THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A Communion of Churches

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REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY REV. DR ANNE BURGHARDT

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Introduction

1) We gather for the annual LWF Council meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at a time of turbulence. Today, as multilateralism is increasingly questioned—even by some of the very state actors who once championed it—and as many nations turn inward, investing more in military protection and reducing international aid, it is essential that churches offer a countercultural example in the face of weakening global collaboration.

2) Churches are well positioned to present a strong alternative to growing fragmentation and the divisive "us" vs. "them" narrative, which is often fueled by polarizing forces and politicians. The latter frequently emphasize these differences as a starting point. By contrast, churches must remind everyone of our shared humanity and the interconnectedness of all life.

3) I am very grateful to the LWF member churches, to you—Council members and advisors—and to our partners for your continued support. I want to also thank the Council members and advisors for making yourselves available for this important LWF governance meeting and participating in the pre-Council meetings for women, men, and youth.

4) At this Council meeting, you will take an important decision regarding the venue of the Assembly in 2030. Although it seems quite far away, we want to ensure a good and timely preparation. The Council members will also decide on a proposal for a slightly reconfigured Office of the General Secretary and Communion Office Leadership Team. This will simplify structures and enable efficient work.

5) We are very grateful to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus for hosting us in Addis Ababa. It is a unique opportunity to get to know the largest LWF member church and experience its powerful witness in person.

6) The report before you covers the period from the end of June 2024 to May 2025. It opens with a context analysis and continues with an overview of developments and activities in our programmatic work, as well as in planning and coordination. The report is organized around the strategic priorities outlined in the new LWF Strategy for 2025–2031.

The context we live in

7) The context analysis in the LWF Strategy 2025–2031 remains valid. We continue to live in a world where **nationalism, fundamentalism, xenophobia, extremism, racism,** and **populism** are on the rise in all regions—where fear is exploited to drive campaigns and maintain power. Populist and polarizing forces capitalize on the diminishing trust in democratic processes and public institutions while (mis)using the trust many place in fake news and misinformation.

8) We also continue to witness a surge in **misleading theologies** that emphasize law, fear, intolerance, and exclusion rather than holding fast to the promise of God's love and grace. The renewed emphasis on meritocracy goes against our theological tradition, which always prioritizes mercy and grace.

9) **Political violence increased** by 25% globally in 2024 compared to 2023. The war against Ukraine and the war in Gaza continue, and the civil war in Sudan has triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the UN. The non-profit organization Action Against Hunger states that nearly 25 million Sudanese people need food aid. Several other "forgotten conflicts"—such as those in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sahel region, and Haiti—persist despite limited global media attention. As LWF, we continue to respond to many of these through our work on the ground.

10) At the same time, military spending in many countries that have traditionally been major supporters of development and humanitarian aid is increasing due to the current political situation. Consequently, funds allocated to **humanitarian and development aid are decreasing**. In 2023, only five OECD (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries met or exceeded the UN benchmark of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) for official development assistance: Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. The remaining 26 countries fell below the benchmark. For instance, the U.S. contributed only 0.24% in 2023, though it remained the largest net donor due to the size of its economy (see https://public.flourish.studio/story/2786612/).

11) The U.S. contribution to humanitarian and development aid has drastically diminished since President Trump came to power at the beginning of the year. Following policy changes in early 2025 under the new U.S. administration, USAID, one of the world's largest aid providers, was dismantled almost overnight. This has led to **major cuts in the global humanitarian and development aid sector**, significantly affecting the most vulnerable communities. I will elaborate more on the impact of this in my report.

12) Global inequality is fueled by the rising power of oligarchs and autocrats who challenge global structures and mechanisms meant to ensure accountability. The world remains far from achieving gender equality, and democratic backsliding is further hindering progress. Significant **obstacles to gender equality** include legal inequality, income gaps, and gender-based violence. Social norms and cultural attitudes are slow to change, and the digital world is amplifying misogynistic voices—affecting young people, especially young men, significantly.

13) The overall impact of **rapid advances in digital technology, particularly AI**, remains challenging to predict. While these technologies offer enormous development potential, realizing that potential requires serious ethical consideration and a rights-based approach. The possibility that some jobs will soon become obsolete due to digitalization is increasingly real. This, combined with growing insecurity and manipulation through social media, puts young people in a particularly challenging position. Churches have the potential to become safe spaces for youth—places where they experience human dignity, mutual support, and a true sense of belonging.

14) In his New Year message for 2025, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "Today I can officially report that we have just endured a decade of deadly heat. The top ten hottest years on record have happened in the last ten years, including 2024." Our planet is under immense stress, with polar ice caps melting and rising sea levels. Climate-induced disasters continue to claim thousands of lives and force people to migrate. It is heartbreaking to hear indigenous communities in Oceania describe how their ancestral lands may no longer exist in a few decades. It was indeed timely that the Thirteenth Assembly in Krakow adopted the term "**climate emergency**" instead of "climate crisis."

15) In this global context, the prophetic voice and witness of the church—grounded in God's mercy—is urgently needed. The church's task is not to support meritocracy and prosperity gospel in various forms but to proclaim "*charistocracy*" (derived from Greek *charis*, 'mercy'). Equally, a call and work for reconciliation and justice (which belong together) is needed. Sharing hope is needed—this is why it is so timely to have hope at the center of the LWF Strategy. As a communion of churches, the LWF seeks to offer tangible, holistic hope by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed—or, in the words of the LWF Assembly message, "to build communities of hope."

Sharing hope: four priorities

16) The new LWF Strategy, which started to be implemented this year, has been very well received by our constituencies and partners. It identifies our priority areas for the coming years. Thanks to the visual aid, its content is easy to explain and accessible.

17) Given the current rather bleak global context, it is important to note that all priorities aim to share hope. Hope is needed both for humans and for the rest of creation, which waits with "eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Romans 8:19). For Christians, hope is always eschatological—both in terms of present and future eschatology.

18) Although the implementation of the Strategy started officially only this year, the period in 2024 that followed the last Council meeting could be regarded as a transition time; several new study groups and task forces were already formed in 2024. This contributes to the reporting along the lines of the current strategic priorities.

3.1 Responsible theology

19) Theological reflection is foundational to everything the LWF does. Responsible theology means grounding our witness in Scripture and the Lutheran confessions while responding

faithfully to contemporary challenges. In a world marked by fragmentation, exclusion, and fear, theology must be a living, contextual, and liberating force—helping churches articulate their identity and purpose in the public square, engage in holistic mission, and pursue unity in the body of Christ.

20) 'Responsible theology' is a term coined by the Thirteenth Assembly in Krakow. According to LWF, it is a theology that seeks to be grounded in Scripture and Lutheran confessions while living up to the understanding that "to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical." Responsible theology is deeply rooted in holistic mission and seeks to respond to the question of how to be church in the public space today.

21) The Strategy has identified the following five thematic areas as foci for LWF's work in the priority area of "responsible theology":

3.1.1 Theological understanding and engagement with our confessional identity

22) The LWF has the task of further exploring what it means to be confessional and outward-looking communion today; how key Lutheran theological concepts, such as the theology of the cross, emphasis on God's grace, etc., can be fruitful in today's context; and how we can meaningfully mark the 500th anniversary of Augsburg Confession in 2030, asking what it means to confess our faith today.

23) One of the study processes mandated by the Assembly is **Theologies of the Cross for the 21st century**. The study group, which was formed in 2024, has been meeting twice online (in February and May 2025), with the first in-person meeting planned for October 2025. During that meeting, the members of the study group will present their respective approaches and contextual expertise on theologies of the cross for the 21st century.

24) The study group for Augsburg Confession 500 will be appointed in the second half of 2025 by the Executive Committee; the Council is asked to appoint a **Steering Committee for Augsburg Confession 500**. The task of this committee is to identify LWF's approach to this 500th anniversary, including main themes, principles, etc.

3.1.2 Theological reflection that deepens the understanding of holistic mission as expressed in proclamation, worship, diakonia

25) The Thirteenth Assembly mandated the LWF to work on the understanding of holistic mission in the 21st century. Since the last Council meeting, there has been quite some engagement with the topic of mission. At the mission consultation in Helsinki, held in August 2024 and organized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, involving partners of Finnish Mission Societies worldwide, I offered a **keynote presentation on *Society and Church – Changing Landscapes***, followed by an input on the panel.

