only the Catholic church, or the church catholic – to consider the cosmic implications of Christ's suffering. He writes, "One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross" (paragraph 99). The text goes on to say that "the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed, the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: 'Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.'" (paragraph 236)."

Christ's incarnation is a reminder to us of the necessity of being incarnate – *in-person* – with one another. While we can be spiritually formed as we gather in communion we are spiritually transformed in our participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion. There we come, side by side with each other, and face to face with Christ's incarnation. We participate in the communion of saints in all times and all places, and in the incarnation – the *real presence* of Christ – extended throughout the cosmos.

What, then, of our separation? To be reminded of the cosmic presence of Christ in the means of grace is to be reminded also of ecclesial, theological, and even sometimes cultural divisions that keep us from enjoying this cosmic feast as God intends. While we assert that our unity is a gift, already accomplished once and for all in Christ, we persist in rebuilding the dividing walls that separate us from God and from each other. We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. Our fixations with ourselves – what you call our inhibiting forms, and what Luther called *incurvatus in se* – are keeping us as individuals, churches, and a global communion, from living out the dynamic invitation of the living Christ.

In my own North American context of church decline, we are captivated by corporate models that confuse organizational innovation with spiritual transformation. We have deceived ourselves, ex-culturating the Christian faith while insisting that we are inculturating it. We have obscured the gospel with strategies that

put *who* needs to be reached over and against proclaiming the good news that reaches out to all people by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. As Lutherans, we claim our baptismal vocation to the free course of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, and our freedom to love and serve our neighbors. But do we believe it? Do we live it?

We need the LWF to be reminded that Christ is at the center of our life together, and indeed at the center of the cosmos. We will not always agree, nor should that be the goal. Mutual accountability demands both our mutuality with one another, and our accountability to each other through Christ. For nearly forty years, the LWF has claimed its self-understanding as a global communion. We are bound together not by the banner we bear, but by the One whose life, death, and resurrection binds us to one another, so that we might live, love, and move beyond ourselves, as one body, one spirit, with one hope.

To be called to a wider ecumenical endeavor is at once necessary and daunting. Isn't it already difficult enough among those of us within the LWF? Between Lutherans and other Christians? How, then, do we move beyond ourselves toward unity with those of other religious and spiritual traditions and none, the creatures and the creation, the depths and the heights of the universe? When we only glimpse the surface of creation, how can we begin to ponder the cosmos? The Psalmist, too, wondered about this. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps 8:3-4). We are obsessed with our position in the grand scheme of God's story. We are afraid, as you said, of losing our place, our identity, and our very souls. Yet, the powers of this world exploit our fear, and so we restrict our forms out of self-preservation and risk our credibility as people who proclaim God's salvation through Christ. Your call to self-transcendence – to *kenosis* – is one we need to hear and embrace.

In closing, I would like to put Rabbi Pinchas in conversation with American Sikh theologian and activist, Valarie Kaur. She published a book in 2021 entitled, *See No Stranger: A Memoir*



Ms Kathryn Lohre.

*and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*, borne of her experiences as a third-generation Sikh-American, a minority-religious community that has faced bigotry, racism, Christian nationalism, and violence. She describes how Guru Nanak, the founder and first teacher of the Sikh religion, had an ecstatic vision of the Oneness of humanity and of the cosmos, *Ik Onkar*. “I see no stranger; I see no enemy,” he said. This wisdom, she writes, is echoed throughout the generations by Indigenous leaders, religious and spiritual teachers, and social reformers – and endorsed by modern scientific findings. She concludes, “We can look upon the face of anyone or anything around us and say – as a moral declaration and a spiritual, cosmological, and biological fact: You are a part of me I do not yet know.”

All of you are a part of me I do not yet know, and I am a part of you, too. Realizing and embracing this truth need not be perfected before we look up and move out beyond ourselves. One body, one spirit, one hope is at once who we are, and who God calls us to be. You have challenged us to follow Christ beyond our limits to the vast expanse of God’s eucharistic act of cosmic love, and in doing so to return to “the living Christ” whose victory of life over death is all we need to account for our hope. Thanks be to God.

*Ms Kathryn Lohre is Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations & Theological Discernment at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

# ONE BODY

## BENNY SINAGA

The theme of “One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope” is inspired by Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” This text given by Paul goes on to set down the basis on which Christian unity is founded. There is “one body,” and Christ is the head, and the church is the body. No brain can work through a body which is disintegrated and uncoordinated and split into fragments. If there is not a coordinated oneness in the body, the thoughts and plans and designs of the head and the brain are hindered and frustrated. The oneness of the church is essential for the work of Christ. That does not need to be a mechanical oneness of administration and of human organization; but it does need to be a oneness founded on a common love of Christ and of every part of other (Barclay 1958, 166).

Everyone can explain the meaning of body, the human body, according to our various theological, or philosophical understanding, or according to the context where we live. Every day, as human beings, we use our body to work, to serve, to preach, to play, to talk, to help, and even to do bad things. The movement of the body depends on the thought and heart. The head as the place of brain is the main control of all and coordinates the members of the body. The works of the brain determine the movement of the body. In our Batak tribe, we have been and are being taught that we have to keep our body warm, (we usually put on the “ulos,” a traditional Batak cloth woven by Batak women) to cover our bodies, eat good, nutritious, and delicious food. A warm condition of the body results in the goodness of heart and mind to carry out activities. In a way, this condition brings about how the Batak people treat others. For those who have visited Batakland, the host will welcome you with good, nutritious, delicious food, and ulos to keep your body warm. Similarly, we do the same way to express

our gratitude, show our friendship, oneness, or togetherness. Overlaying ulos on someone means that “you are most welcomed as fellow Batak, as one family, as one body.”

In this assembly the concept of One Body is an outcry to the LWF members as churches to be one in Christ. In Christ, all Christians can see the fact that God gives special value to not separate body, spirit, and mind from each other, for then we risk devaluing the body and especially the body of our neighbors. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, we read: “Do you do not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (cf. *Study Guide* 2023). But the body of Christ is broken. The body is not fine. Every day we find and experience some brokenness through war, injustice, violence, polarization, discrimination, hate, hunger, etc. The body is crying, and this reminds us how Jesus is crying and suffering on the cross.

When the body of Christ was hanged on the cross, we can see the wounds, tortured body, pains, sufferings, rejected, excluded, crying, and violence. The brokenness of Christ’s body showed the brokenness of the church and the world. In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic tortured the spirit, the breath, and lungs, and millions of people died. This biological war has brought families into crying, the churches are also crying, the world is crying because people are separated by the terrible massive death. From this experience, we come to understand more about how to value the air which is inhaled and exhaled every second of life in the body; to value the meaning of the family and the church worshiping together as the fellowship in one body; to value the people who are always caring more about health, diseases, and pain. We were in silence, and in silence we talked more about God and with God.

We listen and see Brazil’s polarization and democracy since 2013 or 2014 has become a major risk not only to the country’s democracy



Rev. Dr Benny Sinaga.

but also in its capacity to address its most urgent policy challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic devastation brought by the pandemic will likely make overcoming this deep-seated polarization even more difficult, as Brazil's already extreme level of inequality will rise even higher. While greater socio-economic inequality does not necessarily translate into greater polarization, the millions of Brazilians who escaped poverty during the commodity boom in the 2000s and who slid back in the 2010s— when Brazil's economy practically did not grow at all— have had their expectations reversed and will be far more vulnerable to radical solutions and populist temptations during the 2020s (Oliver Stuenkel 2021, "Brazil's Polarization and Democratic Risks" in <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/02/17/brazil-s-polarization-and-democraticrisks-pub-83783> accessed on 23 July 2023).

Democracies divided, rising political polarization is a significant element of the global democratic crisis. Intense divisions are tearing the seams of democratic societies in every part of the world, from Brazil, India, and Kenya to Poland, Turkey, and the United States. South and Southeast Asia, two regions with tremendously diverse democracies, are a vital ground for understanding the swelling tide of polarization, its many troubling consequences, and the ways in which domestic and transnational actors committed to strengthening democratic governance can try to contain or reduce them. Like in India – the longest-lasting democracy in the global South – “threats to liberal freedoms are now approaching critical proportions” as the government advances a polarizing Hindu nationalist agenda.

We can see the war in some parts of the world is ongoing armed conflicts until today, even not far from this city, the neighbor of this country, Ukraine, is still at war. As a result of this war, which is brokenness of unity, there are more people crying, children facing hunger, and separated families. Not far from the venue of the assembly, there is a historical site of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Since 1940's Auschwitz has become the symbol of terror, genocide, and the Holocaust (“KL Auschwitz – Birkenau,” <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/kl->

[auschwitz-birkenau/](https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/kl-) accessed on 1 August 2023). The voice and the name of Auschwitz could be heard globally; and Auschwitz-Birkenau became synonymous with the Holocaust. The story of Auschwitz-Birkenau is important for us, because this site is the witness about dehumanization, and how power was ruthlessly abused. This site also awakens people to value others more as fellow humans and fellow creatures. We need the Holy Spirit to strengthen our fellowship.

We hear also the crying of the children who lack nutrition in developing countries, like in Yemen, Madagascar, Congo, Chad, Haiti, Nigeria, Lesotho and Liberia. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) reports, the level of hunger in Yemen reached 45.1 in 2022. This makes Yemen the country with the highest hunger rate in the world. Central African Republic followed second, with a hunger rate of 44 points. Its position was followed by Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with a score of 38.7 and 37.8 points respectively. The level of hunger in Chad was recorded at 37.2 points and in Haiti is 32.7 points. Lesotho and Liberia are recorded to have the same hunger level, which is 32.4 points. The hunger level score is calculated based on four indicators: malnutrition, child stunting, child wasting (weight below normal range), and child mortality (<https://dataindonesia.id/varia/detail/8-negara-ini-punya-tingkat-kelaparantertinggidunia-pada-2022>, accessed 2 August 2023). If the body is hungry then the body will be weak and sick. If some parts of this world are hungry, then the world will be sick and has no warmth, no spirit to do the activities as the member of the body of this world. If one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers.

As LWF member churches, we are committed to value the living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world. There is a life of acceptance of others or inclusion, but let us correct ourselves as the body of Christ, whether we live more in inclusion or exclusion. We see people reject others because of their skin color (black and white), the economic level (poor and rich), education (educated and uneducated), clergy and lay, man and woman, as Asian or American or European or African.



Some people are superior to others. Let's look at neighbors around us; the way you treat others, determine the way you understand the body of Christ. Sometimes we, the church and the body of Christ, talk a lot about the theology of the body and the unity, but in our daily life we reject others for some reasons created by people themselves.

In Indonesia, some women (and also men) prefer buying skin care whitening to have brighter skin color. They are worried about being rejected by people around them. Many Indonesians are more interested in people with light skin color. Some people in Indonesia listen more to the person with fairer skin color or Northern people. The discrimination based on skin color is an Asian thing (and also in some parts of the world, like: Europe, America, and Africa). We are aware of the black-and-white bias all across the world. Not long back, we knew that people were primarily treated due to their skin color irrespective of their skills, talent, education, interests, or anything for that matter. It was a colossal denial of their existence. Even back home, in Asia, when the British came to India, white supremacy over brown was established for well over 200 years. Moving

forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one would imagine such discrimination and oppression would have stopped, but in fact until today we are still talking about some discrimination whether skin color or race or gender (Riya Desmukh "Our Skin Color Does Not Need to Define Us" in *The Times of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/myhealthtips/our-skincolour-does-not-need-to-define-us-not-anymore-25825/> accessed 2 August 2023.)

We are the LWF members coming from 99 countries. Some of us come from rich countries and some from poor countries. During this assembly let us greet our neighbors who sit next to us, right and left, anytime, maybe they need your touch, smile, prayer, or ideas. They need your hands to embrace and to help, your feet to walk together, your mind and heart to be wiser to find solutions, your talents to educate others. Next, we might visit each other to strengthen and to build more inclusion. Some people are either afraid or reluctant to talk to their neighbors, so before and after the assembly, it's just the same. We might be very excited to go abroad to see sisters and brothers in one body of Christ in the LWF, but after the assembly, we fall back into our regular or usual tasks.



**Hospitality is a virtue to welcome others and relate to them as members of the Body of Christ.**

LWF has committed to justice and equality, but till today we find violence against women, discrimination against women, and subordination of women. When God spoke about creating a “helper” or ezer to man (Gen 2:18), God did not mean that women should be subordinates or submissive. The word ezer in the Old Testament mainly refers to assistance that one offers in terms of strength to the one in need, for example: God helping (ezer) God’s people, a king offering help (ezer) to his people, etc. In fact, we still hear the cries of women who are living in a double burden or even triple burden. Women do not have access to health, participation in politics. Women raise their voices for equality. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Batakland was not yet evangelized, women were subordinated, their life was just to live at their father’s house, and after marriage, women belonged to their husbands. But the efforts for justice and equality that have been made so far have not been in vain. Before 1900, the Toba Bataks were already aware of the importance of education as a

new way to achieve social status. When the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, a German missionary society arrived in Batakland (1861) and introduced education and the gospel, some Batak women were educated. The seminary where I teach, named Sekolah Tinggi Biblevrouw HKBP (Protestant Christian Batak Church [HKBP] Biblevrouw Seminary), is historical evidence that women in Batakland have received education in order to help improve mothers, girls, and children. From this seminary, women are ordained as Biblevrouw (woman preacher) to take part in the ministry and leadership. In 1986 for the first time Batak women were ordained as pastors, and now more than 2,000 women in the HKBP have been ordained pastors, Biblevrouw, deaconesses and Guru Huria, evangelists, and elders (Sintua).

We also hear the good news from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, which took a historic step on 7 May 2022, when the Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec ordained

nine women to the priesthood at a service in Warsaw's Holy Trinity Church. The event marked a concluding milestone in the discussion about women's ordination, which has been ongoing in the Polish church for decades ("Poland: First Nine Women Ordained as Pastors" in <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/poland-first-nine-women-ordained-pastors> , accessed on 30 July 2023). We have to celebrate this historic story of Poland and give thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that God continues to move the church to do justice and equality in the body of the LWF and the whole world. "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). We experience global warming, the global crisis of the earth. Cosmos, our mother earth, is sick. We find more educated people, but more people are cutting down trees without limits, the wild animals have no homes; the rivers, the lake, and the air are polluted, droughts, floods, rising sea waters, wildfires, and unprecedented heat and cold waves. These are the signs of climate change.

The earth is God's creation and God created it so well, but because of the greediness of human beings, the earth as the body is falling into brokenness (*Study Guide* 2023).

The sufferings of Christ on the cross are not just his sufferings; they are "the sufferings of the poor and weak, the sufferings of all creatures in this world, which Jesus shares in His own body and in His own soul, in solidarity with them" (Moltmann 1992, 130). And since God was in Christ, "through His passion, Christ brings into the passion history of this world the eternal fellowship of God and divine justice and righteousness that creates life. On the cross, Christ both "identifies God with the victims of violence" and identifies "the victims with God, so that they are put under God's protection and with Him are given the rights of which they have been deprived." All sufferers can find comfort in the solidarity of the Crucified, but only those who struggle against evil by following the example of the Crucified (Volf 1996, 22-24).

The church as the body of Christ is both, sinners and sacred body. The church is sinners who are called to believe in Jesus and let themselves be

directed and covered by the Holy Spirit because of the resurrection. The church also could be understood as a sacred member where the body has the only head, Jesus Christ. This metaphor could be found from the explanation that Jesus Christ is the only head of the body, while the member churches as the members of the body (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 3:6; 4:6, 15-16, 5:23; Col 1:18, 24). The church has sinned and become a sacred body because of the resurrection of Christ, therefore the church as the body of Christ must be governed and overlaid by ulos, the Holy Spirit.

For the unity of the body of Christ, let us practice more not "hostility" but "hospitality" as a virtue to welcome others and to treat our relationship as members of the body of Christ. Our hospitality starts from the Eucharist where Jesus welcomes every sinner to the banquet at his table. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the people, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" and in the same way, he took the cup saying, "This cup that is poured for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-10; Mt 26:26-28). This hospitality has taught believers to welcome others without borders, discrimination, rejection, violence, and hatred, but with peace, open hands, living as neighbors, justice, equality, righteous because he told us so: "Do this in remembrance of me." The members' body of the LWF is the body of Christ who practices hospitality not only among the members but also to all people and all creatures. This must be the strong character of the ecumenical life of the LWF.

Christ united different "bodies" into one body, not simply by virtue of the singleness of his person ("one leader – one people") or of his vision ("one principle or law – one community"), but above all through his suffering. It is profoundly significant that, Jews and Gentiles are made one body of God's children without regard to ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, or class precisely in "the cross of Christ" (Volf 1996, 47).

The apostle Paul wrote: "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). On

the surface, the singleness of the bread seems to ground the unity of the body. And yet the one bread stands for the crucified body of Jesus Christ, the body that has refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity but has opened itself up so that others can freely partake of it. The crucified Messiah creates unity by giving His own self. Far from being an assertion of one against many, the cross is the self-giving of the one for many. Unity of the body is a fruit of Christ's self-sacrifice, which breaks down the enmity, discrimination, rejection, polarization, war, inequality, hatred, and injustice (Volf 1996, 47).

The Holy Spirit is the center. The aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church are: first, the Holy Spirit builds the church, which is the body of Christ (2:22: 3:16) and which can, therefore only be one. The Holy Spirit always governs to the unity, not separation, for the power of movement of the church as one body is in her unity. Second, the Holy Spirit also gives the church hope (1:14), as such hope is integral to the Christian calling as true Christians (4:1). Hope is like the warm body that is overlaid by ulos to call for the good mind and heart to strive for more love. This calling is the work of the Holy Spirit, as Luther confessed so well in his explanation of the third article of the Creed: "I believe that... the Holy Spirit

has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gift ... in the same way She calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth." The Spirit of God is one; the church, therefore, must also be one; it is unthinkable that it could be divided (see 1 Cor 1:13). The hope of the church must also, therefore, be one. It is not directed to a dozen different ends and goals. The church has only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ (Strelan 1981, 52).

As member churches of the LWF we need to reflect on what it means to be the body of Christ in our different contexts. As a communion of churches, we have the obligation to keep the body together, be it the unity of churches, be it defending human bodies from violence and dominance. This is the calling we have and that we shall live out, together and in our different contexts. Because we are liberated by God's grace. I do hope this assembly will be more than just a gathering of people from different places, and that we can think about developing some instruments to connect us more closely and more regularly in the future.

*Rev. Dr Benny Sinaga is President of the Sekolah Tinggi Bibelvrouw Seminary, Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), Indonesia.*

## RESPONSES

### ONE BODY IS ABOUT INCLUSIVITY

#### NALEDZANI JOSEPHINE SIKHWARI

A body is a unit joined together by ligaments that hold the body to a particular shape. Yes, we refer to the physical flesh, the mind and the soul. Some parts of the body are visible, and some parts are not. Some parts do not look so important until someone does not have them then we realize their importance.

The body of Christ is a special unit. As indicated from the verses that were quoted it has to do with those that have been bought by the blood of Jesus. According to Paul there is no Greek, no Jew, no Gentile and obviously no man and no woman, no slave no free. All people have indeed been created in the image of God. All people are equal in God.

In South Africa we have eleven official languages and many of the people who speak these languages are accommodated in our church services and in the communities. My observation is that so far, we have been able to accommodate the physically challenged church members in the church service, but

we have not yet made consideration for sign language needs. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) is diverse due to culture, language, ethnic groups as well as the background (Berlin, Hermannsburg, Swedish, Norwegians) of the missionaries who brought the gospel in Southern Africa.

It is not easy to unite the missions within ELCSA but in diversity we still strive for The gospel. This requires a lot of calls for respect, sacrifice and compromise. The one common purpose which is salvation through Jesus Christ and the witness of the salvation power to the world

One body is about inclusivity. Who draws the agenda of unity of the body of Christ. Christ died for all, meaning all and respect means treating each other with dignity and having a lot of integrity. The gap between the poor and the rich keeps widening throughout the world and the percentage of unemployment amongst the youth keeps growing. It is under these circumstances where the unity of the body of Christ should rise as a testimony to the world. Jesus associated with those at the margins, the poor and the rejected.

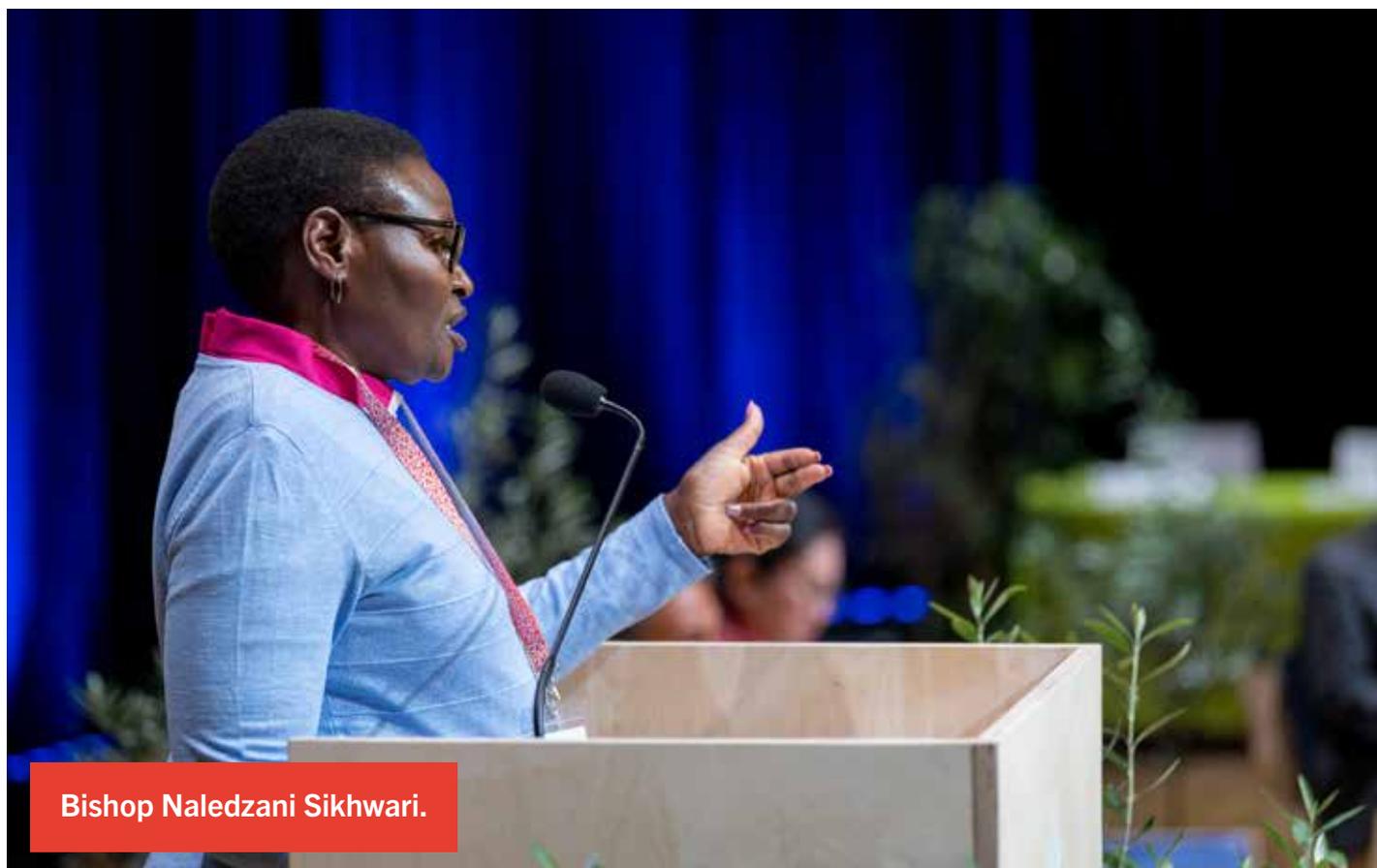
Labelling according to society standards has now become a requirement in everyday living.

One body is not an arrival at a point in time, it is a continuous journey. We had unity talks that somewhere got stuck and we now resuscitate the talks in a desire for one body, the body of Christ. Willingness, zeal and passion coupled with acknowledgement and understanding of each other's role as a member of the body. Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit and when the Holy Spirit takes the lead.

We have hope for now and for the future. That they may know that you are my disciples (Jn 13:35) if you love one another. Without love as a cod/glue that binds the body together, the body cannot survive.

May the Spirit that binds us continue to unite us to keep the Glory of God alive within us.

*Bishop Naledzani Josephine Sikhwari is head of the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA).*



**Bishop Naledzani Sikhwari.**

## SENSITIVITY FOR THE 'BODY OF GOD'

BY BERND OBERDORFER

When St Paul compares the communion of Christians with a body, even characterizes the church as the “body of Christ,” he shares with us deep and meaningful wisdom about what human beings are and what humanity is and should be. A body is more than only a brain. A body feels, is sensitive to its environment, to heat and cold, it inhales and breathes out, it needs nutrition, it has eyes to see and ears to hear and a tongue to speak and sing. A body has a skin to protect its inner life and to sense what happens outside. A body has a form which makes it individual. We distinguish each other by our body: ‘Ah, that’s you.’ Of course, sometimes we get to know people by emails or phone calls, but every time it is a special moment when we meet these people “in person,” which means in rich performance of his or her bodily presence.

A body is not a static entity that never changes. Rather it is dynamic, full of processes that even do not pause when we sleep. A body has a history, it grows and develops its forms.

A body has many parts which only together form its unity, its identity. Every part has its specific function. But they cohere by the circulation of blood and the system of nerves. In an almost mocking way, St Paul reminds us that one part of the body can neither declare other parts for less relevant to the benefit of the body nor claim to take over the functions of others.

A body is sensitive. As we have heard, this implies that it is fragile and vulnerable in many ways. It can be hurt, harmed, humiliated, tortured, it can be damaged by lack of nutrition, it can suffer from diseases and pandemics. Reversely, a body can harm, hurt,

torture other bodies itself. A body can be a source of violence and fear.

When St Paul speaks of the church as the “body of Christ,” he focuses on the inner life of the communion. He encourages us to embrace the diverse gifts we can find in our congregations and churches. And he reminds us not to be indifferent against the needs and suffering of any parts of Christ’s body. “If one member of the body suffers,” he writes, “all the other members suffer with it.” As Lutherans, we know that we all-too-often lack this sensitivity, obsessed by what we regard to be our own problems, eager to maintain what we have. We have to confess that we all-too-often tolerate and even stabilize inequality within or between our churches. Sometimes we even create pain instead of healing it. Luther therefore called the church *maxima peccatrix*, “the biggest sinner.”

This sensitivity for the needs and sufferings of others, however, cannot limit itself to the church and its members. We cannot care for the welfare of our churches and at the same time ignore the needs and sufferings of other human beings, of other creatures of God. We cannot create “safe spaces” only for ourselves.

Today, we are on our way to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When this session ends, we will go to the buses and leave. As a German, and as German Lutheran, to me the memory of the Shoah always has formed a crucial element of my cultural identity. The older I get, the more I feel ashamed to read about the cruel and nefarious details of the discrimination, exclusion, humiliation, expropriation, deportation, and finally the explicitly planned genocide of the Jewish people, which the generation of my grandparents executed first in Germany and then all over Europe. Not even their dead bodies could be granted a place of rest and remembrance: They were burnt in the crematories to extinguish any traces of their existence. Rightly, this was called a “crime against humanity.” It radically denied anything of what we would expect of even basic standards of human behavior. So, it is



a monstrous memorial of dehumanization: By dehumanizing the Jews, the Germans executing the genocide dehumanized themselves, and the German society was a dehumanized society.

Of course, this was not initiated or conducted by the church. The Nazi ideology, in its core, was radically pagan. But, as evident, the antisemitism of the National Socialists could build on a long history of Christian anti-Judaism which was still widespread in the Christian congregations of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the deliberate exclusion of our Jewish brothers and sisters from the people of God – or let us even say: from the body of God – had an important impact on the exclusion, discrimination and persecution of human beings with Jewish ethnic background. At least, it weakened the willingness of Christian church leaders and church members to defend the civic and human rights of Jews in society. Therefore, it was an essential step of repentance and renewal that Christian

churches after the Second World War, in light of the Shoah, started to theologically reflect and revise their understanding of the relevance of the Jewish people as part of the people of God. And I am very glad that, preparing this assembly, the LWF initiated a task force to develop educational resources on “renewing Jewish-Christian Relations,” which resulted in the recently published reflective guide *Hope for the Future*. To me, this is a significant example of a Christian sensitivity for the “body of God” which goes beyond the reductionist focus on the mere welfare of the church.

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ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

Rev. Dr Bruk A. Asale.

# ONE SPIRIT

## BRUK A. ASALE

I am very much honored to be one of the speakers of the LWF Thirteenth Assembly theme, especially on the thematic plenary on “One Spirit”; now we are on fire, the fire of the Spirit.

## INTRODUCTION

Since inception of preparations toward the LWF Thirteenth Assembly, all of us have heard countless times the theme of the Assembly: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” The theme of One Spirit is a very crucial and timely call for my church today more than ever, as it is true for each and every other church globally.

Today’s plenary session at hand is on “One Spirit.” As Lutherans, we need to address in this talk a basic and crucial question of understanding: What does it mean by “one Spirit”? And what is meant by one spirit “today?” And most importantly, what does it mean by one spirit to each member church and the communion at large?

As stated in Ephesians 4:4-6, “One Spirit” is one of the lists of seven “ones,” namely: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God; an expression of completeness. The call was needed at Paul’s own time as there was fragmentation and disintegration among God’s Children.

Paul’s emphasis and his main call is “. . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (verse 3).

As structured in the *Study Guide*, I prefer to follow almost the same structure with three sections: (1) start with introducing one aspect of the theme, beginning with “listening to” two or three “cries” that emerge from contemporary challenges to one Spirit, the focus of our talk. (2) It follows with some theological discussions to help interpret the theme of “seeing with new

eyes.” (3) Then we provide some examples of blessings, gifts, and promise that nurture the hope within us in a spirit of “thanksgiving.” This will lead us into reflections and responses from another perspective.

## THE CRY

What are the spirits of today that we see?

After the experience of the abhorring history of Auschwitz, it is not difficult for us to understand how much we human beings are involved in the destruction of our own fellow human beings! Auschwitz is just an example of well-preserved and an extremely larger scale human cruelty; but there are countless unpreserved but silenced evil practices all over the world and at every period of human history. Besides the holocaust, the Apartheid, Rwandese genocide, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, etc., are reminders of evil acts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the time of the Fall, the world has been suffering from the effect of sin. At every stage of history, the effect of sin has been felt, essentially in the same way but manifested in various ways, in their own unique manifestations. We hear from all corners of the world a painful cry due to humans’ cruelty, greed, and sinfulness.

What is rampant today in our time, unsurprisingly both in the church and in the world, includes discrimination, segregation, stigmatization, division, oppression, injustice, conflict, scheme, ethnocentrism, tribalism, genocide, domestic violence, human trafficking, strife, slavery, dehumanizing acts, etc. These are very common expressions and cries we hear on a daily basis. Every day we witness every kind of evil happening everywhere.

The global systemic oppression, the divide between the North and the South, the East and

the West, the brutality of the powerful and an endless cry of the powerless and the poor are the phenomenon of the world order today.

Let us pick up a few of them from a very local level to an international level:

In my own country and church, due to ethnic conflicts between the Konso and the Gidole, the Amhara and the Tigre, the Oromo and the Amhara, the Nuer and the Anuak, the Gedeos and the Gujis, etc. have been killing one another, even those who belong to my church, brothers are killing their own brothers in Christ.

Ethiopia has been going through a fully-fledged civil war in the last couple of years, and the church and its members are not free from it. This is the outcome of a spirit of hatred that has led to these killings — a spirit that is opposed to unity and the Holy Spirit.

Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Ukraine, etc. are a few examples of nations suffering from continued internal conflicts and civil war, external aggressions and invasions, by empires and powerful allies.

With the hope of escaping from these kinds of unfavorable conditions, thousands and millions of people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are on the run, in search of life and hope elsewhere.

With their uniqueness by their own rights, the Rwandese genocide and the Holocaust are extreme examples of the world order and its cruelty.

To be sure, these are not exclusively abhorring incidents of our times, rather, it all begins at the time of the Fall. One major trajectory of the Old Testament as a story is the strife between brothers: brothers against their own brothers. The Old Testament is the story of such continued conflict, competition, oppression, strife, and conspiracy between brothers: Cain and Abel, Noah's children, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers (Leah's and Rachel's children), Judah and Israel, which continued until the time of Jesus.

Besides all these negative external elements affecting humanity altogether, as a church, there are other elements which negatively affect the unity of the church as one body in one Spirit. The most outstanding among these internal factors is the emergence of countless misleading theologies in many parts of the world.

Today, misleading theologies are negatively affecting brutally the lives of many poor people and demonizing the face of Christianity. Misleading theologies are very much related to power, exploitation, and selfish gain, at the expense of many poor people. Theology is used to control people, not to serve. The true oneness in the Spirit is jeopardized as one is exploiting the other, who is helpless and more vulnerable. In so doing, the oneness in the Spirit is endangered as well.

For instance, when we held the Africa Pre-Assembly in Nairobi, the massacre of many innocent people in Kenya was openly disclosed, where hundreds were killed brutally. Among these victims, most of them were children and women. The so-called Pastor Ezekiel Odero, a leader of the New Life Prayer Center and Church, was enjoying life himself after preaching to his followers, mass killing by starvation.

These days, the saying goes like this: In the New Testament, one fed five thousand, but today, due to misleading theology, five thousand feed one. For instance, another person called Pastor John Mwangi, a leader of Githurai Revival Church, travels only on the shoulders of the members of his church, as he "cannot walk on sinful ground because he is too holy."

All these are the cries of the day both within the church and outside the church.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Why one Spirit?

A. Because it is a divine call. We need to preserve the call of "one Spirit" because it is worthy for our calling. This is a very crucial call

we need to hear today in Ethiopia, in Africa and globally among Christians. Jesus prayed for unity. (Jn 17:23)

B. Because it is biblical and confessional. That's what we confess – the communion of saints (See what Luther says in the Small / Large Catechism)

The explanation of the third article of the Apostles' Creed on "holy Christian church" and "communion of saints" makes it clear that the third article is directly connected to the Holy Spirit, who brings all saints to communion by grace. In the explanation of this article, Luther strongly and clearly points at the one Spirit.

The explanation in the article is directly in line with Luther's understanding and expression of *simul justus et peccator*, "sinner and saint at one and the same time."

The concluding remark focuses on forgiveness of sin where oneness in the Spirit is maintained.

## BLESSINGS, GIFTS, AND PROMISE THAT NURTURE THE HOPE WITHIN US IN A SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING

One Spirit or oneness in spirit is indispensable because all churches sincerely confess and preach that they belong to Christ and live for the cause of the gospel. The ultimate head of the church, Christ, is calling for unity of spirit and fellowship of the body.

One of prominent church leaders in Ethiopia said: "Only if we have a united spirit, do we have the potential to overcome the threats of the day and accomplish our mission in our churches. Therefore, the spirit of unity and ecumenical cooperation is mandatory."

As part of its purpose, this presentation strives to bring all member churches and their participants to be in an ongoing conversation and to effect a better understanding of one another through a better understanding of the

**Gathered in one place, to share blessings, gifts and promise that nurture hope in a spirit of thanksgiving.**



Scriptures that all believe in as a spirit inspired and authoritative text.

This could be achieved by engaging in an ongoing conversation in a spirit of unity in Christ, brotherly / sisterly love, genuine fellowship, and appreciation of the other. Appreciation of the other calls for *openness, mutual respect, and a common goal*. These would be the main but by no means the only conditions for establishing an appreciative conversation in a spirit of oneness and belongingness. What, then, do these requirements mean and how can each of them be applied to promote a spirit of unity and oneness among us?

The call for one Spirit refers primarily to the multidimensional movement of churches and Christians whose goal is both the *“visible unity of the churches and an integration of mission, service, and renewal”* (Rusch 2001:46).

I would like to take the example of Rev. Gudina Tumsa, the late EECMY General Secretary,

in his selfless attempts to attain the unity of churches in Ethiopia in particular and globally in general.

The common conceptual basis for all thought and action of “one Spirit” is the fundamental conviction of the message of the New Testament—that unity is in the nature of the church.

The unity of the church is a matter of Christian faith and confession, and not mere utility (Eph 4:15). Thus, the church in its unity is indestructible / [unbreakable]. This insight is part of the Christian faith and confession. The unity of the church is viewed as God’s gift. (Rusch 2001:56).

Tumsa perceived a number of qualities about the unity of the church connected to the Lutheran definition of the church as “the communion of saints where the word of God is proclaimed rightly, and the sacraments are administered rightly.” This meant, in his view,



**Assembly: A place for ongoing conversations on Scripture and better understanding of one another.**

that “the Church is located where grace is offered, the bitterness of sin is taken away, the blessings of God appropriated, and the joy of the Lord’s forgiveness is experienced” (Gudina 2003:16).

Whatever structures we might have, what matters is the common goal: to promote and experience the grace, blessings and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this sense that Tumsa embraced the Lutheran vision of unity of saints under God’s grace and the spirit of unity bringing this grace of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the gospel, which is in effect evangelical.

## ONE SPIRIT AS CONFESSIONAL

It has to be noted that the church firmly confesses and believes in the “unity of saints” as expressed in the apostolic confessional creeds. Furthermore, Lutheran reformers have stressed that their teaching “should not be conceived as the dogma of a new church but simply as the correct teaching of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, to which the reformers belonged.” In other words, like the apostles and the church fathers, in principle the reformers were focused on the unity of the church in mind and spirit when they set out to reform the church. The confessional creeds of the Lutheran communion have kept this spirit alive.

Thus, oneness in spirit among the churches can and should be built on global, regional, and local levels. At all these levels it allows divided churches in their own settings to work cooperatively for the cause of the gospel, to stand together against evil that Christians — and all human beings for that matter — face, and to discuss divisive issues. In the Ethiopian context, for instance, Tumsa was able to emphasize the evangelical perspective of the communion of saints as integrated in his Lutheran identity.

Oneness in Spirit is an ideal that the churches of Christ strive for in order to reach complete unity. But, even if many agree with the indispensability of the unity of saints for the

realization of a true church of Christ, it remains a real challenge when it comes to praxis.

In the search for oneness in Spirit, some principles that would considerably enhance the possibility of a successful mutual conversation, which includes openness, mutual respect, and common goal.

If we focus on openness, it implies the willingness to learn about and from the other and, thus, establish appreciation of the good qualities of, and contributions made by the other. It entails readiness to be changed and renewed by what one learns from the other.

The nature of openness in our relationships with one another arises from the nature of the Bible itself. While it serves as a common heritage for the creation of one Christian faith community, it also allows for alternative voices coming from different contexts. As Elliott (2010:162) remarks about the Bible: “What else can the church or churches rely on? But it is also the Bible which allows the church to be a community of openness yet alterity.”

We need to underline that openness in ecumenism entails belief in the omnipotence of God and miracle, even in regard to church unity. It is true that many distance themselves from ecumenical unity because they fear it is, in practice, an impossibility. However, the church should base its principles on the Scriptures’ firm teaching that nothing is impossible with God. He is a God of miracles. Therefore, it is our responsibility to move forward and to give ourselves in faith to him and obey Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17:23) to the effect that we should be completely one.

Speaking from the Ethiopian context, Gudina Tumsa was strongly convinced of the need for openness. He argues: It seems to be necessary to remind ourselves of the mighty power of the Bible’s God, because there are Christians who argue that there cannot be unity among the churches. *Biblical faith is based on the impossible, on miracles. . . . miracles are contrary to the laws of nature. Ours is still the God of miracles, and one of the miracles he may perform today is to bring about unity among His churches. Let us then talk about*

*His church rather than our churches* (emphasis mine) (Tumsa 2003:19).

Back to misleading theologies: they are destructive and self-centered at the expense of many others; while openness to the Spirit, in a charismatic way, is for the nourishment and benefit of the one Body. The one Spirit gives many gifts for the good and benefit of the body and we need to be open to the work of the Spirit with a spirit of empty handedness. As a charismatic Lutheran church, this is where we are diametrically different from the wave of misleading theologies. Let's be cautious that we should "not throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Openness, therefore, entails readiness to learn from, and listen to the other, in a manner that the church and it asks for obedience to Him, accepting what is right in His sight. It is in this spirit that this study is conducted, and it expects the different churches to embrace the same openness and engage in a vibrant ecumenical conversation. At God's table, *oikoumene*, we cannot limit ourselves. We must be open to accept this new phenomenon based on adequate interpretations of the Scriptures.

In proclaiming the gospel, the mandate is inclusive which means "that proclaiming Christ to his world is the responsibility of every Christian and every church, regardless of the varying situations in which we find ourselves" (Tumsa 2003:63). However, inclusiveness does not mean succumbing to the identity of the other; rather, it is about treating all equally and fairly. Justice must be at the center of this approach so that the process does not get stuck in another kind of animosity or hatred.

Experience teaches that there are a number of things that a single member church cannot do on its own. We also need collaboration with other churches or even denominations, as well as other global communions, too. Besides bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the poor in common, examples include challenging the communist persecution and the denial ideology in Ethiopia in the 70s and 80s, the

overthrow of apartheid in South Africa, and the struggle against HIV and AIDS. I cannot particularly ignore the spirit of oneness globally in prayer and all kinds of support during the catastrophic flood which damaged the Mekane Yesus Seminary in August 2021. We can witness the power and abundance of God's grace when we are in one Spirit.

Even if it seems that evil and darkness are powerful and perishing us, the power of the light and the eternal hope we have is much stronger and mightier than the darkness. During our visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau yesterday, our tour-guide explained about the power of propaganda and indoctrination of evil before any practical measure was taken. Today, fictitious stories and narratives of hatred are created and spread in social media wherever conflict and selfish motives prevail.

However, let us be reminded that the word of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, the message of forgiveness and reconciliation at our hands are incomparably more powerful than those destructive hate narratives. Let's be bold, as we are called to be in one spirit to be the light and salt of the darkness of our age.

In conclusion, we may be divided institutionally or physically, but we can continue being one in the Spirit, a mystical way of life we experience when we are living in Christ's union. As the theme of the Assembly calls for, I strongly urge and encourage each and every member church of the communion to foster the one Spirit in the communion and in the member churches and by so contributing to the larger unity.

As the apostle Paul urges us as his main call, let's make "... every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4: 3).

May the Lord's Spirit guide us to the unity he himself calls for.

*Rev. Dr Bruk A. Asale, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, is President of the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa.*

# RESPONSES

## UNITY IS A GIFT FROM GOD

### IZANI BRUCH

First of all, I thank Dr Bruk for such a profound and challenging presentation, which challenges us to unity from the beginning to end. It challenges us to discern and seek unity in the spirit from our local, regional and global contexts where many “spirits” reign, where we find it difficult to see and feel the Spirit of God amidst the cries of pain and suffering that is everywhere in the world because of human sin, as Dr Bruk rightly points out.

Dr Bruk’s presentation on “One Spirit” challenges us as a worldwide Lutheran communion to discern in the spirits present in the world, which I call spirits of dehumanization, which produce pain, oppression, discrimination, exclusion,

segregation, discourses of hatred, gender violence, division, poverty .... As I read his presentation, more than an answer, questions arose in my mind:

What does it mean to be a communion united in the Spirit? What does it mean and has it meant for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile to be part of this communion?

I cannot fail to mention how important this unity in the Spirit has been for our church. We are a church that has always been a minority. However, the fact that we are part of the Lutheran World Federation empowers us and sustains us in our being a church in Chile. We know that we are accompanied by the communion of 150 churches and by more than 78 million Lutherans and other churches. It is good to know that we are not alone in the face of contexts that challenge us beyond our strengths, capacities and resources. In Chile, all the work of the churches and of our church in



God is present in the different contexts that churches find themselves.

the defense of human rights during the 17 years of civil-military dictatorship was possible thanks to the accompaniment of the LWF and the WCC.

Latin America shares the common cries of injustice, poverty, segregation, division, polarization, exclusion, migration crisis, climate crisis, hate speech, negationism, gender violence, growing alliance between religious and political fundamentalisms, crisis in ecumenism and other crises of economic and political character. Misleading theologies seem to be becoming more and more common.

This means setbacks in rights for women, girls, Afro-descendant communities, native peoples, people in situations of human mobility and the LGBTQI community. There are spirits that organize and mobilize evil in our territories, that install hopelessness and a fatalistic determinism for our peoples. We need to be united in one Spirit.

Thank you Dr Bruch, your presentation inspires us and renews our hope to continue being hope

against all hopelessness. Thank you for bringing us examples and practices of the deceptive theologies that are at the doors of our churches (perhaps in some they are already inside) and for bringing examples of blessing, of hopes that are gifts in which we can visibly see that God's grace has acted and continues to act through God's Spirit: that creates, recreates and makes all things new. The examples help us to discern, to be able to see and feel that God's Spirit is at work — God is present in our different contexts, he is not an absent God in the cries of pain.

