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A Communion
of Churches

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LWF Strategy 2019-2024: With Passion for the Church and for the World

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1 Introduction

For all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

"With passion for the church and for the world" is the title of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) strategy 2019-2024, adopted by the LWF Council in July 2018. The strategy will guide the work of the communion of churches in its global witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It outlines the journey we are undertaking together as a communion of 148 churches in 99 countries.

This title is a reminder that we are passionate about the presence and witness of the churches and about working together for justice, peace, and reconciliation in the world.

The strategy builds on the previous one, balancing continuity with innovation. It looks to the foundational commitments of the LWF: supporting refugees and internally displaced people, working for unity, developing theology, and strengthening churches in mission. It also builds on the outcomes of the Twelfth Assembly, its message, resolutions, and public statements. The strategy affirms the vision and values of the LWF, offering an analysis of the global context in which we live and identifying what is necessary to bring us closer to our vision and goals.

When you read "we" in the strategy it always refers to the communion of churches. The strategy helps us articulate our common purpose and direction and guides the focus of what we will be doing "together" as a communion of vibrant churches, promoting human dignity, justice, and peace.

I commend this strategy to the 148 member churches of the LWF. These are our joint commitments. It is my hope and expectation that the member churches will use the strategy in their own context, holding fast to the core commitments of the communion of churches, applying it in the local context and contributing to the global work—to what we want to be and do together in this world.

May the strategy be an inspiration for the work of the communion of churches and bring us closer to realizing our vision of being "liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world."

Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, LWF President

2 Who We Are

Established in 1947, we are a global communion of 148 member churches with 75 million members in 99 countries. We share a common Lutheran

heritage, shaped by the diverse contexts in which we experience and witness to God's liberating grace.

Our constitution outlines the following foundational commitments:

The Lutheran World Federation:

- *furtheres the united witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthens the member churches in carrying out the missionary command and in their efforts toward Christian unity worldwide;*
- *furtheres worldwide among the member churches diaconic action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, care for God's creation, and sharing of resources;*
- *furtheres through cooperative study the self-understanding and the communion of member churches and helps them to act jointly in common tasks.*

From the LWF Constitution

Our engagement in the world grows from the action of the Triune God who calls, transforms, and equips us to participate in God's mission of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

We understand God's mission to be holistic, which includes proclaiming the Gospel, diakonia (serving the neighbor), and advocating for human dignity, justice, and peace.

We describe our relationships with the theological concept of "communion." They are a response to God's call that brings churches together.

- Being churches in communion is a gift. We are united in the proclamation of God's Word and in pulpit and altar fellowship. We are called to gather in worship of the Triune God, to share the Word and sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Together we hear and share the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as witnessed through the Holy Scriptures and expressed by the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessions (the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism).
- Being churches in communion is also a task and a responsibility. As we share the gift of communion, we are drawn into a spiritual journey, which invites us to listen to one another, share our joys and sufferings, grow in practices of mutual care, and deepen our understanding of the need for one another as members of the one Body of Christ. We seek to engage constructively in the world, based on our theological identity and for the sake of our common faithfulness to the Gospel. We are ready to work in ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, and with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

We are committed to Christian unity, based on the self-understanding of being part of the one Body of Christ. This is lived out in theological dialogues and joint service with ecumenical partners.

We are an internationally recognized faith-based actor, expressing faith through advocacy, development, and humanitarian engagement. We are partners with the United Nations, through many of its agencies. We are accredited by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC).

God calls us into a prophetic witness, to uphold diversity, live with difference, respect human dignity, and serve the suffering neighbor. Therefore, based on what faith teaches us, our approach to the world is one of hope.

3 Vision and Values

We express our self-understanding and calling in this world with the following vision statement:

Liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

Our values derive from our faith. They are informed by biblical texts that are central to Lutheran churches and have continuously shaped our theological identity.

- **Dignity and justice**

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Am 5:24).

Each and every person is created in God's image, is gifted with talents and capacities, and has dignity, irrespective of social status, gender, ethnicity, age, ability, or other differences. Our commitment to human rights and justice means that we work on the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion and for a more equitable distribution of power, resources, and opportunities.

- **Compassion and commitment**

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity (Lk 10:33).

