



**“Holistic Leadership for Sustainability”**  
*LWF President’s Keynote Address to Church Leaders in Asia*

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I greet you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It is a great pleasure to be with you here. As President of our Global Communion, I am privileged to travel to every region of the globe. It is always wonderful, however, to return to my home in Asia. I deeply appreciate your hospitality and the joy we share together in expressing our passion for the church and for the world.

I am also pleased to be discussing this important theme: “Holistic Leadership for Sustainability.” This theme is a pressing concern for every church in our communion. No church is exempt from concerns about the health of its institutional expression; every church works to ensure that its emerging generation of leaders is equipped to face the challenges of the present and the future.

Sustainability is a key theme for us as we tend to our own concerns, but also for how we engage neighbors and communities not within our walls. If we seek sustainability only to preserve our institutional expressions, we are missing the mark. Instead, we seek sustainability that serves the mission given to us by God, to go out into the world proclaiming “good news to the poor ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4.18). As we discuss sustainability, we should always seek to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Eph 4.1), a calling centered on love and concern for our neighbors rather than ourselves alone.

Today, I will discuss several different forms of sustainability, including doctrinal sustainability, spiritual sustainability, sustainability in society, sustainability in interreligious and ecumenical engagement, sustainability for mission, and sustainability within our communion. First, however, we must discuss what we mean by the concept of sustainability. Our conversation will not be fruitful if we cannot agree on our basic terms.

The Spanish language provides an important resource for reflecting on sustainability. Those of you who speak Spanish will be familiar with the distinctions between *Sostenibilidad* o *sustentabilidad*.<sup>1</sup> I am not claiming to be an expert on the Spanish language! But I do appreciate the subtle distinction between these two words. *Sustentabilidad* can be used to indicate that sustainability is the preservation of a static reality, intended to keep things in their present state. *Sostenibilidad*, on the other hand, indicates something changing and developing at a steady rate, moving forward. Understanding ourselves as “ecclesia semper reformanda,” we can fully embrace sustainability as *sustentabilidad*, always moving forward. We are not called merely to preserve ourselves, or live in imaginations of the past, or create static impressions of society. We are instead sent out to seek justice and establish peace to promote the flourishing of all human communities. This vital work—grounded in God’s passion for the church and for the world—is why we have been called together as a global communion.

### **The Root and Foundation of Lutheran Sustainability**

Our Global Communion’s approach to sustainability must necessarily begin with our roots. Before we effectively serve our neighbors, we need to be strongly grounded in our own calling, as distinct churches and as a communion. To again recall the two different approaches to sustainability, we must ask ourselves what it is we seek to preserve and carry forward. What do we need to minimize or change so we can better respond to God’s call? What is it that we offer to the world?

Lutheran churches in Asia and throughout our communion are often faced with the question of Lutheran identity. The LWF is currently developing a resource on Lutheran self-understanding. It is important for us to articulate the things that bind us together, those things that are distinctively Lutheran, the things that bind us in unity with churches not in our tradition, and those things which bind us in love and care to all our neighbors.

Our Lutheran identities have been formed doctrinally, historically, and contextually. As evangelical Christians in the Lutheran tradition, we agree with Martin Luther that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith apart from works of the law is the article on which the church stands or falls. From our confessional foundation, our churches have taken many forms and flavors in different periods and in different places. Because of the Reformers’ insistence that the “one holy, Christian church ... is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel,”<sup>2</sup> what is known as “Lutheran” has taken on a vast variety of expressions.

So while our identity is formed doctrinally and historically, it is also formed contextually. Some of the churches in our global communion emerged in the contexts where the Reformation was

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<sup>1</sup> I draw my discussion of Spanish subtleties from this concise article: Carlos Miguel Barber Kuri, “¿Sostenibilidad o sustentabilidad?” Cable News Network (May 22, 2009), available online at <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/actualidad/2009/05/22/sostenibilidad-o-sustentabilidad>.

<sup>2</sup> “The Augsburg Confession: German Text, Article 7 (Concerning the Church),” in R. Kolb and T. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 42.

birthed. But even those churches—in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, for instance—contain wonderful diversities of structure and expression. Many other churches are the result of missionary service and outreach from these European and North American sisters and brothers. This is the case with my church in Jordan and the Holy Land as it is for many of your own. Our various struggles, challenges, and cultures have each come together to form a beautiful tapestry of what is now our global communion.