I think of the words of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 36: 26-27), where he tells us about God's relationship with the people of Israel, the text speaks of God's promise to give the people of Israel a new heart. The text tells us that it is God who initiates change, putting a transformed heart — a new heart that desires to collaborate and serve Him. And according to the verses, the transforming process of removing the heart of stone/hard and putting in a heart of flesh/docile, takes place with the breath of the Spirit of God.



In Luke chapter 4, Jesus returned to Galilee filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (v.14), and verses 18-19 describe to us that the Spirit of God that is upon Jesus is a spirit that liberates, that leads to a new life, is restoration: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord.”

Throughout the history of salvation, we see that God’s spirit is liberation—it is openness, it is life, it is restoration—of our wounded and divided humanity.

The spirit-ruach is the breath of the living God, a gentle and strong wind that empowers us for mission through the diversity of gifts. In Jesus, it is revealed to us that the Spirit of God is a proclaiming spirit of God’s grace, of forgiveness, of abundant life, of new beginnings, of restored and reconciled life. Unity in the Spirit of God is the force that creates unity among us, empowers us to proclaim the good news of the gospel and to work for dignity, justice and peace in the world. Thank you for reminding us of the potential/ strength that unity in the Spirit brings to community responses to local, regional and global challenges.

His quote from Gudina on the unity of the church (from the Lutheran concept of church) is inspiring: “the church is situated where grace is offered, the bitterness of sin is removed, God’s blessings are appropriated, and the joy of the Lord’s forgiveness is experienced.”

Unity in the Spirit is an evangelical mandate, not an option. From our different contexts and cultures we need more than ever unity in the Spirit, so that we can as a communion have one voice in our diversity that the gratuitousness of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ, does not presuppose merit, it is grace, it is liberation, rest, it is healing, it is inclusion, it is justice, it is peace.

Thank you for challenging us to strengthen unity in spirit through openness, mutual respect and common goals, and for showing us very strongly that we need each other to be witnesses and heralds of God’s liberating grace in the world.

Thank you for reminding us that unity is a gift — a gift from God — and as you mention: “Every effort for Christian unity presupposes an essential unity of the church that already exists. The task of ecumenism, then, is to enable this God-given unity to become visible.” This is our task.

*Bishop Izani Bruch is head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile.*

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## HEARING THE CRIES OF SPIRIT AMID SUFFERING

### VELI-MATTI KÄRKKÄINEN

A very curious and strange biblical passage from the book of Ezekiel came to my mind as I was pondering upon the profound presentation: “The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven” (Ezek 8:3).

The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven! I dare to suggest that this is the place for us to take a look at our suffering and divided world, between earth and heaven. There we will hear the cries of the Spirit in the midst of enormous suffering and pain.

Between earth and heaven we can also discover the many blessings of the Spirit, as Dr Bruch so eloquently described for us. And Between earth and heaven we best learn how to discern between the one Spirit of God and the many other spirits, the spirits of oppression, violence, and greed.

Let me summarize briefly what inspired me most in this rich plenary presentation. And I am using a simple acronym of six letters to make it short. This acronym might sound familiar to you: L-U-T-H-E-R!

**L** speaks for LATITUDE. The Spirit makes room, creates space. Why? Because we live in a world of narrow-minded attitudes and postures. Ethnocentrism, tribalism, stigmatization, making my neighbor the “other”—Isn’t that but narrow-minded, parochial, petty behavior. Lifted up Between earth and heaven we can see beyond the walls dividing us. Following Dr Bruk’s call, we can cultivate openness and mutual respect.

**U** speaks for UNITY. Indeed, the theme of unity is the bulk of the wonderful presentation. It is about unity from the first to the last paragraph, a call for “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And he

reminded us that unity is not forced uniformity, rather it is unity-in-diversity, through the one Spirit of God.

**T** speaks for TENACITY, the capacity to stand firm for what is right and what is good for all people, all Christians. As the New Testament promises: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7). Tenacity wrought by the one Spirit, however, is neither oppressive, nor haughty but rather humble, gentle, and caring. And this takes us to . . .

**H** speaks for HEARTFULNESS. What is that? It is living by the heart, listening to what the gentle voice of the Spirit is speaking to your heart. You can hear the Spirit in the silence, stillness. I was struck by Dr Bruk’s exhortation for us to “continue being one in the Spirit, a mystical way of life we experience when we are living in Christ’s union.” Mystical way! Yes,



in union with Christ, listening to the Spirit, we cultivate the fruits of heartfulness: compassion, sensitivity, caring. Our world is dying for it, a world full of hatred, lies, and greed.

**E** speaks for EMPOWERMENT! The same Spirit of God who is like a gentle dove or a cool evening breeze, is also the mighty Spirit of the Pentecost and spiritual power. The Spirit empowers the church for prophetic speech and for healing the sick. In the power of the Spirit the church is equipped “to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, [and] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18). The one Spirit is the source of diverse gifts and endowments for the service of the church. But, it has nothing to do with what the presentation helpfully labeled as “misleading theologies.” Those are theologies which promise health and wealth for everyone. They also falsely promise earthly power and prestige. Those misleading theologies have to be condemned and rejected. Instead, the Spirit’s empowerment comes through the portal of the Crucified Christ, the One who laid his own life for the healing of the world. Theology of the Spirit is also Theology of the Cross!

**R** speaks for REFORMATION, ever-continuing, fresh reformation. When in 2017 we celebrated

the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lutheran Reformation, we reminded ourselves of the continuing need for re-formation. To authentic reformation belongs also daily repentance, as the first of the 95 theses puts it: Christ “willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Between earth and heaven. This same vision comes also from another prophet, Isaiah:

Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted,  
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their  
strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:30-31)

“Mount[ing] up with wings like eagles” gives us the vision from heavenly perspective. Walking and running provides the vision from earthly perspective. Both of them come from the one Spirit of God!

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# ONE HOPE

## ANTJE JACKELÉN

Five years ago, Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg started her school strike for the climate in Stockholm. When she subsequently addressed the leaders of the world, her message was: “I don’t want you to have hope. I want you to panic!”

Even though Greta is the great-granddaughter of a Lutheran pastor<sup>1</sup>, who was influential in Swedish church life, including involvement with the LWF, I don’t think she made a theological analysis of her statement. So, what can we say about this fierce message: “I don’t want you to hope. I want you to panic!”?

Greta’s message rightly opposes false hope, the complacent and presumptuous “someone will fix it, no costly changes needed, just pray and carry on as usual.” Yet, panicking in despair is not an option either. As Martin Luther puts it: God hates both presumption and desperation.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the disciples panicked and despaired when Jesus died on the cross. Paralyzed with fear, they hid behind locked doors and did – nothing. It took the testimony of the women who had the courage to visit the empty tomb to get them out of despair and lethargy. It took Pentecost, the intervention of the Holy Spirit, to turn them into apostles of hope.

Panic has a role to play if it, rather than causing despair, alerts us to the choices we get to make under stress and without guarantees for the outcome. In extreme situations, hope requires exactly this: with the abyss opening before our feet, making the leap of faith and

love. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we cannot give up on the idea that there still is a way forward, that things can be done to stop business-as-usual, mitigate and adapt.

## THE STATE OF THE WORLD

Polycrisis is a word used to describe the state of the world. It means the occurrence of several crises at the same time: climate emergency and loss of biodiversity, war and conflict, global migration, economic crisis, the ambivalence of digitalization and AI (artificial intelligence). Polycrisis happens in a world widely marked by what I call the five poisonous Ps of polarization, populism, protectionism, post-truth and patriarchy.

- Where polarization widens the gap between those who have too much and those who have too little, creating climate, education, health, demographic and intergenerational injustice,
- where populism pits people against each other and fails to do justice to the complexities of current crises,
- where protectionism blurs the view for the global scope of polycrisis, sacrificing the common good for self-interest and promoting egoism and nationalism,
- where post-truth with the dissemination of disinformation and lies undermines the honest communication that is vital to every democratic system, and

<sup>1</sup> Ebbe Arvidsson (1914-2006) [https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbe\\_Arvidsson](https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbe_Arvidsson). Her grandmother was a deacon in the Church of Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> WA 44, 822, 13-14. (Commentary on Genesis 31-50) “Ideo timendus est Deus, qui et praesumptionem et desperationem odit.”



Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jackelén.

- where patriarchy boosts a global backlash on the rights of women and girls, promotes toxic masculinities and counteracts gender justice, hope is under attack and put to the test.

People are yearning for credible hope. Why is action on climate change so slow? Because there is too little hope that liberates people to give up things for the greater good. Why is there so much fear of those who are strangers or just “other”? Because too many people lack hope that nurtures the courage to think and act outside the box. Why are there so many tensions and conflicts, why so many mental health issues, not least among the youth – and so we can go on to ask. Lack of hope is a serious condition. And when lack of hope comes together with a surplus of fear, we are in real danger – as individuals, as a communion of churches, as humanity.

## WHAT HOPE IS NOT

Hope is not optimism. Optimism builds on what we already know. It looks at what is at hand and draws out the trends. Rather than extrapolating trends, hope is the practice of spotting the promise. Optimism aims at extending reality. Hope wants to change it. Optimism builds on the known. Hope is motivated by the promise of the realm of God that breaks into and takes shape in our reality. Optimism relies on the facts of the past. Hope sees the past as a history of grace, and therefore looks forward in anticipation.

Optimism is fascinated with graphs and diagrams, especially when they point in the “right” direction. Because then, they support an optimistic view of reality. But remember, it is easy to use statistics for manipulation. With a particular choice of scale, time period and other parameters, a false aura of scientific rigor can be generated. Our wishful thinking is often strong. It can misguide us when we choose, present and interpret facts. Both optimism and pessimism can be deceptive.



But isn't hope also deceitful? We have all heard of vain hopes and false expectations. Yes, like all human endeavors, hope can also be distorted and abused, both theologically and politically. Preaching prosperity gospel is a theological misuse of hope, as well as the privileged telling the poor and oppressed: the worse you are off here, the greater your compensation in heaven, also known as "you get pie in the sky when you die." In my native Germany, the Third Reich saw itself as the fulfillment of hope, and many a political leader has tried to give his appearance a messianic glow. Hope that builds on the disadvantage and condemnation of others is not a Christian hope.

Hope can be painfully disappointed. The distress of disappointed hopes may make a mindset of cool self-composure more attractive, a stoic letting go of what you cannot control or an attitude of apathy and fatalism, a "what happens happens." Yet, neither stoicism nor apathy nor fatalism is hope according to the gospel. If incarnation, God becoming human, is at the center of the gospel, then surely hope's place is "life in the messy middle of things."<sup>3</sup> Hope has a place. It is not utopia, which literally means "no place."<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT HOPE IS

### HOPE IS OUR CALLING

Christians are a people of hope. Ever since Jesus Christ overcame the power of death through his resurrection, there has been no other option. "Rejoice in hope, be patient

in suffering, persevere in prayer," Paul encourages the congregation in Rome (Rom 12:12).

Esperanza, Espoir, Hoffnung: Hope is a tough plant. It can bear a whole lot. And resist a whole lot. *Dum spiro spero*, the old Romans said – as long as I breathe, I hope. Nevertheless, hope is also vulnerable. We need to cultivate our own hope if we are to foster hope among other people. Like the security instructions on an aircraft: put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. Make sure you inhale what the Holy Spirit offers you and you will be a blessing to others.

This does not mean that Christians are unique supermen and superwomen of hope who can uphold the rest of the world. As Lutherans we know that everything is a gift before it becomes a task. So even hope. It is a treasure we hold in fragile clay jars (2 Cor 4:7). Sooner or later, they crack, and that is how the light gets in.

While optimism rejoices at the continuity of a graph moving in the right direction, hope sees meaning despite and through the leaps and cracks of discontinuity. Hope never puts human failure first; it puts human rights first. In polycrisis, we are called to cultivate a spirituality of resilience, co-existence and hope.

### HOPE IS A GIFT AND A VIRTUE

Hope is a gift, like faith and love. At the same time, hope is a choice you make, a virtue if you like.<sup>5</sup> And virtues are like muscles. You get to train them if they are to make a difference. Part of the training is this: "Always be ready to make

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<sup>3</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock: *Losing Your Innocence But Not Your Hope*, in: Maryanne Stevens (ed.): *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, New York/Mahwah 1993, 47.

<sup>4</sup> For more on what hope is and is not, see also Antje Jackelén. "What May We Hope?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* vol.61, nr 1 (2022), 13-19. Antje Jackelén. *Samlas kring hoppet*, Stockholm: Verbum, 2016. Antje Jackelén. *Otålig i hoppet: Teologiska frågor i pandemins skugga*. Stockholm: Verbum 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Hope as virtue means "a more stable and enduring quality of character that helps to direct the emotion of hope toward the right objects in the right ways." Quoted from Michael Lamb, *What can Augustine of Hippo's philosophy teach us about hope?* | Aeon Essays.

your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear” (1 Pet 3:15–16). Praying and confessing, singing both *Kyrie eleison* and *Gloria in excelsis*, reading and hearing the words of Scripture, all of this nourishes the hope that makes us bold in advocacy and action.

## HOPE IS INCARNATIONAL

Hope needs songs. We can be filled with the Spirit of hope as we “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). One powerful song of hope, *Tenemos Esperanza*, beautifully illustrates the incarnational character of hope.<sup>6</sup> I quote some lines:

... Because he was born in a dark manger,  
Because he lived sowing love and life,  
Because he opened up the hard hearts  
And lifted up the downcast souls

... Because he exalted the children, the women,  
And rejected those who burn with pride  
Because he carried the cross of our suffering  
And tasted the bitterness of our ills  
And thus died for all mortals

Because a dawn saw his great victory  
Over death, the fear, the lies  
Now nothing can stop his story,  
Or the coming of his eternal Kingdom

(Chorus)  
That’s why we have hope today  
That’s why we fight tenaciously today ...  
That’s why today we look with confidence  
To the future

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<sup>6</sup> Songs of Advent: Hope - This Crazy Call (weebly.com) (Thanks to Martin Junge for drawing my attention to this song written by the Argentinian Methodist Bishop José Pagura).

<sup>7</sup> Basil, Hexaemeron. Cf also Mario Baghos. St Basil’s Eschatological Vision: Aspects of the Recapitulation of History and the “Eighth Day.” *Phronema* Vol XXV, 2010, 85-103 (91). [http://www.sagotc.edu.au/sites/default/files/files/baghos/St\\_Basils\\_Eschatological\\_Vision.pdf](http://www.sagotc.edu.au/sites/default/files/files/baghos/St_Basils_Eschatological_Vision.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed. The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004, 103–122.

## HOPE IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

Hope resembles faith, as Hebrews 11:1 points out: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” And Paul says: “For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:24-25). For hope, the future is not merely future, it is advent. It is waiting for God who is at work in us and comes toward us from the future, while we “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12-13). The fear and trembling apply to all the smaller hopes, for ourselves and our loved ones, our generations, our countries, and even the planet here and now. The big hope, namely the consummation of creation, is pure advent. Or, to say it with Cappadocian church father Basil the Great (ca 330-379), it is the eighth day of creation, which comprises all time and yet ultimately transcends it, thus making the eschaton present in the here-and-now, as foreshadowed in every celebration of Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

In this, the Book of Revelation, as difficult as it is, is a source of hope. It deals with struggle and victory in apocalyptic terms and contains clear criticism of the imperial power of its time. Hope lies with the power of the lamb.<sup>8</sup> The lamb is Jesus, crucified and risen, prevailing through non-violence. While the Book of Revelation is a narrative of great violence, it is primarily a story that exposes violence to fundamental change. The key to this book is the slaughtered lamb that has conquered death. The final victory is not attained by the mighty lion – not even a lion feeding on straw (Isa 11:7) – but by the slaughtered lamb.



We should cultivate hope that liberates to act wisely and boldly.

This fundamental transformation of violence in the Book of Revelation may have inspired Jürgen Moltmann's description of judgement. He writes:

“The Last Judgement” is not a terror. In the truth of Christ, it is the most wonderful thing that can be proclaimed to humans. It is a source of endlessly consoling joy to know, not just that the murderers will finally fail to triumph over their victims, but that they cannot in eternity even remain the murderers of their victims.<sup>9</sup>

Or what would you say about the description of judgement I heard from Sami theologian Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg, namely, on judgment day, all humans are bound to be silent while the animals are given the gift of speech?<sup>10</sup>

## HOPE IS ECCLESIOLOGICAL

A hopeful church is aware of its history, but its purpose is not to be a guardian of traditions. Rather, it is focusing on the here and now while looking forward to the consummation of the reign of God. Latino/a theologians in particular have emphasized that eschatological hope is about the transformation of society and the creation of community.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than an emotion, hope is a serious theological notion. In its ministry of hope in the public space, the church needs to be prophetic (see and give voice to those who do not benefit from current developments), diaconal (listen, support and help), ethical (initiate and take part in public conversations about right and wrong) and theological (raise questions that are rarely being asked).

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Moltmann: *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie*. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1995, 284 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg, researcher at Sami allaskuvla i Kautokeino.

<sup>11</sup> For example Luis G. Pedraja, *Eschatology and Hope*, in: *The Wiley Blackwell companion to Latino/a theology 2015*, 231-248 (ed. Orlando O. Espin).

## HOW CAN THERE BE ONE HOPE?

This was the question asked by a young person during one of the pre-meetings for our Assembly. How can there be ONE hope? Well, we could argue that there are more hopes than there are people on this planet, because everyone has small and big hopes. One could also argue that there are religious hopes and secular hopes, that there is Christian hope and Buddhist hope, even Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic, Pentecostal and Orthodox hope, and Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox hope – and you can indeed find arguments to support such views.

However, God did not give God's only Son to save only the church or any specific people or culture, but to save the world (Jn 3:16-17). Therefore, Christian hope is never hope for Christians only. It is hope for the world. The hope that we are baptized into draws its energy from faith in the triune God and seeks to express itself in love. Hope is eager expectation toward the outcome of God's project of love for the world and our participation in this ongoing project of love.<sup>12</sup>

We can be confident that God is involved in all true actions of hope. The cross of Christ stands at the center of the universe, his outstretched arms embracing the whole of creation, not merely the Christian church, not merely humankind. In this sense, there truly is ONE hope.

Hope is ONE – but it has at least three elements. First, hope does not flee from reality; therefore, hope also consists of anger at the forces that contradict the true, the good and the beautiful. A credible hope must be able to harbor anger, frustration and grief.

Second, hope is concerned with our human imperfections as well as with our resources as God's created co-creators. Therefore, humility is also an important component of hope.

Humility is the art of dealing wisely with our power and our weakness, our creativity and our vulnerability, our accomplishments and our mortality.

Third, since hope is different from passively enduring the challenges of any given situation, together with anger and humility, courage characterizes hope. In most situations, we still have a choice, and we can choose a more courageous path.

I want you to panic, Greta said. Yes, we should note the alarm bells that sound. And no, we should not succumb to panic, because panic leads to fear and paralysis, not to sensible action. Instead, we should cultivate hope that liberates to act wisely and boldly. The more reasons there are for pessimism, the more special the power of hope. As people of faith, we can always choose to be on the side of courage, impatient in hope!

Now, hope wants to move from head and heart to hands. It wants to get handy. It seeks embodiment. Therefore, I will conclude with a story of embodied and literally handy hope.

One day, when I taught at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, the then head of what is now the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper came to speak at the Roman Catholic Seminary. I volunteered to give a response. A young Mexican woman was in the audience. Afterwards, she came forward and wondered whether she might attend a Lutheran worship service led by an ordained woman, because she just could not imagine how that worked. Of course, she was welcome. Several years later, when I already was Bishop of Lund in Sweden, I received an e-mail from this same woman. Maricarmen was back in Mexico, living as a nun in a Catholic community, serving a socio-economically poor area. She asked for my postal address because she wanted to send me something. Some weeks later a thick yellow envelope arrived. It contained a stole. Maricarmen wrote: "I want you to have this stole, it is made by women in Chiapas, a province heavily afflicted by conflict and violence. Amid

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Werner Jeanrond. *Reasons to Hope*, London: T&T Clark, 2020, 179-185.

the ugliest humans can do and suffer, these women responded by creating beauty. Stitch by stitch.”

Martin Luther probably never said those often-quoted words about the apple tree that he would plant even if the world were to go to pieces tomorrow. But the flowers that the women of Chiapas in the middle of suffering planted on this stole are a powerful spiritual teaching. The seeds of hope have already grown into beautiful flowers, in anticipation of what the Bible describes as the gathering of all nations around the tree of life, “producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2).

This spirituality of ONE HOPE binds together humanity with all creation. It is well expressed in a much-loved post-communion prayer in the Church of Sweden:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your inexpressible gift.

You became the answer to our prayer, the bread for our hunger.

Help us now to answer the need of those who lack the things we have in abundance.

Help us to hear the cry you have heard, to understand as you have understood, to serve as you have served.

Reveal to us the secret of your table: one bread and one humanity.

Amen.

*Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jackelén led the Church of Sweden, 2013-2022, and was LWF Vice-President for the Nordic region.*

## RESPONSES

### CALLED TO SHARE THE TREASURE OF HOPE

#### PAVLO SHVARTS

There is no denying that that time of polycrisis, which Archbishop Dr Antje Jackelén mentioned in her presentation, is not a new phenomenon in the history of mankind. Various crises such as wars, famines, natural disasters, diseases, and many other calamities were also present in the lives of our ancestors. They will probably be a part of our descendants’ lives as well. For centuries, the Christian community (the Church) has been forced, just like us, to seek answers to questions about life in times of crisis. This search was not always successful, and the answers were only helpful for the society of the time. Despite this, Christians of the past, same to us, were looking for a source of hope. A source that would give strength to live in times of crisis and give hope for the future.

“I want you to panic!” the words of Greta Thunberg quoted by Archbishop Dr Jackelén, are not a novelty as well. Many Christian preachers and theologians preached God’s punishments and described graphically the horrors of hell in order to instill panic in their listeners and thereby urge them to repent. In a way, this is a fulfillment of one of the tasks of the Law, which Lutheran theology tells us about. The Law, like a mirror, enables us to see our own imperfection (sinfulness) and the reality of the world in which we live. The Law has the power to snatch us out of our own utopia, for example, from an imaginary world, where no violence exists, and everything can be solved through dialogue.

It is worth mentioning that the practice of using exclusively the Law in one’s message is popular not only among moralizing preachers but also among the new “prophets” of the secular age. If in the Middle Ages “prophets” terrified their listeners with hell, today they do it with horrors of atomic war, pandemics, and natural disasters. The difference of our time lies



**Bishop Pavlo Shvarts.**

primarily in the fact that ideas and information in the digital age spread much faster and reach a much wider range of people. In that way, everyone can become a new “prophet” of the apocalypse or “an armchair expert.” After all, is there anyone, who knows about the great power of a word better than the Christian community? It can heal and inspire but also destroy and take away the last hope. Fear turns into hatred and aggression if there is no hope standing in its way.

The real treasure of the church is the gospel, as Martin Luther described it in his 95 Theses. The gospel is filled with hope. It is paradoxical, that this hope is born on the cross out of the sacrificial love offered for all people and fully revealed its magnificence in the Risen Christ, who is our hope for the resurrection and the source of hope for Christians.

Having understood that we ourselves are in need of hope, we now should think of ways we can share it with others. Each of us has our own history, spirituality, and culture in which we grew up. Before sharing hope, we need to hear the story of the other person. Otherwise, we risk turning our hope into a “cheap” and meaningless idea, rather than a power that changes us through the Holy Spirit.

In my current situation, I find it difficult to imagine what it is like to hunger, which is a day-to-day experience for many people in Africa. However, the previous Ukrainian generations could have said a lot about hunger and the man-made famine, that killed millions of people. I *can* imagine what it’s like to have a corrupt state system and even *tell* you about it, but there is no comparing it to the experience of people living in authoritarian totalitarian states. I can talk a lot about the war, Russian

rocket attacks on peaceful cities, life during sirens, hiding in bunkers, and the horrors of occupation, but this story will probably sound somewhat distant for many of those present. Sometimes, when we talk about our suffering, we feel that our presence and our life story are a hindrance to those who strive to hold on to their own utopia. So, before we proceed with preaching hope, we need to learn to listen, to cry, and to rejoice together.

Our modern-day Ukrainian story of hope sounds like this:

Even amid war and destruction, we hope for peace and revival of our country. We hope for justice for the victims of violence. We hope for the future of our children, even if they must study with air-raid sirens and in bomb

shelters. We hope to be freed from fear and trauma. We hope for victory over hatred and for forgiveness. And of course, we hope for a just peace and an encounter with God. *Dum spiro spero* – as long as I breathe, I hope. The Latin saying quoted by Archbishop Dr Jackelén is probably the only alternative we have today, both for the people and for the church.

Hope is the gift of God that gives us the strength to live; it lifts our hands for battle against the injustice of this world and for service to those in need. This hope is part of our faith and the treasure we are called to share with others.

*Bishop Pavlo Shvarts is head of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine.*

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## A CHOICE, TO LIVE WITH HOPE

### KATARINA KUHNERT

Thank you Bishop Jackelén for your reflections on hope in context for our assembly. As a young climate change scientist, the emphasis on Greta Thunberg's quote was of particular interest to me. "I don't want you to have hope, I want you to panic." In climate change work, we use the term "solastalgia" to describe a kind of climate change related panic. Solastalgia is described as the grief of those who intimately know and care for their lands, who understand that the land is changing and that this change is beyond their control. This is especially salient in Indigenous communities with intimate and foundational relationships to the land.

Living North of the Arctic Circle, as a white settler on the Indigenous lands of Inuvialuit and Gwich'in peoples, in a region designated a global hotspot for climate change, this panic feels like a daily experience in the face

of change. We are currently living through the sixth mass extinction event in planetary history, the Anthropocene Extinction, where over 1 million species are facing extinction. We understand that this degradation of ecological integrity is human caused, from industrial greenhouse gas emissions and land-use change intervening in planetary cycles resulting in the climate crisis.

If it is as Sami theologian Lovisa Mienna Sjoberg says, that on judgement day, all humans are bound to be silent while the animals are given the gift of speech, What will they say to us? The living beings around us know panic to be a true lived experience. In the context of the climate crisis, place-based cultures know panic to be a true lived experience. In the context of the polycrisis, youth know panic to be a true lived experience. But when panic is a daily experience, you almost come to know it as a neighbor and even in the midst of the strain, you learn to live with it.

I believe that our global community is becoming increasingly aware of the decay around us caused by the systems of extraction

that have become the primary mechanism of relating to the world around us. There are many extractive structures that aim to weaponize the word of God, strip resources from the Earth to the point of environmental collapse, exploit our neighbors, and divorce ourselves from our own minds and bodies. We turn the vitalities of our relationships, from the divine to the internal, into a resource that always seems to be running out and it leaves us spiritually impoverished. These extractive dynamics include the aversion to authenticity, vulnerability, rootedness, and accountability.

Bishop Jackelén refers to the Book of Revelation as a source of hope, dealing with struggle and victory in apocalyptic terms and containing a clear criticism of the imperial power of its time, as violence is exposed to fundamental change. If Reformation was a critique of economic exploitation through spiritual extractivism, then we maintain the roots of our Lutheran faith now by clearly criticizing the imperial powers of our times,

exposing violence to fundamental change, and committing to constant reformation of systems of power and privilege. The world is hungry for moral and spiritual leadership. If we want to have a role in that leadership, then our actions must match our theology with integrity. That means letting our hope lead us over and through the unknown.

As Bishop Jackelén says, with the abyss opening before our feet, we are making the leap of faith and love into the unknown. This is against the white cis heteronormative paradigm of incremental change that is impeding our ability to respond to the polycrisis. When people with power refuse to risk to lose their relative influence by using their voice and actions to oppose polarization, populism, protectionism, post-truth and patriarchy, despair risks to overcome and overwhelm our hope. These forces exist in and are perpetuated by the infrastructures of our religion, forces that undermine the foundations of our faith by scapegoating the vulnerable,



imprisoning the impoverished, disappearing the LGBTQ, assimilating the Indigenous, isolating the disabled, exploiting and excluding the women, violating the children, weaponizing supremacism in all its forms against the rich diversity of God's Creation, modelled by the land and embodied in God's children.

Bishop Jackelén highlighted Latina theologians that assert that eschatological hope is about the transformation of society and the creation of community. In the midst of this ongoing transformation, hope must be greater than despair because there is no other choice. Hope is not a delicate, ephemeral whisper but rather hope is full of dirt and grit and sweat and blood that continues to rise to meet the challenges of the day, in spite of and in response to adversity. People who despair are easy to divide and control because fear can be leveraged into oppositional and disposable ontologies. It is easier to give up on each other than it is to stay with each other through challenge and change. Relationality means risking to be brave enough to be honest with each other. It is the challenge of our active and embodied hope to maintain a relationship to land and place through catastrophic conditions. To maintain our relationships and stay in community with each other to work through shame, embarrassment, disagreement, and harm. To bear witness to the consequences of taking too much from each other and the land. To engage in active curiosity with the resilience of the land and reject unconstrained mobility, including the instinct to run away. To cultivate a relationship to time that rejects time as a resource but rather views the longevity of land and community and compassion through waves of experiences of transformation, knowing that we do not always have to perfectly understand each other to have compassion for each other. To wrestle with intergenerational justice in understanding those who came before us and sharing the truth of our understanding, our successes and our faults, with those who come after us.

Hope is not cemented in infrastructure crafted by human hands, destined to crumble with the rule of the empire. Bishop Jackelén calls hope “a tough plant” that can bear and resist a lot. I was told once that nothing that was learned from the land can ever be lost because even when we forget, the land remembers. Take your troubles to the land, because the land is big enough to bear them. The land holds many infinities. Gender and sexually diverse communities understand that the land knows no binaries. Like transgender communities, the land also shows us how to transform. The land holds the good with the bad. It is strong enough to hold you too.

We may be forced to live with panic but we choose to live with hope and we decide not to let our hope be consumed by despair. If as Bishop Jackelén says, hope coexists with anger, humility, and courage, then let hope burn in your spirits, like the fires of Pentecost, the intervention of the Holy Spirit, fierce in burning change. I believe that hope lives in the land. And as we were each made in God's image from the land, my hope lives in each of you too. The divine, the transcendental, and the sacred are actively embodied in the world around us, vibrating at the frequency of urgency and calling out to us to come home to our relationships, to God, to Earth, to each other, and to self, from a place of active and agential hope rather than extraction. Hope is not a resource that risks to run out. Bishop Jackelén speaks of hope as a choice, as a virtue exercised like a muscle. We can ground our choice to continue to hope in a motivation that comes through love, in all its forms. Love, not shame or guilt or fear, but love that sustains and that guides us to be ever more grace-filled in how we respond to challenge and change.

*Ms Katarina Kuhnert has served on the Carbon Neutral Task Force of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.*

# TESTIMONY

## MARIAN TURSKI

I should begin with a confession.... I hesitated whether I should speak today.... No... I am not going to talk about it now. I will speak about it at the end of my speech.

So, esteemed Assembly,

If you have given me the honor of being the first to speak at this very important convention, me, a follower of a different TRUTH than the one which has gathered you here, a member of a different COMMUNITY, different FAITH – then I assume you wanted a man who, by virtue of his age and experience, is considered a witness of history to say what troubles him.

So I ask you, esteemed Assembly, and myself, over and over again, the questions: Why am I, a prisoner of the Lodz Ghetto, a prisoner of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, a man who survived two death marches: from Auschwitz to Buchenwald and from Buchenwald to Theresienstadt – why am I constantly confronted with anti-Semitism, with racism, with xenophobia, with the violation of the rights due to every human being, regardless of skin color, views and beliefs.

I will now repeat some thoughts voiced exactly six months ago on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

I have no intention of diminishing the guilt of the Germans, enslaved by fascism and supporting Hitler. Their guilt toward many countries, nations and social groups. It was they who brought about something unimaginable: the near total extermination of the Jews and the Roma.

Now pardon me, I am going to make a small digression.

May I ask: who of you has ever visited Vienna?

I would like to share a personal experience with you. My time is limited, so I will only use one example.

One of the most beautiful squares in Vienna is called Judenplatz. Which is to say: Jewish Square. Because it was inhabited by Jews in medieval times. It's a five-minute walk from the famous Stephansdom, from St Stephen's Cathedral. In the Jewish Square itself, on one of its sides, there is today a beautiful baroque palace – it houses the Archives of New Records. And that is where I did my research as a historian. On the opposite side is a house particularly dear to my heart as a music lover – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart lived there for a year. On the rear side, there was a synagogue in the Middle Ages. And across from it – the so-called Jordanhaus – the House of Jordan, and on it a plaque from the 15<sup>th</sup> century with an inscription which essentially says that since the Jews REFUSED TO BE BAPTISED BY WATER – THEY WERE BAPTISED BY FIRE. This plaque justifies the cruel pogrom of 1420 against Jews gathered in the Judenplatz synagogue, who preferred to commit suicide rather than change their faith through coercion.

I return to my main argument: the breeding ground for Nazi crimes had therefore existed for many hundreds of years! This breeding ground was anti-Semitism!

And here I cannot but repeat the question: Why?

Why are people afraid of someone who is considered a stranger?

Why do prejudices and superstitions against this stranger lead to their alienation from society?

Why is this alienated person then dehumanized, depersonalized?

Why has anti-Semitism moved from distrust of the stranger, through pushing them out



THE BODY  
THE SPIRIT  
HOPE

Mr Marian Turski, a Holocaust survivor from Poland.

of society, through fanatical hatred – to extermination?

Why do we still, today, have to fight it?

Esteemed Assembly,

The blade of anti-Semitism is directed toward me as a man who is considered a Jew. But I must say that anti-Semitism is mainly a product of Christian Europe. Coming from different parts of the world you know very well that – just to give few examples – in South Africa, the main target of hatred were once the Hindus; in Indonesia – the amok of pogroms was directed toward the Chinese; in Myanmar – toward

the Rohingya ethnic minority, and in China – against the Uyghur population. I could multiply examples. And everywhere hate speech is the base and foundation of humiliation.

We must stop the hate speech and at the same time, try to understand another point of view. Another – that is, not mine. Not my point of view, not my way of believing or disbelieving, not my style of behavior. Understanding is a steppingstone to empathy.

Let me conclude this argument by quoting a poem by my late friend, the poet Bolesław Taborski. The title of the poem: COMPASSION

*Najważniejsze jest współczucie  
Dla wszystkiego co na ziemi.  
Ludzi, zwierząt i też roślin,  
Skał, mórz – znów mówię – ludzi.  
Ono czyni życie znośnym,  
A jego brak odczłowiecza.  
Weźmy sprawców Holokaustu,  
Sługi diabła na tej ziemi.  
Udawali, że są ludźmi,  
Ba, nadludźmi.  
Byli niczym,  
Nie wiedzieli, co współczucie.*

*The most important thing is compassion  
For everything on earth.  
People, animals, the plants too.  
The rocks, seas, and – again I say – people.  
It makes life bearable.  
And its absence dehumanizes.  
Take the perpetrators of the Holocaust,  
The devil's servants on his earth.  
They pretended to be humans,  
Nay, superhumans.  
They were nothing,  
They knew not what compassion is.*

A word of comment. I will not correct the poem, especially when the author is no longer alive. But Bolek Taborski admitted to me that, given Polish phraseology, he couldn't use a word other than *współczucie* (compassion) in the poem. But he agreed that what was most important was: *współodczuwanie* (empathy). What is perfectly articulate in German, for example: not MITLEID, but MITGEFÜHL, not: compassion, but empathy.

Dear friends,

We know that in the history of humankind – every now and then – there are times when it seems to us that the days of the Apocalypse have come. The Four Horsemen representing war, pestilence, famine and death. This is what is happening today, especially since the pandemic. The war in Ukraine and many other wars, drought, water shortages, famine, epidemics, tyrannies causing

migrations of peoples. All this makes people, ordinary people, fearful. Autocratic governments, populist governments want to win the electorate by sowing hatred of strangers, inducing and exploiting fear and anxiety.

I think that spiritual leaders have a special role here. I will invoke the words of a song, sung by Jews every Saturday. A song – much like a psalm, but it is not a psalm. I will first say in the original, because I think some people here know Hebrew, then I will translate.

*Kol haolam kulo – gesher car meod. Vehajikar:  
lo lifached klal!* The whole world is nothing but a narrow bridge. The main thing is to have no fear. SO LET'S HAVE NO FEAR OF THE STRANGER! Ruth, the great-grandmother of Jesus, was also a stranger, a Moabite.

Candles at the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, lit to lament the violence at the former Nazi concentration camp, and commit to renewal and reconciliation.



This is where I should end. But I promised, after all, that I would explain why I hesitated to speak here today.

Well, today is a special day for Jews: today we are celebrating the NEW YEAR. I confess: I am not a man who observes religious precepts, but for the sake of remembering my ancestors – there are important days like the Day of Atonement, like the New Year, when I go to the synagogue. This is why I was hesitant to come. But I was reminded of a gesture by my very wise friend, the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich. He once came to my flat, my life partner (who is present here) welcomed him effusively and held out her hand in greeting. I wanted to rebuke her: how come you don't know that a Rabbi is not allowed to touch women, except his mother and wife? But the Rabbi was quicker – he extended his hand for a shake. And he commented like this: if I shake hands with a woman – the Almighty will forgive me, but He will not forgive me if I cause the woman to feel offended. So, I, too, found it

more important to meet the spiritual leaders of a very important denomination.

So, I will end with a traditional Jewish New Year's wish: Please, let's eat a piece of apple smeared with honey today. In doing so, we say the phrase: *Shana Tova Ve'metuka* – May the new year be good and sweet.

What am I saying? I realize that for me as a central eastern European, for me as a Pole, for me as a Jew – today the term “sweet year” sounds paradoxical, grotesque, even mocking. So, the last sentence I will say now will be: PEACE TO UKRAINE – May she stop experiencing aggression! PEACE TO EUROPE! PEACE TO THE WORLD.

*Mr Marian Turski is a Polish historian and journalist, who was imprisoned in the Łódź ghetto in 1942 and sent to the Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau two years later.*

# BUSINESS SESSIONS

During its business sessions, the Assembly as LWF's highest decision-making body received reports about LWF's work, greetings from the host church and from ecumenical and other partners, and from the host city representatives. It also elected members of the LWF governing bodies.





During trying times, the LWF remained resilient, showing clearly the importance of living and working together as a communion of churches.

Rev. Albert KOUTIA  
Evangelical Lutheran Church Of Congo

# ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT

## PANTI FILIBUS MUSA

Grace and peace to you all in the name of the Triune God!

What a joy it is to gather here in Kraków for the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). We meet in Poland which was one of the first countries to welcome the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation. Praise be God for the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, the host of the Thirteenth Assembly.

What a joy it is to gather in person. We have experienced much over the last few years. None of us suspected what was coming when we departed from the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia after that festive celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary.

I think no one will dispute that one event stands above others since the last Assembly: the COVID-19 pandemic. It affected people, communities, and churches across the whole world. Upending lives and economies almost overnight.

COVID-19 isolated and destroyed. It upset the lives and livelihoods of many people. It took away far too many lives, including some of our members and church leaders. I want to invite you to stand to observe a moment of prayer and silence, remembering those who are no longer with us.

Let us pray.

[Silence – one minute]

Merciful God, you hold all things in your hands. You hold our dearly departed and welcome them in the great communion of saints. Praise be you for their lives now given and their witness

that continues to inspire us. Encourage and strengthen us now, today, as we seek to carry forward that witness. We ask this all in the name of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The pandemic brought to the fore our deep longing to be together, but also visible expression of solidarity as communion of churches. During these trying times, the LWF remained resilient, and we saw clearly how important it is that we live and work together as a communion of churches. The LWF member churches came together to share their sorrows and pains, share resources, and be strengthened. I want to thank the former LWF General Secretary Martin Junge for his strong leadership of the communion during these troubled times as well as for our good collaboration. I want to equally thank member churches and all our support network for their generous response to our appeal for support.

COVID-19 also affected the work of the LWF's governance. The LWF Council, elected at the Twelfth Assembly, met online for two years. It also meant that the Council initiated the search for a new General Secretary online and met online to elect Estonian theologian Anne Burghardt as General Secretary online. I think this is another indication of the resilience of the LWF and its structures. General Secretary Burghardt is the first woman and the first person from Central Eastern Europe to serve in this leadership position. She did not step in at the easiest time and she has led the communion strongly towards this Assembly in Kraków. We are grateful for that.

COVID also meant that the planning for the Assembly began online. In fact, the Assembly Planning Committee, composed of representatives from all the regions, was



Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa.

only able to meet once in person and yet the work done is admirable! I want to express my gratitude to them and to Bishop Tamás Fabiny who chaired the committee – as well to the Local Assembly Planning Committee here in Poland – led by Ms Anna Wrzesinska – who carried on the work bringing us to this day.

In this divided and fragmented world, coming together is crucial, supporting one another, worshiping together, praying and giving thanks, sharing in conversation and in encouragement, and serving the world together. These are all signs of our communion and its vibrancy amid the many challenges we face. This vibrancy was clear 76 years ago when the LWF was founded and it is clear today, when we meet in Central Eastern Europe. Then our forebears met at a time of rebuilding after the Second World War, which devastated many parts of Europe. Now we meet at a time when war rages in neighboring Ukraine and in many countries across the whole world. Then and now, we were called to support people in need and work for peace and reconciliation. Let us always remember that this is our mission.

## THIS ASSEMBLY IN POLAND

Today we are in Kraków, Poland, at the invitation of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, a church that is a founding member of the LWF. I am deeply grateful that this church which counts 0.1% of the population of Poland as its members – 61,000 in a country of almost 38 million people, invited us here and took on the immense task of organizing the Assembly.

We meet in a country which has had a turbulent history, with having experienced the so-called “golden age” in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, vanishing from the world map at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the World War I, Nazi occupation with its horrible consequences for its inhabitants in 1940s, and Communist rule that followed after the end of World War II, with its atheistic propaganda. At the same time, this country was at the forefront of mainly peaceful revolutions in Central Eastern Europe that brought about the fall of

the Berlin wall and the collapse of atheistic Communist regime in this part of the world.

Poland’s rich history has also been reflected in the experiences of our host church. Christianity has been present in Poland for more than a thousand years. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Lutheran Reformation spread fast in many parts of the country that is the roots of our host church.

Lutherans in Poland have through history seen times of flourishing and times of oppression. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Poland stood out for its considerable religious tolerance, but in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestants in Poland were deprived of political rights and their space to practice their faith was limited. Freedom of religion was granted with the Polish constitution in 1791. But the outbreak of the Second World War marked the beginning of what has been described as the most difficult period in the history of Lutherans in Poland. Many pastors, not only of Polish nationality, were persecuted, imprisoned in concentration camps, and many lost their lives. The property of many Polish parishes was confiscated, and many churches were destroyed. Rebuilding took place after the end of the Second World War, but in the political reality of an Eastern Bloc country, this was an effort met with resistance and even harassment from authorities.

As I learn more about the history of Lutherans in Poland, including the times when the church could not officially exist, the times of partitions, wars, years of communism, and finally the time of religious freedom, I am convinced of the value and importance of hosting our Assembly here in Kraków. I can imagine that for many people in this country this is an event they would never have dared to dream about.

Indeed, our communion, through the experiences of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and many churches within the region bear the mark of a suffering context within which the LWF communion of churches was born and which until today continues to witness to hope in Christ among many who find themselves in similar situations. Hence as we gather here from across all regions, we look forward to be exposed and learn from



**The Assembly brings together people from different world regions, cultures and Lutheran traditions, to be co-participants in God's plan of reconciliation.**

our host church and its witness, even in a minority situation. This brings us to an important biblical insight, that our communion has never been about numbers but “living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world,” about faithful witness to Christ even if numerically small. This then, reminds me also of the pain of many of our member churches struggling with declining membership especially in Europe and North America. Your struggle is the struggle of all of us within the communion. I therefore appeal to Assembly delegates and all participants to be open to be enriched by the experiences of our host church. I also appeal that delegates consider this Assembly as opportunity to mutually equip each other for holistic mission in God’s world.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A COMMUNION

It is good for us to re-read the first verses of Ephesians chapter 4 from which our Assembly Theme is drawn:

“I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:1-6).



**Exceptional teamwork and ready availability of LWF's Vice-Presidents and Executive Committee contribute to the organization's stability.**

The letter to the Ephesians has a large and broad vision for the community of the faithful who have been brought together through their baptism. Throughout the letter, the writer emphasizes that in Christ, God's mystery has now been revealed. It is, as stated in Ephesians chapter 1: 10, "to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth."