Inspired by God's love for humanity, we are compassionate about standing with and caring for people who are suffering—the poor, the vulnerable and marginalized, and minority populations and faiths who experience discrimination, violence, and hardship in different contexts.

- **Respect for diversity**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ (1 Cor 12:12).

Differences among us express the richness of God's creation. As a global communion of churches, we value and seek to understand our differences in culture, history, and context, and the way in which these

have shaped our theological understandings, our perspectives on moral and ethical questions, and our participation in God's mission.

- **Inclusion and participation**

“Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet” (Mt 22:9).

We are committed to being inclusive and enabling the full and equitable participation of women, men, people of all ages and ethnicities, as well as people with disabilities, in church life and society and in decision-making processes, activities, and programs of the LWF. We understand that power dynamics, cultural norms, access to resources, and other factors create barriers to participation and we work to overcome these.

- **Transparency and accountability**

“... ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’ ” (Mt 25:40).

We are a responsible steward of the resources and responsibilities that God has entrusted to us. We are committed to transparency in our aims, processes, decisions, and use of resources and to being accountable to the people we serve, our member churches, partners, and donors.

4 Our Journey as a Communion

In recent years, our journey and witness have been informed by the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation under the theme “Liberated by God's Grace” and the three sub-themes “Salvation—not for sale,” “Human beings—not for sale,” and “Creation—not for sale.” These themes have significantly shaped programmatic engagement.

The Reformation anniversary became a catalyst for ecumenical development, with significant milestones, such as the Joint Catholic–Lutheran Commemoration in Lund, Sweden, and the expansion of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification from a bilateral to a multilateral declaration. It provided the opportunity for shared engagement with biblical hermeneutics and for commitment to jointly discern the public role of theology and the church. The Reformation anniversary provided a sense of unity that allowed us to witness together, while dealing with differences in the communion.

We engaged in a process to discern the self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion. This process attested to what it means to be an ecclesial communion from a Lutheran perspective and how the communion lives not only for itself but to serve and witness in the world.

We continued to grow together as a communion of churches with increased interaction and cooperation at a regional and global level. We placed greater emphasis on connecting across contexts and held fast to each other even when faced with challenging differences.

In the context of an unprecedented surge in migration and forced displacement of refugees, we were able to significantly scale up our response, currently reaching some three million people. In doing so, we expanded our partnerships, including new ecumenical and interfaith actors.

We consolidated our work with youth, who led us into a strengthened commitment to address climate change and helped us understand it as a matter of intergenerational justice.

We adopted a Gender Justice Policy that provided the basis for contextual implementation within the member churches.

At the Twelfth Assembly (Windhoek, Namibia, 2017), the LWF member churches came together to discern their future journey. The Assembly message, resolutions, and public statements offer the collective thinking of the global communion of churches for this journey. They affirm the following themes as important for their joint witness in the world: communion building, churches and their role in mission, theological education, ecumenical commitments, interfaith relations, advocacy, climate justice, Lutheran identity, youth and women's participation and leadership, gender justice, humanitarian response and development work, and support to refugees, internally displaced people, and migrants.

5 Our Global Context

Our journey as a communion of churches takes place within a global context that is constantly evolving. Below are some trends that shape the world today.

Awareness and analysis of these trends informs our engagement as a communion of churches.

Global, external

- While important progress has been made to eradicate poverty, the levels of **inequality** at national and global levels continue to grow.
- There is a prevailing **logic of the market** that takes precedence in societal discourse on social and ecological matters.
- The solid achievement of the **human rights framework** is increasingly under pressure. There is growing contempt for and violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, and religious freedom. The rights of children, women, and indigenous people are undermined.
- Growing **violence** and increased **conflicts** and instability are resulting in more displaced people, refugees, and migrants.
- There is rising **nationalism**, fundamentalism, xenophobia, extremism, racism, and populism, which uses fear to manipulate people and escalate tension.
- **Climate change** is accelerating, with vulnerable populations taking a particular burden.
- **Civil society space** continues to shrink, with the legitimacy and relevance of civil society's actors being questioned, increased national government control, and growing influence of the private sector.