26) In late April, DTMJ organized a **webinar on a mission** that brought together over 70 participants worldwide and raised the question of how the churches can rethink mission in an increasingly globalized, polarized, and technologically driven world. One of the participants, Rev. Dr Priscilla Singh from the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, reminded

the participants of the need for authentic Christian witness in interfaith contexts where many LWF churches live and witness: "I have to be a living Epistle, the only one my neighbor will ever read."

27) In May, the LWF organized a **Global Mission Consultation** with the theme "Embodying Hope: Renewing Mission in a Wounded World" at the China Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan, with approximately 40 representatives from member churches and mission agencies. The consultation was a kick-off event for a longer process to renew LWF's understanding of holistic mission. Participants from all LWF regions contributed with their inputs; I was grateful for the opportunity to offer a keynote, albeit virtually, reflecting on some aspects of the mission today. The member churches and the seminary in Taiwan expressed gratitude for the opportunity to host an LWF global consultation for the first time.

28) In October 2024, in cooperation with the German National Committee of the LWF, **the desk for liturgical studies** was reintroduced for the first time in almost 20 years, located at the Liturgical Institute in Leipzig, Germany. The LWF Liturgical Studies Coordinator will work with a group of Lutheran liturgists and scholars in liturgical theology. One of the tasks is to compile guiding materials to support communion's understanding of worship based on Lutheran tradition, while being mindful of different contexts. The second task is to advance the publication of the **Global Song Book**, which, in its initial form, was introduced in 2024. The liturgical desk also supports the preparation of worship and prayer materials of the LWF for different events and occasions, including the regular weekly morning prayers held together with the World Council of Churches.

29) Besides practical diakonia, LWF also aims to strengthen the **theological foundations for diakonia** alongside improving technical expertise. **Regional diakonia workshops** were held in Moshi, Tanzania (July 2024), with 30 participants from seven member churches sharing good practices and reflecting on biblical foundations of diaconal service, as well as in Bangkok, Thailand (March 2025) with 34 participants from 23 member churches across Asia highlighting best practices in diaconal work.

3.1.3 Strengthen churches' theological understanding of and engagement in the public space

30) The position of the Program Executive for Global Public Theology in DTMJ has been vacant since the second half of 2024; a new staff person has been appointed and will take up her position in September. The work on the churches' role in the public space has been carried out through LWF's advocacy work, particularly in the field of human rights, gender, and climate justice, but also through various other platforms, such as through the participation in NIFEA (*New International Financial and Economic Architecture*) platform (see more under the priority area "Justice and Peace"). The study document "The Church in the Public Space" (LWF, 2016) continues to serve as a solid background document for the theological rationale for churches' engagement in society. Nevertheless, given the increase in violations against the freedom of faith and belief in many countries, we need to strengthen our reflections in this field.

31) Three areas that have a strong link to the church's role in the public space and LWF's advocacy work yet are at the same time deeply rooted in our understanding of responsible theology are work in **eco-theology, women's position in church and society, and constructive interfaith relations**.

32) **Gender Justice consultation**, which reflected on gender justice and LWF's engagement now, more than 10 years after the approval of the Gender Justice Policy in 2013, met in Geneva in December 2024. Over 50 participants affirmed the continuous importance of the policy and outlined the general direction for the coming years. Prof. Mercedes Bachmann from Argentina offered theological reflections on the hermeneutics of Scripture passages, which are often used to justify the traditionally subordinate role of women in the church. In my input, I highlighted the need to be more purposeful in engaging men in LWF's gender justice work and always base it on theologically solid ground.

33) The work on **eco-theology** includes a strong educational component; the English Certificate in Climate Justice & Faith, as well as its Spanish version were offered in partnership with multiple institutions.

34) Through our multilateral engagement with the Season of Creation and Feast of Creation processes, we have contributed theologically to the ecumenical approach to the care for creation (see more below by 3.1.5).

35) **Interfaith dialogue** remains a vital dimension in fostering peaceful relations within increasingly polarized societies. As part of the *Inclusive Citizenship and Human Rights* (ICHR) project—led by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-SENTERET)—the LWF contributed to videos on religious diversity and dialogue for an online course. This collaboration also involved supporting the LWF National Committee in Indonesia to pilot educational tools with interfaith partners at universities and other educational institutions. Furthermore, the LWF shared its perspective on interfaith engagement during learning exchanges with NGOs dedicated to promoting freedom of religion or belief.

3.1.4 Foster initiatives and networks that prioritize theological education and formation

36) The **Hélène Ralivao Fund** for Theology, Gender Justice, and Leadership Education continued to expand: The program has now expanded beyond the Africa region to Asia in cooperation with member churches and the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, with the program launched in October 2024. Online modules have continued in Asia in early 2025, with in-person training scheduled for July 2025 in Sabah.

37) Theological networking gained new momentum throughout the past year. In November 2024, representatives from theological institutions worldwide gathered in Geneva for the first in-person meeting of **the Theological Education and Formation Network's (TEF) global steering group**, bringing together 21 representatives of theological institutions from all seven LWF regions. The group identified several priorities for 2025-2027, including spirituality, gender justice, contextual public theology, and ecotheology. Besides initial

discussions with theological institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, follow-up in-person conversations with relevant stakeholders have continued during meetings in Hong Kong, the USA, and India. These discussions focus on strengthening the collective capabilities of theological institutions to support theological education both regionally and globally

38) LWF also continued with granting scholarships; last year, altogether, 109 new scholarships were awarded for 2025.

3.1.5 Deepen Christan unity

39) Since the Council last met in June 2024, the LWF's ecumenical work and engagement have been intense.

40) **Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations**: After the last Council meeting, the LWF President and Vice Presidents, as well as members of the Communion Office Leadership Team, visited Rome and had encounters at the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU) with Cardinal Koch, Archbishop Flavio Pace and Pater Augustinus Sander. Meetings also took place with Secretary General Alistair Dutton of *Caritas Internationalis*. On 20 June, the group was welcomed by Pope Francis in a private audience.

41) The guidance text for the next dialogue phase of the **Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue,** prepared by the International Preparatory Group, was officially received and approved in late June 2024. During the Joint Staff meeting of DPCU and LWF (represented by the Assistant General Secretary (ASG) for Ecumenical Relations and myself) in April, the starting date (February 2026) for the Sixth Phase of the Commission of Unity was confirmed. The Commission's work will begin by preparing a statement on the 500th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession and continue with reflections on ecclesiology.

42) Through the ASG for Ecumenical Relations, the LWF was also represented at the **Synod of Bishops on Synodality** in Rome, held in October 2024. Following the Synod, the LWF and other world communions were invited to write a formal response to the publication of the DPCU, ***The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in Ecumenical Dialogues, and the Responses to the Encyclical Ut Unum Sint***. The response is about to be finished. In early April, I presented a lecture on LWF's approach to the document at the conference organized by the Johann-Adam-Moehler Institute in Paderborn, Germany.

43) The LWF sent its deepest condolences to the Roman Catholic Church on the passing on of Pope Francis. In my interview with Vatican Radio, I highlighted his legacy of drawing attention to those who were oppressed, marginalized, and set aside, as well as his legacy of empowering women and calling for unity - not only Christian unity but for recognizing a sibling in every human being whom we meet. The LWF President and ASG for Ecumenical Relations attended the **funeral of Pope Francis** in the Vatican on 26 April.

44) On 8 May, LWF was among the first communions to congratulate the new **Pope Leo XIV** on his election as Bishop of Rome. On behalf of the LWF, the ASG for Ecumenical Relations and I attended the **inauguration of Pope Leo XIV** on 18 May, followed by a papal audience for ecumenical and interfaith guests on 19 May.

45) **Lutheran-Orthodox relations**: the **Lutheran-Orthodox Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue** is active. The Joint Statement on the *Filioque* was published in a joint press release on 30 July 2025. It has sparked considerable interest among LWF member churches and the wider *oikoumene*. A short guidance note, helping to understand the process, methodology, and content of the statement, was shared with the General Secretary's letter to member churches last year. The first Plenary Meeting of the new phase of dialogue, which concentrates on *Synodality and Primacy*, is taking place during the writing of this report (from 19 to 25 May in Cyprus).

46) **Lutheran-Pentecostal relations**: The Lutheran-Pentecostal dialogue concluded its first phase in 2022. The second phase started with a meeting in São Leopoldo, Brazil, in February 2025. The topic of the second round, *Worship and Formation*, seeks to find ways Lutherans and Pentecostals can connect in their understanding of worship, even if differences in practice seem to be most pronounced in this domain.