And God's plan for unity, for gathering all people, reconciling all people and creation, in a beautiful and harmonious whole begins with God showing us "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" as we read in Ephesians 2:7. Not only does God show God's grace but shows how it is effective in the lives of believers. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Grace – God's own righteousness manifest in Jesus Christ – is gift and transformative power. And it is now into this transformation that we join as we gather in this Assembly. For we know ourselves to be many bodies, from many countries, all the regions of the globe, different cultures and ethnicities, with many different experiences and sensibilities, different streams of Lutheranism and Lutheran pieties and traditions. Yet through the immeasurable riches of God's grace, we have been brought together into One Body, not to be the privileged or to be stronger but to be co-participants in the one Spirit to God's plan of reconciliation.

Gospel witness and service to the neighbor then are not our own doing but we are part of God's action in the world. We are part of something greater than each of our own initiatives. We are participating in God's mission in the world, not only through the LWF and all its member

churches but also with other churches, with all our ecumenical partners. We are all co-participants in the work of the one Spirit.

This essential, deep-down unity and the hope that it inspires is now our focus for the coming days. Unity is not uniformity, compliance or compromise. It cannot be imposed or defined by others.

Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, the one Spirit, who in the words of Martin Luther is “always making holy,” that is, always creating, reconciling, and renewing, always shaping and molding us – as individuals and as member churches – into the one body of Christ.

And here is our task: to discern and build (or nurture) this unity, what it means to be an ecclesial communion. At the LWF Assemblies in Budapest in 1984 and Curitiba in 1990, we affirmed the strong communion bonds between member churches, that are expressed in our fellowship at altar and pulpit. The 7<sup>th</sup> article of the Augsburg Confession, describes the church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached, and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”

Our recognition and celebration of altar and pulpit fellowship indicates to us the ecclesial nature of our communion. We are all familiar with the definition of church in Article 7 but we sometimes overlook the fact that this article continues and in its concluding sentence, cites Ephesians 4 – the theme of our Assembly: “One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc.” (Eph. 4:5-6).

To be church is to gather around the Word preached and the sacraments distributed but to be church, in Article 7, is also to be part of God’s plan gathering all people, all creation, together into one communion.

The ecclesial nature of our communion means that we confess and witness to that deep unity God desires and which God accomplishes in this world. It means that we are not isolating ourselves or hiding in a corner to maintain some form of imaginary purity, but we go out into the world, into the messiness and suffering of the

world, to step into the world without fear, always witnessing to the liberating grace of God.

What does this mean for our Assembly? Well, the Assembly has a legislative and juridical function, but also an ecclesial function as we gather around Word and Sacrament, and we gather in unity. Our challenge, which we are reminded of in Article 7 is to discern what it means to be a communion and how we can deepen this reality among us without remaining in the status quo. By its nature, the Assembly is already a sign of our communion. But even more, the Assembly also helps to define what we, as Lutherans, mean by confessing the gospel in and out of season, renewed in every time and context.

There is a second challenge in Article 7: our discernment and decision-making are accomplished together, as a communion of churches in mutual conversation and sharing, in mutual comfort and sometimes in admonition. Put differently, in mutual accountability.

Mutual accountability is a mark of the church. Share one another’s burden, writes Paul, referring not only to individuals but also communities. In his succinct definition, Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles that “God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (. . .); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar (or Holy Communion); fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them’” (Smalcald Articles III, art. IV).<sup>2</sup>

There are so many ways God shares God’s goodness with us and here we have the sure signs: in preaching, in the sacraments, in confession, and in mutual conversation and consolation. Let us engage that gospel reality today, here, during these days, in this Assembly. Let us discern through mutual conversation and consolation what it means to be church in this world, to be witnesses of the gospel.

The LWF is a confessing communion. This is our tradition. And never forget our rootedness in the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism. Let us claim this long, beautiful, and risk-taking heritage: confessing the gospel in and out of season, in and out of culture, in and out of politics and economic power games. Let us always be the confessing churches in every time and place and especially in these times of polarities, fundamentalisms, and extremisms.

And perhaps a special reminder: with this Assembly we also begin our journey towards the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. This is not only a historical anniversary but also shapes the Lutheran identity as confessing, liturgical, ecumenical and diaconal. How will we, throughout the next 7 years, spiritually, theologically, pastorally and ecumenically prepare for this significant celebration in a way that does justice to our maxim that to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical?

## EXPERIENCES IN OUR COMMUNION

As president, I had the privilege to experience the vibrant diversity of life and work in our member churches, partner agencies, as well as our international humanitarian and development – diaconal – work through LWF World Service and with ecumenical partners. My visits deepened my understanding of what it means to be in communion and the diverse contexts within which our member churches offer their witness.

I am grateful for the privilege of seeing firsthand the realities faced by LWF member churches, the impact of our collective work and the resilience exhibited by the communities we serve. And I am deeply grateful for the wonderful hospitality accorded to me during these visits.

Allow me to highlight some of what I heard and some of the insights I gained during these visits, and some key issues for our attention

as we continue our journey together, related to some aspects of the LWF's programmatic work.

## PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY, JUSTICE AND PEACE

I have consistently been impressed by how our global communion continues to assume a pivotal role in responding to human suffering and supporting the most vulnerable communities. Increasingly close cooperation between our member churches and LWF World Service in several countries makes this response particularly effective, as I saw on my journeys, for example, to Cameroon and Myanmar.

Walking through camps where internally displaced people and refugees are living, I was deeply moved by the suffering I saw impressed on the faces of so many, in particular the children who are born and raised there.

In the communities of Northern Cameroon, grappling with displacement due to conflicts in the Central African Republic, and among those struggling with the internal challenges in Myanmar, I saw how people can provide for their families, develop resilient hope and build dignified lives, bolstered by the support of the LWF and its member churches.

During my visit to the Gado refugee camp in northern Cameroon, I was warmly welcomed by students. It was touching to see the messages displayed on placards held by the students, with words like “peace,” “love,” “care,” and “unity,” symbolizing their prayers and aspirations that the LWF embodies. This steadfast commitment has earned the LWF a respected reputation in the eyes of governments, UN agencies, and international NGOs.

As a global communion we should take great pride in the simple fact that our humanitarian and development arm is directly serving more than 3 million people annually, offering hope in challenging contexts.

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Our commitment to the participation and leadership of women has deep roots. In 1984 the LWF introduced a quota system to ensure at least 40% participation of women in all its work. In 2013, the LWF Council adopted a gender justice policy which has been taken up by LWF member churches across the world. These commitments aren't just about respecting women and men, but also recognizing their gifts and shared responsibility for the church and in caring for our world.

Over the years, we have witnessed more member churches embracing the ordination of women into pastoral ministry and their active participation within church communities. But we must do better. Many ordained women encounter challenges in their ministry. We

must work together to address these. I ask the LWF and our member churches to not waver or retreat in their commitment to the empowerment and inclusion of women's leadership. When women and men work together for the same goals, we can shape a future that's fair, just, and full of life for the LWF community. We will also be a strong voice for justice and inclusion, and against violence, both within the church and in the world.

## EMPOWERING AND LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

During my various encounters, I have been equally pleasantly surprised by the importance of prioritizing young people and their leadership in our work. Looking back over the past six years, the vitality and zeal I



**Young people's vitality and leadership underscore the enduring vibrancy of the LWF communion.**

observed in the engagement and leadership of young people underscores the enduring vibrancy of our communion and its churches. I passionately encourage us to sustain our commitment to nurturing this generation of leaders, investing in their spiritual growth, strengthening their leadership skills, investing in their education, and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes within our communion.

Let us recall that at the 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary, LWF set a youth quota to ensure 20% youth participation. Over time, we have made concerted efforts to translate this commitment into action at various levels. The LWF has committed itself to the quotas globally, but the goal of youth empowerment, leadership, and inclusion, will only be realized when the member churches themselves commit to this locally.

Some churches have done that and seen how transformative it can be. My hope is that more will take steps in that direction. At the same time, we also need to find ways to reignite the passionate participation of young people within church communities since the vibrancy of our churches, now and in the future, depends on our ability to connect with and engage the younger generation.

## RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

On the topic of climate change, I am deeply grateful to our young people who, through their participation in United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP Conferences) for some years now, have led the LWF in advocating for an urgent response to the climate crisis which poses an existential threat to our whole planet.



Already decades ago, the LWF set a 20% youth quota for its governance bodies and meetings.

In the autumn of 2022 I was invited by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland to participate in the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik. This visit offered me insights into the impending dangers posed by the disappearance of glaciers. For many of the LWF member churches the climate crisis is tangible, affecting their daily lives. This is one of the largest challenges humanity faces and it is visible in the struggles of millions worldwide whose livelihoods have been jeopardized and in the alarming loss of biodiversity, the stark realities of floods, droughts, and rising sea levels. As a global organization, the LWF has a crucial role in fostering international dialogues about responding to climate change and working for climate justice. This role includes both global advocacy at the highest levels and local advocacy and action in collaboration with the LWF member churches.

## CHRISTIAN UNITY

Working for Christian unity has been a foundational pillar since the inception of the LWF, forming the basis for both our theological dialogues and our growing cooperation with ecumenical, as well as interfaith partners. For close to six decades, we've actively participated in dialogues with other Christians.

I am grateful that since the last Assembly we have been able to strengthen the collaboration between LWF World Service and Caritas Internationalis, the Roman Catholic humanitarian agency. For me, such joint witness in serving people in need is strong testimony to what unity means in practice.

Our ecumenical commitment has deepened our understanding of the connectivity between the theological discussions and our collaborative partnerships with members of other Christian world communions. Looking back, we're grateful for significant moments in recent history that have shaped our journey. It is imperative that we remain committed to our ecumenical engagement.

On a personal note, I fondly remember praying the Lord's Prayer with Pope Francis during the

visit of the Executive Committee in June 2021. As we said our farewells, he shared a hopeful whisper, saying, "I hope we will be able to celebrate communion together someday." His words have stayed with me, and I believe this is in our future.

## ADDRESSING MISLEADING THEOLOGIES

I would like to address another pressing issue, that is the rise of "misleading theologies." In today's fast-paced world, where beliefs and information spread rapidly, as a communion of churches, we cannot overlook the growth of these misleading ideas, which can stem from misunderstandings or manipulative teachings. These can sometimes even twist suffering to imply God's judgment or a lack of faith.

During the African Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2022, and the Africa Pre-Assembly in Nairobi earlier this year, I listened keenly as the African churches delved into this topic and the impact of misleading theologies on the churches. They often exploit current issues, offering a selective reading of Scripture, as well as simplistic but misleading solutions to complex human situations. The result is that people may anchor their faith and hope on false assurances. In my country Nigeria, this has caused some to wander from one denomination to another under the influence of new teachers and prophets.

It is critical to counter this challenge and I believe Lutheran theology has much to offer. The response could include thoughtful discussions on Lutheran approaches to our understanding of the Bible. Through the LWF's work on Lutheran Identity, we can strengthen our churches in maintaining a steadfast and authentic faith and help them stay aligned with Lutheran perspectives on a meaningful spiritual journey. Let us have the courage to address the concerning trend of commodifying salvation, recalling what we stated in Windhoek in 2017: *Salvation is not for sale*. This also calls for strengthening of theological education and formation within our communion, which must

be rooted in the realities faced by people today and in Lutheran theology. I hope we can find ways to sustain our scholarship programs, which are vital for this work.

## CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Finally, let me mention the topic of the church in the public space. We must not waver in our call that the public space is inclusive and democratic. Churches can play decisive roles in the work for reconciliation and peace. An example close to heart would be the churches in Ukraine as well as the neighboring countries. In addition to being vocal advocates for peace, they are now supporting refugees and people in need. In the future, we can see them as key actors for reconciliation and rebuilding in Ukraine and in other countries. But the picture is not one-sided. There are examples, e.g. from my home country, the Middle East and parts of Asia, where churches cannot speak freely or are hindered in their advocacy for justice and peace. In some of these countries fundamentalist religious beliefs have led to terrorism and violence against Christians. Against that, we must call for the full access to the public space.

## MY OWN CONTEXT IN NIGERIA

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I also greet you on behalf of my own church, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN). As a member church of the LWF, we share the joys and responsibilities of being part of our global Lutheran communion. In recent years, we have grappled with complex issues of insecurity and conflicts due to extremist religious violence. The LWF Council resolution on the Situation in North-East and Central Nigeria during its meeting in Geneva in July 2018, extending prayers and solidarity with the churches and people of Nigeria and condemning communal violence that has cost hundreds their lives was greatly appreciated. Thank you that we were not left alone.

Despite this and other challenges such as the impact of climate change and complex government decisions, the LCCN has continued to grow in its holistic mission. We have been resolute in our efforts to respond to violence with the message of love.

The church has been increasingly visible in its public witness, calling for peace and justice and working to restore hope and dignity, especially through its response to irregular migration and human trafficking through the Symbols of Hope program, supported by the LWF. You are welcome to the “Jarmark” exhibition organized by the Symbols of Hope to get to know. We are grateful for the support and prayers of the communion.

## HOW CAN WE OFFER HOPE

In Windhoek we came together and declared that we are liberated by God’s grace. This liberating grace has inspired and guided us since then until this very present moment, when we receive the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, which give us our Assembly theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” We shall hear from our keynote speaker, Tomas Halík, and others who will explore the assembly theme. Allow me to make one brief remark about the centrality of hope, which is a key element of the assembly theme, and more importantly something that the world needs.

Hope holds us together as the Lutheran World Federation. It inspires us to stand in solidarity with each other, while addressing the rapid changes and challenges our world is facing together – challenges that include the climate crisis, conflict and war, polarization, fundamentalism, diminished space for civil society, not to mention the rapid change in technology, including artificial intelligence. Hope exemplifies what it means to be a global communion of Lutheran churches living and serving together for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

As we reflect on the future work of the Lutheran World Federation and that of member churches around the world, we must find ways of offering



**The generous contribution of all LWF's member churches and partners make the communion's shared journey and witness possible.**

hope to people. Not an empty hope, but one that is inspired by our faith in God and followed by our actions to serve the poor, the needy, the refugees and everyone affected by crises. The kind of hope that enables us to speak out in the public space for justice and human rights.

In this assembly therefore, let us reaffirm our theology, our prophetic voice, the diaconal ministries of the LWF, our communion building, ecumenical, and interfaith relations as gifts and contributions we offer to the world. As churches in communion, “we are both givers and receivers” as was eloquently affirmed in the message of the Tenth Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, 2010. And we should always remember the words of Bishop Josiah Kibira, the first African president of the LWF, whose steps I have followed: *“There is no church, so big and so rich, that it wouldn't depend on the gifts of others; there is no church*

*so small and so poor it wouldn't be able to enrich others.”*

## CONCLUSION

With this address, I mark the conclusion of my tenure as president of the Lutheran World Federation. I am profoundly grateful for the confidence and trust vested in me to provide leadership for our cherished communion. These years of service as president have brought forth unforgettable experiences. Navigating the dual responsibilities of global communion leadership and pastoral duties within my church has not been easy. Yet I must say, these experiences deepened and strengthened my faith and commitment to our beloved communion.

I offer my sincerest appreciation to the outgoing Council members, whose dedication and understanding were especially evident during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted our ability to meet in person for a period of two years. Your patience, sacrifices, understanding, and unwavering support are immeasurable. I am so thankful to the Vice-Presidents and the Executive Committee members for their exceptional teamwork, readily making themselves available whenever called upon. This gratitude extends to our advisers for their immense support for the governance.

My heartfelt gratitude equally goes to all those with whom we collaborated during my tenure: member churches, support networks, ecumenical partners, and dedicated staff. A special thanks to our member churches for their prayers and support, which enabled us to fulfill our governance functions as a council. As my tenure runs with two General Secretaries, I would like to again express my appreciation to the former General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge, for his leadership during the transitional period following the Twelfth Assembly. Likewise, my deep appreciation to the current General

Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt for her exemplary leadership, especially in convening this Assembly. The Communion Office Leadership Team, and the staff within and outside of Geneva, deserve recognition for their exceptional work, even in times of great uncertainty.

I thank all of LWF's partners and the member churches whose generous contributions make our shared journey and witness as a communion possible. My deepest appreciation also goes to our ecumenical partners, acknowledging the meaningful collaboration we've shared.

I am grateful to our member churches for your warm welcome, generosity and indescribable hospitality. Thank you for not abandoning our shared journey, despite the many challenges and issues that sometimes tend to threaten our journey together.

My heartfelt gratitude extends to my home church, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, for supporting me to serve the global communion, an affirmation of our shared commitment to this global journey and witness. A special mention to my spouse Ruth, for



**The Assembly theme draws the LWF communion together in one place to reflect about the transformative power manifested in God's righteousness.**

her patience and unwavering support even when I had to be away for some time. I am grateful to our children for their prayers and encouragement.

In our shared journey beyond this assembly, I would like to emphasize the call to hold onto unity and hope in our common journey as communion of churches. The theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” unites us, empowered by the Holy Spirit to work tirelessly for justice, peace, and reconciliation. As we read in the biblical accounts of the Apostles, let us continue to come together, pray together and nurture each other in God’s mission – a testament that God’s power to bring us together is stronger than all the forces of the world pulling us apart.

In a world crowded with diverse voices and the risk of division, it is so easy to walk away from one another at the slightest disagreement. For us though, the act of earnestly listening to one another need to take on paramount importance, across local and global spheres. As we confront today’s challenges, unity becomes a beacon of hope amidst complexity, uncertainty, and changing ideologies. The practice of respectful listening, a core principle for our communion, becomes transformative, safeguarding our collective purpose and relevance. Amid differing interpretations of doctrine, practices, and cultural nuances, our strength lies in unity amidst diversity as an ecclesial communion.

In confronting contemporary complex issues including conflict and insecurity, climate and environmental crisis, poverty and injustice – a divided church risks losing its impact. It’s

precisely in such moments that a united body can offer guidance and its public witness remain a sign of hope.

Our unity rests on genuine and respectful conversation. When we genuinely listen to one another, bridges of understanding are likely to emerge across theological and cultural gaps. Through this, we deepen our comprehension of God’s call and our role in a fragmented and suffering world.

In closing, I offer praise and gratitude to God, whose enabling grace allowed me to serve as President. I entrust my limitations to God’s grace and any accomplishments to His glory. Permit me to draw from the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians to conclude my address and presidency:

“I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:16-19).

May the name of the Lord be forever praised;  
Amen.

*LWF President (2017-2023) Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, Ph.D., OFR, is head of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.*

# REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

## ANNE BURGHARDT

Honorable church leaders, Assembly participants, ecumenical guests, distinguished hosts from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and from the city of Kraków, dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

It is a great honor and privilege to present my report to you today. It is a great joy to be together in person as churches from all corners of the world: from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, representing 99 countries, 150 churches and more than 77 million Christians. We come together as one Body, in one Spirit, driven by one Hope. Who would have thought three years ago, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, that an in-person gathering like ours would be feasible again?

This is the second time that the LWF Assembly meets in Central Eastern Europe, the first was in Budapest in 1984. That was a different time, when Eastern Europe was still under the Communist rule. There is a famous saying: “The one who doesn’t remember the past, lives without a future.” Let me therefore share some glimpses from Eastern Europe in the eighties.

It was a difficult time for the churches. They had lost all their privileges under Communist rule and the ruling party was only waiting for that time when Christianity could be considered simply part of history books. There was much uncertainty and many fears in early the 1980s: many feared that a nuclear war could break out; Europe was divided by an iron curtain. But there were not just challenges in Europe, in the late 1970s, a few years before the Assembly, the Communist Khmer Rouge regime had carried out a brutal genocide, killing up to 2 million people in Cambodia. Yet,

the theme of the Assembly in Budapest was *In Christ – Hope for the World*. Doesn’t this resonate with the beautiful theme of this year’s Assembly, *One Body. One Spirit. One Hope?*

A few years after the Assembly in Budapest the iron curtain was torn down, there was renewed hope for many; several nations regained their freedom and independence. The Communist party’s dream of putting Christianity into the dustbin of history was never realized.

In my home church, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, at least one out every five ordained ministers now serving grew up in secularized families. I, myself am one of them. But, by now I have been a Christian for two thirds of my life. Furthermore, at least half of those who are confirmed every year are adults, who are coming to the Christian faith in their 30s or 40s. They have come to the church in different ways: Some have been drawn by seeking answers to existential questions, looking for deeper meaning in life, others have been attracted by the care for the neighbor demonstrated by Christians, some have been attracted by the rituals of the church.

One of the experiences of some churches in Central Eastern Europe over the past few decades is an understanding that there isn’t a single answer to the question: “What brings people back to the church?” This is a question which many churches in the global north are struggling with.

Arnold Toynbee, an English philosopher of history, once said: “Nothing fails like success.” It is natural to try to implement solutions that worked well in the past or in other contexts, when solving new problems and addressing new challenges, e.g. decreased interest in institutionalized religion. However, over time, the nature of the challenges inevitably



LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt.



**In the context of war against Ukraine and increased polarization in Central Eastern Europe, churches in the region have offered hope to refugees.**

changes. And just like societies, churches too often respond to new challenges with old approaches.

Our keynote speaker, Mons. Prof. Tomáš Halík, comes from the Czech Republic which is one of the most secularized countries in Europe. He has written about how the history of religion and Christianity consists of periods of crisis and renewal. He states that the only religion that is truly dead is one that does not undergo change, that has dropped out of the rhythm of life.

There is nevertheless something that does seem to make it easier to hear and to follow God's call, namely when we encounter authentic witness and see Christians walking the talk. This is because faith in Christ and service to the neighbor are inseparable, witnessing in faith and serving belong together.

As a global communion, we are reminded that we are not to be ashamed of the gospel (Rom 1:16) but also that we are not to forget to feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger and visit the prisoner (Mt 25:42f). Mission is always holistic.

As we gather in Central Eastern Europe, the region is again going through difficult times. There is an increased polarization in many societies and churches in the region and some countries face very challenging political situations. There is war against Ukraine, not too far from the place where we gather. Millions of refugees have fled and thousands of soldiers and civilians have lost their lives, and infrastructure has been damaged.

It has been impressive to see our member churches in the countries neighboring Ukraine respond to the war. Here I want to particularly

mention our host church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and one of our newest member churches, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine. The churches have offered hope in the context of war, prepared shelters for refugees, organized language courses and children's daycare – as most of the refugees are women with small children. They have offered credible witness and shown us what it means to be church during times of war. They have also reminded us that being church is not first and foremost about numbers. It is about commitment, the willingness to serve God and the neighbor, the readiness to walk the talk.

When our hosts invited the LWF Thirteenth Assembly to Poland, none of us knew that a war would break out in Europe. What they have done is admirable: taking on demanding preparations for the Assembly and giving a helping hand to those in need.

## FROM WINDHOEK TO KRAKÓW: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The year 2017, when our journey from Windhoek to Kraków began, was special. The commemoration of 500 years of Reformation meant for many churches rediscovering their roots and recalling the basic theological messages that Lutheran tradition has contributed to the world Christianity. Many memorable events took place in 2017, both in the lives of individual churches and globally.

There were also some positive trends to report from the global context: in 2017, a smaller share of the world's population was hungry, impoverished or illiterate than at any time before, the world economy seemed to be on the way of recovering for the first time since the big economic crisis started in 2008. In general, there was a renewed hope that international consensus around the UN's 2030 agenda would lead to improved living standards through the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the same time, many tendencies that were tearing societies and churches apart, continued to create polarization, including fundamentalist and extremist ideologies; rising exclusionary nationalism that instrumentalizes religion; increasing racism; proliferation of 'fake news' and conspiracy theories. In the face of an increasingly complex world where many have the feeling they cannot keep pace with developments around them, it is natural that people tend to feel insecure and look for simple (and often simplistic) answers to complex questions, which are frequently being misused by politicians to serve their own interests. What is very alarming is the way how fear is being fueled in public discourse. In 1 John 4:18 we read "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." Unfortunately, too often it also works the other way around: fear tends to cast out love toward one's neighbor and therefore toward God.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, inequality increased around the world with a strong pushback against human rights, and in particular the rights of women. According to the UN, sexual and gender-based violence increased by almost 40% which was described as a "shadow pandemic." The global economic crisis deepened because of the pandemic, poverty and inequality continued to grow, hampering hard-won gains towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Youth unemployment remains a major problem in many parts of the world. Conflicts and wars, from Ukraine to Myanmar, from Haiti to Sudan and Ethiopia also challenged the international community, and have forced millions to flee in search of safety. In 2022, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees announced that the number of forcibly displaced people had surpassed 100 million for the first time in history.

On the positive side, there has been a growing realization within the secular world of the need to work more closely with faith-based organizations. The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns highlighted the ability of churches and other faith groups to reach and effectively support the most marginalized communities, underlining their importance as vital partners in humanitarian emergencies, as well as for longer-term development work.

There was also a growing recognition of the value of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. During the pandemic, there were many examples of people from different faith communities showing solidarity and working closely together to support their neighbors in need.

Already in 1972, the Club of Rome which brings together thought leaders from across the world that seek holistic solutions to complex global issues, published the report “The Limits to Growth.” In it, they warn that population growth, food production, industrialization and environmental pollution, threaten life on earth and that a collapse is inevitable unless behaviors change.

The consequences of the climate crisis are tangible. Globally, July 2023 was the hottest month on record and possibly the warmest in 120,000 years, according to climate scientists. Many parts of the inhabited Earth are at risk to be deserted, which will increase the number of climate refugees in the coming years. Unfortunately, we still see many people denying human-made climate change, also among our own constituencies. This is irresponsible and it delays necessary work that is for the benefit of all humanity.

Despite these alarming global developments, when we take a closer look, we see many good initiatives. Churches often play a strong role. They are called to be messengers of hope, not of naïve optimism. On our journey from Windhoek to Kraków, there are a number of stories of churches that have sown hope and brought about real changes in the lives of people. Although the work for peace, hope and reconciliation will never be complete, we are called to engage it even more and don't have liberty to give it up.

I hope you had a chance to read the report *From Windhoek to Kraków* which gives an account of our communion's journey over the six years from the Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, to the Thirteenth Assembly here in Kraków. With this presentation, I would like to draw your attention to some of the highlights but also challenges during this journey. I will thereby use the LWF strategy and the LWF

vision statement, “*Liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world,*” as the framework.

When visitors from member churches come to the Communion Office in Geneva, they often ask how they can support the LWF. One of my requests to them and to you, dear delegates and participants, is that you be messengers and ambassadors of the LWF. That you help to “grassroot” the LWF among our constituencies. We can be so proud of what the LWF does and we need to join hands in sharing those stories.

## LIBERATED BY GOD'S GRACE, A COMMUNION IN CHRIST

### COMMUNION RELATIONS

The LWF has grown since the last Assembly. Five churches have joined as member churches: The United Evangelical Church in Cuba Lutheran Synod, Christ Lutheran Church in India, and the Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala in 2018; German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine in 2022 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia in 2023. The latter two churches were previously members of the LWF through the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and Other States but have now been received into individual membership by the LWF Council. Two more churches, Lutheran Church in Cambodia and Gereja Niha Keriso Protestan Yyear and they were received into a two-year interim period to learn more about the LWF before becoming full members with voting rights. Welcome to all their representatives!

Communion is a gift and a task. Communion and unity are gifts from God, yet our task is to keep and to nurture them, making them ever more visible. The LWF brings together diverse churches: some whose history can be traced back to the times of the Reformation

and others who were founded a few decades ago; some that live and witness in majority situations and others that are not only a denominational minority in their countries but where Christians are a minority, living under difficult political conditions. A variety of contexts and legal frameworks also shapes the priorities of the churches.

Nurturing regional and cross-regional relationships between member churches, supporting respectful and careful listening to each other, defining common concerns and taking action upon these are core tasks of the LWF. The communion is truly alive and bears fruits when it is experienced. Since 2017, the LWF has continued to organize leadership consultations in all regions with a number of meetings taking place also in sub-regions. It was amazing to see how fast we were able to find new ways of communicating during the

global pandemic when in-person meetings were not possible. Online platforms were used creatively, regional secretaries organized meetings and online prayers for church leaders and offered accompaniment in various other ways. Since 2022, travelling became gradually possible again which made it possible to bring the leadership from LWF regions together in-person again, most recently for pre-assemblies earlier this year.

I would also like to highlight two key projects: RONEL, the Retreat of Newly Elected Leaders, and the Seminar for Lay Leaders which have played an important role in connecting church leaders across the global communion. Interrupted by the pandemic, these in-person gatherings were reconvened last year. They serve the important purpose of supporting member churches in practicing good governance and transparent leadership. How



**In the different Village Groups at the Assembly, participants discuss the Lutheran communion's hopes and challenges.**



**Assembly: A place to connect, build relations.**

is servant leadership understood? What does priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9) actually mean in the life of the church and its governing structures? What do the Lutheran confessional writings say about authority and leadership in the church? These are some of the questions explored.

This year, I had a privilege to attend all four regional pre-assemblies. At almost all pre-assemblies, there was a strong yearning for being welcoming and inclusive churches. Some churches particularly emphasized the need to include more youth and women in decision-making roles. The LWF 40% quota for women and 20% quota for youth for governing bodies and other activities have contributed to more diversity. I am glad that in preparing for this Assembly many regions met the requested quotas easily. At the same time, all LWF member churches are autonomous and the

LWF can only encourage them to stand for more inclusion of young people and women in their home contexts, not to impose it.

The question about the mutual relation between the autonomy of LWF member churches and their mutual accountability is an ongoing one, having been addressed several times since the Assembly in Curitiba, when the LWF became *communion* of churches. In 2022, the LWF Council Committee for Communion Relations, approved a proposal to develop a *Mutual Accountability Framework* for member churches. Given the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of churches, the framework is one to which LWF member churches can commit as they deepen their understanding of unity and strengthen the bonds between them. The incoming Council will finalize the framework which will then be shared with all member churches.

While the communion has grown stronger in mutual relationships and exchanging gifts, it is not a secret that there are also tensions among the churches. One topic of tension is related to human sexuality. The LWF Council at its meeting in Bogotá in 2012 decided that “the LWF communion as a whole should not take action on issues of family, marriage and sexuality.” These questions did though surface at some of the regional pre-assemblies.

At its Council meeting in Bogotá in 2012, the LWF introduced the “Emmaus Conversation” method (referring to Lk 24:17) to support open and respectful dialogue. It aims at accompanying and bringing together member churches in a dialogue about sexuality, inviting them to listen and understand different opinions. The Emmaus Conversation still offers helpful guidelines on how to lead respectful dialogue so that we can better understand what has led to the positions of each member church. There are also other helpful ecumenical materials available, including the World Council of Churches (WCC) study document “Moral discernment in the churches” (2013) which does not focus on moral questions as such, but rather on the process of discernment.

However, what we as a communion can say together is that each person’s human dignity, based on being created in the image of God (Gen 1:27), should always be protected and that any kind of violence should be condemned, regardless of where we stand as churches or individuals on matters of family, marriage, and sexuality.

## ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The LWF is a confessional communion but it is not an inward-looking confessionalist body. Since its foundation, working for Christian unity has been one of LWF’s core tasks. The communion has always understood itself as part of the broader ecumenical movement, with close connections to multilateral ecumenical bodies and other global Christian World Communions.

In today’s world, where misleading theologies promise prosperity and success based on works; where we often encounter the understanding that a human being is his or her own savior, there is an urgent need to “translate” the message of justification into a language which is understood today. In July 2017, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) joined the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). On Reformation Day, 31 October 2017, the Anglican Communion conducted a festive worship service at Westminster Abbey to acknowledge the 2016 decision of Anglican Consultative Council to affirm the substance of JDDJ. I am very pleased that on the last day of the Assembly we are going to have an ecumenical panel where the five Christian World Communions and churches who have associated with JDDJ, are going to reflect on the question “What does the message of justification mean today? Where is it particularly relevant?”

Despite the restrictions caused by the global pandemic, the LWF was able to continue with its bilateral dialogues, using online platforms for staying in touch with ecumenical partners during the pandemic. There are three reports from the past six years I would like to highlight in particular.

The Fifth Phase of the dialogue carried out by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission (2010-2018) concluded its work in 2018 with the Report *Baptism and Growth in Communion*. Currently, the next dialogue phase of the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Commission on Unity is being prepared. I am grateful for the Common Word that will be presented during the ecumenical morning prayer on 19 September on behalf of the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church.

Baptism was also the theme of the trilateral conversations between the LWF, Mennonite World Conference and the Roman Catholic Church that concluded in 2017. In the report, published in 2020, the representatives of all three communions express the hope that the document will not only take a significant step toward increased mutual understanding of baptism, but also make an important

contribution to the wider ecumenical conversation on baptism as it relates to the justification and sanctification of the sinner.

The First Phase of the International Lutheran-Pentecostal Dialogue finalized in 2022 the dialogue statement “The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me,” which deals with questions such as identity, mission and proclamation, mission and the poor, healing and deliverance. The statement includes a helpful section on *Faithful and unfaithful approaches to prosperity* that concludes: “Although we reject a theology of prosperity which offers false promises and runs the risk of turning God into an object of our desires, we do affirm an understanding of prosperity as a blessing of God freely given and affirm Jesus’ promise to bring abundant life for all people. Those who are so blessed are called to be a blessing to others and to work for the betterment of all society, to overcome injustices, and to care for all of God’s creation.”

At the LWF, we are also very grateful for all the other ongoing dialogues with our sisters and brothers from other churches and Christian World Communions. In 2023, the Joint Lutheran-Orthodox Commission celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ongoing dialogue and is busy preparing a statement to mark the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicea. Good relations have continued with the WCRC through strengthening and implementing the *Wittenberg Witness*, a common statement of the LWF and the WCRC (2017), and through New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative.

The Anglican-Lutheran International Commission on Unity and Mission (ALICUM) was finally able to meet in person in March this year. A key task of the Commission is to identify and support national pairings of Anglican and Lutheran bishops or other church leaders to enhance the implementation of the consensus statements between the two communions and to further ecumenical collaboration.

All statements and dialogue reports have a tangible impact only if they are received and implemented locally and nationally. The document *LWF Commitments on the Ecumenical Way to Ecclesial Communion* (2018)

emphasizes the commitment to reception and implementation of consensus statements. It offers theological reflections about ecumenism from a Lutheran perspective and contains six commitments that guide the work in the field of ecumenical relations. These commitments express a need to work for unity locally and globally, through a holistic approach to ecumenism, which includes theological dialogues, diaconal witness, advocacy, and shared spiritual life, reminding that the aim of Christian unity is not just doctrinal unity but also unity in service and prayer. There are some beautiful examples of that from the last few years:

Since 2018, LWF has marked the beginning of the annual Season of Creation on 1 September by joining the Ecumenical Prayer. On Ash Wednesday, 2 March 2022, an ecumenical online prayer for the peace in Ukraine and in solidarity with its suffering people, organized by LWF, WCRC, Conference of European Churches and the Methodist World Council, was held. In June 2021, Caritas Internationalis and LWF met in Rome and affirmed strong collaboration in diakonia, most recently expressed in practical terms through close collaboration in supporting the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

We also give thanks for our multilateral ecumenical partners. Since the last Assembly, LWF continued collaboration with the World Council of Churches, across many areas of shared witness. WCC continues to play a unique role in bringing Christians together, and it is good to know that we share many members which helps to strengthen the bonds between the two bodies. We are grateful to WCC for offering space for confessional gatherings at its Assembly in Karlsruhe where Lutherans constituted the largest confessional group among participants. Collaboration with other multilateral ecumenical actors, including ACT Alliance and Globethics, continued to be strong across various programmatic areas. The LWF also continued to be present at the Global Christian Forum, contributing through participation in the planning committee to the organization of their next global meeting in 2024.

Since the last Assembly, the LWF-associated Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg continued to offer various courses, mostly online. The in-person summer course in July this year concentrated on the different notions of “communion of churches” and brought together more than 50 students and lecturers from across the globe. The LWF aims at keeping the potential of the Institute as an independent think-tank to support the communion’s deliberations on ecumenism and Lutheran theology by also finding ways for the Institute to reflect the global nature of Lutheranism and our communion.

## LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER FOR A JUST, PEACEFUL AND RECONCILED WORLD

### SUPPORTING CHURCHES’ PRESENCE AND VIBRANT WITNESS TO THE WORLD

*The LWF Strategy for 2019-2024: With Passion for the Church and for the World*, speaks about two strategic priorities: Supporting churches’ presence and vibrant witness to the world, and Promoting human dignity, justice and peace. The two priorities are closely connected. This connectedness grows out of LWF’s uniqueness as a global Christian communion which in its organization and structure unites all aspects of holistic mission, including humanitarian and development work.



**The LWF understands itself as part of the broader ecumenical movement, with close connections to other global Christian World Communions and multilateral ecumenical bodies.**

In the past few years, the new Department for Theology, Mission and Justice has been instrumental in implementing much of the work that is related to the first strategic priority. And I want to draw your attention to how the name of the department reflects the key components of holistic mission.

### *Theology for transformation and Lutheran identity*

To be truly transformative, theology should impact how people relate to each other and how they envisage and shape society, so theology should not be done for theology's sake only, but aim at "translating" the good news of Jesus Christ into today's context.

The Twelfth Assembly resolution on theological education highlights the importance of theological education and formation in creating a sense of Lutheran identity and informing the church's witness. The resolution states that

"pastoral formation must integrate the social, political and economic dimensions, and the changing landscape of theology."

Theological education is key to developing leaders who are equipped for the complexities and changing realities of today's world. It supports the ability to think in differentiated ways and to avoid easy or instant categorizations. The LWF launched a series of webinars and gatherings to reflect on Lutheran identity across the regions where member churches are located, as well as other important theological topics.

LWF also launched an online pilot course on Lutheran theology in late 2017. The Theological Education and Formation (TEF) network, launched in 2018, later become part of this process in its role of strengthening the study of theology, facilitating joint reflection, and building on the self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of Lutheran churches. We plan to expand the network and develop a global online curriculum on Lutheran theology



**A communion of churches working together for justice, peace and reconciliation.**

to strengthen theological education across the communion.

Support to theological education also continued through scholarships. There has been a growth in the number of scholarships, from 10 for theological scholarships in 2017 to 52 in 2023. About as many for studies in the field of diakonia were also approved.

There are many contemporary conversations and debates going on about identity. What is Lutheran identity or identities and how is it understood across the global communion? *We believe in the Holy Spirit* was the title of a 2019 consultation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that launched a multi-year process of engaging member churches in defining the identity of the Lutheran church in their own contexts. The consultation itself focused on the diversity of perspectives on the Holy Spirit and its work in the church and in creation. It offered valuable insights, particularly in view of the assumption as if Luther and Lutheran tradition in general did not pay enough attention to pneumatology, that is the teaching about the Holy Spirit. The consultation was followed by a publication *We Believe in the Holy Spirit. Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities* (2021), series of webinars on *Being Lutheran* and on a survey which explores popular views about baptism, beliefs, and liturgical practices. The outcomes of this study can be found in *Now there are varieties: A Study Document on Lutheran Identity in the Global Lutheran Communion* which also includes a good overview of some of the basic messages of Lutheran theological thinking.

Despite the differences in view of what aspects of Lutheran identity were emphasized by the respondents, there are many similarities. Some of them are actually well captured with the words of a former LWF President (1990-1997), Rev. Dr Gottfried Brakemeier: “I want to encourage you to (re)discover the charm of the Lutheran confession. Its charm is not limited to some dogmas and axioms of faith. It concerns a way of being. They reside in biblical hermeneutics that can distinguish between letter and spirit; an anthropological realism that refuses to deify or demonize the human being; a compromised freedom that distances itself from both legalism and permissiveness;

in a participatory ecclesial structure that excludes human hierarchy of any kind. The Lutheran confession invites me to faith without prohibiting critical reasoning. It asks for “thinking believers,” people who know how to judge things (tentatio), and yet don’t remain stuck in criticism. Lutheranism has taught me a certain view of reality that is a little more complicated than many oversimplifications are able to make us believe. To subdivide the world into bandits and good guys, winners and losers, gullible and unbelieving, righteous and sinful. Well, this is the theory of hypocrites or naive ones.”

### *Women’s leadership and gender justice*

The full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry has been affirmed by every LWF Assembly since 1984. In 2013, the LWF was the first Christian World Communion to adopt a Gender Justice Policy. Today, about 90 percent of LWF member churches ordain women and there is an increasing number of women in leadership positions across the communion. However, in many churches women continue to struggle with recognition in leadership positions.

The *Resolution calling for a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry* at the last Assembly in Windhoek was taken up by the Communion Office and several experiences from women in ordained ministry have been gathered. The outcomes can be found in the interim report that is available online. There are stories of empowerment and affirmation, of struggles and challenges faced in ministry.

On our way forward and based on the findings from the experiences collected, we will need to invest more into engaging with theological arguments that are used against women’s ordination, often based on problematic understanding of Christology or creation theology and provide accessible theological materials that help to reflect on this matter on the basis of Lutheran Confessions.

In 2020, the LWF launched the H  l  ne Ralivao Fund, named in memory of one of the first female theologians and a pioneer gender justice advocate in the Malagasy Lutheran Church, who was murdered in February that year. The fund's purpose is to empower primarily women in the African region in theology, gender justice and leadership through scholarships for post-graduate studies and short-term training and research on issues related to the intersection between theology, gender justice and leadership.

The Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek adopted a resolution on the inclusion of gender justice in the LWF constitution. The proposed amendment also includes a commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or race. It was discussed at the regional Pre-Assemblies and will be voted upon by the Assembly.

### *Youth leadership and contribution to peace building and climate justice*

The youth are often referred to as leaders of tomorrow. But they are also leaders of today. The LWF Youth desk is a part of the Leadership program, and seeks to support and empower youth as they contribute to the lives of their churches. There are encouraging examples for how member churches have taken up the idea of youth quota for governing bodies. In 2019, the General Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), which brings together seven member churches of the LWF, decided that from 2021 at least eight of its 50 members should be under the age of 27.

The Global Young Reformers Network which was initially formed in the context of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, has continued to connect young people across the communion. Since June 2020, the Young Reformers Space has been a monthly discussion platform within the network. Convened on the last Friday of each month, it continues to offer youth from all LWF regions the opportunity to discuss three priorities: revival of churches; equity and education; climate justice and youth participation.

Since September 2017, the LWF youth has been implementing Peace Messengers trainings which concentrate on conflict resolution and mediation skills and equip young people to peace building with the help of rich resources from their religious tradition. Since 2017, in-person trainings have taken place in Israel/Palestine, Estonia, Switzerland, and Rwanda. They were followed up by small projects, carried out by participants who implemented in their local communities the skills they had gained during the training. In late 2021, the LWF youth prophetically chose 'peace' as their theme for the year 2022.

Youth has also been instrumental in LWF in taking leadership in climate justice matters. LWF delegations to global climate meetings – the COP (Conference of the Parties) meetings – have been led by youth. One of the subthemes from the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, Creation Not for Sale, has been further used by the youth in their climate justice actions, to illustrate that climate justice is a deeply theological theme, related to the task, given by God, to till and to keep the creation (Gen 2:15).

Sometimes small actions have a big impact. From 2019 to 2022, the LWF supported more than 50 small-scale youth-led climate justice projects in different member churches, from cleaning a beach from the plastic in Kenya to creating organic gardens in South Africa.

### *The Church in the Public Space: Withstanding exclusionary politics*

According to the World Economic Forum, erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization will rank as one of the five main global risks in two years' time. A conference on the role of churches as agents for justice in the face of populism, organized by the LWF and co-hosted by the Evangelical Academy in Berlin, Brot f  r die Welt, and the Church of Sweden, examined the mechanisms of exclusionary populist movements and clarified theological arguments against divisive politics. Following the conference, the LWF Council issued a message to the member churches

in 2018, urging them to be churches of hope that resist forces of exclusionary populism. The outcomes of the conference were published in 2019 in *Resisting Exclusion – Global Theological Responses to Populism*.