- **Weakened funding commitments** are affecting humanitarian and development work.
- **Religious teachings and constituencies** are being **manipulated** for political purposes.
- **Digitalization** is changing the way people communicate and relate to each other, organizations work, information is exchanged, news is shared, and how this influences public opinion, policy making, and society in general.
- **New global frameworks** have been developed, which address some of these realities: Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), the Grand Bargain and Localization Agenda, Paris Climate Agreement, Global Compact on Refugees.
- **Faith-based organizations** are **increasingly recognized** as vital partners in building sustainable societies and working for justice and peace, particularly by the United Nations; at the same time, there are tendencies to exclude religion from the public sphere.
- Growing recognition of the **value of interfaith dialogue** and cooperation and how it contributes to peace.
- **Changes in global Christianity**: churches in the Global South are growing and churches in the Global North decreasing; these changes are also reflected in the life of the LWF.
- **Changing religious landscape**: charismatic and evangelical churches and new forms of spirituality are gaining momentum; societies are becoming more religiously diverse.
- **Convergence is growing** between different confessional families with major ecumenical milestones, **while new rifts around ethical issues** are appearing among and within churches, at times realigning ecumenical and interreligious relationships.
- **Hostility has increased** between religious communities, often aligned to identity politics with severe effects on religious communities in minority situations.
- **New religious actors** are influencing discourse and policy making in the public space.

These developments and trends affect the church globally, influencing the LWF and its member churches as part of the Body of Christ.

6 Our Strategic Priorities

The overarching framework for our ongoing witness is provided by the calling of LWF member churches **to live and work together as a communion of churches in ongoing need of reformation**. This calling, grounded in worship and prayer, is both the basis of our joint witness in the world and the reality that we continue growing into. It is of deep spiritual and theological significance. It constitutes the basis and the context out of which we are active in the world.

Building on our ongoing journey and based on the outcomes of the Assembly and the context within which we live, we identify two strategic priorities for the period ahead:

- **Supporting churches' presence and vibrant witness in the world**
- **Promoting human dignity, justice, and peace**

This framework and the two strategic priorities unfolding from it can be illustrated as follows.



Figure 1: An illustration of the strategic priorities and their basis

At the core of our work is our vocation to live and work together as a communion of churches in ongoing reformation. This is not a static reality, nor is it an end in itself: We live and work together, as we continue responding to God's call and partake in God's mission in the world. In doing so, we focus on supporting each other to witness vibrantly in our diverse contexts and promoting human dignity, justice, and peace.

The lines in the figure above demarcating the spheres are dotted to illustrate the interaction between the two strategic priorities and their relation to the core reality of being a communion of churches.

6.1 Supporting Churches' Presence and Vibrant Witness in the World

We are passionate about the churches holistically witnessing to Christ in their contexts. We seek to equip and resource each other to witness to the liberating grace of God. The challenges that churches face are of a varying nature, given their specific contexts. By engaging in dialogue and collaboration, we strengthen and nurture each other.

As a communion of churches, we continue working together to

- **jointly develop theological reflection that articulates our understanding of being Lutheran churches in communion**
 - *We will further develop a shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which they will continue recognizing each other, belonging to the communion, while witnessing in their diverse contexts.*
 - *We will work together to discern and address issues that represent theological challenges to the churches today.*
 - *We will develop the theological basis and narratives to strengthen the churches' and the communion's engagement in the public space.*
- **live out the communion relationships among member churches**
 - *We will further clarify and define our common understanding, structures, and the praxis supporting churches as they express their call to live in communion.*
 - *We will provide accompaniment and support encounter and theological discernment to understand and address differences and conflict in the communion.*
- **work together to further God's holistic mission**
 - *We will support capacity building of member churches for proclamation, diakonia, and advocacy.*
 - *We will develop processes and structures to enhance theological education and formation.*
 - *We will address the challenges and opportunities resulting from both growth and decrease of church membership.*
 - *We will promote the development of accountable lay and ordained leadership in the churches.*
- **ensure promotion of gender justice at every level**
 - *We will support the implementation of the Gender Justice Policy in the member churches.*
 - *We will work toward just relationships between women and men, creating spaces for conversation about gender roles and education about masculinities.*
 - *We will promote women's leadership in church and society and gender equal involvement in discussion and decision-making processes.*
 - *We will promote the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.*
 - *We will ensure and develop space and structures for gender just participation in the life of the global communion.*