In Asia, there are 49 Lutheran churches, including the ELCJHL. Each of our churches was established by missions from other parts of the world. When these missions came to Asia, they brought their own theologies, sometimes importing their own theological disagreements into our context. As a result, many Asian contexts have multiple Lutheran churches, one identifying as more conservative and the other more progressive. In some places, there are multiple LWF churches, each from its distinctive mission heritage.

I ask you today: is this sustainable? Is it necessary and sustainable to maintain multiple LWF member churches in the same geographic context? Theologically speaking, the challenge before each of us is to develop our own theological identity and understanding of our church's mission. Now that we are independent of our founders' vision, we are able to produce our own theologies. In my context as well, the challenge is to produce a contextually meaningful theological vision for the mission and purpose of my church. The sustainability of our churches depends on each church engaging in intense theological reflection that is contextual and at the same time rooted in Lutheran theology. All of this will deeply enrich our communion, showing how God is at work in every corner of the globe.

In this diversity, we have a strong unity. Above all, our unity is based on the work of God in Christ Jesus, who has given us the gift of justification by grace through faith. Because of this free gift, we are bound together also in service to our neighbors. Gospel of liberation and restoration drives us into the world, to bind up the brokenhearted, heal the sick, and confront injustice.

We do not simply sit and enjoy the gift of our salvation. In his 1520 treatise, "Freedom of a Christian," Luther says "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." As Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, who serves at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, reminds us, "Salvation is never a solitary thing for Luther. It is us wrapped up in God's life, and for that reason wrapped up in each other's lives, too. It is total freedom; at the same time it is total service. It is always trading places, one joyful exchange after another."<sup>3</sup> From this center of freedom and duty, we are sent out into the world. The clarity of this mission and calling strengthens our capacity for sustainability in all its forms. Confident in this shared foundation, we trust that the Holy Spirit leads us, comforts us, guides us, nourishes us, and continues to deepen our *koinonia* through our altar and pulpit fellowship. Thus, we are sent to the world freshly commissioned for holistic mission, including prophetic diakonia.

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Wilson, "2013 Theological Reading Challenge: Luther's 'Freedom of a Christian,'" *Lutheran Forum* (June 12, 2013), available online at <http://www.lutheranforum.org/blogs/2013-theological-reading-challenge-luthers-freedom-of-a-christian/>.

## Toward Spiritual Sustainability

The confidence we have in Christ gives us the courage to go out into the world. In this way, the gift of justification leads not to complacency and laziness, but to prophetic *diakonia* for the sake of the world. It is the foundation of our work toward evangelization, interfaith engagement, ecumenism, along with the development of civil society and political engagement. By reflecting on these non-negotiable aspects of our faith, we can foster the spiritual sustainability necessary to continue participating in God's work of redeeming the world.

In his Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther reflected on what he called a "theology of the cross."<sup>4</sup> Rejecting theological approaches which seek "the 'invisible' things of God as though they were clearly 'perceptible in those things which have already happened,'" Luther favors theologians who comprehend "the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross." Praising the Law but seeking to keep it in its place, Luther says that "without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner." All of this leads to his central point in Thesis 21: "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."

This call for clear-headed analysis, truth-telling, and rejecting the quest for glory can help us today in our quest for spiritual sustainability. Embracing the suffering of the cross means that we can focus on mission through accompaniment rather than focusing on our supposed success, measured in how many people convert to Lutheran faith or attend services in our churches.

All of this takes us far away from the so-called "Prosperity Gospel," which is nothing less than a Gospel-destroying Theology of Glory seeking to shop indulgences in the here and now. Throughout the world, including here in Asia, we are confronted with the false Gospel of prosperity. Again and again, I hear people claim that if you have a car and wear a nice tie, God has blessed you with this and that. The other side of this equation, of course, is that if you are facing challenges, if your child falls ill, or if your best milking goat dies, God is somehow withdrawing blessing from you because of something you have done or failed to do. The false gospel of prosperity contains no love, no grace, no faith. It proposes nothing more than a mere financial transaction between God and human beings, like a modern-day quick-fix indulgence for the here-and-now. Already, we see that such teachings often connect with narrow apocalyptic understandings of God's will for the world. If we do not confront this nihilistic false gospel with the wisdom and clarity of Lutheran doctrine and biblical interpretation, we will face grave problems in the future.