### *Jewish-Christian relations*

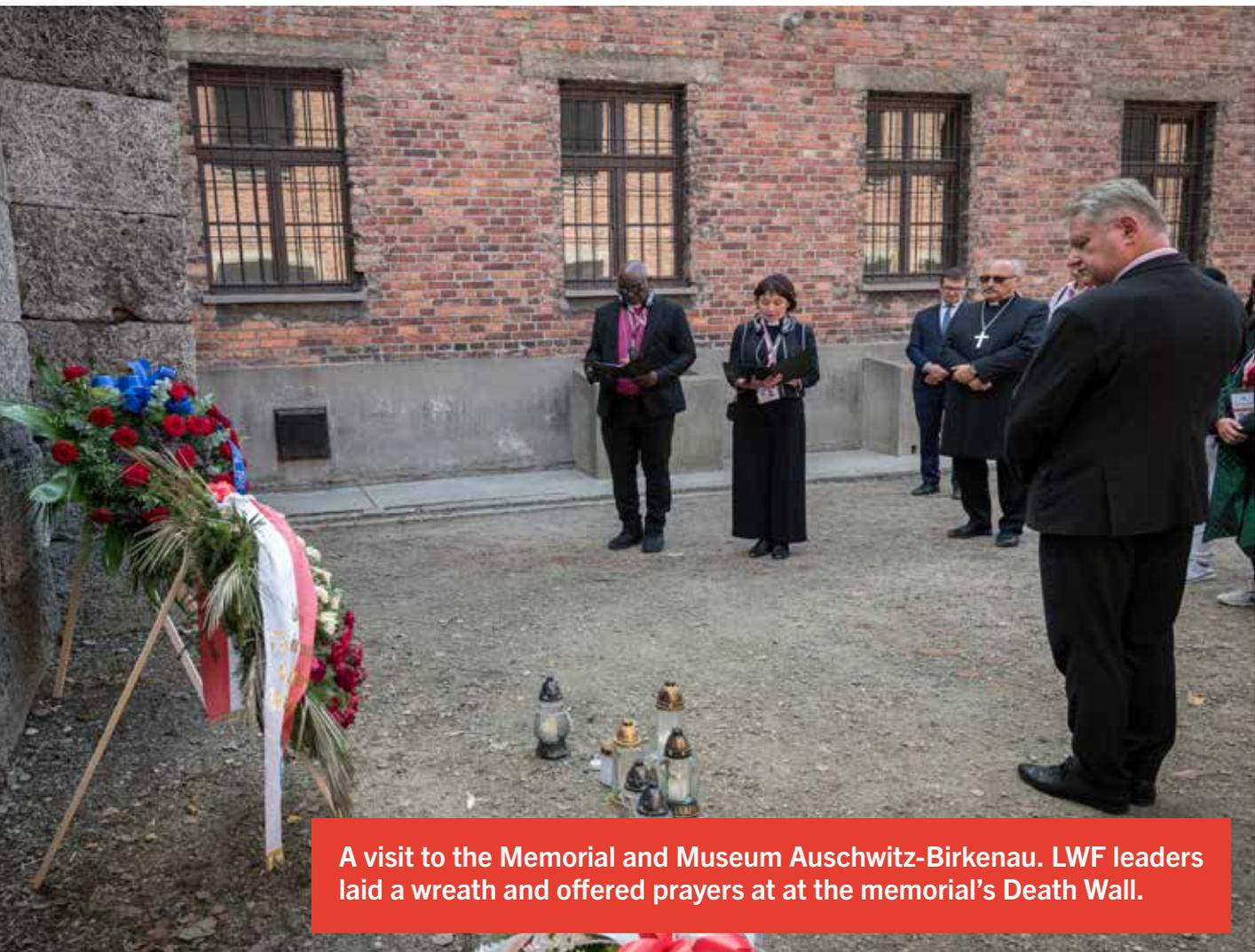
From history, we know of a number of devastating examples of what populism, fearmongering, fake news and false information can lead to. As we gather here in Poland, we cannot be silent about the history of Jewish people in this country. Once a big and thriving minority in Poland, the Jewish community was wiped out with the tragedy of the Shoah, the Holocaust, during the Nazi occupation of Poland. A visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau is part of the Assembly program. It is meant to help us to

understand the consequences of exclusionary politics.

The position that Lutheran churches reject anti-Semitism and affirm the integrity and dignity of the Jewish faith was stated at the LWF Assembly in Budapest in 1984 where the LWF and its member churches distanced themselves from Martin Luther's writings and expressions against Jews and repented of the violence and abuse they led to for the Jewish people.

Some LWF member churches have a long history reflecting on Jewish-Christian relations, others find it harder to relate to it due to minimal Jewish presence in their midst. A new study document, *Hope for the Future: Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations*, has been prepared by a Task Force for Jewish-Christian relations, in order to help to understand better





**A visit to the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. LWF leaders laid a wreath and offered prayers at at the memorial's Death Wall.**

the history of Jewish-Christian relations. The study document reminds us that for Christians, relations with Jewish people are their longest and deepest connection to another faith community: “A shared foundation in the heritage of biblical Israel makes the Jewish-Christian relationship unique. It deserves on-going special attention and care.”

### *Diakonia: serving the neighbor*

Talking about holistic mission at the LWF, we talk about kerygma (proclamation) – leitourgia (worship) – martyria (public witness) – diakonia (service to the neighbor). Diakonia, faith-based service that is a response to God’s grace, was one of the four founding pillars of the LWF. Diakonia is prayer in action, faith in deeds. This happens both through the diaconal

ministry of LWF member churches but also through LWF World Service and its country programs and emergency operations.

One of the practical ways how LWF has been supporting diaconal action of churches, are member church projects which provide hands-on solutions to pressing needs in the congregations and wider community. Among the priorities identified by the churches for both short and long-term projects are theological training, advocacy for human rights, health service delivery, livelihood initiatives, and women’s and youth empowerment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the LWF reacted quickly and setup a Rapid Response Fund (RRF). With the support of member churches, LWF could support 181 COVID-19 related projects in 87 member churches (altogether 1.1mio EUR). Some of the projects

served multiple purposes. The RRF proved to be an extremely helpful tool in responding fast to the most urgent needs of churches.

Based on this good experience, the LWF launched the Communion Solidarity Fund at the end of 2022 to meet urgent needs of member churches, caused either by natural catastrophes or other unforeseen events. All churches are invited to contribute and all contributions, large and small, are welcome. I want to use this opportunity to thank all of the churches who have already supported this new fund.

LWF has also supported regional diaconal efforts. In Europe, within the framework of conviviality (the art and practice of living together) process, LWF member churches made a relevant contribution through the *People on the Move* initiative to how can churches offer credible witness and neighborly love in the context of rapid growth of populist and nationalist movements. In late 2021, four books were published, showing the art and practice of living together in churches in Europe.

In Africa, through the *Symbols of Hope* (SoH) initiative, the LWF has been supporting three of its member churches in their work with migrants and returnees since 2017. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), LCCN, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) received support to raise awareness at community and national levels about the risks of irregular migration and human trafficking in contexts of high unemployment, and weak or non-existent social security systems. Pastors and diaconal workers have received training in psychosocial support and counselling. In the three target countries, Symbols of Hope had already in 2021 reached tens of thousands potential or returning migrants, offering them support and pastoral care.

António Guterres, Secretary General of United Nations, recently commented on the current stand of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.” In 2019, LWF

launched the initiative called *Waking the Giant* to empower churches to contribute effectively to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. Churches and church-based organizations in four LWF target countries— Colombia, Liberia, Tanzania and the United States, have been involved in mapping their work in the areas of health, education, peace and justice, and collecting data on their own contribution to specific SDGs.

## PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY, JUSTICE AND PEACE

The second main priority of the LWF strategy for 2019-2024, “Promoting human dignity, justice and peace” is introduced with the words: “Out of faith convictions and theological reflections, we are committed to uphold human dignity and work for justice and peace.” LWF’s advocacy, which is to a large extent led by the new Action for Justice unit in the Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, and LWF’s extensive humanitarian and development work, which is primarily carried out by the Department for World Service, are guided by this strategic priority. One of LWF’s strengths lies in its ability to bring impulses from the global level to the local and from the local to the global, both for its member churches but also in the context of LWF country programs.

### Advocacy

Action for Justice is a new unit in the Communion Office, founded in 2020 to sharpen the LWF’s approach to advocacy and ensure we bring strongly together the member churches, the humanitarian and development work as well as the LWF’s collaboration with global bodies like the Human Rights Council of the United Nations. LWF’s advocacy has a twofold aim:

- to speak and act on behalf of its member churches on global platforms, promoting and defending human rights and human dignity;

- to support building capacity for promoting and using Human Rights frameworks for advocacy in member churches and among civil society and the populations we as the LWF serve through our World Service country programs and operations.

This work builds on the LWF advocacy framework, launched in February 2022 (*Advocacy Framework. Action for Justice from Local to Global*). It focuses on five areas of engagement: human rights, gender justice, climate justice, peace building and humanitarian advocacy.

Human rights, as formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), are increasingly challenged in many parts of the world, not least by religious fundamentalists. And yet, after taking a closer look we would see that every world religion and most cultures in the world will value fairness, hospitality, solidarity with the weak, the ideal of equality for all, protection from torture and humiliation. These are all principles that we find in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We also know that Martin Luther held the freedom of conscience in high esteem. Human rights grant freedom of opinion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion.

From a faith perspective, we need only look to Genesis 1:27 as a reminder that all human beings are created in the image of God. Despite the continuous brokenness of human nature, the image of God – *imago Dei* – has been restored in Jesus Christ. He is the one who calls us to stand for justice: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

LWF actively supports human rights, e.g. by engaging with the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights (UPR). The UPR is a process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN member states. It holds governments accountable for improving human rights situations on the ground. Through LWF’s advocacy work, its member churches and country programs have contributed to the UPR by sharing shadow reports from their contexts. It is

particularly encouraging to see how these efforts bear concrete fruits. For instance, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone together with other actors influenced the decision of the Government of Sierra Leone to abolish the death penalty, which was a key recommendation in the church’s advocacy. Secondly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania contributed to the Government of Tanzania’s policy and legislative action to ensure pregnant girls re-enter schools, reversing a previous policy that banned them access to education.

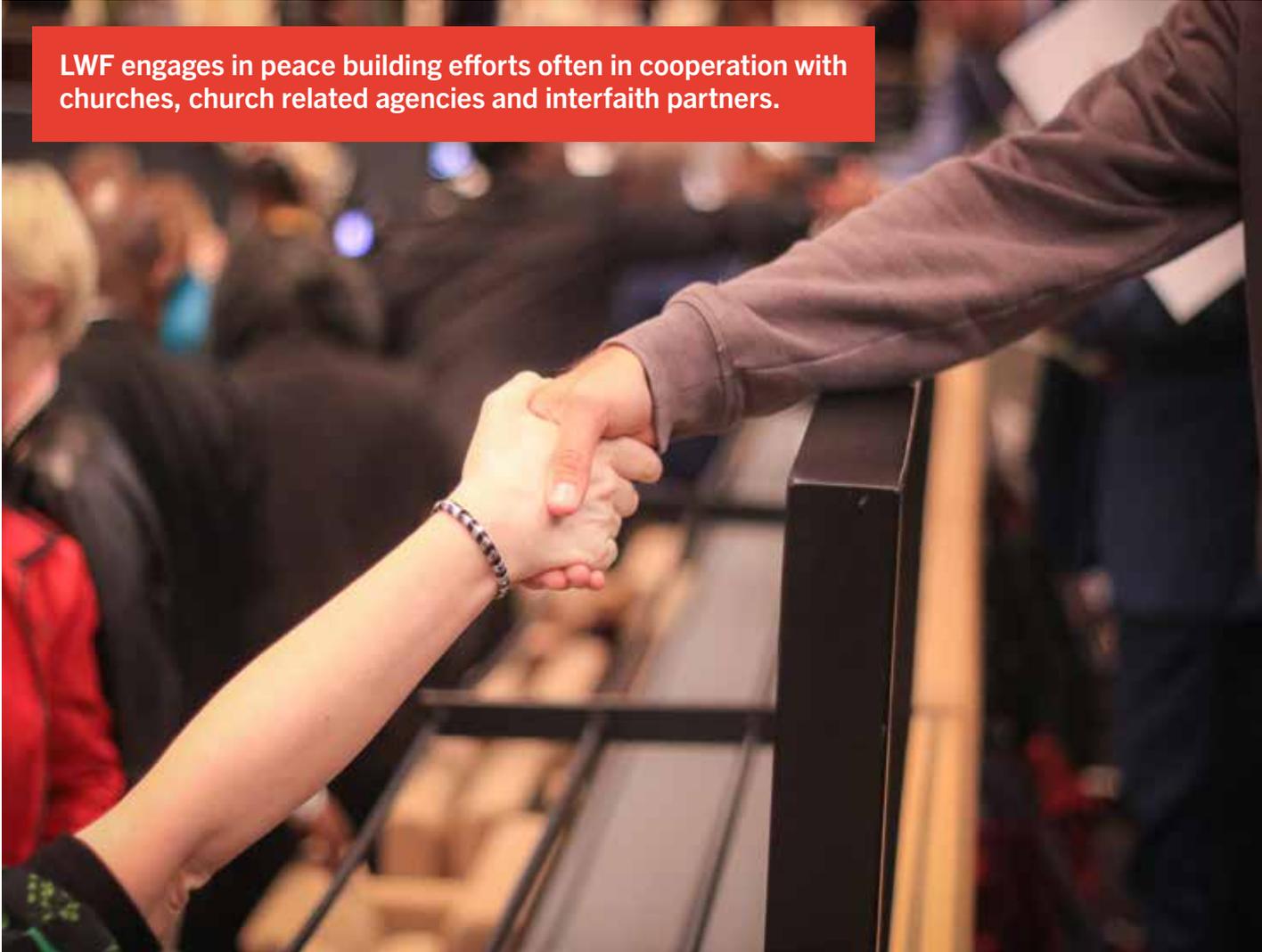
Pushback against human rights, which can currently be observed in many parts of the world, is often first and foremost pushback against the rights of women and girls. Since the Assembly in Windhoek, the LWF conducted numerous workshops, trainings, and webinars to support gender justice and women’s rights. The LWF has also organized events within UN-initiated projects such as the 16 Days of Activism to end Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and the Commission on the Status of Women which the UN hosts annually in New York.

According to the LWF *Gender Justice Policy* “gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations between women and men and the elimination of the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination.” The policy was a milestone document when it was published and this year we are marking its tenth anniversary.

### *Peace building*

In July this year, the LWF completed work on a *Gender Justice Toolbox*. This will provide member churches and country programs with necessary tools to implement the *Gender Justice Policy*.

The LWF’s efforts in peace building have been motivated by the concept of “positive peace” which describes not only the absence of physical violence, but also the absence of structural violence. The LWF Peace



LWF engages in peace building efforts often in cooperation with churches, church related agencies and interfaith partners.

Messengers Training Manual for participants, launched in 2018, recalls a quote from the Nobel Peace Prize lecture of the XIV<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in 1989: “Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.”

LWF has been involved in peace building efforts in a variety of ways, often in cooperation with churches, church related agencies and interfaith partners. A key question has been: how can faith communities support and promote more inclusive societies? The conference *Welcoming the Stranger, Shaping the Future, Living as Neighbors* took place in Geneva on the World Refugee Day in June 2022. Organized in cooperation with Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), it brought together over 50 faith actors from more than 30 countries.

The purpose was to strengthen partnerships between grassroots faith-based organizations and the international humanitarian system to provide better protection and welcome for displaced people. As a follow-up, the UNHCR invited the LWF to organize an Innovation lab at High Commissioner’s Dialogue in December 2022.

Peace building efforts have been implemented with member churches who serve in conflict-loaden contexts, e.g. in Colombia and Ethiopia. In 2022, a good cooperation was initiated by the LWF between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia and the EECMY. In spring 2023, the LWF organized a peace building and conflict resolution training for all synod presidents of EECMY.



*Serving the people in need through humanitarian and development work*

From the first years of the LWF, the member churches mandated LWF's Department for World Service as their key actor in serving people in need, without discrimination of any kind, to empower them to advocate for life with dignity and justice. Today, LWF World Service is one of the largest faith-based humanitarian actors worldwide, active through its country programs in almost 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, World Service has also been active in Europe, in a way recalling times when the LWF was founded. There are more than 8,500 staff working in the LWF country programs, serving over 3 million refugees and displaced persons.

Last year, I visited the country program in Uganda. LWF supports half of the 1.3 million refugees who have found shelter in that country Uganda. I was proud to wear the same LWF branded shirt as our staff on the ground. It was a visible sign of the connection between the local and global level in the LWF.

By the end of 2017 the number of forcefully displaced people worldwide had reached 68.5 million. By the end of 2022 this figure had increased to 108.4 million people, the highest ever recorded. At the same time, the funding of humanitarian and development work is becoming increasingly challenging. Thanks to its excellent and reliable service, the LWF World Service continues to be highly appreciated and has been able to fund its work in its many country programs in a very competitive environment.

World Service focuses on three programmatic priorities in its work: livelihoods, protection and social cohesion, and quality services.

*Supporting livelihoods* means to make people and communities more resilient and economically self-reliant through building capacities and promoting productive activities to sustain their basic needs.

*Protection and social cohesion* that help to create conditions for peace and resilient livelihoods, presuppose cooperation both with the people we serve as well as with the duty-bearers. Both need to be sensitized toward cultural practices that increase inequality and injustice and stand on the way of development.

*Quality services include areas such as access to education, water, food, energy, and health care.* The provision of such services is the duty of local and national authorities, but when service provision breaks down or is unavailable, particularly in times of acute crisis, World Service steps in to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance and education. For instance, the LWF provides education in the Kenyan refugee camps Kakuma and Dadaab, where around 100,000 children study in LWF-run schools.

In recent years, LWF has continued to respond to emergency crises in different parts of the world. In 2022, the LWF opened new offices in Poland and in Ukraine and scaled up its emergency response to meet needs in other countries. Our work has expanded in Colombia to assist Venezuelan refugees. The movement of Venezuelan refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) on both sides of the border between Venezuela and Colombia became a central focus for the program in 2019. More recently, with the descent of Sudan into civil war and chaos, LWF country programs in Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia have also scaled up to respond to the growing refugee crisis, impacting the entire region.

There are many examples of good cooperation between LWF member churches and LWF country programs on the ground. *A Guidance Note on joint engagement of World Service and member churches*, published in 2021, offers useful guidelines for such collaboration.

Ethiopia, the country where our largest member church lives and serves, faced multiple crises between 2018 and 2023: a prolonged drought affecting 24.1 million people, conflict in the northern region of Tigray that turned violent toward the end of 2020, leading to the death of more than half a million people and displacing over 5 million. With the EECMY, LWF provided cash transfers, food, shelter, relief goods, water and sanitation to tens of thousands of people affected by the war.

The resurgence of violence in Myanmar in 2017 forced over 700,000 Rohingya people to flee into neighboring Bangladesh. In 2019, LWF established collaboration with its former country program in Bangladesh and continues to provide assistance to tens of thousands of people who have settled at the Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Despite the extremely challenging situation in Myanmar itself, LWF also continues to provide services to the population dealing with escalating violence and multiple natural disasters, providing assistance to the most impacted and marginalized communities in the country.

LWF World Service is known for working in regions where, quite simply put, not many international aid organizations are willing to go to. Between 2016 and 2021, the LWF provided services in Cameroon for altogether over 200,000 people fleeing Boko Haram in Nigeria and the lasting internal conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR).

LWF managed the Minawao camp for Nigerian refugees in the very insecure extreme North of the country and worked in several camps for refugees from CAR in Eastern Cameroon. LWF's support included installing water and sanitation infrastructures, offering formal education to refugee children, and providing professional training and support to farmers. In addition, LWF planted over 50,000 trees in this semi-arid zone through the "Making Minawao Green Again" project.

Similarly, LWF continues to run a joint program with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Diakonien Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) in Haiti, despite its continued descent into anarchy and gang-

violence, increasing food insecurity, almost total lack of basic services and high levels of insecurity to staff. Working to provide water and sanitation to the population, build capacity for emergency preparedness and response at the community level, this joint program continues to work in a country abandoned by most despite continuing challenges to raise funds for the work.

The LWF takes its commitment to protect all the people it serves very seriously, including protecting the rights of the children. In 2022, LWF World Service developed two practical guidelines: a *Child Protection Guideline and Toolkit* and *Child Safeguarding Guidelines and Toolkit* in its commitment to strengthen country program capacities to end all forms of violence against children.

One of LWF's largest projects is the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Being part of LWF Jerusalem program, it is a center of medical excellence, serving Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Augusta Victoria Hospital has become the main cancer referral center, providing comprehensive and integrated services for cancer patients from the region, while paying attention not only to the medical aspects but also to social, economic, and mental health needs. Children are one of the largest groups of patients receiving specialized treatment for cancer at AVH.

This work is accomplished in a challenging political context. The difficulties which LWF confronts in Jerusalem and the surrounding area include the walls and checkpoints which have been built to limit freedom of movement and impede access to health services. Despite all the challenges, the LWF is committed to ensure that we can continue to offer the life-saving services to Palestinian people. When I visited the Augusta Victoria Hospital in January this year and met its very dedicated new CEO and staff, I saw what an immense source of pride this hospital is for Palestinians, not only as a center of medical excellence, but also as an example for transparent and dignified way of interacting with patients and staff in this very complicated context.

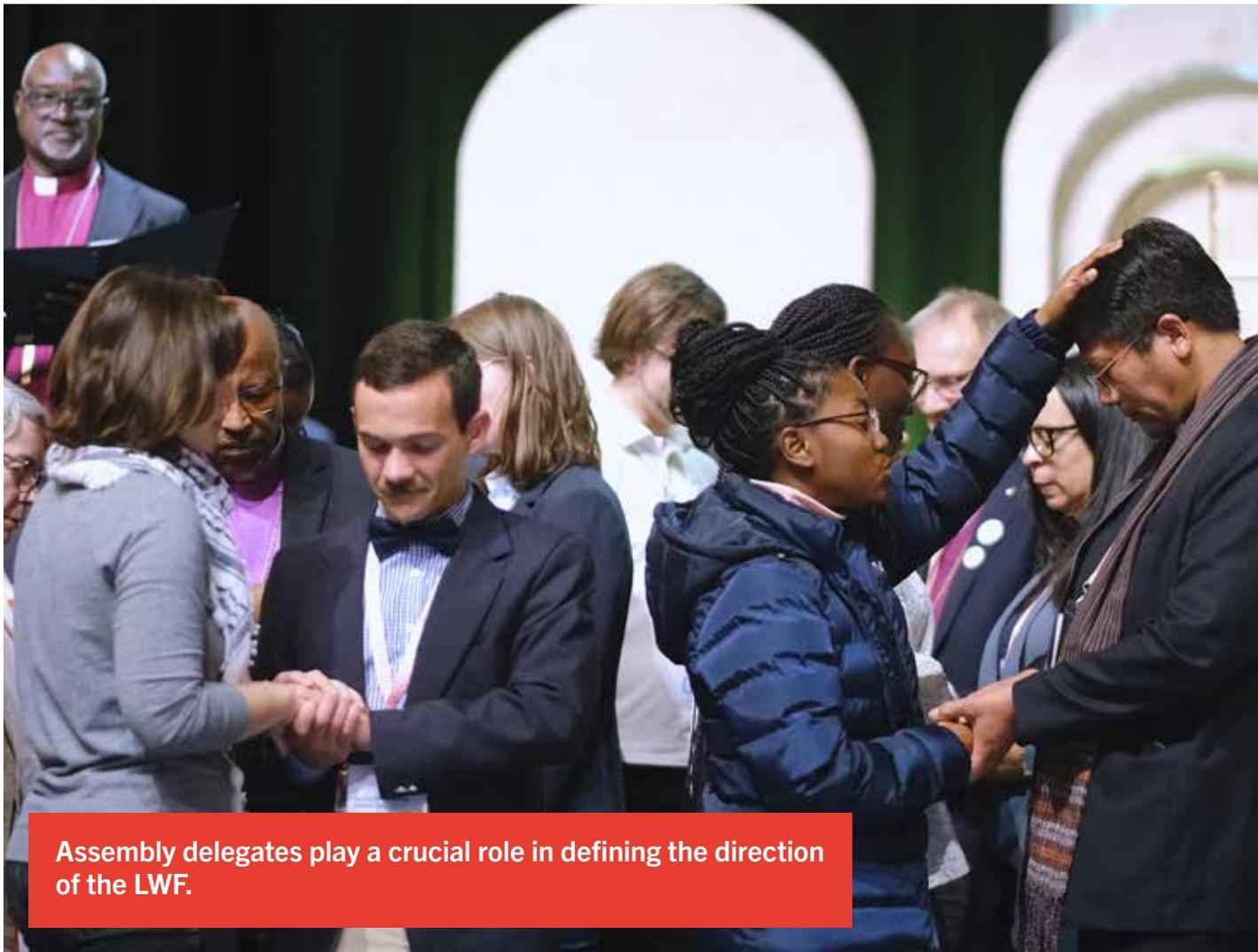
Overall, the humanitarian context in which World Service operates, continues to deteriorate. Security risks to staff have become higher over the past six years, and serious incidents and threats to staff safety more common. LWF has put considerable efforts into improving its crisis management capacity, training key staff at all levels to be able to respond collectively and decisively in times of extreme difficulty.

## CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD

The journey of the LWF communion from Windhoek to Kraków has been full of witnesses to God's love and grace that sustains our joint proclamation and service and builds on the work of those who have gone before us in the communion of saints, as we confess in the Creed. Our shared journey as LWF has been going on for 76 years already. Last year we celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LWF. A new publication *In Communion. The Lutheran World Federation 1947-2022* looks back at how the four pillars of the LWF: joint efforts in theology, joint efforts in mission, working for unity and serving people in need have been carried out throughout LWF's history.

This work would not have been possible without the support from you, our member churches as well as from related agencies, and other stakeholders. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all churches who have supported the work of the LWF through participation in its various programs, but also through financial support through membership fees, contributions to the LWF Endowment Fund (EF), and through targeted funding of projects. I also want to extend my gratitude to the many partners of the LWF who support our mission. Together, we achieve more.

I want to thank the outgoing LWF Council that was elected in Windhoek in 2017. They successfully accompanied the Communion Office during difficult years of pandemic, strongly committed to the mission of the LWF. The fact that the Council could elect



**Assembly delegates play a crucial role in defining the direction of the LWF.**

a new General Secretary in the middle of a global pandemic, is a strong testimony to the maturity of our communion. I thank you for your continuous support and accompaniment. A special word of thanks goes to LWF President Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa for our good collaboration, his valuable advice and for his leadership in the Communion.

In want to offer my predecessor Rev. Dr Martin Junge particular thanks. He retired from his position on 31 October 2021, after leading the LWF for more than a decade. His leadership in the communion and his strong commitment to the work for justice, peace and reconciliation meant a lot not only to Lutherans but to Christians worldwide.

The work of the LWF would not have been possible without the commitment of LWF staff to our mission and vision. Every day I

give thanks for their willingness to lend their expertise to the work of our global communion. I am similarly grateful for the member churches, who share their gifts with us.

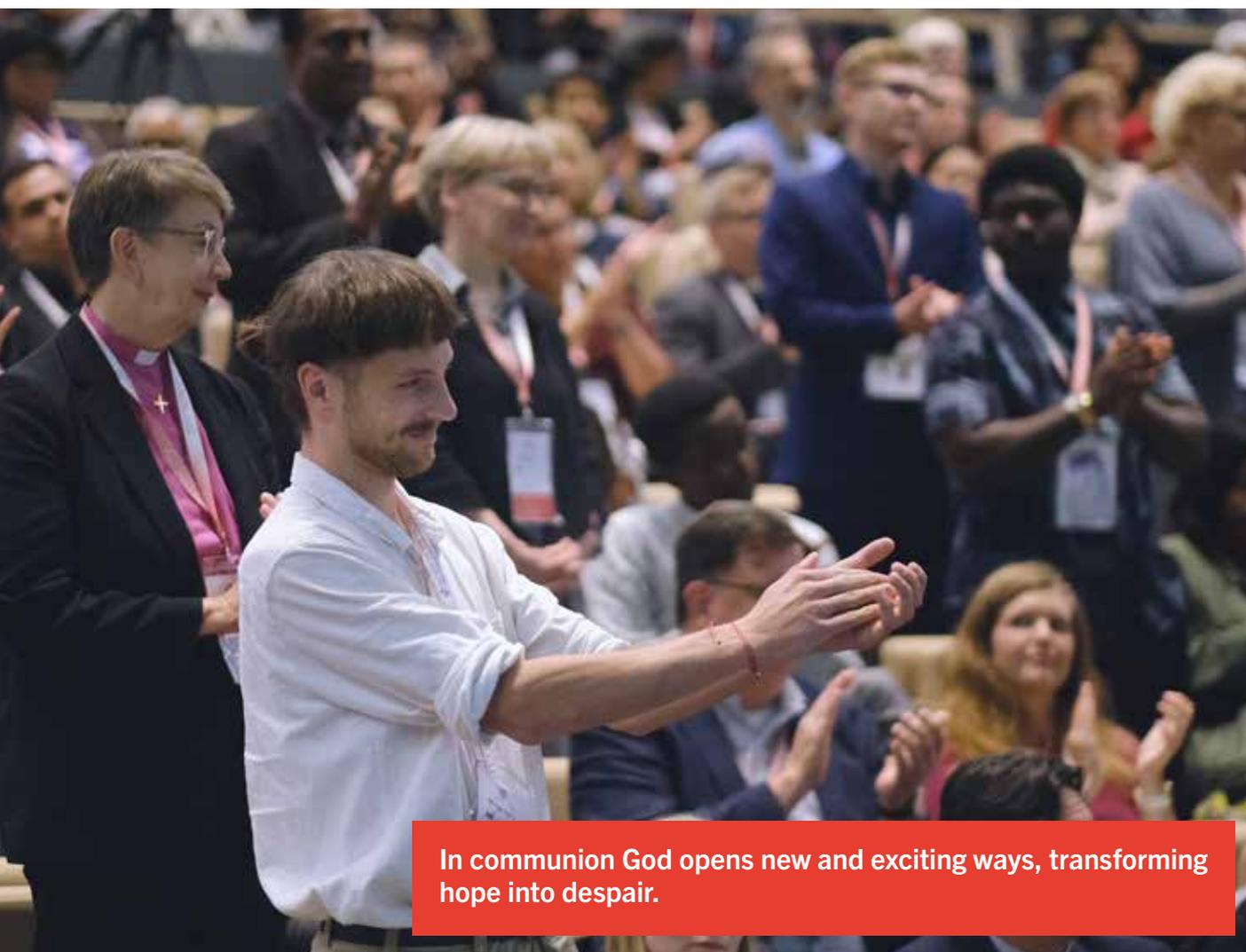
Dear Assembly delegates, you play a crucial role in defining the direction of the LWF as a communion of churches for the upcoming strategic period. The pre-assembly messages highlighted some of the concerns and joys from your regions: from theological education and formation to mental health and pastoral care; from inclusion and accessibility of churches to church in the public space (freedom of religion); from climate crisis to forced migration; from pushback on human rights to instrumentalization of religion; from war and peace building to structural social and economic inequity.

When expressing our concerns and analyzing the context around us, we may sometimes feel we are faced with an insurmountable task. Yet, in communion, God opens new and exciting ways for us, bringing us together, pooling resources, and achieving what might seem impossible: transforming despair into hope. In communion, the Spirit empowers us as messengers of hope and reconciliation.

The Prophet Zechariah talks about “prisoners of hope” (Zech 9:12). Isn’t it a fascinating image for being caught up in hope despite the circumstances that sometimes seem rather hopeless? If the circumstances we live in, define how we see God and the future of the whole creation, we are prisoners of perspective. It is better to be prisoners of hope, understanding that our faith in Jesus Christ calls us to never give up seeking peace, living from hope, and always engaged with the Holy

Spirit in reconciliation and renewal. When Christ is at the center, things don’t fall apart but, as the apostle Paul says, in Christ “all things hold together” (Col 1:17). May this verse encourage us as we continue our journey as a global communion.

As you know, Lutheran theology is full of distinctions. Let me end with an important one: the difference between optimism and hope. In one of his books, our keynote speaker, Prof. Halík, writes that optimists are those who don’t have enough information. Christians are hopeful because they are not ignorant of the challenges but they have faith in Christ. We know that the shape of the world around us did not change overnight through Christ’s resurrection and neither did human nature. Unfortunately, history knows of a few utopias where the brokenness of human nature wasn’t taken seriously. The attempts to implement such political utopias



**In communion God opens new and exciting ways, transforming hope into despair.**

have been rather devastating. The church is called to spread hope without utopia; steadfastness without fearful exclusion. So, let us be prisoners of hope together, journeying as a communion of churches, with great passion for the church and for the world.

*LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt is an ordained pastor of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. She is the first woman to lead the Lutheran communion as its chief executive officer.*



# REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

## OLAF JOHANNES MIRGELER

This report offers an overview of the financial performance, achievements and challenges of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) during the financial years, 2017 to 2022. Before going into the details, I would like to express my profound gratitude. The LWF's ability to fulfill its mission is made possible by the unwavering support of member churches, their joined organizations, ecumenical partners, and our institutional partners. We all are not only financial contributors to the LWF; in fact, we altogether share a common purpose and vision. We work together to shape and attain shared objectives, providing joint support to program initiatives and addressing crises across the globe. Together, we are a communion in Christ, liberated by God's grace, living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

The Office for Finance operates within the Department for Planning and Coordination. Its main responsibilities include establishing global budgets, sustainable use of funds, monitoring and reporting on finances, developing financial systems, administering LWF assets and preparing audit statements.

The office manages the organization's assets in accordance with high standards of professionalism, ethics, and Christian stewardship. It ensures compliance with financial and accounting regulations, while also taking the lead in managing the Communion Office financial resources efficiently and effectively, with a focus on long-term financial sustainability.

During the period of 2017 to 2022, the LWF Finance Committee provided oversight aligned

with the organizational objectives while adhering to sound accounting practices and financial management principles.

Over the course of six years, the finance office implemented several changes to strengthen its systems, processes and outcomes. The work continues into the current year 2023. These initiatives included:

- Enhancing the financial systems and streamlining funding applications;
- Updating financial policies and guidelines;
- Strengthening internal control systems;
- Developing workflows necessary for collaborative tasks and remote work;
- Providing guidance on reducing operational costs and allocation of central costs;
- Overseeing timely and prudent planning and budgeting;
- Monitoring currency fluctuations and advising on technical measures to minimize potential losses;
- Maintaining close collaboration with banks and portfolio managers to manage treasury and investments;
- Improving coordination and collaboration of finance functions across different LWF departments.

During the six-year period, consolidated financial statements of the LWF were prepared in accordance with the widely accepted



ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes Mirgeler.

TABLE 1 – INCOME BY LWF DEPARTMENTS

IN EUR 000s	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL	%
Theology, Mission and Justice	7,953	7,972	7,048	6,552	6,914	9,411	45,850	4.7%
World Service	102,832	91,235	92,354	80,169	82,421	97,113	546,124	56.4%
AVH in Jerusalem	52,592	48,202	64,547	52,954	68,093	66,937	353,325	36.5%
General Secretary	1,731	1,812	2,640	2,757	3,115	3,073	15,128	1.6%
Planning and Coordination	1,005	893	1,166	1,137	1,652	1,545	7,398	0.8%
Total Income	166,113	150,114	167,755	143,569	162,195	178,079	967,825	100%

CHART 1: LWF INCOME TREND 2017–2022



International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), ensuring compatibility with funding agencies' requirements.

The following pages of this report will present a comprehensive overview of the financial results between the two LWF Assemblies, from Windhoek to Kraków.

## LWF INCOME

### LWF INCOME FOR SIX YEARS: 2017–2022

*Refers to Chart 1*

At a time when many churches and church-related organizations were faced with financial challenges, we can look back with gratitude for the growth in the LWF's resources. Despite

declining income from some traditional donors, impact of COVID-19 pandemic, currency exchange fluctuations and general stress on global economies, the income of the LWF continued to show a growing trend over the past six years.

During the period 2017 to 2022, income grew from EUR 166 million in 2017 to EUR 178 million in 2022, an increase of EUR 12 million or 7% in six years, as shown below.

The steady growth has been driven by increased funding designated for LWF’s humanitarian response, revenue from services provided by the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in Jerusalem and additional funding for theological work.

The following table shows the income that was received between 2017 and 2022 by each of the LWF departments.

Total income between 2017 and 2022 was EUR 967 million. The income was designated in the following ways, in compliance with restrictions provided by funding partners:

- EUR 46 million (4.7%) – Department of Theology Mission and Justice (DTMJ) to implement programs on theology, leadership development, diakonia and advocacy work.

- EUR 546 million (56.4%) – Humanitarian response work carried out by World Service (DWS).
- EUR 353 million (36.5%) – Patient services at the AVH in Jerusalem.
- EUR 15 million (1.6%) – Governance, the General Secretary’s office and on Communion Relations and Theological Relations programs (OGS)
- EUR 7 million (0.8%) – Communion Office support services through the Department for Planning and Coordination (DPC).

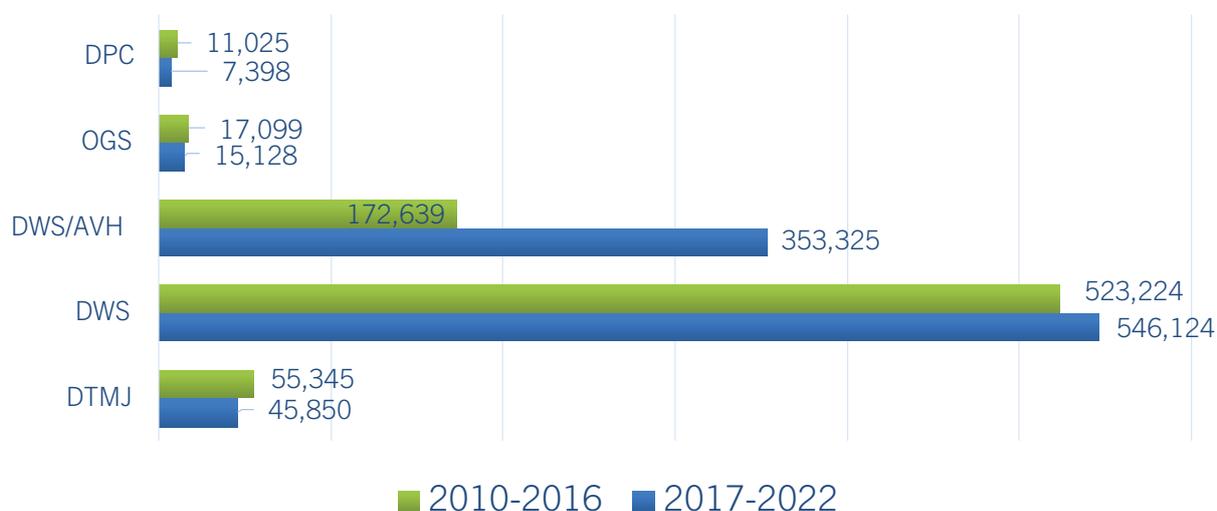
### LWF INCOME FOR 2017–2022 (COMPARED WITH 2010–2016)

*Refers to Chart 2 – Income received 2017–2022*

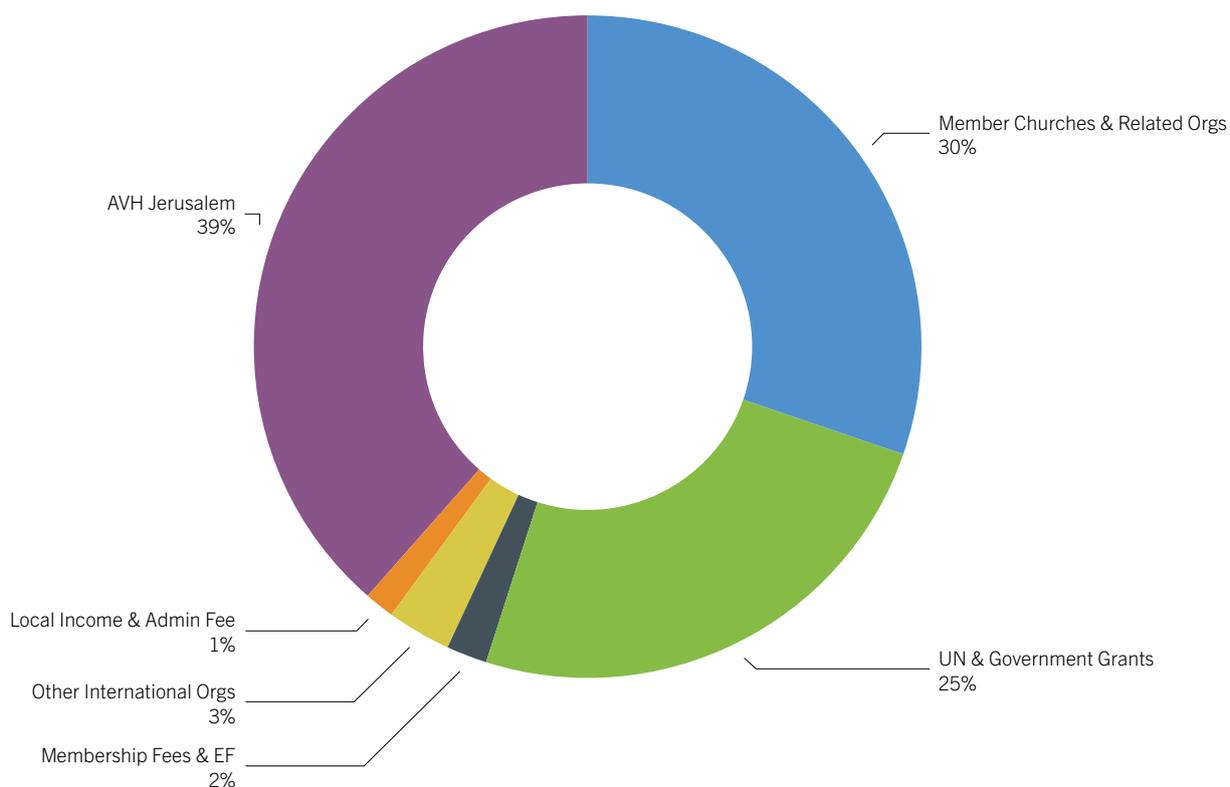
Income received during the six-year period, 2017-2022 was EUR 967 million. In the previous Assembly report (2010-2016), income received was EUR 779 million reflecting an overall increase of 24%. This growth is an important contribution toward the stability of our organization.

The following chart shows the growth in income from the beginning to the end of this

**CHART 2: INCOME RECEIVED 2017–2022 (COMPARED TO 2010- 2016)**



### CHART 3: INCOME BY FUNDING SOURCE



Assembly period, as well as changes in income in the individual departments.

UN and Government agencies funding amounts to EUR 238.5 million (25%).

### LWF INCOME BY SOURCE 2017–2022

Augusta Victoria Hospital – EUR 372.5 million (39%).

*Refer to Chart 3 – Income by funding source*

International non-governmental organizations funding amounted to EUR 30 million (3%) which also includes humanitarian funding from ecumenical partners.

Here is how our income is broken down by source over the past six years:

Income from local sources and administration fees amounted to EUR 14 million (1%) over the six-year period.

Since 2017, member churches and related organizations generously supported the work of the LWF, contributing EUR 292.7 million, which was 30% of the LWF’s income during the six-year period.

The chart below shows the income by source.

In addition, the member churches contributed EUR 19.5 million (2%) through membership fees and Endowment Fund distribution to LWF. The total contribution received from this important part of the LWF is EUR 312.2 million (or 32%) over the last six years.

### MEMBERSHIP FEES

*Refer to Chart 4 – Membership fees received from LWF member churches*

The yearly membership fees contributions from LWF member churches play a vital role in

ensuring our financial stability. The membership fees provide us with the flexibility to plan budgets and allocate resources strategically.

Contributions are calculated based on a fair membership principle, taking into account the wealth of each church relative to other member churches, considering factors such as size and the country’s wealth index.

The Communion office maintains constant communication with all member churches to reach the aim of regular payment of membership fees.

During the period of 2017-2022, the total membership fees contributions amounted to EUR 19 million, compared to EUR 16.8 million in the previous Assembly period.

The graph below illustrates the yearly contributions from churches between 2017 and 2022. Annual membership fees received by LWF range from EUR 2.6 million to EUR 2.9 million. The number of churches fulfilling their annual fair membership obligations fluctuated between 83 and 106.

The fair membership fee policy enables all member churches, regardless of their size or

geographical location, to actively participate and have a stake in the life and work of the LWF communion.

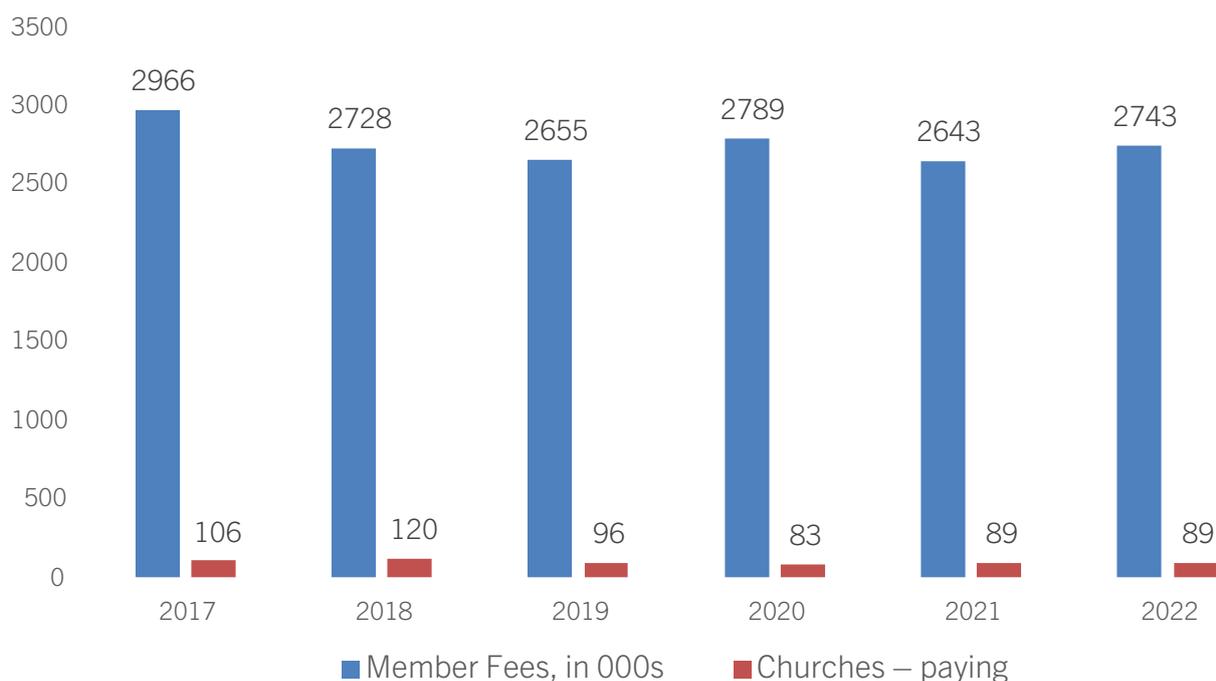
Over the course of six years, the number of member churches financially contributing to the LWF increased from 106 in 2017 to 120 churches in 2018. However, the number of contributing churches remained low between 2019 and 2022.