47) **Lutheran-Anglican relations**: the full **Anglican-Lutheran International Commission on Unity and Mission (ALICUM)** met in Amman, Jordan, from 29 March until 2 April 2025 with the theme *Our baptismal unity*. ALICUM is a dispersed commission comprising regional or national pairings of Anglican and Lutheran bishops and other church leaders exercising *episkopé*. The ALICUM Steering Group is tasked with planning and accompanying these pairings; it meets annually. This was the first meeting of the full Commission. Through ministerial collaboration, it is hoped that some remaining theological questions will also be addressed. **The Memorandum of Understanding for Joint Advocacy**, signed in late 2024 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Anglican Communion is worth highlighting. It offers an important basis for Anglican-Lutheran relations in public theology.

48) **Lutheran-Reformed relations**: Cooperation with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) happens mainly through collaboration in the work for economic justice through the NIFEA framework and the joint working group on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ). In September 2024, the LWF, WCRC, and ACO (Anglican Communion Office) met for the first time trilaterally for their annual joint staff meeting for regular updates. This format was much appreciated and is to be continued.

49) **Institute for Ecumenical Research (IER) in Strasbourg**: the Council will receive a separate report on the Institute's activities. Nevertheless, I would like to draw your attention to the Institute in my report, highlighting the need for bigger ownership by LWF member churches. The Institute has offered valuable support to the LWF's ecumenical dialogues throughout the decades. Recently, its board established the Institute as a **registered association**. With this change in the Institute's legal status, it can become more visible as an operating entity in its full right with the possibility of creating agreements of association with other institutes, universities, and ecclesial organizations; it will be able to engage in fundraising, including with EU organizations, academic grants, and pursue private donations. The change in legal status should come into force this summer. As a registered academic association, the IER can continue and expand its mandate of ecumenical research, consultation, and support to LWF's theological work.

50) The IER has annually helped to organize the **Luther seminaries in Wittenberg**; from 30 January to 1 February, it organized a **consultation on JDDJ** where representatives of five global Christian communions who have endorsed the JDDJ gathered at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg to mark the 25th anniversary of JDDJ. A publication with contributions from the conference is being prepared.

51) So far, IER's work, in the past few years led on an interim basis by the ASG for Ecumenical relations, has been primarily supported by the German National Committee, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland and, to a lesser degree (mainly through supporting participation from the Global South in seminars organized by IER*)* by Church of Norway*.* To help the Institute transition into a new phase with a globally hired director who can advance the Institute in various fields of work, we urgently need support from more member churches for the Institute.

Multilateral ecumenical relations:

52) **The Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions** meets annually. In 2024, the Association of African Instituted Churches hosted the Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference focused on reports from the over twenty world communions present and included a special visit to an African Instituted Church for worship and fellowship. The LWF was represented by the ASG for Ecumenical Relations and myself.

53) Cooperation with the **World Council of Churches** has continued in many areas, particularly in preparing for the **1700th anniversary of Nicaea**. Due to Pope Francis's passing, a **webinar on the *Filioque***, organized by the WCC, the Orthodox Church, and the LWF to mark this major anniversary, was postponed and took place on 27 May.

54) WCC was also one of the convening organizations for this year's NIFEA gathering, where we had fruitful discussions on how to raise matters related to economic justice jointly.

55) As mentioned above, there is also good cooperation with WCC when regularly preparing online morning prayer for Geneva-based ecumenical organizations.

56) **The Feast and the Mystery of Creation:** The LWF continues to participate in establishing the Feast of Creation in the liturgical calendar. Centro Laudato Si' organized this year's conference, which was held in May 2025; I had a chance to offer a contribution at a panel on *Nicaea, the Triune Creator, and Creation Day*.

57) These efforts in theology deepen our shared understanding of what it means to be Lutheran and ecumenical today. They also equip the global communion to speak credibly and prophetically into today's complex realities, always reminding us how our theology is rooted in the gospel and expressed through public witness.

3.2 Thriving churches

58) The term "thriving churches" has sparked much discussion among our constituencies. It is essential to remember that 'thriving' doesn't necessarily refer to the number of members but to the strength of churches' witness. Thriving churches are not measured by size but by their

capacity to witness to the gospel with compassion and courage. The LWF supports member churches through mutual accompaniment, leadership development, and initiatives that foster intergenerational participation and inclusivity. At a time when many churches face external pressures and internal challenges, nurturing resilient and vibrant faith communities remains a key priority.

59) This strategic priority covers areas from communion relations to leadership formation, inclusivity, and youth involvement:

3.2.1 Communion relations

60) Bringing member churches together regionally and cross-regionally for mutual exchange and support, offering accompaniment to churches in times of crisis and struggles, organizing pastoral visits to the churches, and grass-rooting the LWF in its member churches are among key activities in the field of communion relations.

61) Since the last Council meeting, Regional Secretaries have made several **accompaniment and pastoral visits to member churches**.

62) Here I would also like to mention a few visits that I conducted to LWF member churches. I had the opportunity to visit the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) in Nairobi in November 2024, combined with the visit to the LWF Kakuma refugee camp; the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia in March 2025; some of the German member churches together with the LWF Communion Office Leadership Team in March; the Church of Sweden in conjunction with the Nordic-Baltic women theologians' conference in Uppsala in late March-early April; as well as LWF member churches in Japan in May 2025.

63) Each of the visits brought new insights. In Nairobi, I heard about land-grabbing attempts. Parts of the church-owned premises where KELC had carried out diaconal work with children from socially weak families, had been destroyed by a group who unlawfully claimed the ownership of the land: the court case is still ongoing, and the church is looking for ways how to continue with this ministry. In Slovenia, I witnessed how a small minority of Lutherans (around 11 000 members in a country with ca 2 million inhabitants, predominantly Roman Catholic) has a strong standing in society. Our delegation was received by the President of the country and the Head of the Parliament. In Slovenia, there is a strong awareness of the cultural contribution of the Lutheran Reformation to the development of Slovenian vernacular. It was also interesting to learn about two previously Pentecostal congregations joining the small Lutheran church, claiming that one of the reasons was their deep appreciation for the emphasis on God's grace in Lutheran theology, and rootedness in tradition without being traditionalist.

64) In Germany, we learned about the still declining membership but at the same time about big numbers of volunteers who are contributing to the church life. In the Church of Sweden, we had good conversations in the Church House, reflecting on polarization, the war in Europe, the impact of decreasing humanitarian and development aid funds, and the need for the church to offer a positive example of multilateralism and international cooperation. I also very much appreciated attending the worship service at Uppsala Cathedral and having a chance to preach there.

65) In Japan, I visited two LWF member churches—the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) and the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC)—as well as the associate member church, the Japan Lutheran Church, which had ordained its first woman pastor just a few years ago. All church leaders spoke about the challenges of reaching young people and children, as well as the difficulty of finding new theology students willing to serve as pastors. At the same time, the churches remain committed to faithfully serving their congregations. Most new members are adult converts who join the church later in life. The JELC also highlighted their efforts to strengthen diaconal ministry. In Japan, peace building and wish to have a harmonious co-existence are important. I was grateful for the opportunity to offer a lecture in Tokyo on the role of the LWF and the broader ecumenical movement in peacebuilding.

66) In all the churches I had a chance to visit, I sensed the need to be globally connected—not only to maintain a broader perspective, but also to eventually see things from a slightly different angle through encounters with others.

67) Since the last Council meeting, several **regional and/or subregional leadership conferences and consultations** have taken place in the regions:

West South Asia Lutheran Communion (WESALUC) gathered in New Delhi, India, for the Asia Church Leadership Conference under the theme "Abound in Hope: Responsible Theology in Action" in April 2025.
The European Regions' Meeting, which brought together church representatives from all three European regions, took place in Prague, Czech Republic, in October 2024 under the theme "Lutheran Journey in a Changing Europe."
The Leadership Conference of the Americas, "Embodying the Word," took place in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May 2025. The conference brought together heads of churches and LWF Council members from both American regions. At the conference, I delivered a keynote address, exploring on the meaning and implementation of incarnate theology.
The Africa Regional Leadership Conference took place in Kigali, Rwanda, in May 2025. It brought together LWF Council members, advisors, sub-regional leaders, and representatives of regional networks.

68) Besides discussing regionally relevant topics and having a joint worship life, all leadership meetings included engagement with the LWF Strategy for 2025-2031. In current times, the importance of bringing church leaders together in person cannot be overestimated.