Embracing the cross means embracing our full equality throughout Asia and throughout our global communion, no matter our size, our bank accounts, or our relative position in society. For instance, we evangelicals in the Arab world are very few. We are less than one million in an ocean of other churches and other religions. But we have brought ecumenism, education, health care, civil society, and nationalism into the Arab world. Mission does not mean that we are there to

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<sup>4</sup> For the theses and their proofs, see Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation (1519)," in *Luther's Works vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, American Edition, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 39–58.

impose the Bible on all spheres of life. It means that we are being creative with the Word of God, always ready to bring the freshness of the Gospel into our contexts.

Through embracing both our doctrinal foundations and our fresh contextuality, we show ourselves to be a communion that is always reforming itself and always preparing to be reformed by God's response to the world. This dynamic reality means our communion is always one focused on God's call. Even if in some countries we are small in number and in some places we are under pressure, our presence makes a fundamental contribution to individual and society wellbeing. Our presence, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is itself a witness to the world.

### **Sustainability in Society**

The church's quest for effective proclamation of the Gospel and prophetic diakonia to serve all of God's people is opposed by human sinfulness. In our world today, this sinfulness is expressed in many systems and structures that stand against God's will. Rather than promoting human flourishing, these systems and structures promote economic exploitation and environmental degradation, and interreligious conflict. In Asia and around the world, the churches must stand against these powers and principalities if we are to have a sustainable witness for a sustainable world.

For this reason, we must not focus alone on theological renewal and sustainability. Human beings today are not seeking abstract religion. Our people—over 72 million Lutherans around the world—are looking for tangible, concrete faith. In our interconnected world, the church must return to its concrete call to work for justice. This quest for justice must not be in the realm of ideas alone, but in real justice that promotes human flourishing and life abundant. As the Amman Call of the World Council of Churches in 2007 said when it invited Christians worldwide to engage Israel and Palestine, "No more words without deeds. It is time for action."

This tangible faith is found first and foremost in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These are the sites where God has chosen to enter in to the most basic elements of our world, sanctifying our existence. But this tangible faith is also found in the concrete work of churches responding around the world to the concrete needs of persons who are poor and vulnerable.

The challenges of the world are intimidating. But in the sacraments we are given strength and confidence. We are even given, as Isaiah 2 says, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." The sacraments bring us *coram deo*—before God, before the cross of Christ—where every human being is profoundly and utterly equal. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God'" (Rom. 3.9–11). When we consider human relations from a Christian theological perspective, no person is more deserving of benefits—tangible or spiritual—than any other. Because Christ has died once for all, the same Baptism is offered to all, as is the same sacrament of Holy Communion.

This fundamental awareness of human equality is challenged each and every moment by the profound inequalities that mark our fallen world. Injustice is increased when those inequalities are either ignored or exploited, often by those who already possess greater resources.

As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we have chosen to focus on our Lutheran proclamation that we are liberated by God's grace. This freedom we have in Christ Jesus binds us to our neighbors through service. This theological lens, we are called—individually and collectively—to recognize and work against threats to justice, including systemic inequalities. Equality alone does not guarantee justice, but justice cannot be achieved without greater equality.

Here in Asia, one can find rich and affluent countries immediately next to countries that cannot adequately address the needs of their own people. We see, for instance, the inequality between Japan and India. One finds many countries exploited by multinational and trans-national corporations. You find countries with nuclear power and nuclear weapons but not enough food to feed their people. Disparities between countries are matched by growing inequality within them. In China especially, the wealth gap is growing more profound. One of the central reasons for these inequalities is the radical disparity between urban households and those in agricultural contexts. In 2007, the *Economist* magazine observed that “income inequality in emerging Asia is heading towards Latin American levels.”<sup>5</sup> More recently, the *Wall Street Journal* echoed the International Monetary Fund's observation that “inequality hurts growth in a number of ways. It reduces the education levels of poorer citizens, and saps their health, reducing the potential productivity of a workforce. It also can cause political instability due to anger over income disparities, which leads to a falloff in investment.”<sup>6</sup>

The churches are called to rise to this challenge. We must ask hard questions as we seek to call things what they are. Are these inequalities—both between countries and within countries—the result of wrong-headed policies or are we facing the more troubling possibility that there is no will to make necessary changes? The churches, as global voices, can use moral authority to challenge the systems and structures perpetuating inequality and human misery. Some of you may find that your own churches own lack of material resources distracts you from looking at other spheres of concern. One opportunity we have within our global communion is learning from one another's successes and mistakes. I am very impressed with how the relatively small church in South Korea is utilizing its land holdings to build commercial properties that help fund their ministries. This creativity helps us all.