The LWF Council and leadership are actively exploring ways to increase contributions to reach the full fair fee levels. Increased membership fee income would greatly contribute to supporting important areas such as theological and ecumenical work, which are high priorities for the LWF. It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 the Council meetings were held virtually.

Realizing the goals outlined in the Fair membership policy requires ongoing commitment from our member churches and the advocacy of the LWF Council, particularly the regional vice-presidents and other church leaders.

We sincerely appreciate your dedication to this aspect of our shared journey. Your support and faithful stewardship are deeply valued.

#### CHART 4: MEMBERSHIP FEES RECEIVED FROM LWF MEMBER CHURCHES



## LWF EXPENDITURES

*Refer to Chart 5 – LWF expenditure by departments between 2017 and 2022*

During the period spanning from 2017 to 2022, the LWF allocated a total expenditure of EUR 930 million to effectively pursue its strategic priorities. This represents a notable increase in our level of activities when compared to the previous Assembly period, during which we allocated EUR 746 million in line with the approved budgets.

The EUR 930 million was spent as follows, in accordance with the funding restrictions:

- 5% or EUR 46 million went to Department for Theology, Mission and Justice;
- 58% or EUR 544 million went to Department for World Service;
- 35% or EUR 322 million was spent on AVH;
- 1.3% or EUR 12 million went to Office of the General Secretary; and
- 0.7% or EUR 6 million went to Department for Planning and Coordination.

The annual expenditure grew from EUR 142 million in 2016 to EUR 176 million in 2022, representing an increase of 24%. Annual

turnover is expected to grow by about 7% between 2022 and 2023. The planned budget for 2023 is EUR 190 million.

The chart below shows the total expenditures by LWF departments for the six-year period.

## LWF RESERVES

*Refer to Charts 6 and 7 – LWF Reserves*

Due to the complex nature of LWF operations and the associated financial uncertainties, it is essential to maintain sufficient reserves to effectively handle unforeseen operational factors and related financial risks.

LWF reserves increased from EUR 50 million in 2017 to EUR 88 million in 2022. During the last Assembly report, the reserves stood at EUR 41 million in 2016.

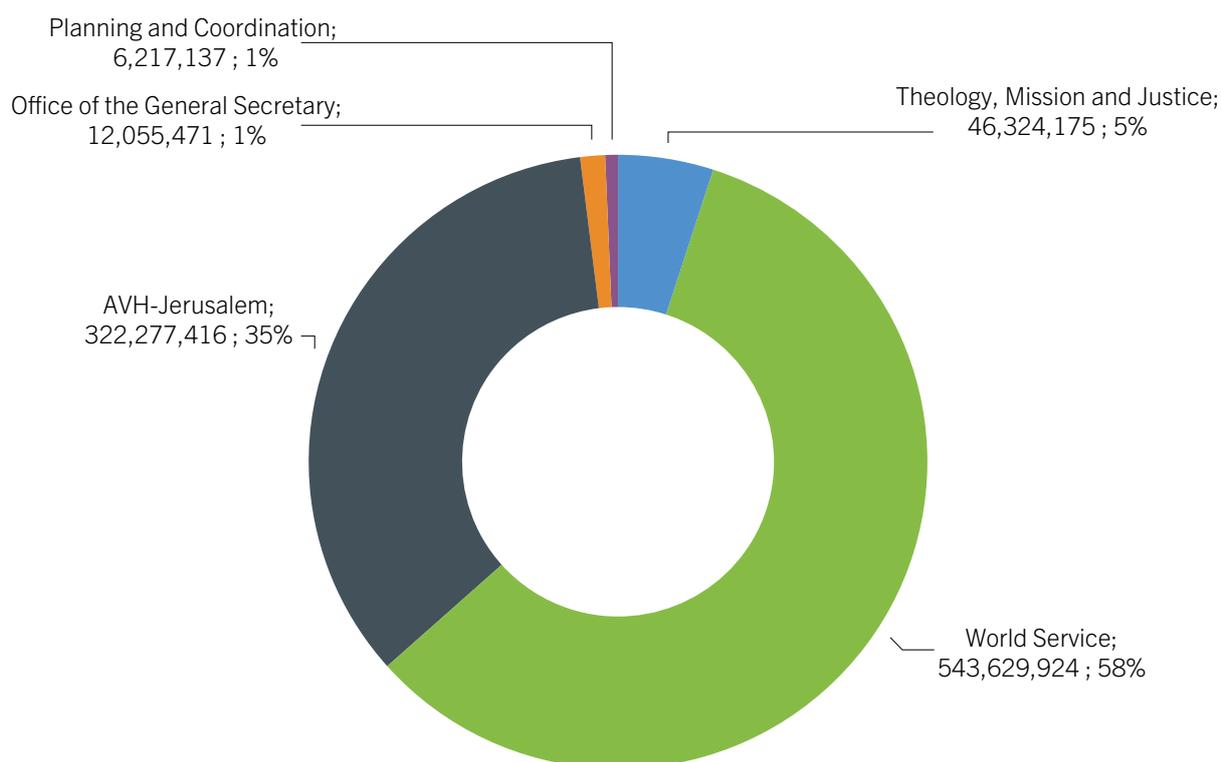
The reported LWF reserve balances reflect the provisions made in accordance with the revised standards for the valuation of pension liabilities (IAS19), as outlined by the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and International Accounting Standards (IAS).

The chart below shows the development of LWF Reserves over the six years.

### CHART 5: EXPENDITURE BY DEPARTMENTS 2017–2022

IN EUR 000s	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL	%
Theology, Mission and Justice	7,477	7,810	8,211	6,540	6,906	9,380	46,324	5%
World Service	105,016	88,566	92,364	80,750	82,155	94,780	543,630	58%
AVH in Jerusalem	48,658	47,100	49,590	48,143	60,423	68,364	322,277	35%
General Secretary	1,476	1,386	1,357	2,552	2,360	2,926	12,055	1.3%
Planning and Coordination	734	815	798	1,134	1,307	1,429	6,217	0.7%
Total Expenditure	163,360	145,676	152,320	139,118	153,151	176,879	930,504	100%

TABLE 5 – EXPENDITURE BY DEPARTMENTS 2017–2022



The growth in reserves can largely be attributed to the operational surpluses of AVH. The AVH operations are less stable due to cash flow challenges arising from unpaid receivables. As a result, it is necessary for the Department of World Service to maintain high level of reserves. The objective is to safeguard the overall programs of the LWF from potential cash shortages related to AVH.

In order to reduce the liability risk associated with the AVH, the LWF Finance Committee and Board of Trustees have established important financial benchmarks. In 2022, the Finance Committee and Committee for World Service recommended a professional analysis of the risks associated with the unpaid receivables from the Palestinian Authority and to review the impact on the overall finances of the LWF. Both committees and LWF staff continue to closely monitor the potential risk.

Usage of LWF reserves is guided by the Reserves Policy of LWF. The chart below shows LWF reserves balances as per the policy designations. The reserves are categorized as follows:

- Restricted reserves (held in field programs) – EUR 72.7 million
- General unrestricted reserves – EUR 15.7 million
- Total LWF reserves – EUR 88.4 million

80% of the reserves are held in the form of accounts receivables or assets/inventory, while 20% of the reserves are in the form of convertible investments and cash in the bank.

The general reserves of LWF represent the net assets available to support its operations without any restrictions. Since the last Assembly report based on 2016 audited financial statements, the general reserves increased from EUR 9.9 million to EUR 15.7 million.

# THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY BUDGET

The budget approved for the LWF Thirteenth Assembly amount to EUR 3.2 million, which is a 6% increase compared to the budget of EUR 3 million allocated for the Twelfth Assembly that was held in Windhoek. As of now, we have received pledges of financial support totaling EUR 2.8 million providing coverage for 88% of the budget. This leaves a shortfall of EUR 345,000. Increased cost of travel as a result of effects of COVID-19, as well as global inflation have a direct cost impact on the Assembly budget.

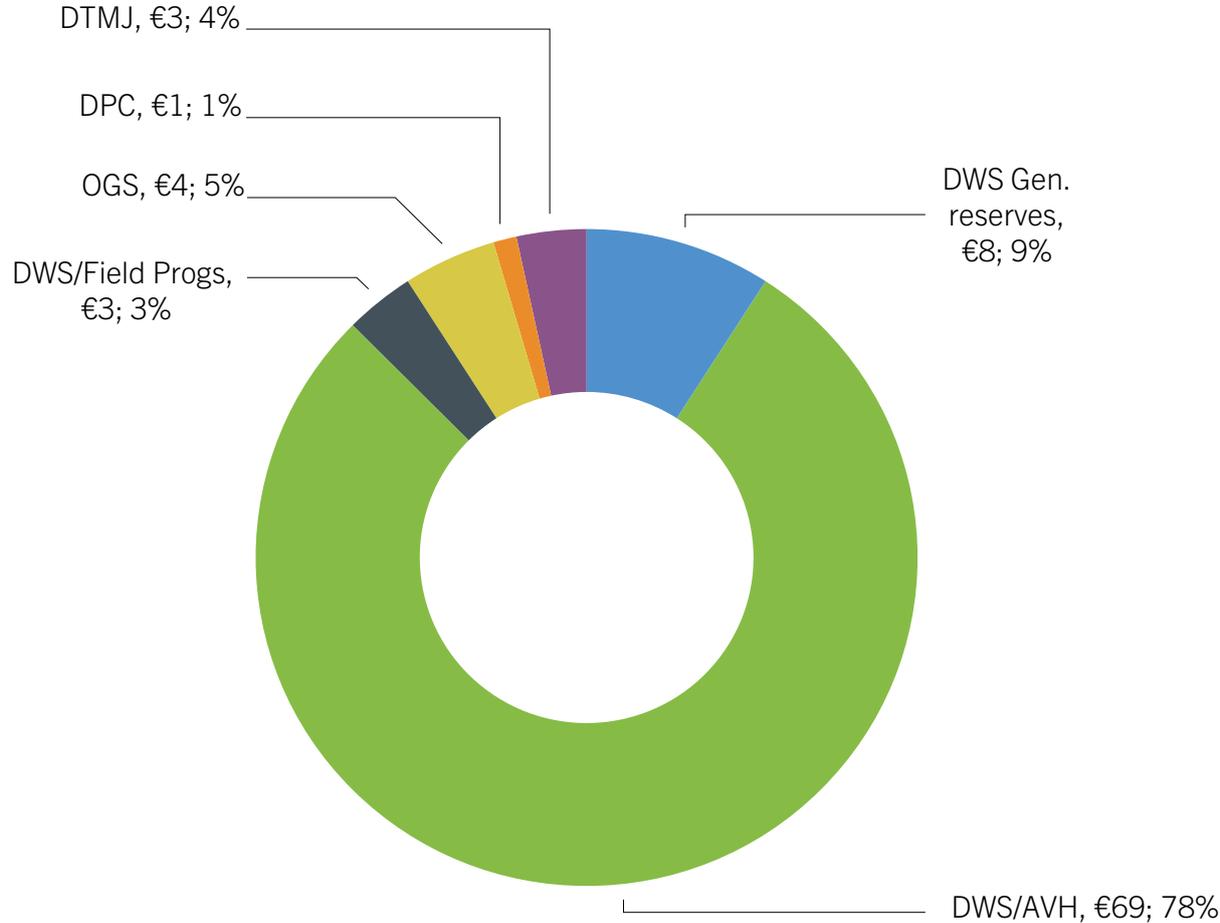
Despite the significant costs increases, the LWF has kept the Thirteenth Assembly as top priority. With your support, the Communion

Office leadership will ensure that the Assembly expenses are fully covered. The LWF Assembly is a truly important event and it provides the LWF with an opportunity to deepen relationships between our churches and to connect and share experiences with each other. We are grateful to our member churches for the additional financial support that makes it possible to gather in this way.

# STAFF WELFARE PLAN – LWF PENSION FUND

The Lutheran World Federation has entrusted “Stiftung Abendrot” with the management of its occupational pension provision for employees and pension recipients. The staff

CHART 6: LWF RESERVES



## CHART 7: DEVELOPMENT OF LWF RESERVES OVER THE SIX YEARS



pension scheme covers disability, death, old age, and termination benefits.

Since 2012, Stiftung Abendrot has been responsible for overseeing the LWF Staff Welfare Plan Pension fund in Switzerland. The foundation handles the overall management of the pension scheme, ensuring compliance with legal requirements, defining strategic objectives and identifying the necessary resources for their implementation.

As of the end of the fiscal year 2022, the pension fund's assets had a coverage level of 111% (compared to 108% in 2016), with a total asset value of CHF 39 million. Through the transfer of pension funds to Abendrot and an increase in the coverage level, the LWF's legal obligations for the pension scheme have been reduced.

The affairs of the pension fund are governed by a Staff Pension Plan Committee (SPPC), consisting of representatives from both employers and employees.

Employee benefits are calculated annually and integrated into the consolidated financial statements following the revised IFRS IAS19 accounting standard. Actuarial assessments are conducted by an actuary, and appropriate adjustments are made to the financial statements on an annual basis to account for any pension liabilities.

## LWF ENDOWMENT FUND

The LWF Endowment Fund was established in April 1999 with the aim of increasing financial stability to meet LWF operational needs in carrying out its programs in fulfilment of its mission. The primary objective is to generate a consistent income stream through a diversified portfolio that effectively manages risk, rewards, and strategic asset allocation while respecting the LWF's investment principles.

As of 2022, the total contributions to the LWF Endowment Fund amount to CHF 14.8 million, below the targeted goal of CHF 20 million. Contributions received at the end of 2016 was EUR 12.8 million.

The Endowment Fund board has embarked on a targeted campaign in order to meet the targeted financial goal and to support the long-term sustainability of the LWF. We express our deep gratitude for the generous contributions made by LWF member churches to the Endowment Fund.

Since its inception, the LWF Endowment Fund has disbursed a total of CHF 5.6 million. During the period, 2017 to 2022, the Fund distributed CHF 3.6 million. The current investment environment remains volatile. The Fund board and LWF staff are actively monitoring the situation in collaboration with the Fund managers.

In response to changing needs in the investment market, the Endowment Fund Board has revised the investment policy. The revised policy aligns with LWF's principles of ethical and sustainable investment, ensuring that the Fund's investments remain consistent with its mission and values.

## ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA OF FINANCE

In response to global economic difficulties, the LWF has implemented various measures over the past six years in order to improve its

financial management practices. The following significant changes have been undertaken:

- **Framework for Financial Systems:** The LWF strategy has emphasized the necessity of robust financial systems, providing the foundation for addressing financial challenges effectively.
- **Continuous Improvement of Financial Systems:** Regular reviews and improvements of financial systems have been set up to ensure the provision of timely and accurate reporting as well as convenient access to financial data.
- **Development of Modern Financial Workflows:** The LWF has responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by developing contemporary financial systems and workflows.
- **Establishment of Resource Mobilization resources:** In order to secure funding for traditionally challenging areas and encourage contributions from member churches, resource mobilization resources were established across LWF departments.
- **Identification of New Funding Streams:** Particularly in relation to the LWF's humanitarian work, efforts have been made to identify new sources of funding.
- **Long-Term Sustainability Direction:** A comprehensive sustainability direction has been established to address income generation, sustainable programming, treasury management, cost management, and opportunities to increase unrestricted funds.
- **Policy on Unrestricted Reserves:** To ensure long-term financial stability, a policy on unrestricted reserves has been adopted, supporting growth while maintaining stability.
- **Close monitoring of exchange rates and taking remedial measures** are being ensured in order to avoid high losses whenever some currencies face high fluctuations.

- **Development of Risk Management Framework:** The LWF has progressively developed a risk management framework to mitigate operational risks, including those associated with cash flow concerning the AVH.
- **Risk mitigation – Targeted risk reviews and risk monitoring** have been carried out on a continuing basis, particularly in relation to the AVH.
- **Strengthening of Internal Controls:** Internal controls have been reinforced to provide reasonable assurance in the identification and resolution of significant risks.
- **Addition of Staff Capacities:** In order to enhance financial oversight, staff capacities have been expanded, particularly in critical areas such as financial controls for humanitarian programs.

Through these measures, the LWF has demonstrated its proactive approach to addressing financial challenges and ensuring the organization's financial stability and sustainability.

## FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude for the unwavering dedication of the LWF Council, committees, and of the staff and its leadership over the past six years in upholding financial stability. The communion office leadership ensured that the LWF maintained a balanced budget and that it established sufficient cash reserves to ensure uninterrupted operations. Their commitment to transparency, consistent policy application, regulatory compliance, and ethical behavior align harmoniously with the vision and values of the LWF.

Through the systematic, disciplined, and proactive approach of the Communion Office leadership team and the Communion Office staff, the LWF has effectively managed significant risks, including potential currency risks, income fluctuations and high operational costs. Their timely attention to critical issues

and thoughtful strategic communication on financial matters have been exemplary. Your diligent stewardship of financial resources and prudent management of expenditures has been extremely useful. While challenges lie ahead, particularly in the area of sustainability, the LWF has positioned itself well to address these challenges with forthrightness and comprehensiveness.

I extend my gratitude to the spirit of collaboration demonstrated throughout these years, as well as the commitment and active participation of our member churches. Your kind support has enabled the LWF to meet its goals during this period.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the great support that I received from the Finance Committee. It has been an honor to serve as the chair of the Finance Committee for the LWF Council. May God continue to bless this communion of churches generously as we strive toward living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

*Oberkirchenrat Olaf Johannes Mirgeler,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern  
Germany, served as chairperson of the LWF  
Committee for Finance, 2017-2023.*



# ACCEPTANCE SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT

## HENRIK STUBKJÆR

It is with great humility and gratitude that I receive the call as president of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

I would like to say that these past days in Kraków have been a great joy and a deep experience of living communion among us.

Together we have reflected on the theme “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” We have come together from so many different churches from many different parts of the world, and I am so encouraged by seeing that we are indeed one communion, with one faith. And I have definitely felt a lot of spirit and a lot of hope for the future.

Thank you for the election. It is a great privilege to be able to serve as president of the LWF.

I believe that work in the coming years shall continue to be based on the basic four pillars LWF was founded on in the wake of the Second World War, namely, to work for the needy and oppressed, common initiatives in mission, joint efforts in theology and a common response to the ecumenical challenges.

My vision for LWF is, that we gain added value by working together as a communion striving to put Christian faith into action through humanitarian and development work, advocacy, shared witness, and dialogue.

To be Lutheran has always been to be contextualized. And therefore, our communion reflects a great diversity. I won't see it as a problem – rather I would see it as a sign on how God through his Son Jesus Christ is

nurturing us as member churches – so that we are able to preach the gospel in all our different contexts in a relevant way. Therefore, I will see it as my responsibility to secure diversity and that all voices will be heard.

Our diversity is – as former General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge expresses it: “a sign that the Triune God is indeed alive and powerful!”

At the same time the world is becoming more polarized, and changes are being made in our daily life. But as Pope Francis said to us, who were part of a joint group from Caritas and LWF World Service that came to the Vatican to sign an agreement of more joint cooperation involving local churches: “You should beware, that it is in times of changes the Holy Spirit has greatest opportunity changing our minds.” In that sentence there is hope. We as Christian churches must be the sign of hope in the midst of an often-hopeless world.

I am looking forward to working together with you General Secretary Anne Burghardt and our competent and dedicated Communion Office in Geneva, and all staff and volunteers all over the world and I will do my best to secure an open and transparent relation between governance and the Communion Office.

I see it as the responsibilities for the incoming Council and President, loyal and with dedication to implement the decisions made by this assembly.

And to implement it in a way that underlines LWF's holistic mission, where proclamation, diakonia and prophetic presence in society are interlinked.



LWF President-elect Bishop Henrik Stubkjær.



Let me end by thanking all Nordic Evangelical Lutheran churches for nominating me to this position and thanks to the entire Assembly for the confidence you have shown in me.

I promise to be the servant of the entire communion. Thanks for your prayers, they will be needed.

And may God bless all of us today and in the days to come!

*LWF President-elect, Henrik Stubkjær,  
Bishop of Viborg, Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in Denmark.*



# ECUMENICAL SESSION

LWF's collaboration with Christian World Communions was highlighted during a special session on the "Common Word" with Catholics and a panel discussion on the meaning of justification in today's contexts.





Lutherans and Catholics acknowledge justification as a sacramental reality, conferred in baptism.

# COMMON WORD

## THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION (LWF) AND THE DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY (DPCU), VATICAN

### SECTION 1

In the midst of a world that suffers from war and violence of many kinds, and from polarities dividing the human family, our commitment to the unity of the church intensifies. The ecumenical impulse witnesses to God's Spirit reconciling humanity and all creation. Today, in this celebration, we commemorate "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed). With gratitude, we recall the sacramental foundation of our unity and renew our faith in the Triune God.

The ancient Christian Creed of Nicaea, whose 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary we will celebrate in 2025, creates an ecumenical bond that has its center in Christ. As early as 1965, before the end of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics and Lutherans in the United States could testify together: "The confession that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son, God of God, continues to assure us that we are in fact redeemed, for only he who is God can redeem us" (*The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church. Summary Statement*, Baltimore, July 7, 1965).

### SECTION 2

In baptism, God justifies. In the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), Lutherans and Catholics confess: "By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works (JDDJ §15). Catholics and Lutherans rejoice in the consensus achieved on justification. Liberated by grace,

forgiven, we are bound by baptism and faith, yet we also know of our "history of separation, which we cannot undo, but which can become part of our history of reconciliation" (cf. Preface to the Italian translation of the JDDJ, 3 January 2021).

The existential perception of the already existing unity, despite differences between Lutherans and Catholics, nourishes the longing for full visible unity. The international Catholic-Lutheran dialogue was able to contribute its part to the history of reconciliation, especially with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. "How does a person enter into salvation?" – this crucial question, which led to the division of Western Christianity in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, found a common answer in 1999: "Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom 3:23-25; Acts 13:39; Lk 18:14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3:10-14). It is acceptance into communion with God: already now, but then fully in God's coming kingdom (Rom 5:1f). It unites with Christ and with his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5). It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body (Rom 8:1f, 9f; 1 Cor 12:12f). All this is from God alone, for Christ's sake, by grace, through faith in 'the gospel of God's Son' (Rom 1:1-3)" (JDDJ §11).

Lutherans and Catholics acknowledge justification as a sacramental reality, conferred in baptism. As sacramental reality, justification is the certainty of God's promise and the one hope in God's continuous action "to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). We acknowledge that the gospel and church are bound together. "On the one hand the church lives from the gospel; on



ONE BODY  
ONE SPIRIT  
ONE HOPE

**LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt (right) and Kurt Cardinal Koch, Prefect of the Vatican's DPCU.**



The Common Word was read in conjunction with morning worship on the final day of the Assembly.

the other the gospel sounds forth in the church and summons into the community of the church” (*Church and Justification*, §170).

### SECTION 3

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* notes that “there are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification” (§43). Differing theological thought structures led to misunderstanding and conflict and finally division in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The excommunication of Martin Luther is still a stumbling block for some today. It maintains its place in confessional memory, even though the excommunication has long since lost its immediate effect with the death of the reformer and Lutherans are not enemies or strangers for Catholics, but

brothers and sisters, with whom Catholics know themselves to be united through baptism and through “many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself” (*Unitatis redintegratio* 3). Similarly, the fact that Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessional writings refer to the papacy as “anti-Christ” is a stumbling block even though today the Lutheran World Federation does not support that view. Behind these two examples is ultimately the question of the Petrine ministry and the question of the mystery of the church, its unity and uniqueness. In the continuation of the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, it therefore requires our special attention.

We are also painfully aware that the “past,” from the time of confessional “against each other,” can also directly or indirectly influence the “today” of our ecumenical “togetherness.”

Yet, even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luther's excommunication and the Lutheran anti-Christ statements did not prevent encounter, notably the Augsburg Confession in 1530. Today, differentiating consensus allows Lutherans and Catholics to discern areas of consensus where our predecessors only saw insurmountable oppositions. We are able to recognize that the journey toward full communion is far greater than the contingencies of a particular epoch.

## SECTION 4

The journey from conflict to communion led to the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Augsburg, 1999) and to the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation (Lund, 2016). As we continue on this journey, we look ahead to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. This anniversary can encourage us to rediscover this confession in its original intention: "The express purpose of the Augsburg Confession is to bear witness to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" (*All Under One Christ*, §10).

At the time of its writing, ecclesial unity was probably endangered, but ecclesial separation was not yet finally accomplished. As a "pre-confessional" witness to the unity of the church, the Augsburg Confession is therefore not only of historical interest; rather, it holds an ecumenical potential of lasting relevance. Its profound intention was "to maintain the unity of the church" and "witness to the

truth of the gospel in its own time" (*All Under One Christ*, §27). A common reflection could lead to another "milestone" on the way from conflict to communion, comparable to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

Pope Francis explicitly encouraged such a "shared reflection" when he received a delegation from the Lutheran World Federation in Rome on June 25, 2021, the commemoration of the Augsburg Confession. In his address, he described ecumenism as a "journey of grace": Ecumenism "depends not on human negotiations and agreements, but on the grace of God, which purifies memories and hearts, overcomes attitudes of inflexibility and directs toward renewed communion. (. . .) In this light, I would like to encourage all those engaged in the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue to persevere with confidence, in constant prayer, in the exercise of mutual charity, and in passionate efforts to achieve greater unity between the different members of the body of Christ."

Through jointly rediscovering the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time, Catholics and Lutherans recall the fifth Ecumenical Imperative to "witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world" (*From Conflict to Communion*, §243).

*LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt and DPCU Prefect Kurt Cardinal Koch jointly presented the Common Word on 19 September 2023.*

# PANEL DISCUSSION

## PRESENTATIONS BY JDDJ SIGNATORIES

### THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE – CATHOLIC CHURCH

#### KURT CARDINAL KOCH

As a brief introduction to the ecumenical conversation that follows, I will focus my reflections on three perspectives:

1. The doctrine on the justification of the sinner by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ is what Martin Luther called that article in which "nothing can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth fall or whatever is transitory passed away" (Smalcald Articles, 2<sup>nd</sup> part, art. 1).

The disputes over this doctrine found expression both in the Lutheran confessions and in the decrees of the Council of Trent in mutual doctrinal condemnations which have had a binding force and thus also a church-dividing effect right up to the present day. However, with the Joint Declaration on Fundamental Questions of the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg in 1999, a far-reaching consensus, which is no longer affected by the Lutheran and Catholic doctrinal condemnations, was found on this central doctrine of faith, which formed the core of theological controversies in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and became one of the main reasons for the division in the Church in the West. This can be considered an important milestone in the dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans and

in the broader ecumenical movement, for which I am very grateful.

The term "justification" has become, or possibly always was foreign in today's awareness of faith [*Glaubensbewusstsein*], not only in the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the message of what was expressed has not only not lost its relevance, but has become increasingly urgent. For the message that the human being does not have to create his own dignity and identity, nor can he do so, but that it is given to him by God in grace, as the "apple of his eye", is liberating information for today's largely merciless society. The question of how God's grace and the free will of the human being go together is a question that the Catholic Church still accentuates differently today. However, when I observe the theological discussions in the Reformation communities, for example on topics such as justification and justice and justification and sanctification, I have to conclude that these communities are also asking this question more openly today.

2. The Joint Declaration on fundamental questions concerning the doctrine of justification is also of ongoing importance for me because it shows the intimacy between the restoration of the unity of the Church and the truth of the faith. And the ecumenical effort to restore must be dedicated to the unity of the Church as that community which lives in fidelity to the Gospel and the apostolic faith. Ecumenism is a profound matter of faith and should not be interpreted as a political problem that can be resolved through compromise. Ultimately, the unity of the Church can never be anything other than unity in the apostolic faith, specifically in the faith that each individual is baptized into and which is given and entrusted to every new member of the Body of Christ in baptism.

3. This brings me to the third perspective: “Justification” is first and foremost not a doctrine but an event, more precisely, an event of salvation. For justification takes place in the sacrament of baptism. If the decisive salvific event is sacramentally mediated, then the category of sacramentality cannot continue to stand between us, and even more so, theological consensus should also be possible. Only when based on this depth of faith are baptism and its mutual recognition the lasting foundation of ecumenical endeavors. Christian ecumenism is always baptismal ecumenism.

By considering these three perspectives, we will be able to move towards a positive future in dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation and with all the churches and communions that have emerged from the Reformation.

*Kurt Cardinal Koch is Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity at the Vatican.*

## WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF JUSTIFICATION TODAY? – THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

ANNE BURGHARDT

For Lutherans, justification by grace through faith alone is the main interpretative principle, the lens through which we understand and live our Christian faith. The Augsburg Confession, one of the confessional writings ascribed to by all LWF member churches, talks about justification in the 4<sup>th</sup> article, saying: “...human beings cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith.” The central place of justification in Lutheran theology is well captured in the famous phrase, “Justification is the article by which the church stands and falls”, a formulation which actually stems from the 17<sup>th</sup> century but summarizes in fact very authentically Luther’s idea about the



The ecumenical panel was an opportunity for Assembly participants to hear about the shared journey of the LWF and its partners toward Christian unity.

importance of justification by grace through faith. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), in its Annex, states that “The doctrine of justification is measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion” (§ Annex 3).

In the history of Lutheran theology, there have been many disputes about what justification actually means. Certainly among the first and most popular, the so-called forensic interpretation – the sinner is pronounced righteous, as in a court of law – has continued to shape Lutheran thought in various forms throughout the centuries. At the same time, there have always been discussions about how it relates to the so-called effective side of justification: a human being not just declared righteous, but made righteous. The explanation of the message of justification was and is thus connected with the demanding task of always holding two things together, always thinking together two sides of the same coin: that the human being is “passive” in the event of justification, recipient of God’s grace and not participating or contributing to it in any way, but, at the same time, being justified by God is an event that gives new life, renews the human

being and flow forth in action. As Luther put it so organically: a “good tree bears good fruits”. It cannot do otherwise!

The task is thus always before us, who come from the Lutheran tradition, to keep the two seemingly contradicting sentences from Luther’s *On the Freedom of a Christian* simultaneously in mind: “A Christian is a free lord of all, and subject to none” and “A Christian is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone.” By holding these together, we affirm that we have been liberated by God’s grace, freed from that inward, self-centered focus, and at the same time liberated to serve our neighbor. Initially, through intense dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, we were both able to recognize a consensus deeper than interpretations that divided us in the past. The JDDJ and subsequently the association statements have helped us all deepen our understanding of justification and of our own faith traditions, calling us to reflect, as the Methodist do, on the dimension of sanctification, and as the Reformed do, on the need to seek justice.



**The JDDJ and its association statements have helped in deepening the understanding of justification and the respective faith traditions.**

The Notre Dame Consultation Statement, states that “to proclaim God’s grace in our time requires connecting the distinct horizons of justification in biblical times with contemporary perspectives. Language from our traditions about the human person before God, grace and sin, forgiveness and righteousness, must come alive for people today.” Here is the challenge, the five world communions who have associated with the JDDJ engage today: translating justification for our time and doing so together.

Indeed, many struggle these days with the notion of “justification”. In many contexts, people find this notion difficult to comprehend due to its legalistic interpretation or simply because the existential crisis today is different than it was in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Although the term ‘justification’ itself has become strange to many, the actual need for justification by grace is acute, perhaps even more so today than in other times. Today, there is immense pressure in some parts of the world to be successful at any price. It is as if “salvation” is defined in terms of wealth or social status. People seek to “earn” this “salvation”, even spiritually by achieving a “peace of mind” through their own effort. In other places, a theology of works returns in force, preached by those proclaiming prosperity gospel, or those who take a fundamentalist approach to Scripture and use the Bible as a weapon. These misleading theologies present long “to-do” lists to believers, which need to be “fulfilled” in order to prove that one has earned God’s grace and benevolence.

We also find ourselves in an increasingly ungracious world, less and less willing to forgive and to reconcile. Yet, it is into this broken and divided world that God enters and offers hope in Jesus Christ. Isn’t this what the message of justification is about: God reconciling the world to God and liberating human beings, liberating us, to engage in God’s reconciling action? Isn’t this the message of Ephesians 4 that we have studied these days: One Body, One Spirit, One Hope? The message of justification is the message of reconciliation: called to be ministers of reconciliation.

At the portal of Westminster Abbey in London, where a special liturgy was held to commemorate 500 years of Reformation and

the Anglican affirmation of the JDDJ, there stand four personifications next to each other: truth, justice, mercy, and peace. They belong together and should always be held together. My hope and prayer is that all Christian World Communions who have signed the JDDJ will continue to implement the Notre Dame Consultation Statement, exploring how to share the message of justification in today’s world and proclaiming loudly and courageously the Good News of God’s free and liberating grace in Jesus Christ.

*Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt is LWF General Secretary.*

## WHAT DOES JUSTIFICATION MEAN FOR THE WORLD TODAY FROM A METHODIST PERSPECTIVE? – WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL

IVAN M. ABRAHAMS

We join together under the theme *One Body, One Spirit, One Hope*. An appropriate theme considering we meet in a country with a rich tradition of unity. A country which fostered peaceful coexistence and even cooperation between different faiths and initiated steps toward unification between different Reformation denominations from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (1570 – the Sandomierz Agreement, and 1573 – the act of Warsaw Confederation) (ECACP 2023:7 & 14). We meet in a time where there are many challenges facing not only the Church but the world. Challenges such as disease, war, rising prices, the anticipated shortage of electricity, climate change, and migration to name but a few (ECACP 2023:19). Considering these challenges, I have been asked to be part of this panel to present on the topic of: What does justification mean for the world today from a Methodist perspective?

## LOOKING BACK

As we are all aware, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) is a historic agreement, signed by Lutherans and Catholics on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg Germany, resolving divisions on the “basic truths” of salvation as a free gift from God, subsequently also signed by the World Methodist Council, the Anglican Consultative Council and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. As the JDDJ itself says, “It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification.” (JDDJ para. 5) but it is a “decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church.” (JDDJ paras. 44, 5.). This step toward unity is what we celebrate.

## METHODIST CONTRIBUTION

The 2010 Methodist Church of Southern Africa’s Conference theme was “An invitation to a Round Table”. This theme reminded us that we all have an equal say and contribution to make. Our theology, our understanding, and the Body of Christ will not be complete without all voices and perspectives being heard (MCSA 2011:6). We cannot be the *One Body* unless all parts make their contribution (1 Cor 12:12-26). That being said - What is our unique Methodist contribution on the doctrine of justification that we bring to the table as a gift to share with the world?

## WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

The first thing we must understand is that John Wesley, who, among others, was the founder of the Methodist Movement, was not a systematic theologian. Wesley’s theology was always rooted in his experience and understanding of what God was doing in the moment. Wesley responded and reevaluated his theological convictions in response to his experience and reflection on his spiritual life and ministry (Maddox 1994:47). Wesley was deeply rooted in the traditions of especially, the early church, both western and eastern, but remained open

to change based on his experience of the work of God in the life of the Methodist Movement. Methodism therefore brings to the table an ability to adapt, grow and transform our theological understanding in response to what God is doing.

## CATHOLIC SPIRIT

Wesley in his sermon *The Catholic Spirit* is at pains to remind us that we are called to love God and love neighbor. That even though we may have different opinions or modes of worship, our affection should be one of unity (Wesley). Methodists therefore offer the understanding that we are not called to agree on everything, but rather to take each other’s hand and walk this Christ following journey together as we live lives of love toward God and neighbor. As we embrace this truth of our unity in Christ, we journey together in *One Spirit*.

## THE ROLE OF FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

Methodists affirm that faith plays a central role in justification. Our belief aligns with Ephesians 2:8-9: that salvation is by grace not works, our Methodist perspective also emphasises the importance of good works in the life of a justified believer. As James 2:17 reminds us, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” While good works do not merit justification, they are the natural response of a transformed heart, evidence of our faith, and a means to demonstrate God’s love to the world.

## LOVE IN ACTION

Wesley understood that orthodoxy and praxis go hand in hand. Long before Liberation Theology became fashionable Methodists understood that through our actions, we had to show the poor that God loves them (Gutiérrez 2015:6). Thus, as Methodists our understanding of justification cannot merely remain a theory or a personal experience

but must result in a changed life, producing works in keeping with repentance (Mt 3:8). Justification is not an isolated event, disconnected from all of life but is part of the experience of Salvation. Salvation includes, *inter alia*, justification and sanctification. One cannot talk of justification without speaking of sanctification (Willimon 2002:228). Salvation is synergistic since it is a cooperative endeavour between God and human beings. God extends grace but humans must respond (Collins 2007:15). Justification is what God does for us, Sanctification is what God does in us (Collins 2007:170).

## THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

As we continue to respond and cooperate with God's Grace we are transformed through the process of Sanctification. The process of sanctification leads to "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctification". This, for Wesley, is where we act from a place of perfect love toward God and others. For Methodists, Salvation includes justification but is not a momentary event but a transformative journey, a journey toward Holiness or Christian Perfection. Wesley's embrace of grace and holiness, or in theological terms: *co-operant grace, responsible grace and free grace*, holds together both the Catholic and Protestant understanding of salvation (Collins 2007:165).

## SOCIAL HOLINESS

Wesley was unequivocal that there is no holiness but Social Holiness. We are called to love neighbor and not live secluded lives of piety (Mt 25:31-46). As an African the understanding of community is critical to my life view. *Ubuntu* is derived from the Nguni phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means that a person is a person through other persons (Khoza 2011:439). Thus, I am because we are. Who I am and what I do affects your humanity and similarly my life impacts yours. We are all connected.

## LOOKING FORWARD

So where do we go from here? We are coming up to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the JDDJ. Will it remain a doctrine, will it remain a theological, intellectual assent or will it become a vehicle for social transformation? As was mentioned earlier the world and the church are facing struggles. We profess One Body yet there is economic disparity within the Body. We profess unity of Spirit and doctrine, but debts of the poor remain unforgiven. If one part of the Body suffers all suffer (1 Cor 12). Poverty is multifaceted and people caught in systemic poverty lack opportunity (Bonino 2002:181). Can we say we share *One Hope* when people have no opportunities. Our Methodist contribution is clear, and we extend an invitation "give me your hand" (c.f. 2 Kings 10:15 and Wesley *The Catholic Spirit*). Let us move forward as *One Body, in One Spirit, with One Hope*, despite some areas of difference, so that we can *work* towards social transformation. As we live out our doctrine of debts forgiven (justification) and oppose all that holds people in bondage (liberation) we can offer this hurting world the *One Hope* of God's transforming love.

*Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams is General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.*

## WHAT DOES JUSTIFICATION MEAN TODAY? – ANGLICAN COMMUNION

### ANTHONY POGGO

We meet under the inspiring theme One Body, One Spirit, One Hope. It captures who we are by the grace of God. We can say we are One Body because we are Justified.

The Church in Ephesus knew their calling was to live in Hope, "in One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all" (Eph 4:5-6), and "by grace you have been saved through

faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). And as St Paul told the Christians in Rome: ‘In hope we were saved’. (Rom 8:24)

We are justified by faith in Christ and called to be his Body. We receive the Holy Spirit so that we may live Christ’s risen life. Christ the justifier brings us to the Father and gives us a hope that nothing can quench. This is the foundation of Christian unity for which all Christians pray.

Justification is the amazing grace of God, which the world needs as much today as it has ever needed it.

In 1999 the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church signed the historic agreement on the doctrine of justification by faith. The Joint Declaration on Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) has done so much to heal our historic wounds and has a vision that inspires. Other Christian World Communions have joined the vision of the JDDJ, and I am proud that the Anglican Communion has done so.

Justification means that we can claim together and with confidence that we have the same Baptism into Christ. We are able to say clearly that we stand together as justified by Christ, in hope, and in the Spirit.

We can walk together in discipleship and obedience, on the way of sanctification and holiness, persevering in hope until Christ brings the whole creation to the Father.

The JDDJ says, “God equips and calls us to good works. This echoes the Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission.

‘The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’

Our Mission springs out of our Justification by faith in Christ. The JDDJ says: “Justification and renewal are joined in Christ, who is present in faith.” In the Anglican Communion, we call this renewal *Discipleship*. Discipleship is the whole journey of faith and formation in the gospel, and as Anglicans we are committed to a season of intentional discipleship, or what JDDJ calls ‘the fruits’ of justification.

Lutherans and Anglicans have a common concern in our Assemblies, Councils and Conferences, for the nurturing and growing of the fruits of justification, fruits which Anglicans see in the Five Marks of Mission, and which Lutherans live out in World Service, Theology, Mission and Justice, and the whole work of this Assembly.

Christian unity matters, and justification drives us to be truly one. The JDDJ group said at Notre Dame: “We are convinced of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform us and the world and we are committed to witness more and effectively together to the salvation given to us in Christ.”

And in your statement *From Conflict to Communion* in 2016 you said we “should always *begin* from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division, *in order to strengthen what is held in common*, even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.”

I rejoice that Anglicans and Lutherans are able to speak so clearly together about God’s grace. I pray that our churches may extend their common mission, and deepen our witness to the God who justifies. I pray for all those who share the JDDJ vision of justification: and in particular I rejoice to see God’s love at work among you, my Lutheran sisters and brothers in the Lord.

*Bishop Anthony Poggo is Secretary General of the Anglican Communion.*

# WHAT DOES JUSTIFICATION MEAN FOR THE WORLD TODAY? – A REFORMED REFLECTION – WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

## HANNS LESSING

The World Alliance / Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) took almost 20 years to associate with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This reluctance was motivated by many factors, but in the internal debate, one reason was key: Many churches in the Global South felt deeply uncomfortable with the fact that the original declaration did not explore the relation between justification and justice. They were concerned that the emphasis on justification would devalue the prophetic witness of the church.

Therefore, the WCRC states in the Letter of Association to the Joint Declaration: We wish to underscore the integral relation between justification and justice. [...] The doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression and violence in today's world. Justification is both a "declaring righteous" and a "setting right." [...] God has entered into covenant with all of creation (Gen. 9:8-12), and God's covenant of grace intends a "setting right" that is world-embracing—including even political, economic and ecological realities. All of God's covenantal acts are acts of justification and justice.

This morning, I want to focus on prophecy and ask: How can we embrace God's justifying grace in the justice pronouncements of prophets that often threaten condemnation? I will explore this question in dialogue with a beautiful interpretation of the book of Jona by the Jewish theologian and philosopher Gershom Scholem (On Jonah and the Concept of Justice, 1919).

According to Scholem's interpretation, God teaches Jona what it means to be a prophet. This teaching is necessary because Jona fundamentally misunderstands his role. For Jona, prophetism is essentially a form of politics. The prophet has power. If he pronounces God's judgement, the threat of punishment must be real to scare people into godly behavior. In Pauline's terms, this is prophecy according to the law.

What would prophecy by grace alone look like? For Scholem, it is significant that, in the book of Jona, God defers from executing judgment out of compassion for the many people in the city. And this deferment changes everything. The condemning judgement becomes an exchange of questions. The king of Ninive remembers God's mercy and asks: "Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." And God indeed responds in compassion and asks: "Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

In Scholem's interpretation, this deferment of the execution reveals the special character of God's justice: "Justice is the idea of the historical annihilation of divine judgment, and just is that deed which neutralizes divine judgment upon it." Politics and the law are all about the execution of power. On the other hand, God's justice does not condemn but raises a question by putting a decisive question mark on how we as human beings organize our affairs. This question challenges us but, at the same time, opens what Scholem calls messianic time.

What does this story mean for the understanding of justification in our world today? Many of us can identify with Jonah much too well. We live in a scandalous world that requires decisive and imminent action. This untenable situation gives the prophets among us substantial moral authority. And we hope this authority can translate into real power to transform the world.