69) Since the last Council meeting, several **pastoral letters** have been sent to churches that have been struggling with natural catastrophes, terror attacks, civil war, and other demanding matters (in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Holy Land, Myanmar, Germany, Sweden, and many others).

70) Since the pandemic, when **video greetings** became more common, the LWF has continued to send virtual greetings from the General Secretary and Regional secretaries to churches on occasions such as synod meetings, important gatherings and campaigns, etc. It is a good possibility to grass-root the LWF.

71) Besides in-person meetings, visits to member churches and presentations at various church gatherings, such greetings help to grass-root the LWF and raise awareness about it. The

same goes for **interviews, articles** etc. that are published on national level. Several colleagues have offered such contributions during the reporting period (among the recent ones I would like to mention my interview to the German magazine *Zeitzeichen*, Rev. Dr Sivin Kit's interview to the Finnish church newspaper *Kotimaa*, both published in May).

72) Last June, the Task Force on **Mutual Responsibility Framework** was established to explore the relationship between the autonomy of LWF member churches and their mutual accountability due to being in full communion with one another. One of the objectives of this process is to articulate a set of commitments to which LWF member churches are invited to adhere as they deepen their communion relations. The task force has met twice online and one time in person in Geneva. The group is making good progress and has identified points that need to be addressed, such as main theological principles drawn from Lutheran tradition(s) and the understanding of the communion as a basis for the whole framework; further, mutual recognition of ministry; decision making processes; guidelines for LWF membership; missionary endeavors in the territory of another LWF member church; principles for leading respectful dialogue.

73) Currently, LWF has officially 150 member churches. At this Council meeting, two churches that have finished their two-year interim period will be received into **full membership in the LWF**: Lutheran Church in Cambodia and Geraja Niha Keriso Protestan Church (Indonesia).

74) The former dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Himalayan States in India have returned to the status where they used to be independent churches and they have expressed their wish to become individual members of the LWF.

75) Further, the Communion Office has received a **membership application** from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Gambia.

76) The Standing Committee for Constitution and Membership (SCCM) will discuss and present to the Council all LWF membership matters.

77) **Relations to International Lutheran Council (**ILC): the informal talks with ILC that had been stopped in 2019 haven't yet been restored. Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), by far the largest full member of ILC (ILC was officially founded in 1993 in Antigua, Guatemala), doesn't seem to have changed the approach of encouraging the churches with double membership in ILC and LWF, to leave the LWF. A meeting with the leadership of ILC to bring our concerns as LWF to the table and to listen to the arguments from the other side should be considered.

3.2.2 Leadership formation and good governance

78) The LWF's commitment to strengthening leadership for thriving churches was evident through the annual **Retreat of Newly Elected Leaders** (29 September—8 October), which brought together 14 bishops and church presidents across the communion. The retreat offered space for spiritual renewal and reflection on leadership journeys. Meeting in Wittenberg, Germany, and Geneva, Switzerland, participants discussed the pressures of leading in contexts shaped by challenges like competition from Pentecostal movements, misleading theologies, and strained ecumenical relationships.

79) LWF's commitment to lay leadership continued through the 7th International **Seminar for Lay Leaders**, held in collaboration with the Wittenberg Center (22 June—1 July 2024). The seminar, which had 17 participants from member churches around the communion, focused on theological and biblical values of church leadership and offered space for reflection on challenges and opportunities.

80) **Leadership development for LWF scholarship holders** continued with two online "Coming Together" meetings and the launch of a new leadership development training program in January 2025. The program consisted of eight learning modules and individual mentoring, with 24 students from different regions participating.

81) Two new initiatives explored bringing leaders at different levels closer to the LWF's strategic priority of thriving churches. A **Leadership Seminar for General Secretaries** in the African Region was organized in Nairobi, Kenya (March 17-21, 2025), with 24 general secretaries attending. The seminar was much appreciated but also revealed that much work still needs to be done to grass-roots the LWF.

82) Another **Leadership Seminar for Newly Elected Leaders of Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP)** church, the largest LWF member church in Asia, was held from 27 April to 4 May 2025 in Bangkok, attended by 36 new leaders. Both seminars strengthened leadership capacity, collegial support, exchange, and relationship-building.

83) These seminars look into what it means to be a leader in a Lutheran context, the deeper meaning of the priesthood of all believers, the meaning of servant leadership, etc.

84) The LWF Communion Office in Geneva has been approached a couple of times by members of our member churches on the ground, reaching in complaints about bad governance in their home churches. Unless there is an allegation that LWF funds have been misused, we are constitutionally not entitled to take any action vis-à-vis the respective church. Good governance is nevertheless essential for the church's credibility. Therefore, we are happy to support member churches who would like to reflect on how to ensure more transparency and accountability within their structures.

3.2.3 Inclusive spaces and structures, respectful dialogue

85) The LWF has always advocated for the inclusion of women and youth in the church on all levels. We continue to uphold our commitment to 40 % participation of women and 20 % participation of young people. Since the Assembly, we have also consciously paid more attention to including laypeople in our study groups and task forces. We continue to uphold these commitments, also by raising awareness about the need to be a welcoming and inclusive church, also to those who may be marginalized by the wider society.

86) In the current polarized landscape, churches must be able to conduct respectful dialogues among their constituencies. It isn't easy to lead dialogue with extremists, but one should at least be willing to call to the table those who have different opinions but are still ready to engage. The fact that the LWF is operating globally also helps us understand that the notion of 'dialogue' may not necessarily be understood in the same way everywhere. In one of the trainings in Ethiopia, our Communion Office colleagues realized that 'dialogue' is often

understood as 'dispute', where one of the participating sides has to 'win.' Developing and sharing supporting materials that help to conduct dialogue and hold meaningful conversations on delicate matters within our member churches is planned to be approached also by the Mutual Responsibility Framework.

3.2.4 Intergenerational engagement

87) The commitment toward developing an LWF **Intergenerational Justice Policy** stepped forward further, with the task force meeting in person in Amman, Jordan (February 27-March 6) to develop the policy framework. Later in March, an online webinar was organized by the LWF Youth desk, inviting participants to discuss what intergenerational justice means to them.

88) In early 2025, monthly capacity-building training for youth was launched, with 55 youth attending the first session. The LWF youth has also launched **"Global Faith Unfiltered,"** a new monthly series featuring reflections from young theologians on pressing global issues. With discussion resources and video messages, the series encourages theological conversation not only across regions but also across generations.

89) These activities reflect a communion that is alive, diverse, and strongly connected. By investing in relationships, leadership, and inclusive participation, the LWF helps strengthen the witness and sustainability of its member churches in their varied contexts.

3.3 Justice and Peace

90) Given the current state of the world, the present Strategy puts more visible emphasis on justice and peace and, thereby, on the theologically grounded advocacy work of the LWF. Justice and peace are central to the LWF's identity and public witness. This strategic priority focuses on advocacy that is grounded in faith, speaks truth, uplifts human dignity, and seeks reconciliation. The advocacy for the LWF is twofold: on the one hand, it means bringing local and national concerns to the global level, e.g., to various international platforms; on the other hand, it is about strengthening member churches in their understanding and practice of advocacy and public witness.

91) Advocacy in the LWF is inspired by the biblical prophetic tradition that commands people of faith to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God (Micah 6:8). Our advocacy follows the example of Jesus Christ, who preached the good news of freedom for the poor and the oppressed, referring himself to the words of the prophet Isaiah (Lk 4:17-19).

3.3.1 Advocating for Justice

92) In September 2024, a delegation organized by LWF and the Lutheran Office for World Community attended the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and **the Summit of the Future** in New York. Global leaders gathered to pledge action on peace and security, sustainable development, climate justice, human rights, and better global governance. On the eve of the Summit, I joined other faith leaders in calling for governments to address the root causes of conflict. At the side event that several interfaith church leaders attended, I had

a chance to give an input on Transformative Peace and the specific role of faith actors. The visit also included meetings with senior government and UN representatives, with whom we also addressed the difficult situation in Gaza and on the West Bank.

93) I attended the Global Forum of the **United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** in Cascais, Portugal, in November, where I spoke on behalf of the LWF about the role of religious communities in ending hate speech and gave an input on the importance of protecting holy sites.