- **ensure the meaningful participation of youth in church and society**
 - *We will ensure and develop space and structures for ongoing participation of youth in the life of the global communion.*
 - *We will promote intergenerational engagement on topical issues for church and society.*
 - *We will support each other to ensure youth participation in the member churches' decision-making processes.*
- **engage ecumenical partners and build relationships to respond to the call to unity and joint witness**
 - *We will move forward in our commitment to seeking the unity of the Body of Christ with all our ecumenical partners.*
 - *We will, together with our ecumenical partners, strengthen the interaction between theological study processes, shared prayer, and joint service (diakonia).*
 - *We will uphold a pastoral responsibility in our theological dialogues and seek to respond to the ecumenical challenges of local communities.*
- **engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation to build mutual understanding and promote collaboration**
 - *We will contribute Lutheran theological perspectives into interfaith conversations.*
 - *We will foster interfaith learning and interreligious literacy among communities and religious leaders.*
 - *We will equip member churches to engage in interreligious relations in their own context.*
 - *We will support interfaith initiatives on advocacy and diakonia, to make an impact and build bridges between faith communities.*

6.2 Promoting Human Dignity, Justice, and Peace

Out of faith convictions and theological reflections, we are committed to uphold human dignity and work for justice and peace. This encompasses upholding the integrity of creation and affirming the human rights of every individual person.

Building on the local witness of LWF member churches, we aspire to express these commitments as a global communion of churches. In doing so we seek to respond to suffering and address its root causes.

As a communion of churches, we will work together to

- **respond to people in emergency situations, with a focus on refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, their host communities, and communities at risk**
 - *We will operate as a global communion emphasizing human rights and protection, with access to livelihoods and services.*

- *We will work in an integrated and complementary way at individual, community, and institutional levels.*
- *We will link emergency responses to recovery and long-term development work.*
- **support local communities in sustainable development efforts to achieve life with dignity and full enjoyment of their rights.**
 - *We will focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized people and promote a rights-based approach in all we do.*
 - *We will be flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts to ensure social and environmental sustainability.*
 - *We will ensure our work is consistent with the values of global targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Grand Bargain.*
- **equip member churches to engage in diaconal action**
 - *We will build the capacity of member churches to address challenges sustainably in their contexts through diakonia.*
 - *We will support member churches to address local diaconal needs through specific projects.*
 - *We will encourage and equip member churches to engage effectively with the Sustainable Development Goals.*
- **collaborate with ecumenical partners, interfaith actors, and religious leaders on issues of human dignity, justice, and peace**
 - *We will work together, wherever possible and at all levels, to contribute to collective action, holding governments accountable and mobilizing people to uphold human dignity and advocate for the integrity of creation.*
 - *We will foster our commitment at all levels and expand partnerships to support sustainable development cooperatively.*
- **strengthen efforts for climate justice**
 - *We will support member churches in their climate change education and action.*
 - *We will contribute directly to climate mitigation and adaptation among the most vulnerable.*
 - *We will strengthen advocacy for adequate climate action at all levels.*
- **strengthen local and global advocacy to promote human rights and protect the rights of marginalized communities**
 - *We will build on grassroots experience and knowledge to bring local human rights issues and realities to the global arena.*
 - *We will be proactive on issues of justice, addressing economic inequality.*
 - *We will encourage member churches and country programs to advocate locally and to build local coalitions with faith-based actors and civil society groups.*

- *We will hold UN member states accountable to the international norms, instruments, and agreements to safeguard human dignity and the integrity of God's creation.*

7 Our Ways of Working

In all of our work, we strive to be innovative and creative, using methods that are dynamic and take into account content, context, needs, efficiency, and accountability.

The LWF Assembly and the Council, as expressions of the communion, give direction to our work. The LWF communion office acts on behalf of the communion, accompanying member churches in their contexts and coordinating and implementing joint actions. In carrying out its work, the communion office applies the following working methods and approaches.