**Representatives of LWF's ecumenical partners who participated in the panel discussion. During the Assembly, they delivered greetings on behalf of their respective organizations.**

But at the same time, we have to realize that this authority is fiercely rejected by many. We experience a profound breakdown of communication. When prophets speak, many people can't receive God's promise of life but only hear the judgment and reject it as an infringement of their freedom. As churches, we have to understand that prophecy can produce its own rejection. This calls for a critical assessment of language and approach to prophecy. The book of Jonah invites us to grow from a prophecy of the law towards a prophecy of grace. Guided by Gershom Scholem, we can identify four different learnings:

God calls us to be prophets. Like Jonah, we must not turn away from the duty to confront the wickedness of the world. Where man-made evils threaten the life and well-being of God's creation, the church has to proclaim God's justice in word and deed.

But, like Jonah, we need to learn to pronounce God's justice as a question. God defers the judgement to open a space for constructive engagement. In following God's example, we have the chance to overcome divisions and discern together.



This opening of the space can inspire processes of repentance. The people of Ninive and their king did not hear God's judgement as condemnation but as a liberating question that allowed them to respond with fundamental change.

And finally, the book of Jonah puts our attention to God's justification of victims and vulnerable people. Particular moving is God's care for the animals.

During this assembly, we have visited Auschwitz and Birkenau. After the war, many

Christians responded to this experience with prophecies of grace: "War is Contrary to the Will of God," proclaimed the World Council of Churches in 1948. Churches intensely engaged in witness for peace and justice. In many parts of the world, we are currently losing this spirit. Today, we urgently need a rekindling of this spirit that proclaims God's justifying grace that declares us righteous and sets us right.

*Rev. Dr Hanns Lessing is Acting General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.*

# GREETINGS

The Assembly received official greetings from the host church and city, and from representatives of LWF's ecumenical partners and from humanitarian and development partners.





Mrs. Mariliah JAGTER  
Executive Director of the Indonesian Lutheran Church

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Rev. Freddy CHOQUE RONDO  
Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

Mr. Shumain SOEAN  
Executive Director of the Indonesian Lutheran Church

Being churches in communion is a gift and a task.

# GREETINGS TO THE ASSEMBLY

EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG  
CONFESSION IN POLAND

CITY OF KRAKÓW

## ECUMENICAL GREETINGS

- Anglican Communion
- Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe
- Conference of European Churches
- Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Global Christian Forum
- Mennonite World Conference
- Pentecostal World Fellowship
- Roman Catholic Church
- World Communion of Reformed Churches
- World Council of Churches
- World Methodist Council

## HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- ACT Alliance
- Caritas Internationalis
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



# GREETINGS

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN POLAND

### JERZY SAMIEC

At last! We have been preparing for many years to issue an invitation and then to hold the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). So here we go.

When, as Polish Lutherans, we extended the invitation, we were living in a different world. A lot has changed in those few years. We learned humility when the COVID-19 pandemic took over the world, locking us in our homes and countries. We also suffered many losses. Many people died. Some of them would certainly be here with us today. This situation taught us humility. We were reminded that not everything depends on us and when planning we are to pray: “Lord, we will do something as long as you allow.”

There was a time when we asked ourselves whether it would be possible to hold the Assembly in 2023 because of the pandemic. Today it seems obvious, in 2021 it was a leap of faith.

For us, the outbreak of the war was an equally painful experience. Our neighbors in Ukraine were brutally attacked by Russia. Wherever war happens it brings death, pain, violence. Let us remember in our prayers everyone around the world experiencing the catastrophe of wars.

Thank you again for choosing Poland and Kraków as the venue for the Thirteenth Assembly. This is a great reason for us to rejoice. I am often asked how such a small church — the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP) — will cope with such a big challenge.

First of all, we do not feel like a small church. Yes, there are only or as many as 63,000 of us. There used to be more, but the geopolitical situation caused most of them to leave for our western border. Now, however, about 300 people join us every year, choosing the Evangelical Lutheran church as their community of faith.

Second, we are not a small church. We are a strong community whose power comes from the preaching of the gospel and the involvement of competent and wise people. For many years we have been guided by the slogan: “Free in Christ we change the world.”

Third, the organization of the Assembly does not rest only on the shoulders of the local church. In fact, most of the organizational and conceptual work has been done by international groups and the LWF office in Geneva.

For the enormous amount of work you have done, I thank you now on behalf of our church.

I also thank all our partners and friends from all parts of the world. For the prayers, for spiritual, emotional and substantive support. To the German National Committee of the LWF, which I want to thank specifically for the joint preparation of several projects carried out around the Assembly and for financial support. Without it, there are many things we as a host church could not have done.

I thank all of you.

Another question I am being asked from various sides is what we expect from the LWF Assembly.



Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec.



Assembly participants on a walking tour of Kraków Old Town.

When inviting the Assembly to Poland, I said that I expected important topics that affect people living in different parts of the world to be addressed, and that bold decisions and directions for the development of world Lutheranism would be worked out.

The theme chosen for the Assembly is: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” I am very grateful for this choice, because I am convinced that it makes it possible to address the most important issues that affect all regions of the world.

Our task is not only to discuss them, but to find answers to them: how we as Christians, as Lutherans, can deal with them. Christ said that we are the salt of the earth. A pinch of it is enough to give flavor to a dish. We should not close ourselves in our enclaves, but we are to go out to our societies with the gospel and exert influence to achieve positive change.

In Lutheranism, we emphasize the responsibility we carry: for our lives, our relationship with the Savior, and our environment, i.e. homelands, continents and the global community.

So, I wish for all of us that we know how to take on difficult topics, and that we know how to come up with wise solutions that will show directions but also give a “taste of salt” to our societies.

Ahead of us are several days filled with joyful services, Bible studies, lectures but also voting and elections. An important event will also be a visit to the former concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The place will bring many difficult reflections and perhaps extreme emotions.

Man brought this fate to man. But if you take a good look, you can find there, in addition to the immensity of suffering, lights of hope. I was extremely impressed by the former prisoners and their testimonies and efforts to reconcile with the perpetrators. You will meet one of them and hear about hope.

We are also very pleased that you have accepted the invitation to our parishes. Some will also visit the parishes of our sister churches of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I can talk a lot about our

church but on Sunday you will be in it and you will experience a small part of it yourself.

And finally. One Body, One Spirit and One Hope.

One Body. We are all the body of Christ, equally loved and equally important. And it is worth remembering this. It doesn't matter if your church numbers several millions or just a few hundred people, we are equally important to the Savior.

One Spirit. We can't cope alone with what we encounter in the world. We won't be able to cope, but Christ said he will send the Spirit of Truth, who will be our Guide, Defender, Comforter.

Our task is to pray and listen to God, who tells us what to do.

We are to obey the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will not leave us idle and will show us ways and possibilities. Christians cannot be idle. God calls us to action, all who confess Christ, regardless of denomination.

And finally, One Hope. With what hope will we leave Kraków? How will we convey hope to our communities? What hope will we pass to the world as Lutherans?

Let's pass on what we hold most precious: The gospel of Jesus, who has reconciled us with God and who has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. With this mandate, we will not stand indifferent to the challenges of everyday life.

I hope that we will leave Kraków full of energy, new inspiration and, above all, full of hope.

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope!

Free in Christ, let us change the world!

I wish you a good time.

*Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec is head of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.*

# CITY OF KRAKÓW

## ANNA KORFEL-JASIŃSKA

On behalf of the Mayor of the City of Kraków, as host of the place where the global Lutheran communion is meeting, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the distinguished participants in this year's Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation. We are honored that our city was chosen for this international gathering. It is always a great pleasure to host people coming here from all over the world. By the way, it is something we have made our specialty of since the so-called Kraków Convention in 1364, when European monarchs and numerous princes met at the Wawel Royal Castle.

This is a great honor for Kraków, given that the current Assembly is only the second ever meeting of the highest decision-making body of the Lutheran World Federation in Central

and Eastern Europe, and almost 40 years have passed since the previous one. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland — one of the Federation's founding members — has a special significance for our city, as proven by the location of the [Lutheran] parish in Kraków i.e. in the heart of the historic metropolis, on the Royal Route.

I hope that the days of the Assembly will pass in an excellent atmosphere for the faithful and will be extremely fruitful on every level. I am happy that today, in celebration of the joy of the meeting, I can wish everyone a good stay in Kraków and, of course: enjoy the food!

*Ms Anna Korfel-Jasińska is Deputy Mayor of the City of Kraków.*





Ms Anna Korfel-Jasińska.

# ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

## ANGLICAN COMMUNION

### ANTHONY POGGO

It is my great pleasure to bring greetings to The Lutheran World Federation Assembly from the churches of the Anglican Communion, and from the Anglican Consultative Council. Anglicans pray for you, just as you pray for us. I pray that God will continue to bless you in your ministry and service, and in all that you do for God's glory and for the sake of the world Christ came to save. Thank you for your invitation to join you in Kraków. I rejoice in your fellowship.

You have chosen the theme: "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." The unity of Christians is found in answering God's call to us – to be truly One Body, inspired by the same Spirit, and enlivened with the same hope in Christ.

I thank God for your commitment to the unity of Christians and your solidarity with the Anglican Communion. In particular I am grateful that the LWF was represented at the recent Anglican Communion meetings. The Lambeth Conference in 2022 was enriched by a strong Lutheran team — Bishop Tor Jørgensen, Bishop Matti Repo, Bishop Jan Otto Myrseth, Bishop Johan Dalman, General Secretary Anne Burghardt, and Dr Dirk Lange. Dr Lange also came to the Anglican Consultative Council in 2023.

Anglicans and Lutherans are bound by many years of close friendship. At the international level we have achieved so much in our theological dialogue, and our Communion have worked through the historic divisions that kept us apart for so long and ignorant of the riches of faith we now find and value in each other.

We rejoice in our full communion agreements, in the Porvoo Communion, and in the USA and Canada. Communion is being lived so well that this year the Anglican Church of Canada's

43<sup>rd</sup> General Synod was held jointly with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada's Assembly. We pray that more such agreements of communion will come into being, as we work for greater unity between our two families of churches, and together deepen our experience of the *koinonia* that is God's gift and call.

Our formal theological dialogue has worked so well over the decades that now we are able to focus on the living out of our shared faith and engaging in common mission. The Anglican–Lutheran International Commission on Unity and Mission (ALICUM) is currently engaged in setting up pairs of leaders in different parts of the world, to foster and deepen the ways in which our two families engage together locally.

The historic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* agreement of 1999 continues to broaden and inspire Christians. The current five Christian World Communions that are drawn together by *JDDJ* may soon number six, with recognition soon to be given by the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, with whom Anglicans have long been in full communion. The ecumenical significance of Justification will be drawn out later in plenary in this Assembly. I hope that the *JDDJ* vision will inspire us all both to common mission and also to renewed joy in theological commitment to study and to teach the principles that must underpin all the work we do in our work as churches, and for which you have responsibility in this Assembly.

May God bless the Lutheran World Federation, that it may rejoice in our justification through faith in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. To the Triune God be glory, now and forever.

*Bishop Anthony Poggo is Secretary General of the Anglican Communion.*

# COMMUNION OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE

## MARIO FISCHER

Thank you very much for inviting me to your Assembly and giving me the opportunity to greet you. I speak for the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) also known as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

Those who come here from other continents quickly realize: Europe is a continent of short distances. In a small area you will find many languages, countries and also churches. This is the cradle of the Reformation, but at the same time the Reformation led to the emergence of several Protestant churches that condemned each other and sometimes fought bitterly.

Different positions and traditions were perceived as a threat to the purity of doctrine and the unity of the church. Diversity was seen as a threat. Thus, the Lutheran, Reformed and later the United churches stood unreconciled next to each other. This state of affairs continued for 450 years until 1973, when the Leuenberg Agreement opened a new chapter in the book of Protestantism.

In the Leuenberg Agreement, Reformation churches in Europe declared that they agree in their understanding of the gospel and that together they participate in the one Church of Jesus Christ. They declared that the doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation era no longer affect the doctrine of today's partners and that they accord each other pulpit and table fellowship, recognizing ordinations.

With this, church communion was put into effect – the marriage decision was accomplished. Each church could continue to live its own traditions; a standardization of forms of worship or church organizations was deliberately not intended. The goal was communion, the reconciliation of the existing diversity.

This year we are celebrating 50 years of the Leuenberg Agreement – in other words,

a golden wedding anniversary – and in the meantime 112 churches, including the Methodist churches, have joined the church communion, which is almost all the Reformation churches of Europe. With the exception of four churches, all European member churches of the Lutheran World Federation also belong to the CPCE.

Today, we live church communion as a communion in worship – in the joint celebration of the Lord's Supper – in pulpit and table fellowship. We live church communion as a communion in doctrine in common theological reflection for our respective contexts. We live church communion as a communion in witness and service – in acting together and responsibly giving testimony how we should live for the good of our society. And we live church communion as a communion that is evolving in shape by seeking appropriate forms to organize our communion and our churches.

Today we like to speak of unity in reconciled diversity. The differences remain, but they are perceived as richness, as diversity in our unity.

Dear sisters and brothers,

I am glad that the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation is meeting in Poland, in Europe. Much of what you are discussing and celebrating here has implications for all our churches. I am very grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to speak as a representative of a regional communion of churches in your worldwide assembly. Europe is a continent of short distances and narrow spaces. But the unity model of the Leuenberg Agreement is not a special European way. In the past decades, communions of Protestant churches with different confessional positions have also come into being on different continents. In this way, we learn to appreciate the common Reformation heritage even more and are enabled to witness together to the

joyful and liberating message of Jesus Christ in the world in our respective contexts.

I would like to encourage you to find ways in your respective contexts how you as churches of the Reformation can dare communion and preserve your identity, how you as churches of the Reformation can bear witness together to the one hope to which we are called (Eph.

4:4), just as you are doing here in Kraków, in praying and celebrating, discussing, deciding and acting together. And I would be happy if you could tell us about your experiences on this journey, so that we can learn from each other.

*Rev. Dr Mario Fischer is General Secretary of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe.*

## CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

### JØRGEN SKOV SØRENSEN

It is my joy and privilege as General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, also known as CEC, to greet you on the occasion of this Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). My heartfelt appreciation goes to the LWF leadership and the Assembly delegates for granting me and the Conference of European Churches this opportunity.

You, as a world communion, gathering in Europe is significant for European churches, and I feel a particular responsibility to welcome and thank those of you who have travelled from beyond the borders of this continent to share your thoughts, your concerns, your prayers, and your presence with fellow Lutherans from near and afar.

Europe and European Churches, the Conference of European Churches, welcome you as friends in Christ sharing in our common global mission.

The Conference of European Churches was established in 1959 as Europe's prime regional ecumenical organization. Today, it comprises 113 member churches: Anglican, Old Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Also, we work together with National Councils of Churches and faith-based organizations throughout Europe. Our relationship with denominational world communions like the LWF and global ecumenical partners like the WCC is pivotal and fruitful.

It happens so, that the Conference of European Churches gathered for its Assembly as lately as June this year in Tallinn, Estonia. Some 350

participants from all corners of Europe were delighted to meet in the home country of LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt. Dr Anne Burghardt, as a former member of the CEC Governing Board, had been instrumental in paving the way for the realization of a dream to host a CEC Assembly in a Baltic country.

Thank you, General Secretary, thank you Anne, for taking the first steps and making this possible. Also, thank you, Archbishop Urmas Viilma of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for your unwavering and dedicated support throughout the preparations and execution of the event in Tallinn. And finally, a big thank you to the Lutheran churches of the Nordic region for generously backing the Assembly financially.

We who work in ecumenical organizations know that we can always count on the Lutherans. Lifting our eyes beyond our organizations, however, to the wider world in which we live, in a similar way the wider world should know that it can always count on the churches. The theme for our recent CEC Assembly in Tallinn reflected this, as we gathered around the words "Under God's blessing – shaping the future."

Not just our own future as churches. The future of our societies and our communities. The future of our wider social fellowships. The future of this generation and the next. The Conference of European Churches stays together as a fellowship of churches and faith-based agencies to enhance the voices of churches in a European political context, one which is increasingly secular and ever more plural.

Yes, Europe is in many ways a secular continent. And yes, churches and Christian communities are in many parts of Europe struggling to navigate a societal reality where they are losing some of the influence and status they used to have. However, this should never halt us from knowing that we have an everlasting message to everyone, a message which needs to be shared no matter the context: We are here witnessing to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

For that reason, CEC decided to gather for its Assembly on a bold note: That we feel God's blessing every day, and that we as churches wish to share that blessing with others, shaping our common future, locally, nationally, continentally and – with your help – globally.

We in CEC with our member churches and partners work hard to establish a constructive dialogue based on sound public theology with decision makers and influencers in European countries and in the European Union. Currently – how could it be any different – with a particular concern for the war in Ukraine and all its wider consequences.

With the theme of your Assembly here in Kraków, I see a similar bold expression: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” How can we as churches, you

as Lutherans, in the best possible way, in a dividing world promote “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” as the only way forward toward peace.

We feel blessed by God as one body, with one Spirit, giving us one hope – the hope that express both our uncertainty of what the immediate future will bring and our trust that we can – under God's blessing – shape the future together, if we want: As One Body, in One Spirit, with One Hope.'

It was a good friend and colleague from ELCA who – some 30 years ago – gifted me with what became the headline of my ecumenical journey. He reminded me that “The Church is a worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement.” This ecclesial definition has followed me since as a guiding ecumenical principle, and it is today as strong and fundamental as ever.

Over the coming week, be that worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement as you sing, pray, and talk together. Let Kraków know, let Europe know, let the entire world know that it can count on the Lutherans, on your will and capability to encourage people, sparking the hope that is needed to mend a broken world.

*Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen is General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches.*

## ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

### METROPOLITAN KYRILLOS OF KRINI

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we extend to you a greeting of profound affection and warmth, reflecting the bond that knits siblings in Christ. As we reflect upon this momentous occasion, we are deeply moved by the encompassing spirit of unity and communion encapsulated in your theme: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.”

The Book of Ephesians underscores a pivotal message, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who

is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-6). This scripture not only speaks to our interconnectedness but also urges us to realize the tangible unity that the Lord desires among His children. This unity transcends mere theological discourse and permeates our daily interactions, guiding us toward a harmonious coexistence.

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, a landmark assembly, gathered representatives from ten local Orthodox Churches globally, manifesting their dedication to addressing modern challenges through dialogue and consensus. This Council, held on the island of Crete in 2016, epitomized

over a century's preparation. Among its key resolutions, the document "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" stands out, delineating the Orthodox perspective on ecumenical ties and emphasizing the importance of inter Christian dialogue in contemporary times. By fostering mutual understanding and respect among various Christian denominations, the Council aspired to bridge divisions, mend historical rifts, and chart a path for collaborative endeavors in the future.

For the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church as a whole, dialogue between different Christian Churches and religions is of paramount significance, underpinning the quest for peace, unity, and fruitful collaboration. Our engagements with the World Lutheran Federation, exemplified by the growing frequency of delegation meetings, kindle hope for a brighter, more united future. The Holy and Great Council, with its emphasis on open dialogue, robustly reaffirms this commitment, positioning such engagements as essential strides toward global unity and understanding. In an age of religious fragmentation, this spirit of collaboration and mutual respect emerges as a luminous guiding light of hope.

Martin Luther professed, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." By analogy, a Christian existence devoid of unity and the spirit of communion is bereft of its essence. Like a body requiring every limb and organ to synergize for the overall well-being, the body of Christ mandates collective endeavor, nurtured in love and understanding, from its diverse constituents.

The present era, unfortunately, is witnessing unprecedented upheavals. Radicalism, wars, prejudices, and intolerance are steadily eroding the foundation of human solidarity, taking us further from the divine aspiration of peace and brotherhood. In this backdrop, the distress signals from our natural environment, consequent to human recklessness, are ominous portents, underscoring the urgency for remedial introspection and action.

Luther, ever so insightful, opined that "God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars." In this assertion, nature emerges as a divine testament, a sanctified scripture urging humanity towards respectful coexistence with all creation. Your ecumenical sojourn, thus, transcends denominational reconciliation to encompass a broader mandate: harmonizing humanity with the world it inhabits.

Our venerable predecessor to the Throne of Constantinople, St John Chrysostom, once remarked, "The bee is more honored than other living beings, not because she labors, but because she labors for others." In this wisdom, there lies a lesson for us all. Unity and collaboration are at their zenith not when pursued for insular benefits, but when aimed at the greater good, encompassing our brethren and the world.

As you convene under the banner of "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," may the journey ahead be imbued with patience, mutual respect, and ceaseless learning. This path of unity is not just an end; it is a continual process where the Holy Spirit relentlessly endeavors to create, reconcile, and rejuvenate. May this assembly serve as a lighthouse, illuminating the virtues of unity, understanding, and shared responsibility. And as you chart the course forward, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be your guiding star.

In deep prayer and shared aspiration.

*Metropolitan Kyrillos of Krini presented the greetings on behalf of His All Holiness, Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch.*

# GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM

## CASELY B. ESSAMUAH

On behalf of the Global Christian Forum, I bring greetings to the Thirteenth assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. With our Christian brothers and sisters from all over the world, I join in your prayer that this gathering will be a celebration of the diversity within our family and a recommitment to our shared ministry of *One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope*.

The Global Christian Forum cherishes the contribution of the LWF and its member churches to its growth and ongoing sustenance. Your contribution goes beyond the structural and formal channels to areas of friendship and partnership in ministry that transcends many boundaries. Indeed, it is the credit of our Lutheran brothers and sisters, that the concepts of “reconciled diversity” and “differentiated consensus” have entered the ecumenical lexicon. We join you in prayer for all that these concepts mean to our churches.

The Global Christian Forum provides a space for encounter among the leaders of leaders from what we call the FOUR PILLARS, the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostals World Fellowship and the Roman Catholic Church through the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity. When we meet we strengthen our bonds in Christ and engage in faith-sharing where testimonies of God’s faithfulness in our lives help us build trust and increase our awareness of each other’s faithful witness to Christ and to Christian unity. We seek, as we say, to see Christ in each other and each other in Christ.

Our upcoming flagship event is in April of 2024, when we be gathering in Accra, Ghana, West Africa under theme, “*that the world may know*” (Jn 17:23c). I would like to ask that you keep us in your prayers as this diverse group meets to consider what it means to be the Church of Christ in our various countries sent out on mission. When we meet in Ghana, we will celebrate our Oneness in God, and we will be reminded of our brokenness across all spectra of our humanity. It is our prayer that our gathering in Ghana, just like this gathering here in Poland, will encourage one another through a greater awareness of the healing of our brokenness through Christ and we will be sent forth into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Christ’s love.

The *Study Guide* for this Thirteenth assembly says that our theme of One Body, One Spirit and One Hope “*calls for an embodied theology of the cross, a robust embrace of the gifts of the Spirit that build up the body, and a sacramental experience of hope that transforms our anxiety into action and inspires a readiness to be surprised by the ways we are called and equipped to participate in God’s mission.*”

We share that aspiration with you, and we say together – Amen and Amen. Let it be to the glory to God and for the blessing of God’s people all over the world.

Amen and Amen.

*Rev. Dr Casely B. Essamuah is Secretary General of the Global Christian Forum.*

# MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

## CÉSAR GARCÍA

Greetings and Blessings from the Mennonite World Conference—a global Anabaptist-Mennonite communion of 108 national churches in around 60 countries!

I have meaningful memories of our celebration some years ago in Namibia. In that Assembly, we commemorated your 500<sup>th</sup> birthday. One LWF Assembly before, thanks to your initiative, leaders of the Mennonite World Conference

joined you in Stuttgart, Germany, for a worship service of mutual repentance and forgiveness.

Our more than 40 years of ecumenical conversations—first at a regional level and then in international, global dialogues, have taken us on a prosperous journey. In the first place, we can mention how our commitments to each other in Stuttgart were transformative. They changed the trajectory of our shared history. In the second place, as I greet you today, our Mennonite Communion is immersed in a process of discernment about the challenges arising from our last dialogue with you and the Roman Catholic church on baptism.

Those are just two examples of the fruit our relationship has produced. Our mutual journey has helped us better understand each other and grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. It has enabled us to experience reconciliation as one Body, in the power of the Spirit, bringing hope to the world.

As many of you know, the Anabaptist tradition that I represent also traces its beginnings, as you do, back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 2025, we will commemorate the first 500 years of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich, Switzerland. In that commemoration, we hope to tell our history in a new way. We hope to count on your presence in a global worship service that will remind us of our call to restore relationships in Christ and of the reconciliation process our

communions have experienced during the last years.

The theme of your Assembly speaks very well about that call: “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” The more than four decades of dialogue and reconciliation have helped us see God’s vision for the unity of the Church with more clarity. We are just discovering some of the implications of being One Body; the power of the Spirit that creates the miracle of unity; and the impact that unity brings as hope to a world marked by divisions, war and fragmentation.

The global, joint prayer times in which our communions have participated and the local expressions of mutual collaboration are some manifestations of that hope. You are helping us live into that deep, unifying communion that is the Church.

We are grateful to your general secretary, Anne Burghardt, for her leadership of the Lutheran World Federation. We enormously appreciated her greetings at our global Assembly in Indonesia last year.

May God bless your Assembly and grant us always to follow Jesus in One Body, One Spirit, One Hope!

*Rev. César García is General Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference.*

## PENTECOSTAL WORLD FELLOWSHIP

### WILLIAM WILSON

On behalf of Holy Spirit-empowered believers around the world, and more specifically, the member denominations and organizations of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, I bring you greetings in the matchless name of Jesus.

Spirit-empowered Christianity is now the fastest-growing religious movement in the world and encompasses Pentecostals and Charismatics from a wide range of movements and denominations. Together, we are a people

who believe in the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit and the continuing work of God in the world so that we witness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what we read about in the Bible. Combining a passion for biblical truth with a hunger for authentic spiritual experience, this movement continues to find reception among the nations of the world so that every nation on earth has been touched in some way by the work of the Spirit among us.

Today, I am honored to represent this movement with you, our Lutheran brothers and sisters, in this important gathering.

Pentecostals have long recognized the great contributions of Luther and Lutheranism to the body of Christ. Every member of the Pentecostal World Fellowship would have in its foundational doctrine the teaching of Justification by Faith alone and would speak often of this in their churches. It is a delight and honor to be with you here in Kraków. Please be assured of our prayers for a successful Assembly that will add value to your churches and move Lutheranism forward for Christ in this unique time in history.

In John 17, Jesus prayed for unity among all that would believe in Him and that they would be one as He and the Father are one. I believe that Christian unity starts with relational unity, loving one another with God's love as brothers and sisters. However, I also believe that the unity Jesus prayed for must not only be relational but also missional.

*And I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who shall believe on Me through their word, that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. (Jn 17:20-21)*

We are being called to unite in our day so that the world will believe that God sent Jesus as our savior.

Ten years from now, in 2033, Christianity will celebrate the 2,000-year anniversary of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, along with His giving of the Great

Commission and the birth of the Church at Pentecost.

Across Christianity, a new impetus and call is rising for us to pursue the fulfillment of the Great Commission together. Could it be possible that in the next 10 years, we would be able to bring the good news of the gospel to every person on Earth? I believe that the greatest injustice of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that Christ's church has the resources, opportunities, finances, technology, and personnel to reach every person on earth with the gospel, and yet there are millions who have never had an opportunity to know Jesus. We can right this injustice in our day if we will join hand in hand, heart and heart, together to focus on the main thing – the living out and fulfilling of the Great Commission. What will you do toward this end over the next 10 years? Who will you reach for Jesus? What new efforts will you make toward reaching the unreached? Will you unite with the greater body of Christ so that the world may know God sent Jesus as the savior of all?

May the Lord bless every gathering in Kraków with a tangible sense of His presence and a strong, united conviction toward the future. And May He unite all of us so that our 21<sup>st</sup> century world that is filled with drama and trauma might know the joy, peace, and love that only Jesus can bring. May the grace of God be with you in this Assembly!

*Dr William Wilson is Chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship*

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

### KURT CARDINAL KOCH

At the conclusion of the Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation I greet you very warmly in the name of the Catholic Church. At the same time, I wish the newly elected president, Bishop Henrik Stubkjaer, who will be installed in office today, the help and blessing of God.

This morning we remembered together our Holy Baptism and, in so doing, were assured

anew of our God-given salvation and of our divinely endowed ecumenical bonds.

After all, that is what baptism is: a sacrament of justification and a sacrament of unity. It “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.” Those are Martin Luther's words – brief and to the point – in the Small Catechism. And the Second Vatican Council professed,

“Baptism [...] establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it” (Unitatis redintegratio 22).

It is important and necessary to be constantly reminded of these fundamental realities, to always strive to understand them better and more deeply, and to bear grateful, joint witness to them. Because a Christian is someone who can give thanks for their baptism.

“Praise the Lord . . . and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2) – this verse from the Psalm, rightly understood, is also an ecumenical exhortation and encouragement. It reminds us not to forget what God has already pre-given and bestowed on us in baptism, and in the communion of the baptized. It encourages us to preserve a vivid memory of these good gifts – because sometimes we Christians, too, are forgetful people.

Salvific remembering will also continue to stimulate and inspire our time-honored

ecumenical dialogue. Of course, I do not want to overlook the distressing memories that have engraved themselves on our confessional memories. We have to face them but also hold them in the healing and reconciling presence of God. This is because we are united through hope, “hope in the Spirit, who can banish from us the painful memories of our separation. The Spirit is able to grant us clear-sightedness, strength and courage to take whatever steps are necessary, that our commitment may be ever more authentic” (John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 102).

Sisters and brothers, we need one another in order to be able to remember together, but also to be permitted, together, to consign the distressing events to the past. May the living and Triune God bless our common endeavor.

*Kurt Cardinal Koch is Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in the Roman Catholic Church.*

## WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

### HANNS LESSING

You have chosen a theme for your assembly that could not be timelier and more significant! Oneness has been the guiding perspective for the ecumenical movement for the last 200 years. Its beautiful simplicity offered an orientation to the churches and a vision for a fractured and divided world. For many decades, people in the churches were deeply inspired by the conviction that the world was moving toward oneness and that the church was uniquely equipped to contribute to this development.

However, this hope was subjected to a rather harsh reality test in recent years. In the churches, we made the experience that the way toward church unity was much more challenging than many of us had hoped. And in the world, we see the disintegration of unity processes wherever we look. In this difficult climate, it is the solemn

task of the church to give witness that our faith in the oneness of body, spirit and hope can still transform the world.

And this is a considerable challenge. We do not only have to come to terms with the profoundness of the divisions that tear us apart. We also have to be convincing in our witness at a time when the whole idea of oneness is being challenged. People from all sections of the political and ecclesial spectrum reject the very concept as too rigid and criticize that oneness much too often is achieved by violent exclusions that suppress diversity and force dissenting voices into silence.

In this situation, our witness becomes even more critical. We all have realized cherishing diversity is not sufficient to keep churches and societies together. We need a sense of oneness that allows us to overcome divisions

even if there is no common ground on which our conflicts could be solved. In many parts of the world, this sense of an unquestioned base that keeps our polities together is disintegrating with dramatic consequences, particularly for marginalized people. Without a minimum of solidarity, care and acceptance of fundamental human rights, the lack of oneness becomes a matter of life and death.

With its connection of oneness, body, spirit, and hope, your assembly theme offers a perspective to come to terms with these challenges.

According to the letter to the Ephesians, oneness is not something that we produce. It is an already existing reality that we are called to receive. The body the assembly theme is speaking about isn't the body of an existing national, ethnic, or cultural polity. It is the body of Christ that God invites us into. Our calling into the body of Christ allows us to live and act in the hope that the conflicts of this world are reconcilable because they are already reconciled in Jesus Christ.

When we at the World Communion of Reformed Churches learned about the theme for the Kraków assembly, we were deeply moved. Ephesians 4 is one of the important foundations for our self-understanding as a communion. Thirteen years ago, our General Council gathered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, under the theme "Unity of the Spirit in the

Bond of Peace," which was taken from Ephesians 4:3, one verse before that of your theme at this assembly. This seems to be more than a coincidence. It is a significant demonstration of the common purpose that creates a sense of oneness between our two organizations. In the *Wittenberg Witness* that we signed in 2017, we committed ourselves to look "for renewed imagination of what being the church in communion could mean — for our world, in our time." And your assembly is a profound expression of this longing that we share:

"We need new imagination to live together in ways that would embrace our unity not only as a gift but also as a calling. We need new imagination to dream of a different world, a world where justice, peace, and reconciliation prevail. We need new imagination to practice spiritualities of resistance and prophetic vision, spiritualities in service of life, spiritualities formed by the mission of God."

In this spirit, we wish you all the blessings for the work of this assembly.

*Rev. Dr Hanns Lessing is Acting General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.*

## WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

### HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM

It is with great joy that I extend my gratitude for the kind invitation of the LWF Communion Office to address this Assembly on behalf of WCC. As we stand on the threshold of this gathering, I am humbled and honored to join hands with you in the spirit of Christ's love, the very force that moves our world toward reconciliation and unity.

The theme of your Assembly, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," reflecting the first triad of the seven characteristics of unity from the inspiring words of Ephesians 4, resonates deeply with

the very essence of our shared journey and our ecumenical goal. This theme mirrors the message that reverberated throughout the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe – that our oneness is rooted in Christ's love. In the WCC Assembly Unity Statement, together we strongly affirmed that "the love of Christ is the spiritual source of the ecumenical movement, that moves us to walk together, compels us to pray together, and urges us to respond to Christ's invitation to be of one spirit and one mind." Advancing an "ecumenism of the heart" rooted in the experience of Christ's love, the Assembly called us to become disciples of this love, loving one another, transforming the world by love, each in our places and together as

the body of Christ. This love also leads to mutual accountability, where kindness and speaking the truth in love are essential for fostering communion. It is the quality of the relationships between us and our churches that inspires our journey and our common work toward the full visible unity for which Christ prayed.

The concept of “One Body” reminds us that we are all intricately connected, transcending boundaries and divisions that often seem insurmountable. In the Karlsruhe Unity Statement we referred to Paul’s first letter to Corinthians where he describes how we are members together of the one body of Christ, namely by honest self-examination (11:28), by waiting for one another so that we eat at the same table (11:33), by receiving and honoring the variety of gifts of the one Spirit (12:4), and by celebrating the apostolic witness (12:28).

“One Spirit” evokes the pneumatic force of the Holy Spirit that binds us in a sacred embrace empowering us to live out our unity in diversity. Just as the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe urged us to seek justice and unity in the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the LWF Assembly stands as testament to the transformative power of the Spirit in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among the diverse expressions of faith within the human family. In the context of the current multidimensional challenges, it is vital that we carefully listen to each other to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the churches in the present historical situation.

In the warm embrace of the shared “One Hope,” we experience in here and now the eschatological promise that our efforts for reconciliation and unity are not in vain. Our current global context has been described as a ‘polycrisis’. Multiple threats – of accelerating climate change, COVID-19 and its impacts, conflicts, ethnic and gender-based violence, war, displacements, hunger and food insecurity, rising inequality and marginalization adds to the complexities and sufferings in the world. The church is called to be an agency of hope and reconciliation in the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ in whom we have life, hope and love. It is important for ecumenical movements, Christian communions and churches to stand together and live together this “One Hope” that is common to us all as we work with other faiths

and organizations to create a better world for all people and creation.

On our pilgrimage we are aware that the search for agreement in faith, the working together in service to the world, and the walking the path of loving and transforming discipleship need our heads, our hands, and our feet, the whole of us, to be fully engaged (1 Cor. 12). Paul’s words resonate with the assurance that our journey toward unity is anchored in the hope of a restored and harmonious creation and with the anticipation of a future where all things will be united in Christ.

As I stand before you during the opening days of the Assembly, I not only bring greetings from the World Council of Churches, but also express the fervent hopes and aspirations of the global community that yearns for a world reconciled, just, and united. Our world needs a spiritual and moral renewal; it needs us to speak prophetically and with one voice to the challenges of our times and we can succeed by constantly allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us and with us to transform the world. Discipleship in the school of Christ’s love commits us to embark on a spiritual journey that will continually challenge us and shape us into people who reflect the Lord Jesus Christ in our actions, words, and attitudes. This Assembly offers a unique opportunity to weave together the narratives of our faith traditions and cultures into a rich tapestry of understanding, acceptance, and shared purpose. As many are listening to God’s voice in what you say and decide during this Assembly, may the Holy Spirit accompany you to bring a vision of hope, encouragement, and inspiration to a suffering and broken world.

Let us embark on this remarkable journey with hearts filled with joy, as we are reminded that Christ’s love is the binding force that compels us to become its vessels in working for a world that mirrors the divine plan for justice, reconciliation and unity.

*Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Germany, presented the greetings on behalf of WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Jerry Pillay*

# WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL

## IVAN M. ABRAHAMS

It is a singular honor, joy, and privilege to be present at the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathered under the theme: “One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope.” This is an appropriate theme considering that we meet in a country with a rich tradition of unity fostering peaceful coexistence and cooperation between different faiths initiating steps toward unification between different Reformation denominations as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. I refer to the Sandomierz Agreement in 1570, and the act of the Warsaw Confederation in 1573. We meet at a time when unity and peaceful cooperation is needed more than ever before to resolve global challenges that affect us all.

I bring warm greetings and best wishes on behalf of the World Methodist Council and its 80 member churches in 134 countries representing some 82 million followers of Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition.

It is my earnest prayer that this Assembly will be a time of deep discernment, prayer, worship, debate, and resolution that will invigorate the

Lutheran family to be an effective instrument of healing and hope in a fractured world. Please know that the World Methodist Council together with other ecumenical bodies are united in your mission, work, and witness. Thank you for the leadership you give to the ecumenical movement and the rich gifts you so generously share with those on the margins of society all over the world.

The World Methodist Council gives thanks to God that together with the Anglican Consultative Council and Reformed Churches we could affirm the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by Lutherans and Catholics on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, resolving divisions on the “basic truths” of salvation as a free gift from God. We celebrate this step toward unity and are committed to the goal of full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life.

I wish God’s rich blessings as you continue to pursue your vision of a “more just, peaceful and reconciled world.”

*Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams is General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.*

# HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

## ACT ALLIANCE

### RUDELMAR BUENO DE FARIA

I extend my warmest greetings to the esteemed members of The Lutheran World Federation Assembly 2023. As the General Secretary of the ACT Alliance, Action by Churches Together, I convey my heartfelt regards on behalf of our alliance's entire membership. I wish you wisdom and courage as you engage in these important deliberations.

It is both a pleasure and an honor for me to participate in the Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), convened here in the historic city of Kraków, Poland, under the theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope."

The theme of this Assembly carries profound significance in today's world. It underscores the imperative of unity and collaboration among diverse churches, individuals, and communities. It also underscores the pressing need to work collectively in addressing global challenges such as social injustice, climate change, and conflict. This theme emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity, highlighting that a shared sense of purpose and hope can serve as a catalyst for positive change. Ultimately, it encourages us to recognize our common humanity and unite in our efforts to create a more inclusive, just, and sustainable world.

My connection with the LWF dates back to 1992, during my time in Brazil. In total, I have been engaged with this organization for 31 years, with 18 of those years spent as a dedicated staff member in the Department for World Service. I vividly remember my first attendance at an Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1997, held in Hong Kong.

The issues we contemplate today are markedly different from those of 1997.

Presently, the world faces escalating polarization in our societies, coupled with the emergence of new anti-rights narratives that challenge the principles underpinning human rights, inclusion, democracy, solidarity, and justice. Ethical and social norms are being reshaped to accommodate ideologies that perpetuate exclusion, prioritize economic systems, and normalize violence as a determinant of societal behavior. Democracy is under threat in many regions, and the convergence of religious, economic, and political fundamentalisms fuels polarization, discrimination, and exclusion in our societies.

The world grapples with a profound moral and ethical crisis, underscoring the crucial role that churches and faith-based organizations play in addressing its root causes. The Lutheran World Federation, a founding member of the ACT Alliance, has evolved significantly since its inception, firmly establishing its presence in multilateral political arenas by championing human dignity and justice, while recognizing the pivotal role of faith communities and local actors.

As ACT Alliance, we recognize the urgency of intensifying our efforts in areas such as climate justice, linking it to the importance of humanitarian preparedness, as well as advancing gender justice and tax justice. As champions of justice, unity, and humanitarian endeavors, we celebrate this opportunity to collaborate in our shared commitment to effecting positive change in the world.

Your integral role within the ACT Alliance amplifies our collective voice for justice,

compassion, and transformative action. Together, we can shape a world that truly reflects our shared values.

May our joint endeavors inspire meaningful change and pave the way for a brighter future

for all. I extend my best wishes for a successful and productive Assembly.

*Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria is General Secretary of ACT Alliance.*

## CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS

### ALISTER DUTTON

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you for your Assembly today, particularly so soon after my election as Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis. I bring you the warm regards and prayers of the whole Caritas Confederation and our 162 national Caritas Members, working in more than 200 territories.

It was important to me to be with you in person today to emphasize the importance of our ecumenical relationships in our service of the poorest and most marginalized, and our quest to build a just world where everyone experiences and knows the love of God in the practical realities of their daily lives.

There is one body of Christ and as Christians we jointly manifest the love of Christ in the world today. We are his eyes, his ears and his hands. Together, we are the people of God building the Kingdom of God.

For many years I have held the Lutheran family in the highest regard. My first memory of working closely with you is when I led the joint ACT-Caritas response to the Darfur Crisis in 2004.

I have such fond memories: of the burning passion to respond to the dreadful atrocities that were unfolding in Darfur; of the unique spirit of partnership between the ACT Alliance, Norwegian Church Aid, the Caritas Confederation and CAFOD, as we came together to unite our efforts and resources, and respond at scale; and of the pivotal role that LWF played in supporting that response and making it possible. It was then that I forged strong friendships with Maria Immonen, Eberhard Hitzler, Rudelmar Bueno de Faria and Michael Hyden.

That quickly became a huge response and an incredible manifestation of the love of us all as Christian agencies for the people of Sudan, and I am proud that it continues to this day, long after it fell out of the spotlight. It is sad, however, to see history repeating itself in Sudan and the civil war that is raging again in the country. The ghosts of Darfur then are the reality of Sudan today.

A milestone in our relationship was the Declaration of Intent “Together in Hope,” that we signed in 2016 to “join our hands, bring hope, witness and act together,” and “to consolidate and develop a mutually inspiring relationship beneficial to the people we serve, accompany and defend.”

Looking at the world today, I see massive, accelerating inequality, increasing conflict and war, and the climate emergency that is an existential threat to us all. Faced with such colossal challenges it would be easy to become trapped in the pain and suffering of the crucifixion and become despondent.

But we are Easter people. We are people of faith, and in that faith we find an unquenchable hope that a better world is possible. And by working together, we can contribute more effectively to making this world better and more equitable. “In truth, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.”

We are committed to continue enhancing our ecumenical partnership, as highlighted also in the new Caritas Strategic Framework, by engaging in regular strategic discussions, including in the networks where we sit together like the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, by sharing learning, challenges and opportunities in the areas of migrants

and refugees, peacebuilding, humanitarian response and preparedness, and advocacy.

I wish you all a good Assembly, a time of communion and renewal, and I look forward to our continuing close cooperation as we

strive for peace, love, justice and the equitable development of all people in one human family.

*Mr Alister Dutton is Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis.*

## UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

### FILIPPO GRANDI

It is an honor to address you, even if virtually, as you convene for your Thirteenth Assembly meeting.

This gathering comes at a time of great complexities, as we face the consequences of the international community's inability to make peace, to prevent predictable catastrophes, and to respond to emergencies. The impact of this inaction is greater for over 110 million people whose lives have been disrupted by conflict, persecution, and human rights violations.

Against these unprecedented challenges, this year's theme – "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope" – reflects a shared feeling, one that comes with desperate urgency, that unity is the only way forward. And in today's world, our cooperation gains new significance.

The partnership between the Lutheran World Federation and the (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dates back to 1956 and has evolved to respond to a changing world. Who would have thought back then that 65 years later, climate action would be an element of our renewed Memorandum of Understanding? And here we are, working on climate action, on education, localization, livelihoods, resilience, to name a few.

Rooted in a common quest for justice and human dignity, we have continued working to amplify protection and support for refugees, internally displaced people, and host communities. We have stood together, swift and determined, to ensure that those fleeing adversity are met with compassion and respect. And our joint efforts have demonstrated that unity is not only vital, but effective in changing people's lives.

As we look to the future, let us reiterate our pledge to unity. Let us continue to serve the vulnerable with renewed strength. Together, we possess the potential to redefine the narrative of displacement. Together, we vow to leave no one behind. Together, we lay the groundwork for a world where those in need are supported, equipped, and empowered to thrive.

Thanks to each of you for your unwavering dedication. May this Assembly serve as a platform for meaningful exchange, transformative connections, and impactful actions – one that shows the world the power of unity.