94) In March 2025, I represented the LWF at **the NIFEA (*New International Financial and Economic Architecture*) meeting** in Geneva with the Head of Global Advocacy and experts from our member churches. NIFEA is a platform that brings together WCC, WCRC, LWF, WMC (World Methodist Council), and CWM (Council for World Mission) to discuss economic justice and the current economic system. This is one of the main platforms for LWF to engage with matters of economic justice. This year's consultation was attended by the General Secretaries of all participating organizations as well as economists and advocacy experts. The discussions highlighted the main challenges of the current economic system but also named other hindrances to development, such as bad governance. Particular attention was paid to the situation of Indigenous communities, also raising the question for us as a communion on how we can strengthen our advocacy for them. At the meeting, the role of faith communities in addressing moral and ethical aspects of economic justice was emphasized.

95) Closely related to the NIFEA initiative is the annual **GEM School**, which met last August in Kenya with representatives from member churches in Papua New Guinea, Namibia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Germany.

96) At the beginning of 2025, LWF joined a **UN civil society conference** in Nairobi, Kenya, where local faith leaders and community actors pushed for governments to be held accountable for addressing today's overlapping crises. At the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, LWF supported refugee leaders from Uganda and Kenya in bringing their testimonies directly to decision-makers. They spoke about how food ration cuts, violence, and early forced marriages are impacting refugee children. Many of these refugee community leaders would not have been able to attend without LWF's support.

97) LWF youth continues to be actively engaged in advocacy efforts on the global level. For the first time, an LWF youth delegation was taken to the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) forum** in April 2024, where seven young delegates shared experiences of youth initiatives that have moved communities to action as part of Lutheran churches' contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

98) I also want to draw your attention to the launch of the **renewed LWF Advocacy Framework** at this Council meeting. It is based on the previous framework launched in 2022 but considers the new Strategy and its priorities. The document highlights the priorities of LWF's advocacy work: promotion and protection of human rights, commitment to gender justice, climate emergency, justice and peace, humanitarian advocacy, and churches' prophetic voice.

99) Throughout the reporting period, LWF issued **statements** on various conflicts, human rights issues and emergencies (see the compilation among Council documents).

3.3.2 Working for Peace

100) The LWF engages in discussions about peace from a theological and advocacy perspective, aiming to bring the two together. At its meeting in June 2024, the Council formed the study group for **Peace and Reconciliation in Times of War and Conflict**. It has held two online meetings and will have its first in-person meeting in September 2025.

101) In December 2024, 44 representatives from LWF member churches in Europe gathered in Vienna for a consultation titled **"Churches reflecting together: peace, justice, and reconciliation in times of war."** The meeting explored theological and practical responses to conflict and its impact on communities, contributing significantly to the broader peace study process. The consultation received very positive feedback for the methodology used.

102) The LWF youth continues to be active in the field of peacebuilding. **Peace Messengers training** took place again in 2025. At the training, participants gain expertise in attentive listening, conflict analysis, human rights, and creative problem-solving. In May, over 35 youth leaders participated in the sixth peace messengers training in Guatemala, which for the first time included a Spanish-speaking component. The participants are encouraged to carry out small projects in their home churches after the end of the training, contributing to further peacebuilding efforts on the ground.

3.3.3 Protecting human rights

103) At a time when human rights are increasingly questioned, faith actors are called to speak out even more firmly on protecting the human dignity of all.

104) LWF's engagement with **Human Rights Council (HRC**) sessions continued during the reporting period through written and oral statement submissions, including statements on climate change, the right to education, and women's rights.

105) Member churches and country programs were supported in engaging with the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** process in multiple countries: shadow reports were prepared and submitted for Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Colombia, El Salvador, Jordan, Honduras, and Malawi; technical support was provided to member churches in preparing reports and participating in the process.

3.3.4 Promoting gender justice

106) The LWF has continued its strong advocacy for gender justice, which is one of our intersectional priority areas.

107) The report released by UN Women in early 2025 said that in 2024, nearly a quarter of governments worldwide reported a backlash on women's rights. Despite significant progress, only 87 countries have ever been led by a woman, and a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes

by a partner or member of her own family. Digital technology, particularly social media platforms, spread harmful stereotypes, while the digital gender gap limits women's opportunities.

108) When I participated in the **Nordic-Baltic conference *Women Sharing Good News*** in Uppsala at the end of March, giving a short introduction to the LWF and its commitment to gender justice, it became clear that one can never take equal rights for women and men for granted. This is also true for regions that count as champions in gender justice, and for men among the younger generation who are impacted by social media influencers and some populist politicians who sow among them fear and role models which advance toxic masculinity.

109) Women's rights were a key focus during the **March UN Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW). LWF facilitated a delegation of 17 representatives to the 69th CSW in March 2025, organizing two parallel and three side events. Meetings were held with the U.S. State Department for Women and the Kenya Permanent Mission to the UN. The Beijing+30 Profiles documentation was published and launched, with work continuing on finalizing the Beijing+30 Promising Practices compilation.

110) Member churches and country programs were also supported in engaging with the **CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women)** process: The LWF member church in Rwanda submitted a CEDAW shadow report; the Salvadorian member church produced a list of issues for El Salvador; ongoing support was provided to member churches in Chad, Cameroon, and Iraq on CEDAW reporting.

111) **The LWF regional gender justice network in Central Eastern Europe** was reactivated after a meeting held in Romania in February 2025, at which two gender justice coordinators for the CEE region were elected for a three-year term.

3.3.5 Addressing the climate emergency

112) Today's main global challenges are all interconnected, with climate emergency being one of the major global risks. It calls us to respond spiritually, through advocacy and actual practice.

113) The **Climate Justice Policy Task Force**, formed last year at the Council meeting, had its first online and in-person meetings in April. This policy will provide guidelines that reflect the above-mentioned aspects of the response needed in the current situation.

114) The focus of the LWF **climate justice** work has been increasingly to persevere in advocating for decisions made at the UN to be translated into actions that meet the needs of local communities. The LWF has a unique strength in bringing the realities of those most affected into global climate policy discussions. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (also known as Conference of Parties - COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024, LWF again emphasized the importance of bringing local voices into global climate debates. Delegates from churches across all regions, including many young people, participated both online and in person.

115) **Preparations for the upcoming COP** in November are well underway. Here, I would like to name two concrete examples:

- In March, in the framework of climate negotiations in Bonn, LWF co-organized an **ecumenical advocacy mission toward COP30**, concluding with a dialogue with Brazil's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Marina Silva, and the presentation of a Call to Action for COP30. In addition, the Climate Justice Campaign "The Road to Brazil" was launched, which included tree-planting initiatives across Latin America.
- In April this year, a **training for climate activists from member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa** was conducted in Peru, bringing together 25 people. The training was hosted by the local member church. The participants reflected on the theological call to care for our common home. A young climate activist from Peru, Jhosselyn Rejas Curasi, beautifully captured the rationale for advocacy for climate justice: "As the Gospel of Matthew says in chapter 5, we want our churches to be light and salt, accompany the people most affected by the climate crisis, and to dare to speak truth to power. To love God also means loving creation. We must not fail to act or raise our voices. If that happens, stones will cry out".

116) It has been good to see young people continuously taking the lead in raising their voices for climate justice and care for the creation. It has also been good to see them living this out through implementing good practices. We have continued with **youth-led climate action projects**; 10 new projects for implementation were approved last year.

117) Climate Justice initiatives at the regional level were strengthened through the **LAC Climate Justice Forum**'s continued implementation of its regional advocacy plan. Based on the success of the LAC forum, plans were made for an Africa Climate Justice Forum to develop a regional advocacy plan.

118) Altogether, three **publications related to climate justice** were produced during the reporting period: *Climate Justice Advocacy. Good Practices*; *Beyond Material Loss. Exploring Non-Economic Impacts of Climate Change through Faith-Based Perspectives*; *Gender Responsiveness Index for Climate Action*).

3.4 Service and Dignity

119) 'Service and dignity' capture the LWF's diaconal commitment to uphold the dignity of every person. Whether through humanitarian relief, development work, or accompaniment in times of crisis, the LWF walks alongside communities affected by displacement, poverty, disaster, and violence. This priority is grounded in values and a theological approach that sees service not as charity but as action to protect dignity, thus serving the neighbour.

120) LWF's work in this priority area is mainly carried out through its diaconal work, which is strongly rooted in member churches, and through the country programs and emergency operations of the Department for World Service.

121) As a reminder, I would also like to refer to the **World Service Strategy for 2025-2031** in this section, which was developed parallel to and in connection with the LWF overall strategy. Based on this, all country programs have developed their own strategies, which were mostly approved by the end of 2024.