- **Theological reflection and discernment**
 - *Bringing together theological perspectives for regional and global trans-contextual and intercultural reflection*
 - *Learning from each other in a spirit of mutuality*
 - *Fostering theological education*
 - *Strengthen interdisciplinary and theological work on an academic level*
- **Accompaniment with member churches**
 - *Walking with each other in mutuality and solidarity, and supporting each other to participate in God's holistic mission*
 - *Working together as regional expressions of the communion*
 - *Engaging in spontaneous alliances and networks to work on common themes*
 - *Standing in solidarity with each other while facing challenges and seeking to overcome them*
 - *Communicating the life and work of the member churches and the communion to strengthen awareness, knowledge, and relations*
- **Convening and facilitation**
 - *Calling churches and organizations together to work on issues they face locally and as part of the global communion*
 - *Developing knowledge and good practices through joint learning and interaction*
- **Direct implementation**
 - *Being operational in humanitarian and development work, responding to emergencies, and addressing the root causes of suffering and injustice*
 - *Engaging globally in ecumenical relations*
 - *Speaking publicly at a global level*

- **Advocacy**
 - *Advocating through and with member churches and country programs and supporting their local advocacy work*
 - *Advocating for the role of the churches as part of civil society in the public sphere*
 - *Advocating for freedom of religion, gender justice, rights of refugees, climate justice*
- **Connecting local to global**
 - *Bringing together voices from the regions and member churches to root global work in local realities*
 - *Amplifying local voices at a global level; holding national governments accountable to their international commitments*
 - *Bringing experiences from local communities to influence global policy decisions and monitor their implementation*
- **Working with others**
 - *Working with partners for mutual value and synergy to achieve common goals.*

8 Partnerships

Strategic relationships are important to us. They take many forms and serve different purposes within and outside the communion. We engage strategically with partners to exchange knowledge and share resources, to collaborate, take action, and improve coordination, and to jointly plan and implement programs.

We identify the following partnerships as fundamental in the years ahead:

- member churches and related organizations, including theological institutions and networks
- ecumenical partners and partners from other faiths
- local communities, civil society, development and humanitarian organizations, and state actors
- the UN system with their specialized agencies

9 Organizational Sustainability and Effectiveness

To reach the goals of this strategy and to be a sustainable and effective organization, we will continue to invest in organizational development in the following areas.

Strategic leadership at all levels

Leadership in the LWF takes place at different levels. Leadership reflects the rich diversity of the communion, maintains gender balance, and ensures youth representation.

The Council and communion office need to be well equipped and supported to enable them to lead the organization in implementing the strategy. For that purpose, we will clarify and sharpen the understanding of the leadership roles and responsibilities of the Council and communion office.

Strong financial management and resource mobilization

In a changing financial landscape, we will be responsive to new opportunities and funding challenges. This will require strengthened capacities and expertise among the staff. Strong internal collaboration in resource mobilization is essential to the financial sustainability of the LWF.

As responsible stewards, we will continue to develop and improve our financial management. The communion office commits to transparent processes and will produce accurate and timely financial reports. Effective reporting mechanisms will help to build strong donor confidence with current and new funding partners.

Alignment of structures and systems

We want to increase efficiency and quality in our structures and processes. We will ensure coherence in the programmatic work of the communion office.

We need to invest in systems that are cost effective and support LWF in becoming a global, networked organization, ensuring access to information, timely communication, and online collaboration. Digital infrastructure and interface will enable access to systems and structures.

Investment in people

We will develop a strategic approach to our staff to maintain a highly competent workforce. This will include investment in recruitment, staff development, and leadership and management skills. We will improve human resource systems to support staff in their roles. We will focus on staff well-being and safeguard their safety and security. We will nurture a work culture that supports innovation, continuous learning, and improvement. Special attention will be given to further develop gender and regional balance, in particular the representation of women in leadership roles.

Effective internal and external communication

Communication is a key tool for communion building and for fostering external relationships. Through good communication we want to tell our story in a way that informs, educates, and moves our audience to action.

We will continue to engage in a timely manner, adapting relevant tools and platforms for each theme and audience, according to our goals. We will continue developing communications tools and methods. We will ensure that those involved in communications are well trained and our work is well-resourced.

Afterword

This strategy was developed through a joint process, to which many contributed. Thanks be to all who participated in its development: members of the LWF Council and Executive Committee, representatives of member churches, related agencies, ecumenical partners, and staff.