*Mr Filippo Grandi is High Commissioner of the UN Refugee Agency.*







## WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY

As with all LWF Assemblies, worship and Bible study were a central part of the Thirteenth Assembly. This included the opening and closing eucharistic worship services, daily morning Bible studies, midday and evening prayers. Liturgies, prayer materials, hymns and music enabled participants to share in celebration, confession, lamentation and reflection as one community in Christ. On Sunday participants joined congregations in Poland and neighboring Czech Republic and Slovakia.

# SERMONS

## OPENING SERMON

DANIELLE DOKMAN

My LWF family, it is indeed good and pleasant to be together in community and a global community to be exact. Faces from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean joined together (online and in person) to reveal the enduring and abiding love of God. Truly, God has met us in the hospitality we have received here, the gifts of bread, salt along with the Baptismal water that continues to call us into communion with each other. I am deeply honored and I count it a privilege to share the word of God with you today. As we unite under the thirteenth general assembly theme: One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope, we allow the Gospel according to Matthew to guide our reflections. The text before us, though familiar, also holds great relevance for the challenges we face in our world today. For just like the magi's or wise ones, we have also traveled with a purpose. Not only from the East but also from the West, the South, and the North. Surely, we have taken note of where our world is today. The different injustices that characterize our lived realities across the globe. However, I put it before us, that it is equally important (if not more) to also take note of where the incarnate One, the One spirit of God and the One Hope for this world is growing today. This was the task of the wise ones we encounter in the text.

They had a simple yet profound question. This is: Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews? This question is both a confirmation of and a task to search for the incarnate God that disrupts that status quo. It is a confirmation because the wise ones were not looking for a child that *will* be born but they were looking for a child that was already born. Meaning that this was not a future hope, but

an already-born hope that was only destined to grow, grow and grow. God had already broken into their world. Even a world characterized by Roman domination, colonialization, and imperialism. Hope was already there, but the question was: where?

Today that same question inspires us to investigate the gospel and equip ourselves for the journey ahead. For starters, the text gives us two locations where the incarnate God was made manifest. At first, the geographical location is given, namely: Bethlehem in Judea, but it was only upon their arrival that the second location, or what I would like to call "*the gospel location*" was revealed to them. Hope had entered the world in an ordinary yet extraordinary dwelling: The body. Notice that this was not just a body, but a body of a child. The most fragile human existence there is. A body that, left without sustenance will starve. A body left vulnerable to violence will give up the spirit. A body, as sacred as it is, left without proper nourishment will decay. Yet, this is the existence that God chooses to be present in this world. God became incarnate!

Now, the incarnation is not a lofty theological concept to flaunt around with. If we believe that God took on a human body and its vulnerabilities, this has real implications for our lives. It means that we cannot ignore our bodies and ignore others. We will encounter God in our neighbors, in those we call strangers or foreigners, and even in the whole of creation. Because just like the church (the body of Christ), the physical body, the rest of creation, and our LWF communion are also holy dwelling places God invites us to remain a little while on this earth.



**Rev. Danielle Dokman.**

Today many dwelling places of God and bodies across the world are scattered and torn apart by discrimination, polarization, and violence. The violence we know occurred during slavery, especially the Trans-Atlantic slavery continues. Even now, persons are still trafficked and their bodies treated as commodities or spoils of war. Some are even killed and ostracized because of their skin color, gender, religion, or simply because there are vulnerable. It might seem as if God is not present in these locations, but precisely here in fragility, God is made incarnate. When all seems to be lost in endless fights and polarization, and others run away, God dives into our world. I know it feels like our world is on fire and it seems like there is no way out of these senseless wars and climate injustice. But don't give up, because God has not abandoned this world. We serve a God that is not afraid of our fragility, vulnerability, or weakness. Rather, God's power is made

manifest in our weakness. The one Hope for this world is located in the one body: Yes! the human body. Yes! The creation. Yes! The body of Christ and I dare add: our communion.

Secondly, there is something to be said about the movement of the one Spirit of God in this text. Although not mentioned in this passage, there is a movement present in the narrative. The question of the wise ones was dropped like a stone in still waters that made ripples throughout and today echoes from this place once again: Where is the child who has been born? The whole of Jerusalem and Herod felt those ripples and were troubled. Herod was already made king of the Jews by the Roman Empire, therefore, this should not have bothered him. However, he was a puppet King, only valuable to the Roman Empire as long as he could control his people and keep them obedient to the rule of the empire. Whether



**The one hope for this world is located in the one Body of Christ.**

they were able to live healthy lives and meet their daily needs, was not his concern. His concern was for the empire. However, God's concern was, is, and will always be for God's entire creation.

The Spirit of God cannot flow in harmony with rulers such as Herod. The one Spirit will rise in opposition to create and make a new way. This might not be good news for some people, especially not for those in power. That is why Herod sought to eliminate the opposition to secure his power, so he might be the only option. In our world today many present themselves as our only option, the one way out or the only chance we got, when all they really offer is further enslavement, greater ignorance of the pending climate catastrophe, and more suffering.

As people of God, we know better. We know there is another way! There is another reign!

So, we must make ripples. In and through our proclamation we must stir up the status quo. And sometimes this is simply done with a question. Yes, some people will be troubled and frightened, but perhaps this is exactly the movement of the one Spirit of God creating, reconciling, and renewing.

My LWF family, the sun is setting on many empires of this world. Some acknowledge it and others wage war over it. But this I tell you today:

Whenever the sun is setting on the empires of this world, you my family in Christ, rise!

When the night covers the land and righteousness becomes rare and scarce, rise!

When fake promises are given to resolve our climate injustice or any injustice, you 150 churches, a communion of churches, you rise!

Rise like the star on that faithful night, and shout to this world. proclaim: there is another way! God is here! The incarnated God has been made manifest. Here! The One spirit of God is moving, here! Hope is already here, yes here! Because God in Christ has not abandoned this world and neither should we. It's not time for us to make war, it is time for us to worship To be in communion. To be united in our proclamation, one in speaking up about injustice and living together from the sacraments. It is time for us

to be the communion we always talk about. So, bring your gold. Bring your frankincense and your myrrh. Bring your gifts even the fragmented pieces. Bring yourself and let us begin in One Body, through One Spirit, and in One Hope. Amen.

*Rev. Danielle Dokman is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname, and a former member of the LWF Council.*

## CLOSING SERMON

### ANNE BURGHARDT

We gathered at this assembly from east and west, north and south. We all speak different languages, and still we understood each other here at the assembly, it was a bit like the Pentecostal wonder in Acts 2 where God's One Holy Spirit made people with different mother tongues to one communion, one church. Experiencing unity and understanding between different people feels a bit like Heaven, a bit like paradise, already here. We all need these moments. They make us happy, enrich our souls, let us experience the blowing of the One Holy Spirit of God.

When speaking of Heaven, it is not easy to describe it. Throughout the ages poets from all around the world have tried to capture Heaven in their poetry, to find an appropriate way to describe celestial experiences. In the Bible we find several metaphorical descriptions of Heaven. Jesus describes Heaven in one of the parables as the Great Wedding, a feast of joy, thankfulness and gladness in unity with God and the bridegroom Christ.

The Book of Revelation offers here an apocalyptic vision, not of a feast but of an already ongoing eternal worship service. We encounter the vision of this everlasting worship before the throne of God already in the writing of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. This vision has inspired our Christian liturgy. At Holy Communion, we sing the Sanctus from Isaiah 6: Holy! Holy! Holy! There are other parts of the

Heavenly liturgy, that we have integrated into our worship. Never underestimate the power of prayer that unites us in the communion of saints, that unites us with our sisters and brothers across times and continents!

In the midst of the realities of our world, it might sometimes be difficult to believe in the victory of the Lamb. Participation in the suffering of Christ, communion in the cross of Christ continues to be part of our lives, as we have to admit that the world and human nature didn't change overnight with God's incarnation in Jesus and in His resurrection. And yet everything did change because if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!" as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

As the beloved of Christ, we are called to the one hope through our one baptism and one faith, we are called to be those who make the new creation and the endless joy over the victory of the Lamb visible in this world. Against the injustices of the world, against all those moments of what seems to be decisive defeat, denial, and shame, against the threat of evil, – escaping from the world won't help us, nor will sinking into hopelessness. God's people live from the strength of the victorious Lamb. The beloved of Christ live, as if they were already before the throne of the Lamb. They are not paralyzed by their worries and don't let fear rule over their lives.

Yes, though John offers us a vision of an eschatological reality, this reality is not only something for a distant future. This eschatological reality breaks into our reality here and now. Not only in the sacrament of Holy Communion, not only in the worship, but also in moments where the fruits of the Holy Spirit become visible: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Nurtured by the prayer and worship, we march together and sing and participate in God's work of renewing the world, we live the liturgy after the liturgy where ordinary, everyday life becomes service of God, to use the image offered by Luther.

John the Divine describes the participants of this heavenly worship service that already begins here in our space and time. A great multitude that no one could count stands before the throne, praising God. Finally, people no longer wage war against one another. They stand summoned before the Lamb, God is revealed before their eyes. They all are filled

with endless joy, astonishment, and praise! Adam's and Eve's lament is over. The torn bodies of the past are no longer a reason to mourn. Because Christ's body is resurrected, other bodies will be resurrected. No death can hold them anymore. And God wipes every single tear from the eyes of those who suffered. New creation, new bodies can't be broken anymore. The one body of Christ is alive, it is unbreakable, not for sale, not to be spoiled.

But, it is not only the uncountable people from all nations and the elders, forming the One ever-living body of Christ, risen through Christ's resurrection. There are also four animals before the throne of God. In the Jewish apocalyptic the animals are often human realms/empires, who are overcome by God's might. Here these animals are part of the heavenly court. Their duty is to praise God—and this only succeeds, when one is filled with the Love of God. The animals are often identified with the four Gospels. God's One Spirit lives in the four Gospels. Although the four Gospels



**At the closing worship service, LWF General Secretary Anne Burghardt encouraged the Lutheran communion to be a blessing for this world.**

are different and were written for different communities, it is the ONE Spirit of God that speaks through them. Unifying and healing, summoning and comforting, challenging and loving. The Spirit is One and draws Christ in front of our eyes. The Spirit lets us look toward the victorious Lamb. She offers direction to our thoughts, word and deeds, to praise the Lamb and to serve the Lamb in this world, by doing the work of the Lamb: reconciling, unifying, healing, challenging and comforting, serving the neighbor, connecting with God.

We participate in this work in two directions, as there are two beams on the cross. We worship God, and are freed by God to serve our neighbor and to care for all creation. All – human beings and creation – are included in this movement, in this march toward the Lamb and toward one another. Yes, creation is also our neighbor and it is crying out.

Sometimes, dear Lutheran family, we need a moment of Heaven, like we have experienced time and again here in this Assembly. May God continue to grant us these moments of communion with God and with one another. May God continue to deepen our communion. May God bless our bodies and Christ's One Body. May God lead us and empower us with the one Spirit, that draws Jesus Christ before our eyes. May our hearts be filled with hope that bears its fruit already today in and for our world. May God bless us and let us be a blessing for this world. Amen.

*Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt, LWF General Secretary, is an ordained pastor of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.*



# PRAYER AT AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, Assembly participants were invited to reflect on a verse from Psalm 13:

“How long, O Lord?” (Ps 13:1)

“Take a moment, in silence, to reflect on the evil you have encountered today and in more recent years, the flames of hatred, judgment and persecution that continue to consume our societies.”

The Assembly was an opportunity to not only look forward but to also learn from the past and “honor the loss, pain or grief, and hold it with compassion” (*Study Guide*). With this in mind the program included a visit to the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau on 15 September, where participants were reminded of atrocities arising out of Nazi Germany’s persecution of various groups of people.

Following the final stage of the tour at Birkenau, participants were led on a 10-minute, largely silent, reflective prayer walk outdoors. Nearly 700 people walked through this prayer experience over a period of about an hour, in groups of 20-25.

The Auschwitz Director gave the LWF permission to stage this prayer experience in

the area in front of the International Monument, at the end of the railroad tracks. Two short, winding walking paths were created, and groups were invited to walk in silence, with a couple of “prayer point” moments where they were invited to stop as a group. Members of the worship team served as silent guides to shepherd people through the prayer walk. The walking paths were identical, located on either side of the International Monument, with the center left open for other visitors (not from LWF) free to still visit the monument.

Both walking paths were marked with a winding gray cloth laid out on the ground. The cloth was knotted every meter, in an effort to bring to mind barbed wire. The intention in using the cloth here was to make a connection to the multiple ways in which cloth was being used in each of the worship services during the Assembly: this piece of gray cloth was used in the morning worship service and the following morning’s liturgy as a thread to connect the three services together. Participants were given a card at the beginning of the experience that asked them to walk with their small group on either side of the cloth and follow a worship leader host who processed through the path with a lit lantern and silently invited them to take time to stop at the two prayer points along the way.



In one prayer point at Auschwitz-Birkenau, participants were asked to reflect on a verse from Psalm 13.



Bible studies, incorporated into the morning worship services, connected participants with the theme of the day.

# BIBLE STUDIES

Bible studies incorporated into the morning worship services, connected participants with the theme of the day.

- **One Body:** Rev. Dr Ho-Yin Kenneth Tsang
- **One Body:** Prof. Kalina Wojciechowska
- **One Spirit:** Rev. Dr Barbara Rossing
- **One Hope:** Rev. Gerson Acker



# “ONE BODY”

HO-YIN KENNETH TSANG

## READINGS

Psalm 133  
Psalm 8  
John 1:1-14

When we read or sing Psalm 133, there may be a beautiful picture of peaceful and joyful interactions among a group of people appearing in our minds. From this psalm, we all know that it is the will of God that “kindred live together in unity” (Ps 133:1). God not only requests us to do so but also ordains blessings to such unity (Ps 133:3). Nevertheless, when we further reflect on the term “unity,” we may need to ask two fundamental questions: 1) Who are my kindred? 2) How do we define “live together in unity”? Since Psalm 133 was produced and sung by the Jewish community in the first place, the most straightforward answers to these two questions are Jews and living based on the Torah. Yet, as Christians, we understand that the answers could be broader. For example, some Christians consider that all people in the church are kindred, while some think all the people of God—Christians and Jews— are kindred.

Another psalm selected in this Bible study session is Psalm 8. I like singing this psalm with a Chinese melody very much. It always touches my heart since it proclaims how God the Almighty honors and cares for mortal and insignificant human beings – “what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands . . .” (Ps 8:4-6). Who are we as human beings? Are we deserving of God’s trust and honor? Despite not deserving, God is willing to entrust human beings with the responsibility of caring for one another and other creatures in this world, which is also clearly stated in Genesis. When

we consider the last two questions above from this perspective, we are expected to regard all people and other creatures of this world as our kindred. We should live together based on the will of God.

Yet, from past to present, the reality is that people often hold a narrow sense of the definition of “kindred.” Firstly, most people do not consider other creatures to be kindred. Secondly, such narrow definitions among human beings may be based on national identity, race and tribe, sex, religion, political standing, social status, Christian denominations, churches, and even a particular congregation. Worse still, is anyone who does not consider anyone else as his/her kindred and is continuously “curved in upon himself/herself.” The narrowness causes division and coldness in society and easily creates discrimination and exclusion, conflicts and violence, damage and hurt. The Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century, occupation under the former Nazi Germany and the ensuing holocaust, and the former apartheid rule in South Africa are some examples. Of course, we can still easily find these negative matters and experiences surrounding us although to a lesser degree. For instance, in Hong Kong, you may know that a great social movement happened in 2019. Because of different political views, there have been rifts in society, churches, and families. The hurt and hatred have made some Christians regard the opposite party as the enemy. It is difficult for them to remember that the “enemy” is also created in the image of God and Jesus’ teaching on “love your enemy.”

Why does reality look like this? I believe that all the participants of this LWF Assembly know that the answer is “SIN” – not believing in God and the separation from God. Without God in their lives, human beings would have to seek protection, security, resources, satisfaction, and the meaning of life itself on their own. In such a context, they can only care for themselves or a limited size of “kindred.” Moreover, they would even try to gain power

and resources by controlling and sacrificing others. I like the following reflection very much. There is a test for a group of little children. Every child is given two pieces of candy by their parents. Then, an adult asks the children, “Can you share one piece of candy with me?” What is the children’s response? As parents, you want your kids to say “Yes,” right? Some children are willing to share, but some are not. The test goes on. The adult asks those who have shared one already, “Can you give me one more?” Can you estimate the result? Yes, most children say “No” this time. We can understand that “No” is the typical response. The children consider that they will get nothing if they give out both. Nevertheless, the fact is their parents have a pack of candies on hand. The parents will give the candies to their beloved children again, won’t they?

Let us now turn to the Gospel reading selected for the Bible study today – John 1:1-14. Based on the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), John 1:1-14 is read on every Christmas Day service. My students asked me why RCL selected this Scripture for Christmas Day. My response was: This question can only be answered by the committee that formulated the RCL. But to my understanding, compared to the nativity of Jesus (which is normally read on Christmas Eve), Jesus’ identity and mission, and the relationship between Jesus and the whole world are more crucial in explaining why the baby Jesus was born by the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Also, the background of establishing Christmas Day to replace the festival held by the Romans in honor of the god of the sun indicates that selecting John 1:1-14 is to announce Jesus as the True Light (Jn 1:9).

Today, let us meditate on three aspects of John 1:1-14.

## THE WORD BECAME FLESH

The Holy Son was born with a physical body and became a man about two thousand years ago. We all know that the Almighty and sovereign God can achieve anything by any method, but why did God choose incarnation? Atonement may be the most heard answer.

Jesus, as a human being, has paid the price of sin for us on the cross. Moreover, Hebrew 4:15 tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” By incarnation, God persuasively tells us that God understands human weaknesses and sufferings. Besides, God may use incarnation to show that the physical body is good in essence, which is contrary to the contention that physical matters are all evil. The Holy God can be in the human body. This brings us back to Genesis 1:31 – “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” Hence, we can cherish having our own body, which is God’s creation: irrespective of the color of our skin or body appearance. We should also not despise or exploit other bodies. Instead, we need to take care of them whenever necessary. In the seminary where I serve (Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong), I am responsible for the subject “Diakonia.” According to the Lutheran perspective, diakonia is the core mission of the church and every Christian. Gospel preaching is not just concerned with human spiritual needs. We emphasize the concept of holistic. A holistic person has physical, psychological, social, vocational, and spiritual dimensions. A holistic missional church preaches a holistic gospel through words (kerygma) and deeds (diakonia).

## THE TRUE LIGHT ENLIGHTENS EVERYONE

Jesus is the true light. This light is not for a particular group of people. The Bible tells us that it enlightens everyone. Indeed, everyone is living in darkness to a certain extent. The darkness may be concerning our sins. The darkness may be concerning our sufferings. Although people in need may not be willing to be enlightened (Jn 1:10-11), Jesus still shines on everyone. The church is the body of Christ. Hence, we have a mission to be the light in the world and enlighten people who are either in “sinful darkness” or “suffering darkness.” We may feel hesitant because we

do not have extra energy or resources to do so, or we are of the opinion that some people do not deserve our care and concern. If so, please think about what Jesus did to us. Do we deserve to be enlightened? Moreover, how did Jesus enlighten people in darkness? He was crucified on the cross, which made God-human reconciliation possible. As mentioned above, the narrowness of “kindred” is caused by separation from God. By the true light, we have re-established the relationship with God. Please note that the relationship is not a distant one. We are the children of God (Jn 1:12)! We were reborn not of the will of a human being (seeking protection, securities, satisfaction by self) but of God (bestowing shalom and fullness of life among God’s people). There are many candies in the hands of our parents.

## THE WORD LIVES AMONG US

“And the Word became and lived among us” (Jn 1:14). When we consider this sentence historically, it is about the life of Jesus in the first century. Again, such a historical act already shows the great love of God. The infinite God is willing to live among insignificant human beings. Besides the historical perspective, the sentence could also be associated with Holy Communion. Although the Gospel of John does not have the Last Supper narrative, John 6:50-51, 53-56 is widely regarded with the meaning of Holy Communion. Jesus told us that he was the living bread that came down from heaven (Jn 6:51). He also invited us to eat his flesh and drink his blood. We are assured that Jesus Christ is alive with us by participating in the

Holy Communion. Moreover, all Christians join together to become one body of Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Then, some questions should be asked. In this one body of Christ, do we consider some Christians who are not members of the body? Why? Does Jesus hold the same view? Let us remind one another that “[f]or in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Furthermore, as the church is the body of Christ, we should ask ourselves whether we are willing to “incarnate” and live among all kinds of people, particularly those who are different from us, the marginalized, and excluded?

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” (Ps 133:1)! After reading this psalm together with Psalm 8 and John 1:1-14, the definition of “kindred” should be broader: from individual churches to the whole church, and from the entire church to the whole creation. The definition of “living in unity” should also not be regarded as “living in uniformity,” which often results in conflicts, oppression, and/or division. Jesus enlightens everyone. Jesus lives among different people. The body of Christ has various limbs and organs, but still in “One Body” that we should respect and take care of mutually. Of course, faith in Christ and being the children of God are crucial factors to help us live such a life.

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# “ONE BODY”

KALINA WOJCIECHOWSKA

## READINGS

Romans 15:2

Romans 15:2 belongs to the second, paraenetic section of the Epistle to the Romans begun in AD 12. In this part of his letter, Paul refers to the conflict in the Roman Christian community in order to draw universal conclusions from this specific situation to regulate relations in any community.

Taking the immediate context into account, the structure into which Romans 15:2 fits can be presented as follows:

- a. 15,1-2a – A call for empathy and unity
- b. 15,2b – Edification
- c. 15,3 – Christ’s example
- c’. 15,4a – Example from the Scripture
- b’. 15,4b-5a – Edification
- a’. 15,5b-6 – Unity in diversity

This means that the underlying theme of the whole passage is the building of unity of an internally diverse community based on empathy and kindness rooted in Christ and Scripture. It is also a translation of the image of the church as a body in which many different members function (Rom 12:3-5) into the experience and practice of a community in which different visions of attitudes to Jewish tradition clash.

The starting point is the situation in the Roman community around AD 58-60. Prior to AD 50, the core of the Christian community consisted of Jews and so-called ‘God-fearers’ gathered around the synagogues. They were gradually joined by Gentile converts. After AD 49 and the edict of Emperor Claudius ordering the expulsion of Jews from Rome, the situation changed dramatically. Ethno-Christians, who did not feel obliged to cultivate Jewish customs, began to dominate the community.

The Jews disappeared almost completely, with only the judaizing ‘God-fearers’ remaining. The ethno-Christian majority regarded attachment to the Law, Jewish customs and traditions as weakness and clearly manifested their superiority and contempt for the weak. Apostle Paul feels obliged to stand up for the minority.

In Romans 15:1, therefore, he addresses the powerful (dynatoi), with whom he identifies himself in some way (hemeis). It is not a question of ethnicity—Paul was, after all, a Jew—but of sharing a vision of Christianity free from the precepts of Judaism. The strength of the ‘strong,’ however, comes not only from their religious convictions, but also from the fact that they are a majority in the Roman community. This majority should not forget its obligations to the minority. This is expressed by the verb *opheilomen*, referring to the obligations of the debtor to the creditor or the abuser to the abused. The apostle is thus aware, firstly, that Christianity owes something to Judaism and, secondly, that an injustice has been done to a minority in the Roman community attached to Judaism.

The way to repay the debt and right the wrongs is to ‘take upon oneself’ (*bastadzein*) the weaknesses of those who do not belong to the strong (*adynatoi*, literally: the not-strong). Taking on weakness here means moving away from triumphalism, from the desire to impose one’s vision of Christianity (*me heautois areskein* – not to be pleasing to oneself), but to empathize with, accompany and support the minority.

This commitment is expressed even more strongly in Romans 15:2a. The pronoun *hekastos* (everyone) leaves no doubt that empathy toward minorities should be shown by every member of the community. This is not some abstract and general obligation, but the particular task of every member of every church community at all times. This shift from the general to the particular is expressed by the change from the pronoun ‘us’ to the pronoun ‘our’ (the recipients of the letter). The phrase ‘Each one of us must please our neighbor’ (to *plesion aresketō*) is a paraphrase of the

commandment of love ‘love your neighbor’, which applies always and in all circumstances. It should not be forgotten that this commandment is also part of the Jewish tradition.

Romans 15:2b indicates that empathy toward minorities is for the good (agathon) and building up (oikodome) both individually and communally. Anyone who empathizes with minorities does so for his or her own good, because he or she develops spiritually. Love and empathy towards minorities also make it possible to build the goodness and unity of a community which, although internally diverse in its attitude to Jewish tradition, worships God with one voice (cf. Rom 15:5-6). In this way, Paul expands the vision of church as a body made up of many members. To the earlier functional understanding of this image (a body in which the members have different functions – Rom 12:3-5), he adds a worldview understanding: the members of the church do not have to be unanimous in everything in order to show patience, love and support for one another, thus following Christ and drawing inspiration from the Scriptures.

In the following part of the passage, Paul cites the example of Christ and recommends reading Scripture in an inclusive way, to find in it examples of embracing (proslambano) rather than excluding minorities (Rom 15:3.4.7-12). The apostle is aware how difficult it can be to build and maintain unity in a community that is diverse and torn apart by divisions. He knows it’s easier to create the community with those who share our views. Therefore, he points directly to Christ, who “did not seek what was convenient for him” (Rom 12:3), and the love shown to people exposed him to ridicule. Already during his lifetime, Jesus embraced everyone with his love, interest and support: those who fulfilled God’s commandments and sinners, those who had professions despised and respected members of society, Jews and pagans, rich and poor, women and men, adults and children, young and old, his friends and his enemies. This inclusive love led him to Golgotha, where he gave his life on the cross for all. He also rose for everyone and united everyone in his body – the church.

Social conditions change, external conditions change, other social groups appear, other

professions, other opinions, with which we do not agree. But the essence of following Jesus remains the same: not to seek one’s own comfort, benefits, self-satisfaction, not to exclude those who think differently, exposing oneself to mockery of the environment and even more serious repression. Since Jesus did not exclude anyone, neither do we—as the body of Christ—have the right to exclude anyone, especially by quoting in a biased way some fragments of Holy Scripture.

An exclusive reading of the Bible and history shows what a lack of empathy toward differences leads to. It starts, as in Rome in Paul’s time, with the perception of minorities as inferior and weaker. Then comes contempt, which means disrespecting the beliefs and traditions of minorities, ignoring them or even stigmatizing them, and over time erasing the traces of their existence. Sometimes this is fostered by state policy. In Rome, there was the expulsion of Jews in AD 49. Then ghettos began to form. From the 1930s onwards, Nazi Germany tried to deal even more radically with the problem of all ‘others’ in terms of ethnicity, politics, religion, sexual orientation, by excluding them from the community and sending them to concentration camps. But camps like the one at Auschwitz could come about because majorities rarely empathized with minorities or stood up for them.

We cannot allow history to repeat itself. Romans 15:2 teaches us how to build community, not tear it down. How to strengthen the body of Christ through love, patience, empathy and mutual support for everyone, also for those who in the church are a minority and seem weak. Every exclusion is a tearing of the body of Christ, it is also a turning away from Jesus, who identifies most with the weak.

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# “ONE SPIRIT”

BARBARA R. ROSSING

## READINGS

Ezekiel 36:25-28  
Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b  
Acts 2:1-21  
Luke 4:14-19 – the Spirit of the Lord is upon me

## EXILE: A SPIRIT-CRUSHING EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA

The prophet Ezekiel lived in a spirit-crushing time. He survived siege warfare, starvation, mass deportation, a forced march of death, and the trauma of exile. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the first wave of deportees in 597 BCE, along with King Jehoiachim and more than 10,000 others (2 Kings 24).

God’s Spirit spoke to Ezekiel when he was far from home, lifting him up, revitalizing him with visions of future hope. Ezekiel’s message can speak to us about God’s Spirit, amidst multiple spirit-crushing traumas today.

During the first ten years of exile in Babylon, when there was still hope that Jerusalem could survive, Ezekiel preached repentance. With astute geopolitical discernment, Ezekiel warned Jerusalem’s puppet leaders not to make a disastrous alliance with Egypt. His prophetic warnings embodied God’s word in strange metaphors and sign-actions beyond words: eating a scroll, lying on his side, binding his hands, and even eating excrement—actions that perhaps “modeled the trauma

and fall of Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup> These early chapters unfortunately also include graphic metaphors of violence against Jerusalem personified as a woman’s body (Ezek 16: 23) that must be critiqued today.

A decade after the first deportation came terrible news, “The city has fallen” (Ez 33:21). The unthinkable had happened. Babylonian armies had destroyed Jerusalem, killing thousands and razing the Temple, God’s eternal dwelling place (2 Kings 25:3-7).

Ezekiel now shifted to hope (chapters 33-48): God had not abandoned the people. God would give a new Spirit, unconditionally, so that “never again” would destruction befall them. Ezekiel proclaims a new heart, transforming people to be capable of keeping God’s statutes. “I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my Spirit” (Ezek 39:29).

## THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE: GOD’S VIVIFYING POWER

“Life” is key to understanding the Spirit’s power in Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel uses the verb “live” (*hayyah*) more than any other prophet. The Spirit’s life-giving power gives new life for God’s people and the whole creation. In the Nicene Creed we name the Spirit as “the Life-giver,” the creative origin and breath of life in all living things (Jn 6:63). Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson describes the Spirit as “God who actually arrives in every moment, God drawing near and passing by in vivifying power in the midst of historical struggle.”<sup>2</sup>

At least two life-giving breakthroughs make Ezekiel important for our theme of “One Spirit”:

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Smith Christopher, “Ezekiel on Fanon’s Couch” in *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible* (Pandora Press & Herald Press, 1999) 143.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 42.

First, Ezekiel saw that newness is possible, even when his whole world—the priestly world of the Jerusalem Temple—had been destroyed. He saw that the presence of God, which previously dwelt only in the Temple, now expanded outward. Ezekiel saw visions of God’s glory traveling around as a wheeled chariot-throne, propelled by God’s living spirit manifested in living creatures (*ruach hahayyah*, Ezek 10:17), coming to dwell with God’s people in their exile in Babylon.

Ezekiel’s second breakthrough was to see how God’s grace acts unconditionally. In struggling to make sense of the exile, Ezekiel came to realize that the nation and people were not capable of turning to God on their own. So in chapter 36 Ezekiel declares that God now acts unilaterally, for God’s own name’s sake (36:22, 32). Without any pre-conditions, God makes us a people of God’s own heart. God puts the Spirit within us.

## I WILL SPRINKLE CLEAN WATERS UPON YOU (36:25)

God will pour clean, fresh, sweet waters upon us, cleansing us from uncleanness and idolatry. *Mayim* is the word for waters, an image for the Spirit throughout the Bible. Jesus images God’s Spirit as “rivers of living water flowing out from the heart,” (Jn 7:38-39). Medieval mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg describes the Spirit as the “outpouring and flowing Godhead.” Like the river of life flowing out from the new Temple in chapter 47, water gives life.

Water heals the world. The waters of baptism connect us to all rivers and springs of water, to all our fellow living creatures for whom water is life. We celebrate the preciousness of water each year on World Water Day (22 March) and during the Seven Weeks for Water during Lent, with the Ecumenical Water Network.

The promise of Ezekiel is that God sends the Spirit to us and to our world, to cleanse all our idolatries and uncleanness.

Today, we might ask: What idolatries and uncleannesses do we need God’s water to heal and cleanse, in our lives and our world today? Martin Luther identified “Mammon” as the most common idolatry on earth.<sup>3</sup> Colossians names “greed” as idolatry (Col 3:5); Might uncleanness today include our dirty fossil-fuel economy, defiling the beautiful Earth, and destroying human and biotic communities?

## GOD’S SPIRIT AS FEMININE: WIND, BREATH OF GOD, RENEWING CREATION (36:26)

The word for spirit (*ruach*) is the same word as breath and wind. One hymn that embodies all these words for *ruach* is “O Living Breath of God, wind at the beginning upon the waters.” In this song we pray for God’s spirit to fill us, to blow upon us as a wind. In fact the original meaning of *ruach* was probably a powerful wind. It is the same spirit that blew over the face of the waters in Genesis 1:1. This is the breath of God that will breathe new life into dead, dry bones in chapter 37.

Like a “solar wind,” suggests Cameron Howard, the innovative wind of God’s Spirit produces new beauty when it energizes us.<sup>4</sup> The breath of God continually creates our world anew, as Psalm 104 proclaims, never abandoning the creation.

The gender of the word *ruach* is feminine in Hebrew. It can be helpful at times to use the feminine pronoun “She” for God’s Spirit. Native American Episcopalian theologian

<sup>3</sup> *The Large Catechism, Explanation to the First Commandment.*

<sup>4</sup> Cameron Howard, *The Old Testament for a Complex World: How the Bible’s Dynamic Testimony Points to New Life for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2021) 14.

Steven Charleston writes that “I refer to the Spirit as ‘she,’” referencing his own Choctaw matrilineal culture. Similarly, Swedish Bishop Krister Stendahl, in his 1990 Bible study for the World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra, notes that “in Hebrew the Spirit is *She*, as is her sister Wisdom in both Hebrew and Greek (*Sophia*).”<sup>5</sup> German theologian Jurgen Moltmann even suggests calling the Spirit “mother”: “If believers are ‘born’ of the Holy Spirit, then we have to think of the Spirit as the ‘mother’ of believers, and in this sense as a feminine Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

## UNCLEANNES AND GENDER VIOLENCE: INSIGHTS FROM TRAUMA THEORY

This feminine gender of God’s Spirit is so important because Ezekiel’s theology becomes dangerously anti-feminine at times, even justifying violence against women.

One problem is that Ezekiel feminizes blood. We need to hear Ezekiel’s critique of war and bloodshed in chapter 36 (“I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land,” 36:18). Yet unfortunately Ezekiel combines the bloodshed metaphor with the metaphor of a woman’s menstrual

uncleanness (Ezek 36:17, “their conduct was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period),” thus deflecting the critique from war toward stigmatizing women.

We must say “no” to any aspect of Ezekiel’s theology that equates women’s blood with uncleanness or sin. God created all bodily functions, and all bodies are good. Today, where women and girls are stigmatized during their monthly periods, we must speak out against any notion of the uncleanness of bodies.

It can be helpful to contextualize Ezekiel as a trauma survivor, using trauma theory.<sup>7</sup> We know from gruesome descriptions of torture inflicted by the Babylonians (the blinding and shackling of Zedekiah, 2 Kings 25:7), as well as forced marches of other populations throughout history—Native American trails of death, and trails of tears in the 1800’s,<sup>8</sup> the forced marches of Jews to Auschwitz from 1940 to 1945—what terrible trauma and atrocities Ezekiel must have experienced.

Trauma scholars note that in dealing with extreme trauma, victims often use behavioral self-blame as a mechanism to reestablish a meaningful world. Ezekiel placed primary blame for the exile not on the Babylonians, but rather on his own nation and people. Most problematic is that Ezekiel scripts the unfaithfulness (metaphorically) of the national leaders of Israel and Judah as whoring daughters, whose bodies deserve to be

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<sup>5</sup> *Energy for Life: Reflections on the Theme “Come Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation* p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 35.

<sup>7</sup> See Ruth Poser, “No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile” in Elizabeth Boase and Christopher Frechette, eds., *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2016) pp.27-48. An abbreviated version of this essay appears as “Verlorene Sprache: Das Ezechielbuch als literarische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Trauma des babylonischen Exils,” *Pastoraltheologie* 105 (2016): 121–3

<sup>8</sup> For Native American forced marches in U.S. history, see Steven Charleston, *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons from Native America on Apocalypse and Hope*. (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2023).

tortured and killed (chapters 16, 23).<sup>9</sup> Such violent rhetoric is never acceptable.<sup>10</sup>

We can learn from Ezekiel 36 how to trust God's life-giving Spirit in times of trauma, even as we do not accept Ezekiel's gendered metaphors of women's unfaithfulness or uncleanness.

## A NEW HEART (36:26)

Ezekiel proclaims God's gift of a new heart and new spirit, echoing what God already promised in 11:19-20. "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh."

"Heart" (*leb*) is our life-center, the life-center of the community and of the person, the seat of emotion as well as of moral decision-making. Ezekiel diagnoses the community's heart problems as stubborn (3:7), wanton (6:9), prone to follow idols (14:3, 4, 7) as well as to listen to false prophets who prophesy from the imaginations of their heart (14:3, 4, 7). The people's heart of stone must be replaced with a new, living heart, in order to be able to follow God's ways.

The new heart will be a "heart of flesh," a unique expression in Ezekiel.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the "heart of stone"—possibly a reference to Pharaoh's hardened heart in the Exodus, or to the adamant heart in Zechariah 7:12—a heart of flesh will lead to faithfulness. Ezekiel also

draws on Jeremiah 31:33, the promise of God writing Torah on the people's heart.

Notice the distinctions between singular and plural in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 36:26-27 (a distinction modern English is not able to reflect): "You" is plural in these verses, "you all."<sup>12</sup> "You" means the whole community. But the words "heart" and "spirit" are singular: The community of God's people shares one singular beating heart, one spirit. Ezekiel does not say I will give you new "hearts" (plural). The parallel with Ezekiel 11:19-20 makes clear that the whole community, as a body, receives one new heart.

Similarly, in the New Testament, the community of Jesus' followers shares one single heart. In the Gospel of John, when Jesus says "Let not your heart be troubled" (Jn 14:1), "your" is plural ("you all") while "heart" is singular.

Indigenous insights can help us see how the Bible helps us "enter into the 'we' rather than the 'I,' as Steven Charleston describes in his Choctaw culture. This is the case also with the Korean concept of "Chi," and the African concept of Ubuntu: Personhood is shared in community.

We might ask: what does our community's heart look like today?

<sup>9</sup> Gail Yee calls Ezekiel 16 and 23 "porno-tropes of trauma," in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 120-22. For analysis of the violence of these metaphors, see Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> As Monica Melanchthon and other scholars note, Jewish tradition banned the reading of Ezek 16 in the synagogue, presumably because of such graphic feminization and violence (see Mishnah Megillah 4, Rabbi Eliezer). Quoted by Monica Melanchthon, "Beyond the Symbolic Stripping of Women: Ezekiel 16, Draupadi, and Dalit Women in Juxtaposition" in *Bordered Bodies, Bothered Voices*, edited by Jione Havea (Wipf and Stock, 2022), 203-223, note 23.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010) 56.

<sup>12</sup> For English readers, the King James Version can be helpful for distinguishing "you" singular from "you" plural. The King James always uses "You" or "Ye" for the plural in Hebrew or Greek; King James uses "Thee" or "Thou" to indicate "you" singular. My students are amazed to learn that most biblical instances of "you" are plural.

## WITHIN US AND IN-DWELLING ALL (36:26, 27)

God puts the new heart and Spirit “within” us (*bekirbekem*), describing in an intimate way how the Spirit in-dwells all of us, together. “Within” is repeated twice, in verses 26 and 27. A better translation would be “within your midst,” since “your” here is plural. God places the new spirit and new heart within us a community, in our midst. Not a privatized Spirit, “within” means within the heart of the people of God, within the heart of the world, and within the heart of the whole interconnected web of God’s creation.

## YOU SHALL KEEP MY ORDINANCES: THE SPIRIT AS MORAL SPIRITUAL POWER FOR ACTION (36:27)

Verse 27 pivots to the ethical transformation that God’s Spirit empowers. Nigerian scholar Philip Igbo underscores:

“In 36:27 the new *ruach* which Yahweh will put within the people becomes the driving force that empowers the locus of the moral will, ‘the heart’ (*leb*). The reformation of the inner will of the people is meant to produce: so that they may “follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”<sup>13</sup>

When God acts to give the new Spirit and new heart, it will be impossible for people *not* to live faithfully, Ezekiel says. Having been cleansed with water, having been given the Spirit, God’s people are now able to resist all false spirits and idolatries. We are empowered for faithfulness, for love of neighbor. We are able to “keep” (“observe”) the statutes and teachings of God.

“Keep” or “observe” is the Hebrew verb *shamar*, the same word describing God’s care for us: “The Lord bless and ‘keep’ you (Num 6:24). Now, empowered by the new heart and the new Spirit, we will be able to “keep” the commandments of God.

How does such faithful obedience become possible for us? Because the Holy Spirit gives what Cynthia Moe-Lobeda describes as the “moral-spiritual power” to live as transformed communities, and to resist the claims of empire.<sup>14</sup> She points to a sermon by Martin Luther which renders the word “Spirit” as “courage.” Luther says: “The Spirit imparts real strength . . . .The Hebrew word ‘spirit’ might well be rendered ‘bold, undaunted courage.’ Spiritual strength is not the strength of muscle and bone; it is true courage—boldness of heart.”<sup>15</sup>

We need this Spirit as bold, undaunted courage; we need this boldness of heart!

Krister Stendahl calls the Spirit “energy for life”—which “engenders *action*.”<sup>16</sup> The Spirit is “power with,” suggests Grace Ji-Sun Kim, a “sharing of power as the Spirit vibrates and

<sup>13</sup> Philip Igbo, The Role of the Spirit (*ruach*) in the Ministry of the Prophet Ezekiel, *International Journal of Religion & Human Relations* 12 (2020) 9.

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “The Holy Spirit: Power for Confessing Faith in the Midst of Empire” in Karen Bloomquist, ed, *Being Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections* (Theology in the Life of the Church volume 1; Lutheran University Press and the Lutheran World Federation, 2007) <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/dts-tlc01-full.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *Sermons of Martin Luther vol. 8: Sermons on Epistle Texts for Trinity Sunday to Advent* (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages) 232; quoted in Moe-Lobeda, “The Holy Spirit,” p.127

<sup>16</sup> Stendahl, *Energy for Life*, 25

moves in us and we become collaborators with the power of the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

Energy, power, courage: Ezekiel’s point is that the Spirit transforms lives. The Spirit is not dead. The Spirit is vibrant and alive today, giving life. The Spirit animates the church’s prophetic ministry, reconciling communities, overturning unjust systems. God gives this Spirit to us unconditionally.

Newness was Ezekiel’s breakthrough—the realization that God’s Spirit is not confined in the Temple. Newness can be our breakthrough also, to see God’s Spirit blowing in unexpected places. New understandings of God’s Spirit “open our imaginations, removing the limits we place on our worldview.”<sup>18</sup> The Spirit opens us to interfaith insights, recognizing how God’s Spirit is alive in many religions. As the prophet Joel says, God will pour out the Spirit on “all flesh.”

## RESTORED TO LIVE IN THE LAND, YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE (36:28)

Ezekiel repeats the wonderful covenant promise: “You shall be my people, and I will be your God,” echoing chapter 11:19, now with ecological connotations. The land itself is restored when God’s people come home to live in faithfulness, keeping God’s statutes, what Ellen Davis calls a “Torah of the earth.”<sup>19</sup>

Ezekiel began chapter 36 with prophecies to the mountains and watercourses of Israel, that God’s people are coming home (36:1-12). The promise to the land is taken up again in 36:28-30: Israel’s obedience will mean the landscape will flourish. Fruit trees will abound. Famine will end. God heals, restores, and reconciles all. God’s Spirit renews the face of the earth.

*Rev. Dr Barbara Rossing is Professor of New Testament and Environmental Ministry Coordinator at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA.*

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<sup>17</sup> Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Homebrewed Christianity Guide to the Holy Spirit: Hand-Raisers Han, and the Holy Ghost* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018) 129.

<sup>18</sup> Kim, 145.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2001) 195.

# “ONE HOPE”

GERSON ACKER

## READINGS

Mark 4: 35-41

Postmodernity is influenced by significant changes in society, such as globalization, technology, and the fragmentation of traditional structures. These changes impact people in diverse ways, leading many to lose hope for the future. There can be many causes for this loss of hope, though most are related to a sense of impotence when facing the problems and the uncertainties of the world today. The lack of work possibilities, financial difficulties, political instability, and the environmental crisis, are some of the factors that can lead a person to lose hope. And if you add to all this a sense of isolation and the disconnection with other people, which are prevalent in the world today, this just increases the sense of hopelessness. A lack of a sharp vision about the future, the absence of any inspiring leadership also contributes to this loss of hope.

There is data that points to this reality, such as an increasing number of cases of anxiety and depression at a global level. A study conducted by the World Health Organization<sup>20</sup>, indicates that depression is the principal cause of disability on the global level. There are a large number of people who feel disheartened about the future, and this is clear in research polls which indicate a fall in optimism and hope in most of the developed countries. It is difficult to keep hope alive when faced with increasing challenges and uncertainties. The sense of a storm is strong, and we are about to call out, as did the disciples: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4: 38).

The story of the storm in Mark 4: 35-41 shows that the experience of the storm is crucial to any faith journey. The disciples, who were experienced fishermen, knew the storms in the Sea of Galilee, but that did not stop them feeling fear when they faced a storm. The boat they were in was small and fragile. Violent storms so often changed the calm on the lake. The cold air that came across from the Mediterranean encountered the warm and humid air on the lake, thus causing winds and waves. Faced with such a windstorm the disciples were terrified. Their experience made no difference and fear grabbed hold of them.