122) The current humanitarian and development work situation is rather bleak, as mentioned at the beginning of the report. Decisions taken immediately by the new U.S. administration to eliminate USAID and cancel almost all US-funded humanitarian and development aid globally were a massive shock to the entire humanitarian and development sector. The USA accounted for approximately 40 % of the global funds available for humanitarian response. Due to this, many countries experience serious threats to their health and education sectors. There are grave fears for the massive resurgence of HIV and other transmissible diseases and pandemics. Next to UN-related structures, many FBOs have also been badly hit, some losing up to 60 % of their funding. Our planning position is not to count on U.S. government funding in the years ahead. We aim for two years to bring our structures to an aligned position (by the end of 2026).

123) Several governments in Europe have also announced reductions to humanitarian and development funding, mainly due to the rise in right-wing politics, increased military spending, and reduced commitment to global issues. The current situation calls for more collaboration among partners and like-minded organizations. Since early 2025, World Service management has held several meetings with other humanitarian and partner organizations. New perspectives for cooperation have emerged with our long-standing partners, such as ACT Church of Sweden, FinnChurchAid, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, ACT Alliance, and eventually Heks (the leading Swiss humanitarian and development organization with close links to the Protestant Church in Switzerland). A global agreement has been signed with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) to host their international staff in World Service country programs.

124) The LWF has been impacted by the cuts in funding this year both in the field (Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Jerusalem, and Central America) and globally. The chapter on sustainability and effectiveness provides more information on actual figures.

125) In 2024, we were still able to serve over 2.5 million people, including 43% refugees, 11% internally displaced people, 3% returnees, and 43% living in host communities. Among these, 52% were women, and 52% were children under 18.

3.4.1 Supporting people in emergencies

126) Diaconal work also extends to rapid-response solidarity in times of crisis. The LWF supported eight short-term emergency projects through the **Communion Solidarity Fund** in 2024. These included food, bedding, medical supplies, and rebuilding after floods in East and Central Africa. In Kenya, for example, the response to severe flooding that displaced over 20,000 people was supported through LWF's Fund. This helped the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya offer shelter, basic goods, spiritual care, and psychosocial support. In the Central African Republic, urgent aid was sent to the village of Yadé after a violent rebel attack in December. With LWF support, the local church provided food and basic supplies—including cassava, salt, soap, mats, and blankets—to 120 displaced people who had fled their homes.

127) The LWF is working to strengthen the capacity of its member churches to respond to emergencies. External evaluations of **Churches and Emergencies** projects were conducted

in Nepal, Colombia, and Venezuela. Four regional workshops on implementing the Guidance Note for Joint Engagement of World Service Programs and Member Churches are planned for May and June 2025 in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East. This is also an example for intentionally increasing cooperation between the Churches in Diaconal Action program in the Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, and the Department for World Service.

128) World Service has been responding to various emergencies on a large scale through its country programs. Here are some examples:

- Throughout 2024, LWF has been providing vital assistance in the domain of shelter, education, hygiene, cash support, food security, and protection to over 234,000 displaced refugees and returnees fleeing the **Sudan conflict** across all the neighboring countries where LWF is present with a country program: **Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, and South Sudan**—affected by violent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces, more than 11.5 million people have been displaced, with LWF's interventions aiding both refugees and host communities in dire need. In South Sudan alone, LWF has provided psychosocial support to 14,000 children and engaged with partners and communities in awareness campaigns on rights and protection, impacting 36,000 people, including community leaders and officials.
- In **Burundi**, the LWF is responding to the refugee situation caused by the **conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** by supplying food and non-food items.
- The LWF responded to the devastating impact of the earthquake in **Myanmar** through our local partners and under new registration. Our own operations in Myanmar were suspended in July 2024, after which a regional office in Thailand was established, and a temporary registration was obtained for work in Myanmar in cooperation with local partners. There has been good cooperation with LWF local member churches throughout the process.
- In **Ukraine**, shelter repair in Kharkiv Oblast and emergency Mental Health and Psychosocial Support have been part of the emergency response. Also, there has been very good cooperation with the local member church.

3.4.2 Implementing people-centered programs and enabling access to quality services

129) LWF aims to support people in need through various services. We continue to provide vital health care through Augusta-Victoria-Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem, a beacon of hope for many Palestinians amid a devastating overall situation. Through vocational education and training, the LWF also aims to support Palestinian children and other vulnerable groups in acquiring new skills and affirming their inherent human dignity.

130) In December 2024, LWF and its **Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) in East Jerusalem** opened a small **new clinic in Ramallah**. This initiative aims to alleviate the challenges of crossing checkpoints and dealing with travel restrictions, making it difficult for patients to access life-saving care in AVH in Jerusalem. The clinic allows patients to consult with AVH

doctors and health experts locally, while more advanced treatments still require travel to Jerusalem. This new facility supports continuity of care, especially during the ongoing conflict, ensuring patients have better access to necessary healthcare. The new clinic will facilitate the patient's treatment journey and ensure continuity even during the country's most challenging times. At the AVH in Jerusalem, the intake of patients unfortunately continued on a reduced level, as has been the case since late 2023 due to the patients from Gaza having practically no access to the hospital.

131) In the **Kakuma** refugee camp, Kenya, where LWF has been present since its establishment in 1992, LWF started a new initiative in 2024, providing vital **cash-based support to vulnerable refugee students**, helping them stay in school despite hardships. The initiative targets students like Musa, a 15-year-old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who strives to become a doctor despite losing his family and facing financial challenges. Similarly, 16-year-old Nyabany, a teenage mother from South Sudan, balances her education with caring for her child and advocating against early pregnancy. With financial aid covering essentials like uniforms and school supplies, these and other students can pursue their dreams and overcome obstacles, even as funding cuts threaten education and protection programs in refugee camps. During my visit to the Kakuma refugee camp in November 2024, I was deeply moved by the educational efforts the LWF is undertaking there, including for **young refugees with disabilities**.

132) In Nepal, people with disabilities face significant challenges, including inaccessible infrastructure, social stigma, and exclusion from education, employment, and public life. **"Local Initiatives for Community Empowerment and Development"** (LICED), a project led by the LWF Country Program in **Nepal**, has addressed these issues by empowering individuals with disabilities and marginalized communities. One of the participants in the project, Mahadev Dhamala, a polio survivor who, despite personal hardships, became the chairperson of a municipal disability network, helped to establish the Disability Upliftment Center in Rajapur, advocating for accessibility and inclusion. Since 2020, the project has trained over 35,000 people.

133) In war-torn **Kharkiv, Ukraine**, LWF, UNHCR, and local partners opened **underground schools** in nuclear shelters in 2024 to safely educate over 3,000 children whose schools were destroyed during the conflict. These secure classrooms, part of the city's "Metro Schools" initiative, provide modern learning environments and emotional support, helping restore a sense of normalcy for students and teachers alike. The initiative aims to serve 7,500 children, eventually offering education and hope amid war.

134) In **Venezuela's Orinoco Delta**, the LWF has been support**ing Indigenous Warao communities**, which face extreme isolation, limited services, and climate vulnerability. Throughout 2024, LWF, in cooperation with the World Food Programme, ECHO, and OCHA / Venezuela Humanitarian Fund, has provided vital humanitarian aid focusing on **food, education, livelihoods, and protection**. Efforts include providing nutritious meals for over 20,000 children across 100 schools, building infrastructure, offering skills training in sustainable practices, and ensuring access to education and psychosocial support.

3.4.3 Climate resilient livelihoods

135) Managing the **Samakale forest in Cameroon**, near the Chad border, comes with considerable challenges due to illegal tree cutting and poor management. The community is affected by Boko Haram attacks and inter-ethnic clashes. Illegal cutting of a specific type of tree, crucial for shade and biopesticides, is prevalent. A multi-year project launched by LWF Chad and LWF Cameroon in July 2024 aims to change community behavior through sensitization and training, promoting nature-based solutions like ecological charcoal and improved stoves, and enhancing skills in developing and using other products from the tree. The project, which will run well into 2026, is based on the acknowledgment that successful and sustainable reforestation requires considering trans-border interactions and local habits and working closely with the community and authorities to propose alternative energy and income sources.

3.4.4 Promoting the dignity of all people through advocating for policies and practices

136) The "**Breaking the Cycle of Fear**" initiative by **LWF Jordan** empowers violence survivors to overcome fear and transform their lives. Highlighted by UN Women in their global "16 Days of Activism" publication in 2024, the program supports primarily women and girls, but also some men and boys through counseling, workshops, and skills-building activities focused on conflict resolution, stress management, and economic empowerment. Each year, around 500 people benefit from the program, which fosters trust, resilience, and long-term well-being. The initiative exemplifies the power of collaboration between LWF, local organizations, case managers, and survivors, as well as LWF's overall commitment to promoting the dignity of all people by implementing the stated commitments in its 2013 Gender Justice policy in practice.

