

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

LETTER TO THE MEMBER CHURCHES

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

We, the delegates of the churches of the Lutheran World Federation, the officers of the LWF, and many other participants, have gathered here in Winnipeg, in the heart of Canada, for the Tenth Assembly of the Federation. We have gathered under the theme: “For the Healing of the World.” In the vision of the New Jerusalem that ends the Revelation to John, the leaves of the tree of life “are for the healing of the world” (Rev. 22:2). This Assembly has rejoiced in the healing presence of the Risen Lamb in our midst, even while we yearn for the day when we will gather with all the saints in the New Jerusalem.

We have been surrounded here by the warm hospitality of our Canadian hosts. Canada’s increasing ethnic diversity, along with its French, British, and Indigenous heritages, make it a striking example of the joys and difficulties of our world. The wounds of the world have not been hidden from us during the Assembly. Among us have been sisters and brothers from lands ravaged by war, afflicted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and drug abuse, crushed by the underside of economic globalization. We heard about the devastation caused by the civil war in Liberia directly from Liberian church leaders. That the world needs healing has been painfully evident. Particularly painful for us has been the absence of more than fifty sisters and brothers denied the visas needed to attend the Assembly. Behind these denials lies a world changed by terrorism, a world ever more closely united by technology but increasingly divided between rich and poor, North and South, those integrated into the new global system and those left out.

We have learned anew, however, that our faith triumphs over division. Christ has come to break down the walls that divide us. The communion in Christ that binds us is stronger than any power that keeps us physically apart. The absence of those denied entry has been for this Assembly like the thorn in Paul’s side, a reminder that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (II Cor 12:7). Our communion is founded on our common participation in Christ and that means a common participation in his cross. Healing and participation in Christ’s sufferings are inseparable, for only by Christ’s wounds are we healed.

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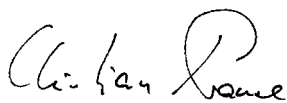
We have experienced under the broad Canadian sky an intense communion. Our days have begun with the Eucharist and been punctuated by prayer and Bible study. The wide range of the Lutheran communion has been represented among us, from Finland to South Africa, from Japan to Argentina. Our delegations have been made up of youth and adults, men and women. Present with us also have been representatives of other churches: Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Anglican, and many others. We have welcomed the ecumenical steps forward of the last decade, especially the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church, but also sensed our need of the Spirit to overcome the significant divisions that remain. The experience of a communion so diverse yet united in the gospel is always a highlight of an LWF Assembly and we hope that you will have some contact with those who have been here and get a fuller sense of what we have experienced.

A major task of every Assembly is to review the work of the Federation since the previous Assembly and to prepare the LWF for its next period. The six-year report of LWF activities, *From Hong Kong to Winnipeg 1997-2003*, was reviewed in ten small groups called “village groups,” organized around individual topics. Elections were held for a new LWF Council and Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was elected LWF President. The village groups also developed commitments for the future work of the Federation, which were reviewed and adopted by the Assembly. These commitments are gathered together in the Assembly Message. This Message, together with the Assembly’s Resolutions, will be distributed to you in the near future. In them, the Assembly:

- committed the LWF to closer work with Indigenous peoples;
- called for a coordinated study on the role of *diakonia* as an integral part of the Lutheran communion;
- invited the member churches to support fair international trade policies and the cancellation of illegitimate international debt;
- expressed its concern about the increasing unilateralism of the United States of America in foreign affairs;
- changed the full name of the LWF to “The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches”;
- expressed its solidarity with the churches of Iraq and affirmed the right of the Iraqi people to a democratic government;
- affirmed efforts for peace in Israel-Palestine based on liberation for Palestine and security for Israel;
- committed the LWF to continue to explore what it means to be a communion.

The Assembly confronted the diversity within the Lutheran Communion on questions of family and human sexuality. We found in the course of an engaged but mutually respectful dialogue that our communion in Christ is stronger than our differences on these issues; here also we must bear each others burdens. The Assembly Message calls on the churches to support one another in continued dialogue on these topics and in advocacy for the human rights of all persons.

We leave Winnipeg with a sense of gratitude for what God has done through the Federation in the past and with prayers for its work in the future. We are all united in the one Christ and the one Spirit. Every time we gather around Word and Sacrament, our local communion is one with the communion that includes all times and places. The Lutheran communion realized in the LWF is one expression of that unity. Our communion needs healing; the wider church needs healing; the world needs healing. The LWF exists to serve the work of God “for the healing of the world.” May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and sustain our communion in this work.



Bishop emeritus Dr Christian Krause
Outgoing President



Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary

Winnipeg, July 2003