Jesus’ presence in the boat with the disciples, even though he was asleep, encouraged them to express their despair when facing the situation and to trust the Teacher. It is surprising that those sailors would seek the help of a carpenter. The Bible passage tells us he was sleeping, probably because he was exhausted. If the storm didn’t wake Jesus up, I can imagine that they tried to wake him more than once. They tried to wake him up several times. In the verb “to hope” we find a sense of persistence, of keep on trying. There is an intrinsic connection between stubbornness (the sort of the tenacious widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18) and hope.

When the disciples finally manage to wake the teacher, the roles are inverted: the disciples’ actions end, and Jesus becomes active. Jesus becomes their only hope. The hope of salvation. If the boat represents the church, the biblical passage reminds us that the church as a human institution, has its frailties, that is has travelled through “fluid times.” We experience the feeling that the teacher does not seem to care and that we, as disciples, are not too sure what to do.

And yet, the calmness in Jesus shows us a way forward. We are invited to be part of that

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<sup>20</sup> World Health Organization *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. 16 June 2022. Accessed 6 June 2023 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338>)

tranquility, which we will not acquire by our own means. It is a gift from God. It is God's grace. Jesus never promised that nothing would threaten us. Hope is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15: 13) that we cannot generate ourselves. Hope is the value of confronting the challenges of life beyond any predetermined idea of success or failure.

Jurgen Moltmann says that hope is the moving force that leads human beings towards the future. Hope is a dynamic process which is renewed at every step, and which is intimately connected with faith and loving kindness<sup>21</sup>. Like the disciples during the storm, hope is generated by an experience of despair and suffering. It is through such a demanding situation that human beings encounter the light of hope which leads them forward. This hope is based on the belief that God is present and acting in the world. That was the security of the disciples!

After calming the violent storm with the words: "*Peace! Be still!*" (v.39) Jesus turned to the disciples (the community of Mark's readers and those of us who read the text today) and asked them: "*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*" (v.40). The disciples were afraid because they could not control the situation. Jesus' question has an obvious answer, but from the question, he forces the disciples to think and reconsider their situation. Jesus was preparing them for their ministry, to face the challenges of discipleship, which are crueler than any storm; and they should be aware of that.

It is important to remember that the Marcan community was formed by Christians with a Jewish background, who were experiencing or had experienced Nero's persecution (65 CE) and the results of the Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE). As a result of this, the community had been shaken to the core of their own belief in the messianic role of Jesus. It was a community organized not only to help those who believed they knew Jesus, but also to proclaim Jesus to those who did not know him. In this sense, the

Marcan community was invited to re-interpret their own life in light of the life of Jesus (as we currently do).

Mark the evangelist wants his community, through the knowledge they have of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, to have hope and the certainty of Jesus' protection in times of tension and confusion. This witness continues to guide us today. To be able to face the challenges of being church in this world, we must discover we are one body, under the guidance of the same Spirit, and sustained by one hope: the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central event in history and offers hope to humanity. In the resurrection, death was conquered, and life is restored. As a result, hope is an expression of faith in the victory of life over death.

The opposite of the chaotic waters of the storm are the waters of baptism, which present us a reconciled community, reminding us that all people are in the same boat, and that Jesus is in the boat with us. Jesus looks at our "storm experiences" with a vision of mercy. He does care! Our journey of life teaches us that without experiencing storms there is no life of faith, even less hope.

Hope is not simply a form of optimism. Optimism tends to see facts or circumstances in a nicer and more positive way. It tries to disguise reality so it will look better and will be easier to face. But biblical hope does not rest on circumstances, be they good or bad. The biblical people of hope very often faced exceedingly demanding situations and stormy times, but they chose *hope* and trusted the Lord, even when there was no evidence that things would get better. This is the same meaning of the word "hope" in biblical Greek ("elpis"). It is a hope that does not depend on the current circumstances, rather one that lives amid difficulties and trials, because it is sustained by the grace of God. It is a motivating force to persevere in faith, in doing good, in loving others.

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<sup>21</sup> MOLTSMANN, Jurgen. *Theology of hope...* Translation Helmuth Alfredo Simon, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Sao Paulo: Teologica, Loyola, 2005

Rubem Alves, a Brazilian theologian and psychoanalyst, said that “hope is the courage of joy”<sup>22</sup>. Hope is an essential element to keep joy and to be able to confront the challenges of life. It can also be seen as a motivating force that keeps us positive and our courage even in challenging times. Hope is not passive, rather it is active and committed to this world, with all of creation. It is through hope that human beings seek to overcome demanding situations and construct a future which is more just and in solidarity. It is a process of constant hoping, of constant trying, even with a degree of stubbornness.

In the words of a Brazilian song of Raul Seixas:

*Look! Don't say the song is lost.  
Have faith in God, have faith in life.  
Try again!  
Drink it!  
Because the living water still lies in its source,*

*You have legs to cross the bridge.  
Nothing is finished, no!  
Raise your thirsty hand  
And start walking again  
Don't believe your head can manage it  
If you stop (...)  
Try once more*<sup>23</sup>

If Jesus is with us in the boat, no matter the storm, with hope, we will try again and again, until the Kingdom comes: the ultimate fulfilment of our hope.

*Rev. Gerson Acker is a pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB). He graduated in theology from the Faculdades EST in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul-Brazil in 2010. He serves the IECLB Evangelical Lutheran Community of Nova Friburgo, in the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro.*

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<sup>22</sup> ALVES, Rubem. *O love the rises to light. (O amor que acende a lua)*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Campinas: Papyrus 2003

<sup>23</sup> SIEXAS, Raul “Tente outra vez” (Try once more). Music and video clip: [https://youtube/hu\\_XSw4e9GU](https://youtube/hu_XSw4e9GU)

# SUNDAY WORSHIP

The following churches and congregations welcomed Assembly participants for Sunday worship on 17 September. The visitors from around the world participated through preaching, sharing special greetings and joining congregation members in a common meal.

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN POLAND

### KATOWICKA DIOCESE

- Bytom
- Chorzów
- Częstochowa
- Gliwice
- Golasowice
- Hołodunów
- Jastrzębie
- Katowice
- Miechowice
- Mikołów
- Orzesze
- Czerwionka
- Pszczyna
- Tychy

- Wodzisław Śląski
- Zabrze
- Żory

### CIESZYŃSKA DIOCESE

- Bielsko
- Bładnice
- Brenna Górki
- Cieszyn
- Drogomyśl
- Goleiszów
- Istebna
- Skoczów
- Wisła
- Wisła Czarne

## SILESIA EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN CZECH REPUBLIC

- Bystřice congregation



Sunday worship at the Parish of the Lord's Resurrection in Katowice, Poland.

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF CZECH BRETHREN

- Český Tesin congregation

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

- Dolný Kubín congregation
- Bardejov congregation

Lutherans from around the globe participated in Sunday worship at the Ružomberok congregation of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic.



Congregation pastors in Ružomberok share gifts with visiting Assembly participants.



Assembly participants outside the Lutheran Church in Bystrice, Czech Republic.



A gesture of hospitality with Assembly participants at the Lutheran Church in Bystrice, Czech Republic.



# EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE





This was the second time since LWF's founding that an Assembly was taking place in Central Eastern Europe. LWF Vice-President for the region, Archbishop Urmas Viilma, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) convened in Kraków, Poland, expresses its deepest gratitude to the following distinguished persons, organizations and institutions for their indispensable contributions to the success of the Assembly and making it a fruitful, meaningful and important event in the life of the LWF and all the participants. To this end, the Assembly adopts the following expressions of gratitude.

To the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland (ECACP), for generously inviting the LWF Thirteenth Assembly to Poland and the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to all participants. The Assembly acknowledges and greatly appreciates the tireless efforts and energy the ECACP and its Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec have invested during the preparation and throughout the Assembly.

To the Municipality of Kraków and its Mayor, Jacek Majchrowski, and Deputy Mayor, Anna Korfel-Jasińska, the Stara Zajezdnia Kraków de Silva, as well as ECACP, for their generous welcome reception dinner for all the assembly participants. Thanks also go to the Polish National Song and Dance Ensemble, “Śląsk,” for their cultural concert. Appreciation is also extended to Kraków Travel for the cultural and other tourism information they have provided. We also thank the municipality and the Congress Bureau of Kraków for the free transportation pass, the free taxi service, hotel for VIPs and their provision of two days’ worth of the costs for the use of the ICE Congress Center.

To the government of the Republic of Poland for their unwavering support and cooperation from the day it was announced that the LWF Thirteenth Assembly would be held in Kraków until the end of the Assembly. To its Department of Foreign Affairs and the various Polish Embassies for their invaluable support and assistance to the delegates acquiring visas to enter Poland.

To the Assembly Planning Committee and its chair, Presiding Bishop Dr Tamás Fabiny of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, and members Ms Colleen Elizabeth Cunningham, Mr Leon Chau, Rev. Gustavo Gómez, Rev.

Katherine Gohm, Ms Kadre Arikainen, Ms Amanda Carlshamre and Rev. Klaus Rieth, and their advisors for their overall guidance, counsel and time spent for various preparatory meetings in the lead up to the Assembly.

To the International Worship Planning Committee and its chair, Ms Kinga Marjatta Pap, Assembly Worship Coordinator Tom Witt, and the Local Worship Committee and its chair, Rev. Piotr Sztwiertnia, the music directors, liturgical leaders and their assistants, drama/performance team, Assembly Choir, local choirs from the different parishes and others for carrying out spirit-filled worship services.

To the Local Assembly Planning Committee, Ms Anna Wrzesińska, chair, and members Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec, Dr Adrian Korczago, Dr Marian Niemiec, Rev. Tymoteusz Bujok, Ms Agnieszka Godfrejów-Tarnogórska, Ms Zofia Niemczyk and Ms Jolanta Palowska, for their capable leadership, devotion and time they have given in guiding all the preparatory processes and actions in the lead toward and during the assembly. Moreover, the assembly offers special words of appreciation to the volunteers for their dedications to their multi-task assignments (welcoming participants at the airport, help with transportation, showing directions, technical assistance, etc.), eagerness to help or simply their smiles to Assembly participants making everyone feel welcomed and at home every day. Warm thanks are extended to the local congregations who hosted participants in the Youth Pre-Assembly and Women’s Pre-Assembly and the delegations of Pre-Assembly visits. Appreciation is extended to ECACP’s Augustana Printing Press for the printed materials, Jordan Bus for local transportation throughout the Assembly and Liberandum, provider of the medical services.

To the member churches, national committees and our generous host ECACP in particular for contributing to the Assembly budget and others who have made in kind contribution to the planning and running of the Assembly.

To the 26 local ECACP parishes and their pastors that hosted the church Sunday services and visits to local communities as



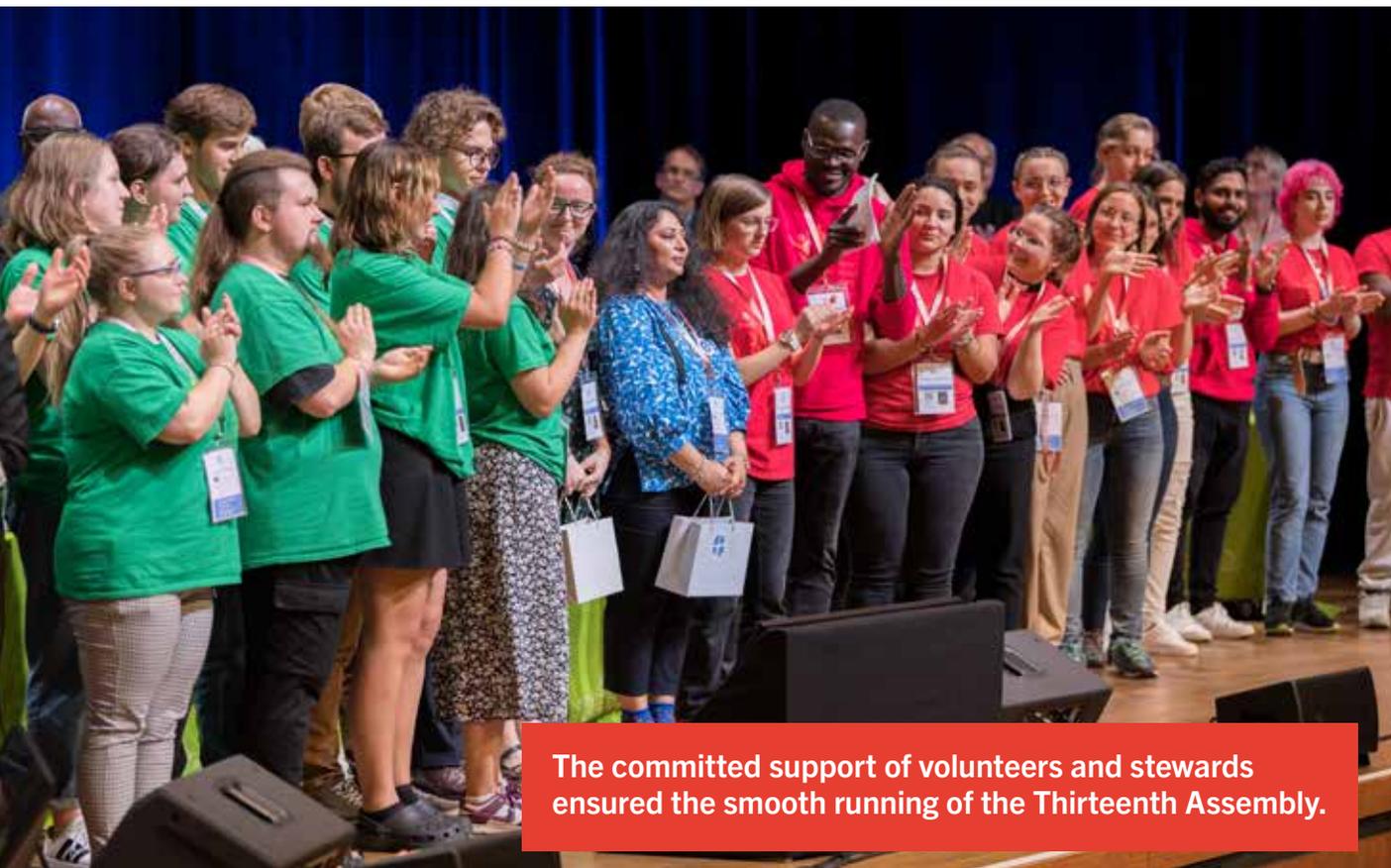
**Members of the Local Assembly Planning Committee.**

well as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic and two Czech churches, the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

The Assembly expresses its profound appreciation for the many greetings extended to it by representatives of its ecumenical partners. We acknowledge the greetings provided by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople conveyed through His Eminence Metropolitan Prof. Dr Kyrillos of Krini, Patriarchal Exarch of Malta; the Roman Catholic Church, through His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity; the World Council of Churches through Rev. Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Moderator; Mennonite World Conference, through Rev. César García, General Secretary; World Methodist Council,

through Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary; the Anglican Communion, through Bishop Anthony Poggo, Secretary General; World Communion of Reformed Churches through Rev. Dr Hanns Lessing, Acting General Secretary; Pentecostal World Fellowship, through Dr William Wilson, Chair; Caritas Internationalis, through Mr Alistair Dutton, Secretary General; Global Christian Forum, through Rev. Dr Casely Essamuah, Secretary General; ACT Alliance, through Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary; Conference of European Churches, through Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary; and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, through Dr Mario Fischer, General Secretary.

This Assembly recognizes and rejoices in the presence of two former Presidents of the LWF, Bishop Emeritus Mark S. Hanson and Bishop Emeritus Munib Younan, and the two former



General Secretaries, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko and Rev. Dr Martin Junge among us.

To the many visitors who joined from places near and far at their own personal expenses in order to share in the life of the Assembly.

To the LWF Thirteenth Assembly Keynote speaker, Mons. Prof. Dr Tomáš Halík, for his powerful and profound address that challenged the Assembly to live up to its theme of “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.” The same goes to respondents who interacted with Prof. Halík, Ms Kathryn Lohre of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Presiding Bishop Dr Fredrick Onaeli Shoo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, bringing the discussion to the realities and challenges of the LWF member churches.

To the preachers at the Opening and Closing Worship services, Rev. Danielle Dokman, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname, and Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt, LWF General Secretary, respectively, Bible study presenters – Rev. Dr Ho-Yin Kenneth Tsang, Prof. Kalina

Wojciechowska, Rev. Dr Barbara Rossing, and Rev. Gerson Acker, for their thoughtful reflections on the theological underpinnings of the assembly themes and its sub-themes.

To the Assembly Thematic keynote speakers – Rev. Dr Benny Sinaga, Rev. Dr Bruk A. Asale and Archbishop emerita Dr Antje Jackelén – for their insightful deliberation on the sub-themes of One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope respectively. Similar appreciation extends to respondents and moderators of the respective thematic plenaries One Body: Bishop Naledzani Josephine Sikhwari, Prof. Dr Bernd Oberdorfer, Moderator: Rev. Dr Johannes Zeiler; One Spirit: Bishop Izani Bruch, Prof. Dr Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Moderator: Ms Colleen Cunningham; One Hope: Respondents: Bishop Pavlo Shvarts; Ms Katarina Kuhnert, Moderator: Rev. Sally Azar, who enriched the discussions through their contextual experiences.

We extend to our Special Guest, Mr Marian Turski, our sincere thanks for his inspiring testimony and words of wisdom which he shared with us on Saturday 16 September.

To village group chairs, co-chairs and rapporteurs for displaying extraordinary facilitation skills that made the village groups indeed open, safe and interactive spaces where the Assembly themes and its sub-themes were further reflected upon and molded into concrete proposals for action by the LWF and its member churches.

To all those who participated in the Jarmark exhibitions and the workshop presenters and facilitators for enriching the Assembly through informal and sometimes entertaining exchange of ideas, traditional objects, clothes and foods that truly reflect the global nature of the LWF communion.

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF records special gratitude to all those who contributed to the moving visit to the Memorial and Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as its director, staff and guides.

The Assembly expresses its gratitude for the work of the LWF Vice-Presidents, other officers, the entire Council and its various committees over the past six years. The Assembly took many actions that required the attention and action of the Council. The Council has faithfully carried out many of those resolutions and statements, the COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding. The members of the Council and its Committees have faithfully executed their tasks, including providing helpful resources and assistance to the member churches.

This Assembly conveys acknowledgments to its various Committees and their Chairs who devoted their time and energy to make this Assembly productive and help it to diligently discharge its responsibilities as per the LWF constitution, these are – the Business Committee and its Chair, Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, Policy and Reference Committee and its Chair, Ms LoeRose Mbise, Editorial Committee and its Chair, Bishop Dr Kaisamari Hintikka, Nominations Committee and its Chair, Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, Credentials and Elections Committee and its Chair, Rev. Dr Robinson Butarbutar, and Minutes Committee and its Chair, Ms Wiebke Zimmermann. We also extend our thanks to the following committees: the Women's Pre-Assembly Global Planning

Committee, the Local Women's Pre-assembly Committee, the Youth Pre-Assembly Global Planning Committee, the Local Youth Pre-Assembly Committee, the Men's Pre-Assembly Global Planning Committee, the Local Men's Pre-assembly Committee, the Auschwitz Task Force, the Code of Conduct Response Team, and the Pastoral Care and Support Team.

To Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt, General Secretary of the LWF, for her wisdom and overall leadership and managerial capabilities she exhibited both in public and behind the scenes to create an enabling and friendly environment for smooth running of the Assembly. We also thank the Assembly Coordinator, Ms Maryssa Camaddo, for her meticulous planning, implementation and general oversight of the entire progression of the Assembly. To Ms Magali Bauer and Ms Jeanne Pierson, Assembly Assistants for their invaluable and tireless work of registering and arranging travel of participants, and to Rev. Klaus Rieth as ICE venue coordinator. The same appreciation is extended to the Local Assembly Coordinator, Ms Malgorzata Zachraj and her colleagues, Mr Adam Marek, Mr Mateusz Wozniak, Mr Konrad Indeka and Ms Magdalena Marek, for their persistent commitment including going extra miles when circumstances required, as it happened many times. We are grateful to the LWF European Regional Secretary Rev. Dr Ireneusz Lukas for all the facilitation and linkages with the region and the host church.

To the many teams and leaders for Communications, Space Management, Information, Safety and Security, Village groups, Jarmark, Registration, Visitors' program, Finance, IT and equipment, Documentation, Thematic plenaries, Regional meetings, Ushers, Women, Youth and Men Pre-Assemblies, as well as the entire LWF staff, co-opted staff and many others from the member churches who have unselfishly given their time and efforts to the Assembly. A special word of thanks goes to the designer of the Assembly logo, Ms Kristen Opalinski, and WCC colleagues Mr Marc Henri Heiniger, Ms Charlotte Belot and Mr Daniel Sanchez for the technical and plenary support during the Assembly. Appreciation is extended to the core volunteers and stewards for their great service. Particular gratitude is expressed to the language service, the interpreters, the translators, the editors and the technical service for their continuous efforts

to enable communication among the Assembly participants. Similar appreciation is also extended to the medical professionals who made themselves available for any help throughout the Assembly period and Delta Travels for the air travel arrangements of the participants.

To all the Polish government's branches, ministries and agencies, who contributed their part to make this assembly peaceful, joyful, colorful and successful.

To the representatives of the press, radio, and television who have covered and reported on the activities of this Assembly, they and individuals who have utilized social media have assisted in communicating to the world the role of The Lutheran World Federation both in the affairs of churches and nations.

To the management and staff of the ICE Congress Center, the main Assembly venue for their state-of-the-art facilities and professional services. Appreciation is extended to Masters Catering for the dining service. The same goes

to the Director and administration of AGH hostels Strumyk, Olimp and Babilon, which provided comfortable accommodation and friendly environment for the participants and AGH Club Studio for breakfast and other meals at AGH. We thank also the Kraków Parish Church under the leadership of Pastor Lukasz Ostruszka for the invaluable support to the Assembly office and side activities organized during the Assembly.

Last but not least, the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF expresses its profound gratitude, love and indebtedness to Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, President of The Lutheran World Federation, for his pastoral and prophetic leadership of the communion for the past six years. Archbishop Musa's leadership and witness during the past six years has affirmed our true global communion through his numerous visits of accompaniment to member churches in all the LWF regions and his care and concern for the member churches and the Communion Office during the COVID-19 pandemic. His competence, experience and



**Members of the Assembly Planning Committee, responsible for various preparatory meetings in the lead up to the Assembly, and during the event itself.**

insight have guided the LWF as it has discussed and explored the practical implications of this global communion within our diversity.

This Assembly recognizes that there are many other persons and organizations who have been involved in the preparation, planning and functioning of this Assembly. Although unnamed, their contributions are not unnoticed, and our hearty thanks are extended to them.

We also thank the delegates, participants and all those who took time off to be at this Assembly.

Beyond this expression, we thank God for the many blessings bestowed upon the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF convened in Kraków, Poland from 13 to 19 September 2023.



# APPENDICES

WILLKOMMEN  
IN POLEN



UN CORPS  
UN ESPRIT  
UNE ESPERANCE  
TREIZIÈME ASSEMBLÉE  
FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE POLO  
2023 - COLOGNE, ALLEMAGNE

BIENVENUE  
EN POLO

UE  
OGNE



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# SCHEDULE

13 September Wed	TIME	14 September Thurs	15 September Fri
	Daily theme		<i>One Body</i>
8:00 - 9:00 The Gathering	8:30 - 10:00	Worship and Bible Study <i>Theater Hall</i> 8:30 - 10:00	Worship and Bible Study <i>Theater Hall</i> 8:00 - 9:30
9:00 - 11:00 Opening Worship <i>Auditorium</i>	10:00 - 11:15	<u>Plenary II</u> Report of the General Secretary First Report of Nominations Committee	<b>09:30 - 10:45</b> <u>Plenary V</u> Final Report Nominations Committee; Reports of other Assembly Committees, Proposed Amendments to Constitution
11:00 - 11:30 Break	11:15 - 11:45	Break	<b>10:45 - 11:15 Break</b>
11:30 - 12:30 <u>Orientation Plenary</u> Induction to the Assembly	11:45 - 13:00	<u>Plenary III</u> Keynote Address	<b>11:15 - 12:30</b> Thematic Plenary One Body
	13:00 - 13:15	Midday prayer <i>Auditorium</i>	12:30 Departure to Oświęcim  Lunch in the bus  Visit to the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz- Birkenau  18:15 Departure to Kraków
12:30 - 14:30 Lunch	13:15 - 15:00	Lunch	
14:30 - 16:00 <u>Opening Plenary</u> Constituting the Thirteenth Assembly Address of the LWF President	15:00 - 16:30	Village Groups	
16:00 - 16:30 Break	16:30 - 17:00	Break	
16:30 - 18:00 <u>Plenary I</u> Messages from the Regional, Women's, Youth and Men's Pre-Assemblies	17:00 - 18:30	<u>Plenary IV</u> Report of the Chair of the Finance Committee Reports of Assembly Committees	
18:00 - 19:00 To Reception venue	18:30 - 19:15	Evening prayer <i>Theater Hall</i>	
19:00 - 21:30 Welcome Reception	19:15 - 20:45	Dinner in ICE	Dinner in AGH
	20:45 - 21:45	Regional meetings	Sharing Circle (optional)
<b>Pre and Post meetings</b>	<b>Pre-Assemblies: Youth 8-11 Sept; Women's 8-11 Sept; Men's 11 Sept a Council 12 Sept p.m; Council 20 Sept</b>		

16 September Sat	17 September Sun	18 September Mon	19 September Tues
<b><i>One Spirit</i></b>		<b><i>One Hope</i></b>	
Worship and Bible Study <i>Theater Hall</i> 8:30 - 10:00	Sunday worship in local congregations	Worship and Bible study <i>Theater Hall</i> 8:30 - 10:00	Worship with Common Word Ecumenical Panel <i>Theater Hall</i> 8:30 - 10:15
Thematic Plenary One Spirit		Thematic Plenary One Hope	<b>10:15 - 11:15</b> <u>Plenary VIII</u> Public Statements Resolutions
Break		Break	
Village Groups		Village Groups	<u>Plenary IX</u> Public Statements Resolutions Assembly Message
Midday prayer Village Groups		Midday prayer Village Groups	Midday prayer <i>Auditorium</i>
Lunch	Lunch		
Jarmark and Workshops	Church and local visits	Jarmark and Workshops	<u>Closing Plenary</u> Any other Business
Break		Break	
<u>Plenary VI</u> Elections: President and Council		<u>Plenary VII</u> LWF Constitution Assembly Message	17:00 - 18:30 Closing Worship & Installation of the new LWF governance <i>Theater Hall</i>
Evening prayer <i>Theater Hall</i>	Evening prayer <i>Theater Hall</i>	Dinner in ICE	
Dinner in ICE	Dinner in AGH	Dinner in ICE	
Sharing Circle (optional)			
<b>and 12 Sept a.m; Combined Youth, Women and Men 12 Sept p.m; Executive Committee 12 Sept a.m;</b>			

# GOVERNING BODIES

## ASSEMBLY

The highest decision-making body of LWF is the Assembly, normally held every six years. It consists of representatives from member churches representing each of the communion's seven regions. Among its many functions is the election of the President and the Council. Between assemblies, the LWF is governed by the Council, which meets annually and by its Executive Committee which meets twice a year.

## COUNCIL

The Assembly elects members of the Council taking into consideration the regional nominations. The Council is the principal authority of the LWF during the period between assemblies. The Council shall consist of 48 members, the President and the Chairperson of the Finance committee if he/she is elected from outside the Council. The Council shall elect the Vice-Presidents from among its members, taking into consideration the seven geographical regions of the LWF. In addition, the Council shall elect two members for the purpose of ensuring gender balance and generational participation. The Council may appoint committees or ad hoc sub-committees as required and appoint their chairpersons.

## MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL 2023-2030

*Name (Man – M, Woman – W, Youth – Y, Lay – L, Ordained – O), Church*

Bishop Henrik STUBKJÆR (LWF President) (M. O.), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

## AFRICA

### *Lutheran Communion in Central and Western Africa (LUCCWA)*

Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA, W, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon

Mr Moses Sanganwo MOMOH, M-Y, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone

Mr Ishaya NUHU, M, L, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

### *Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa (LUCCEA)*

Rev. Dr Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, M, O, The Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus

Ms Toromare MANANATO, W, L, Malagasy Lutheran Church

Presiding Bishop Fredrick Onaeli SHOO, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Ms Phiona UWASE, W-Y, L, Lutheran Church of Rwanda

### *Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA)*

Mr Petrus Johannes HANEKOM, M-Y, L, Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa

Ms Susan MATROOS, W, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa

Bishop Tomás NDAWANAPO, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola



**Members of the LWF Council, 2023-2030.**

**ASIA**

*North-East Asia Lutheran Communion*

Bishop. Chun Wa CHANG, M, O, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong

Ms Mei-Ting (Terry) LIN, W, L, The Lutheran Church of Taiwan

Ms Ibuki HOMMA, W-Y, L, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church

*West-South Asia Lutheran Communion*

Bishop Jacob Priestly BALASINGH, M, O, India Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ms Ranjita Christi BORGOARY, W, L, Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (India)

Ms Rinki RACHEL SOREN, W-Y, L, Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church

### *South-East Asia Lutheran Communion*

Ms Agnes GABEE, W, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea

Bishop Steven LAWRENCE, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia

Rev. Dr Deonal SINAGA, M, O, Protestant Christian Batak Church (Indonesia)

Rev. Mesrawati TELAMBANUA, W-Y, O, The Protestant Christian Church (Indonesia)

Bishop Kristina KÜHNBAUM-SCHMIDT, W, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany

Oberkirchenrat Michael MARTIN, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)

Oberkirchenrat Dirk STELTER, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover (Germany)

Ms Bettina WESTFELD, W, L, Evangelical Lutheran of Saxony (Germany)

### CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE

Bishop Dr Tamás FABINY, M, O, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

Mr Martin Jan JAVORNIK, M-Y, L, Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia

Rev. Dr Olga NAVRÁTILOVÁ, W, O, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

Ms Milita POŠKIENĖ, W, L, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania

Prof. Dr Jerzy SOJKA, M, L, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

### CENTRAL WESTERN EUROPE

Superintendent Olivier DANTINE, M, O, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria

Mr Tim GÖTZ, M-Y, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)

Ms Charlotte HORN, W-Y, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany)

Dr Anna Hildegard KRAUSS, W, L, Lutheran Church in Great Britain

### EUROPE – NORDIC COUNTRIES

Rev. Dr Arnfríður GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, W, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

Rev. Jussi LUOMA, M-Y, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Rev. Veronica PÅLSSON, W-Y, O, Church of Sweden

Mr Øystein SAMNØEN, M, L, The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway

The Very Rev. Kristine SANDMÆL, W, O, Church of Norway

Rev. Dr Peter LODBERG, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

### LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Bishop Atahualpa HERNÁNDEZ MIRANDA, M, O, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia

Mr Michael RAM, M, L, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana

Ms Isabella REIMANN GNAS, W-Y, L, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil

Rev. Wilma Elisabet ROMMEL, W, O, United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Argentina and Uruguay)

## NORTH AMERICA

Rev. William Edward FLIPPIN JR, M, O,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Rev. Katherine Maria GOHM, W, O, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Canada

Ms Khadijah ISLAM, W-Y, L, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Rev. Barbara LUND, W, O, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America (USA)

Bishop Leila ORTIZ, W, O, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America (USA)

Mr Brad WENDEL, M, L, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America (USA)

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee oversees the proper functioning of the LWF between Council meetings. It is the appointing authority of staff with programmatic and supervisory responsibilities, with the exception of Communion Office Leadership Team (COLT) members, who are appointed by the Council.

The Executive Committee serves as the LWF Board of Trustees and Personnel Committee. It includes the President, seven Vice-Presidents, the Finance Committee the Chairperson, and chairpersons of the LWF Council Committees.

The president, vice-presidents and the finance committee chairperson represent the seven LWF geographical regions: Africa, Asia, Central Eastern Europe, Central Western Europe, Nordic Countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America.

## MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### *President*

Bishop Henrik STUBKJÆR, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Denmark (Nordic Countries)

### *Vice-Presidents*

**Africa:** President Dr Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, The  
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

**Asia:** Rev. Chun Wa CHANG, The Evangelical  
Lutheran Church of Hong Kong (China)

**Central Eastern Europe:** Bishop Dr Tamás  
FABINY, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
Hungary

**Central Western Europe:** Bishop Kristina  
KÜHNBAUM-SCHMIDT, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Northern Germany

**Nordic Countries:** Rev. Dr Arnfríður  
GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church of Iceland

**Latin America and the Caribbean:** Ms Isabella  
REIMANN GNAS, Evangelical Church of the  
Lutheran Confession in Brazil

**North America:** Rev. Katherine Maria GOHM;  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

### *Chairperson of the Finance Committee*

Mr Michael RAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in Guyana

### *Member at large*

Ms Ibuki HOMMA, Japan Evangelical Lutheran  
Church

## CHAIRPERSONS OF COMMITTEES AND STANDING COMMITTEES

**Finance Committee:** Mr Michael RAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana

**Committee for Advocacy and Public Voice:** Rev. Jussi LUOMA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

**Committee for Communications:** Dr Anna Hildegard KRAUSS, The Lutheran Church in Great Britain

**Committee for Communion Relations:** Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon

**Committee for Ecumenical Relations:** Dr Jerzy Janusz SOJKA, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

**Committee for Theology, Mission and Justice:** Rev. Dr Deonal SINAGA, Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) (Indonesia)

**Committee for World Service:** Rev. Barbara LUND, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

**Standing Committee for Constitution and Membership:** Ms Khadijah ISLAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

## COUNCIL COMMITTEES

The Council Committees and ad-hoc sub-committees guide and review the work of the LWF. Committee members and chairpersons are appointed by the Council from among its members.

In addition, the Council may name up to 21 advisers to provide additional expertise. The advisers have voting rights in the Committees, and have voice but no vote in Council sessions.

## FINANCE COMMITTEE

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Mr Michael RAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana

Ms Mei-Ting (Terry) LIN; The Lutheran Church of Taiwan

Ms Milita POŠKIENĖ, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania

Oberkirchenrat Dirk STELTER, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover (Germany)

Ms Phiona UWASE, Lutheran Church of Rwanda

### *Adviser*

Oberkirchenrat Olaf MIRGELER, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany

## COMMITTEE FOR ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC VOICE

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Rev. Jussi LUOMA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Bishop Chun Wa CHANG, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong

Superintendent Olivier DANTINE, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria

Bishop Dr Tamás FABINY, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

Ms Charlotte HORN, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany)

Ms Susan MATROOS, Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa

Rev. Mesrawati TELAMBANUA, The Protestant Christian Church (BNKP) (Indonesia)

Mr Brad WENDEL, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

### *Advisers*

Mr Uhuru Ignatius DEMPERS, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia

Rev. Sally AZAR, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Dr Anna Hildegard KRAUSS, The Lutheran Church in Great Britain

Bishop Jacob Priestly BALASINGH, India Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ms Khadijah ISLAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Mr Martin Jan JAVORNIK, Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia

Mr Ishaya NUHU, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria

Mr Øystein SAMNØEN, The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway

### *Adviser*

Rev. Denver Benjamin GRAUMANN, Moravian Church in South Africa

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNION RELATIONS

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Rev. Dr Jeannette ADA EPSE MAINA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon

Ms Ranjita Christi BORGOARY, Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (India)

Rev. Katherine Maria GOHM; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Rev. Dr Peter LODBERG, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Mr Moses Sanganwo MOMOH, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone

Rev. Dr Olga NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (Czech Republic)

Ms Bettina WESTFELD, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony (Germany)

### *Advisers*

Rev. Karla STEILMANN FRANCO, Evangelical Church of the River Plate

Archbishop Urmas VIILMA, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

## COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Dr Jerzy Janusz SOJKA, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

Mr Petrus Johannes HANEKOM, Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa

Bishop Atahualpa HERNÁNDEZ MIRANDA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia

Oberkirchenrat Michael MARTIN, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)

Bishop Leila ORTIZ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Ms Rinki RACHEL SOREN, NEPAL Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Very Rev. Kristine SANDMÆL, Church of Norway

### *Adviser*

Dr Minna HIETAMÄKI, Evangelical Church of Finland

## COMMITTEE FOR THEOLOGY, MISSION AND JUSTICE

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Rev. Dr Deonal SINAGA, Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) (Indonesia)

Rev. Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Rev. William Edward FLIPPIN JR, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Ms Ibuki HOMMA, JAPAN Evangelical Lutheran Church

Bishop Kristina KÜHNBAUM-SCHMIDT, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany

Bishop Tomás NDAWANAPO, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola

Rev. Veronica PÅLSSON, Church of Sweden

Rev. Wilma Elisabet ROMMEL, United Evangelical Church (Argentina)

### *Adviser*

Ms Kathryn LOHRE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

## COMMITTEE FOR WORLD SERVICE

### *Members of the Council*

**Chairperson:** Rev. Barbara LUND, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)

Ms Agnes GABEE, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea

Mr Tim GÖTZ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)

Rev. Dr Arnfríður GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

Bishop Steven LAWRENCE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia

Ms Toromare MANANATO, Malagasy Lutheran Church (Madagascar)

Ms Isabella REIMANN GNAS, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil

Presiding Bishop Fredrick SHOO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

### *Other members*

Mr Martin KESSLER, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

Rev. Dr Karin ACHELSTETTER, Canadian Lutheran World Relief

Ms Karin AXELSSON-ZAAR, ACT Church of Sweden

Mr Roger FASTH, DanChurchAid, Denmark

Dr Pepijn TRAPMAN, Kerkinactie,

Mr Ikali KARVINEN, Finn Church Aid, Finland

Mr Michael STOLTZ, Australian Lutheran World Service

Rev. Dr Yonas Yigezu DIBISA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Bishop Chun Wa CHANG, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong

Bishop Dr Tamás FABINY, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

Bishop Kristina KÜHNBAUM-SCHMIDT, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany

## STANDING COMMITTEE FOR CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP

Rev. Dr Arnfríður GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

Ms Isabella REIMANN GNAS, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil

### *Members of the Council*

Rev. Katherine Maria GOHM; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

**Chairperson:** Ms Khadijah ISLAM, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)



# LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

## DELEGATES

### AFRICA

Ms Rebeca ELIAS, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola, ANGOLA

Bishop Tomás NDAWANAPO, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola, ANGOLA

Ms Matildah JAGTER, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, BOTSWANA

Rev. Mothusi Jairos LETLHAGE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, BOTSWANA

Ms Petja Kelsey NDJARAKANA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, BOTSWANA

Mr Athanase BAÏSSINI, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Rev. Alvius DEBSIA DABAH, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Ms Julie DJANABA, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Ms ° AISSATOU, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Bishop Jean BAIGUELE, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Ms Bélanda Christy NENE GAMFOUO, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, CAMEROON

Ms Sabine NAGBATA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Ms Belvia Siedela NDOMBE BOURA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Rev. Joseph NGOE, Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Rev. Albert KOUTIA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Congo, CONGO

Ms Minia Fecadu GHEBRESELASSIE, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, ERITREA

Rev. Yoseph Fanuel GHEBREYESUS, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, ERITREA

Mr Wondmagegn BIDIRE, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Rev. Zewditu Abdissa CHIMSSA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Rev. Yonas DIBISA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Mr Olif Jira DUFERA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Dr Abeya FUFA, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Ms Zinash KALLO, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Rev. Tagessech TECHELO, The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, ETHIOPIA

Ms Velmer MUKOKO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, KENYA

Rev. Joseph Ochola OMOLO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, KENYA

Rev. Catherine Prisca HEDY, Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, KENYA

Rev. Catherine KITHOME, Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, KENYA

Bishop Johnes Kutuk MELIYIO, Kenya  
Evangelical Lutheran Church, KENYA

Ms Lorpu FERMYAN, Lutheran Church in  
Liberia, LIBERIA

Ms Jenneh M. MOMO, Lutheran Church in  
Liberia, LIBERIA

Rev. Lucien JANERA, Malagasy Lutheran  
Church, MADAGASCAR

Rev. K. KOTOBESOA, Malagasy Lutheran  
Church, MADAGASCAR

Ms Toromaree MANANATO, Malagasy Lutheran  
Church, MADAGASCAR

Rev. Dr Denis RAKOTOZAFY, Malagasy  
Lutheran Church, MADAGASCAR

Ms Etromaro Amalia RAMIARINTSOA,  
Malagasy Lutheran Church, MADAGASCAR

Ms Salimo Paquerette  
RASOAMANALIMBAHOAKA, Malagasy  
Lutheran Church, MADAGASCAR

Bishop Dr Joseph Paul BVUMBWE, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Malawi, MALAWI

Ms Martha MPHALASA, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Malawi, MALAWI

Rev. Bertha MUNKHONDYA, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Malawi, MALAWI

Rev. Zelda Cristina COSSA, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Mozambique, MOZAMBIQUE

Rev. Abel Sousa MACUÁCUA, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Mozambique,  
MOZAMBIQUE

Bishop Burgert BRAND, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC), NAMIBIA

Rev. Anneliese HOFMANN, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC), NAMIBIA

Ms Cynthia Mimagu HARASES, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia,  
NAMIBIA

Bishop Sageus KEIB, Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in the Republic of Namibia, NAMIBIA

Ms Juanita Loami NAOBES, Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia,  
NAMIBIA

Rev. Johannes HAUFIKU, The Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Namibia, NAMIBIA

Ms Eve Theresia Tjinde NANGOLO, The  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia,  
NAMIBIA

Rev. Gideon NIITENGE, The Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in Namibia, NAMIBIA

Ms Otilie Ndamononghenda SHAILEMO,  
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia,  
NAMIBIA

Ms Alice Joel GAYA, The Lutheran Church of  
Christ in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Dr Adama ISA, The Lutheran Church of Christ  
in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Mr Luka JULIUS SHAMAKI, The Lutheran  
Church of Christ in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus MUSA, The  
Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Eng. Ishaya NUHU, The Lutheran Church of  
Christ in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Bishop Theophilus Sahanu SHADRACK, The  
Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, NIGERIA

Ms Eno AKPAN, The Lutheran Church of  
Nigeria, NIGERIA

Archbishop Dr Christian EKONG, The Lutheran  
Church of Nigeria, NIGERIA

Bishop Evalister MUGABO, Lutheran Church of  
Rwanda, RWANDA

Ms Evangeline UWAMBAYE, Lutheran Church  
of Rwanda, RWANDA

Ms Phiona UWASE, Lutheran Church of  
Rwanda, RWANDA

Rev. Mamadou DIOUF, The Lutheran Church of Senegal, SENEGAL

Rev. Latyr DIOUF, The Lutheran Church of Senegal, SENEGAL

Bishop Moses K. MOMOH, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone, SIERRA LEONE

Ms Gulu SAMURA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone, SIERRA LEONE

Ms Nkele Precious MATHE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Mr Kgaugelo MOKOKA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Bishop Nkosinathi Msawenkosi MYAKA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Bishop Naledzani Josephine SIKHWARI, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Rev. Dr Ronell BEZUIDENHOUT, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church), SOUTH AFRICA

Bishop Gilbert FILTER, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church), SOUTH AFRICA

Mr Mulindwa Henry MALONG, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church), SOUTH AFRICA

Ms Siyasanga MLANDU, Moravian Church in South Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Mr Lizwi Xolisile MTUMTUM, Moravian Church in South Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Bishop Theodor JÄCKEL, Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Rev. Petra RÖHRS, Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, SOUTH AFRICA

Rev. Mariam JOSEPH, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Eng. Robert Martin KITUNDU, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Ms Evaline KIVO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Ms Pendo MAHOO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Mr Anania John NDONDOLE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Rev. Mariam NGOJE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Bishop Dr Fredrick Onaeli SHOO, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, TANZANIA, UNITED REPUBLIC OF

Ms Vedred MUKUVE, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia, ZAMBIA

Rev. Geoffrey NJAPAU, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia, ZAMBIA

Ms Siphilanzima MHAKA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, ZIMBABWE

Mr Phakamile NDHLELA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, ZIMBABWE

Bishop Kenneth SIBANDA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, ZIMBABWE

## ASIA

Mr Siu Lung Leon CHAU, The Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong Synod, HONG KONG, CHINA

Rev. Ben Chun Wa CHANG, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, HONG KONG, CHINA

Rev. Wai Chi LEE, Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong, HONG KONG, CHINA

Mr Joel Rishel BARRY, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, INDIA

Ms Mrudula MANUKONDA, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, INDIA

Dr Sunita PALAPARTHI, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, INDIA

Bishop Samuel Kennady VEDAMANI, Arcot Lutheran Church, INDIA

Bishop Stanley Jose MOSES, Christ Lutheran Church, INDIA

Rev. Dr Anil MARTIN, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh, INDIA

Bishop Dr Hausuankap MANLUN, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States, INDIA

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