137) Overall, World Service's global structures aim to enhance World Service's impact by ensuring quality and compliance, sustainable data management, and efficient resource use, thereby maintaining high credibility with donors and partners. This involves aligning World Service's strategic goals within LWF and the humanitarian sector, adhering to relevant standards and policies in practice. World Service continued rolling out many of the newer policies to improve program quality and accountability, including the ***Safeguarding Policy*** and the ***Complaints Response Mechanism Policy and Procedures***. Further **investments in digitalized systems** brought both meaningful results and contributed to the long-term digitalization of the organization and enhancing cooperation with other LWF departments.

3.4.5 Supporting people on the move

138) Most of World Service's work is oriented toward supporting people on the move. Cooperation is an excellent asset in countries where LWF World Service country programs and LWF member churches are present, particularly if the member churches are in the same area where the humanitarian response occurs.

139) The **Symbols of Hope** initiative has continued. This initiative brings LWF's diaconal work and member churches closer together. It addresses irregular migration and human trafficking in Central Africa and has already provided critical support to over 200 young people in

Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Survivors of trafficking, along with potential and returning migrants, received essential documentation, psychosocial support, counselling, skills training, and livelihood assistance. Following an evaluation of the Symbols of Hope initiative in early 2024, a consolidation phase for 2024-2026 was launched with Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. These churches implement a Sister Church Model to replicate their experiences with member churches in Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and South Africa.

3.4.6. Supporting churches through member church projects

140) The LWF accompanies and supports member churches in diaconal action and related initiatives through the implementation of Member Church Projects. Beginning in 2025, the LWF supports 58 projects across five regions: 20 in Africa, 12 in Asia, 11 in Central Eastern Europe, 3 in Central Western Europe, and 12 in Latin America and the Caribbean. These projects focus on key thematic areas such as church sustainability, leadership development, theological education, women and youth economic empowerment, livelihoods, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, inclusion of people with disabilities, environmental and sustainability initiatives, advocacy, humanitarian and crisis response. Most of the member church projects are primarily focused on diakonia, many also align with other key themes or overlaps with additional LWF priorities.

4. Organizational Sustainability and Effectiveness

141) The LWF Strategy outlines clear action points for ensuring the LWF's effectiveness and sustainability. In our work, we have followed the guidance in the Strategy.

4.1 Strategic Planning and Reporting

142) Following the adoption of the new LWF Strategy, the **Milestones document for 2025-2031** was created as a management tool to accompany it and help monitor its implementation's progress. The document was introduced to the Executive Committee in November.

143) In our planning circle, we are increasingly moving towards a **multi-year (3-year) planning model**, at least for the Office of the General Secretary and Department for Theology, Mission, and Justice. This helps to better plan the expected advancement of programmatic work and project budgetary expenditures.

4.2 Finances and Organizational Sustainability

144) The management is aware of the increasingly unstable and fragile funding situation and is constantly **monitoring the financial situation**, aligning the expenditure with actual income. Throughout 2024, proactive measures were taken to closely monitor budgets against work plans and manage spending at all levels. These efforts reflect a disciplined approach to financial governance and risk management. Initially, the 2024 budget projected a planned use of reserves totaling EUR 1,056,894. However, actual utilization was EUR 647,060 only, which is significantly lower than budgeted. The reserves were drawn for the Department for

Planning and Coordination and the activities carried out by the Department for Theology Mission and Justice.

145) Meanwhile, the Office of the General Secretary did not use reserves as planned but ended the year with a surplus of EUR 490,000, primarily due to exceptionally favorable financial market conditions that generated extraordinary investment income and currency gains. This helped significantly balance the initial withdrawal from the general reserves in 2024. Looking ahead, we do not expect similar financial outcomes at the end of 2025 or in 2026. Current trends indicate underperformance in investment markets and continued currency volatility, likely resulting in significantly lower financial and investment income.

146) Significant cuts to World Service funding resulting from the abrupt termination of U.S. government funding in early 2025 have put World Service in a financially complicated situation. To stabilize the situation, the management had to make many decisions, resulting in staff cuts both in the field and in the Communion Office, restrictions on travel, the cancellation of global meetings, and tight control of all spending. Work plans have been revised. The full impact of measures taken will be seen by the end of 2026. The World Service Coordination budget in 2025 has been reduced from the initial EUR 6.5 million to EUR 5.5 million, with a further decrease to EUR 5 million projected for 2026. This reduction significantly limits DWS's ability to contribute to the central costs of the Communion Office.

147) The LWF funding setup is complex, but this is also a strength. Since funding comes from different sources, severe cuts in funding from one partner can be better monitored.

148) The funding from some of the main traditional supporters will decrease in the near future. This is one of the reasons why the management is actively **pursuing diversified fundraising** to secure long-term financial stability. We plan to step up in organizing campaigns for funding specific areas of work; to create a network of LWF's Friends who will be regularly updated about the work of the LWF while invited to support it. At its April online meeting, the Executive Committee approved the Terms of Reference for the Global Lutheran Business Leaders Forum, which would engage with the LWF on ethically responsible economics and support the LWF in its fundraising efforts.

149) The Communion Office has developed a fundraising guideline detailing how to engage with our long-term, large-scale partners, new or potential large-scale partners, small donors, individuals, and member churches.

150) I would also like to remind you of the importance of paying **LWF membership fees**. This is about more than just paying a bill; it is about ownership and commitment. It is not about some churches being on the giving and others on the receiving side. The communion is a communion of all member churches where everyone has something to contribute in many ways (to paraphrase the famous quote from a former LWF President Josiah Kibira). Along these lines, at its meeting in May, the LWF Project Committee decided to amend the guidelines for project application, requesting that paid membership fees be part of the preconditions for applying for long-term projects.

151) The Finance Committee, in collaboration with the Finance Office, is currently revising the methodology for calculating membership fees. This revision aims to promote fairness while aligning the membership fee structure with the shared interests of all LWF member churches.

152) At the end of last year, we sent reminders to the member churches, inviting them to contribute, according to their possibilities, to the **Endowment Fund** as one of the key long-standing instruments in ensuring funding for the LWF. Our finance team, together with the Endowment Fund Board, has been closely following the performance of the Fund. Last year, the portfolio was moved from UBS to LGT Bank which had presented a convincing investment scheme for the Fund. In the medium term, this move is expected to bring a better performance.

153) The move of offices in the first half of 2024 has supported our organizational aim to become more cost-saving and effective. The shape of the office has contributed to the bigger interconnectedness of staff from different departments.

4.3 Human resources and staff well-being

154) The LWF has highly committed staff, with the international staff coming from all regions of the communion. Several colleagues in all departments continue to work from the regions; in early 2025, the administrative support to regional secretaries for Africa and the Americas was decentralized into respective regions. World Service is planning to move some functions to the LWF Prague office, e.g. field-related HR tasks. Due to the cuts in funding, World Service had to implement some staff cuts also in the Communion Office in Geneva, leading to an increased workload of the remaining staff.

155) In the Communion Office in Geneva, we have continued with the policy of compulsory three-day presence in the office when not traveling for work. The Directors and General Secretary are generally expected to be in the office every weekday unless working from home is necessary. This measure has contributed to interconnectivity and an effective exchange of information and ideas.

156) As the workload for the LWF staff is rather heavy, avoiding staff burnout is important. We have continued to **follow up on the staff well-being survey**, which I mentioned in my report to the Council in 2024. This year's work plan for the Human Resources unit includes continuous follow-up on actions identified based on the survey outcomes.

157) The Communion Office has introduced **learning afternoons**, which started with sessions on Artificial Intelligence and stress management. The funds for **individual training** were increased in this year's budget. An important new element is the introduction of the **services of a trusted person** in collaboration with an external agency, *Service Social Inter-Enterprise (SSIE)*.

158) The **Days of Meetings**, which took place in February this year, continue to be a space for the Communion Office staff to build teamwork and learn more about the work of their colleagues. This year's Days of Meetings had story-telling as one of its foci. We asked how we could best tell the story of the LWF and share the numerous stories about lives that have been changed through the work of the LWF.

4.4 Communications, information technology and institutional memory

4.4.1 Communications

159) Communication remains integral to the mission and impact of the LWF. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to tell compelling stories, articulate a clear identity, and invite participation is essential to sustaining and expanding the life of our global communion. LWF's communications work supports the LWF in being a connector of churches, people, and partners across the globe.

160) Since 2024, the Office for Communication has highlighted storytelling that reflects the four strategic priorities of the LWF: responsible theology, thriving churches, justice and peace, and service and dignity. We also worked to communicate the LWF as a global partner engaged in close collaboration with churches and other actors worldwide.

161) We have continued to build engagement around major events through communications accompaniment that shares stories from the LWF's work. This includes **storytelling through narrative, photos and videos**. The goal is to ensure visibility, facilitate sharing by participants, and source local stories from participants.

162) The 2024 **Advent campaign** focused on joy and featured contributions from across the communion. As in previous years it reached a large audience on social media. It was particularly encouraging to see how many churches shared the videos.

163) A major step forward was the launch of the new website content management system for all LWF websites, including a redesigned site for World Service. The new platform is fully aligned with our visual identity and built on a more secure, flexible, and user-friendly content management system. This offers improved access to stories and resources.

164) The "**Voices from the Communion**" series continued to feature biweekly interviews with leaders from different parts of the LWF, highlighting personal stories and showcasing the diversity and unity of the communion. These interviews have helped put faces and voices to our shared witness.

165) LWF's online presence and audience continues to grow. Through the year, the LWF published over 3,000 posts on platforms such Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. In 2024, these posts were seen more than **4.3 million times**, reflecting broad and sustained interest in our work. **Engagement rate** was **9.2%** which is above the average for similar organization.

166) As of late May 2025, the LWF's total audience across all platforms has **grown to more than 104,000**, which is a net growth of 9% between years. Key platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook saw follower growth around 20%. This reflects a strong interest in LWF's work.

167) The communications team operates in a highly **decentralized** way. In 2025 we plan to take steps toward building stronger regional presence to further strengthen local-global connections and grassroot the LWF.

168) As we move forward, we remain committed to communications that inspire, inform, and invite connections. Through this we want to make the life of the communion visible and invite people from all member churches to be a part of our journey of faith and action.

4.4.2 IT and systems development

169) One of the outcomes of the staff well-being survey was the need to avoid system duplication, particularly when it comes to IT-related matters. Under the leadership of the IT Manager recruited in July 2024, a mapping of the needs for improvement in this field has been established, and a roadmap for implementing more effective (also cost-wise) solutions has been created.

170) Various actions were taken in 2024 to improve LWF's response to possible cyberattacks. All staff completed cybersecurity training; a **Disaster Recovery Plan and IT Risk Matrix** were developed in accordance with the PWC audit recommendations; and the SAGE accounting system and related data have been migrated to a cloud-based solution, significantly decreasing the risks related to physical servers used before.

4.4.3 Institutional Memory

171) The **LWF archives** continue to be accessible in the new Communion Office, where physical archives have been stored in the Octagon basement. The inventory restructuring in the archives is progressing with new tools (Docuteam) and continued cooperation with the WCC archives. We are currently looking for an interim who could support the archivist, particularly with digitalizing some photos.

4.5 Partnerships and Stakeholder Relations

172) Particularly in current times when churches and international organizations committed to maintaining their commitments to human dignity, gender equality, and climate justice need to work closely together, it is crucial to create meeting spaces.

173) During the reporting period, we received in the Communion Office several **visitors** from our member churches and partner organizations – from representatives of different member churches (e.g., from Namibia, El Salvador and others) who offered their expertise at various UN-related events and were accompanied by the LWF staff, to the senior leadership teams from ELCA, Church of Sweden and Act Church of Sweden, German National Committee of the LWF and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, the Finnish Mission Society SANSA and others earlier this year.

174) At the beginning of May, the **Working Together Meeting** brought together some major partner organizations to discuss the current global situation, the implementation of the new LWF Strategy, and the funding situation. This meeting was held back-to-back with similar meetings organized by WCC and ACT Alliance.

175) In March, the Communion Office Leadership Team organized a **visit to Germany** with the support of the German National Committee of the LWF. We had fruitful meetings with the leadership of LWF member churches in Bavaria, Wurttemberg and Hanover. Besides many

helpful conversations on the future of the churches in Germany, the impact of recent elections on German political direction, and the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, it was a good possibility to grass-root the LWF. The visit concluded in Berlin, where we visited the head offices of Bread for the world.

176) The proximity to **WCC and ACT Alliance**, as major ecumenical organizations located in Geneva, enhances the flow of information between the organizations. In September, I initiated a conversation with WCC on the overlapping Assembly year in 2030, calling for the need to coordinate the dates closely and to ensure that the Assembly fees are collected staggered. This helps to avoid that member churches who support LWF, WCC and ACT Alliance considerably, are not being faced with tremendous one-time bills as we draw closer to the year 2030.

As already mentioned above, actual cooperation with WCC also takes place through sharing in preparations for **online morning prayers**, **joint work on the NIFEA platform and GEM school**, and other programmatic cooperation. The relations to the ACT Alliance are mainly monitored through World Service.

5. Conclusion

177) As this report illustrates, the LWF remains deeply engaged in holistically witnessing to the gospel in word and in action, standing alongside communities in crisis, advocating for justice, and nurturing theological reflection across the communion.

178) We are living through times of change, be it regarding the geopolitical landscape, the AI revolution, or the actual ecosystems around us. In this context, we are called to serve as a communion that continues to uphold the dignity of all people, equal rights for women and men, care for the creation, and remind of the central legacy of our theological tradition: the centrality of God's grace.

179) This legacy liberates us from being fearful, enabling us to turn our eyes to our neighbours, not only those living next door – true Christianity doesn't know of 'ordo amoris' as recently proposed by a certain politician. The story about the good Samaritan contradicts the idea of defining the neighbour according to the circles of proximity to us. In a deep Christian sense, a suffering child in Gaza is as much a neighbour to me as someone living in the same apartment block as I do. In recognizing that all human beings are siblings and thus closely interconnected, the suffering of our neighbours, both near and afar, is our suffering.

180) The new strategy for 2025-2031 is already shaping our work. The four interconnected priorities don't stand in isolation, together they form a whole, expressing out believe that faith must be lived publicly and practiced through service to our neighbour.

181) When we want to be authentic and credible in our witness, we cannot just remain by words but need to express our love and care for the neighbour and for the creation in deeds. The latter need to grow from our faith and convictions, just as Luther says: "A good tree bears good fruit."

182) The report before you describes how we, as a global communion, have done this on behalf of our member churches during the past year. Above all, it shows how we as a communion are not only surviving during turbulent times but offering an alternative story that is grounded in grace, committed to justice, and sharing hope with the world.

183) Allow me, as always, to finish with a word of gratitude to my colleagues, both the LWF Communion Office Staff and the colleagues in the field programs. Without their committed work, it would not have been possible to accomplish what is presented to you.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt, General Secretary

Geneva, May 2025

Appendix: List of travels

19 – 20 June 2024 Meeting with Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Caritas Internationalis, and audience by Pope Francis with representatives of LWF management and Governance in Rome, Italy

27 – 30 August 2024 Mission Partnership Consultation in Helsinki, Finland

9-10 September 2024 LWF, Anglican Communion Office (ACO), and World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) joint trilateral staff meeting in London

20 – 28 September 2024 Advocacy mission to New York in the context of UN Summit for the Future

30 October – 8 November 2024 Visit to Kenya (Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church; LWF Kenya-Somalia program of World Service, including a visit to the refugee camp in Kakuma; Conference of Christian Communions in Nairobi)

19-22 November 2024 Executive Committee meeting in Tallinn, Estonia

25-27 November 2024 10th United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Global Forum in Cascais, Portugal

1-5 March 2025 Visit to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia

10-14 March 2025 Visit of the Communion Office Leadership Team to Germany (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wurttemberg, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, Germany National Committee of the LWF, Bread for the World)

28 March – 1 April 2025 Nordic-Baltic conference *Women Sharing Good News* in Uppsala, Sweden, and meetings with the leadership of the Church of Sweden

6-7 April 2025 Joint Staff Meeting with DPCU (Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity) in Rome, Italy

2-4 May 2025 Visit to Protestant Kirchentag (*Church Days*) in Hanover, Germany

12-16 May 2025 Leadership Conference of the Americas in Guadalajara, Mexico

18-20 May 2025 Inauguration of Pope Leo XIV in Rome, Italy

21-26 May 2025 Visit to LWF member churches in Japan

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