The rapid economic growth of Asia is also being marked by environmental degradation. One of our Reformation themes as we prepare for 2017 is “Creation: Not for Sale.” As the LWF Council has said,

nature has to be fully respected and protected as God's good creation, entrusted to human care. Therefore it cannot be subject to exploitative domination by humans nor can their

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<sup>5</sup> “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more,” *The Economist* (August 9, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Tom Wright, “Growing Focus on Inequality Puts Asia in Spotlight,” *Wall Street Journal* (March 3, 2014).

resources be concentrated and exploited as commodities.... Policies must aim at sustainable development.<sup>7</sup>

Economic inequalities harm the ability of countries, communities, and individuals to respond to the crisis of climate change. For this reason, our work toward economic justice cannot be separated from the call to work toward environmental justice. This is a Lutheran call.

Care for creation is a fundamental commitment growing out of the first article of the Nicene and Apostolic creeds. This is God's creation and human beings are to care for it; we are to tend to God's beautiful garden. There are times, however, when we can distract ourselves with theological language; it is time that the church speaks plainly about the looming crisis of climate change. Our communion is enriched by the witness of Lutheran churches in Asia regarding the need for effective global responses to climate change. I call on you to help lead and guide our communion's response to this unfolding crisis.

The Lutheran doctrinal emphasis on equality has important implications for gender justice, a topic of great importance throughout Asia. I am proud that the LWF Council unanimously adopted our communion's gender justice policy during its 2013 meeting. I encourage each of your churches to be in direct contact with Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt, the LWF Secretary for Women in Church and Society, to ensure that you are effectively contextualizing the gender justice policy. Without being contextualized in Palestine, India, Indonesia, and throughout our communion, the Gender Policy could simply be a document on a shelf. Gender justice is too important to let that happen.

My friends, our world is dying for fresh streams of water that will transform inequality to equality, injustice to justice, egocentric economies to economies of equal opportunity. The church will be prophetic only when it is the voice of the poor, the ones suffering injustice, the occupied, oppressed, persecuted, and displaced.

In order to bring about such change, we will need to engage the political sphere. For too long, we have labored under the false conception that religion and politics cannot mix, that the church cannot speak directly or critically to the state. My position is that the basic sustainability of the church is found in its vocation to be the voice for the voiceless as it advocates for human rights, gender justice, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of conviction. The churches cannot be silent. This is not politics, but the calling of the church. In an Asian context, no church can be sustainable if the church is not prophetic.

From a Lutheran perspective, it is not our goal to "Christianize" politics. In other words, we do not seek to "Christianize" either the region or work for the benefits of Christians alone. In the Lutheran tradition, we acknowledge that government does not have to be explicitly Christian in order to fulfill God's purposes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German pastor who led resistance efforts in Germany during the Third Reich, suggested that the church acts as the conscience of the state since "the church is what leads government to an understanding of itself." In delineating the political responsibility of the church, Bonhoeffer calls the church "to make government aware of

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<sup>7</sup> Report from the LWF Special Committee "Luther 2017: 500 years of Reformation," presented to the Meeting of the LWF Council (12-18 June 2013, Geneva).

its failures and mistakes that necessarily threaten its governmental office.” As to what political arrangement is best, Bonhoeffer says that, theologically speaking, “the question concerning the form of the state is always secondary.” The importance of government is in its practical functioning, not in its form: “As long as the government fulfills its task, the form under which it does so is not essential, at least for the church.” We are left to consider “the relatively best form of the state” rather than any political pronouncement in absolute terms.<sup>8</sup> One is to judge a particular governmental form or practice not by static principles but by its promotion of the wellbeing of the people and, in specifically Christian theological terms, its relative service to God’s purposes. The benefit we seek is the benefit for all.

The spiritual sustainability we find in the Theology of the Cross does not determine our political positions. It does, however, shape the way we engage in civil society and the political discourses of our various local and regional contexts. Our commitment to radical equality before God strengthens our commitment to the wellbeing and flourishing of our communities as a whole. Unlike some who seek to know the secrets of God’s will by theologically excusing or explaining the realities of poverty, malnutrition, and disease, we have the courage, through the Theology of the Cross, to call things what they are. The particular way of reading the Bible and Christian faith binds us together in communion precisely because it reminds us of God’s love for the entire world.

### **Sustainability in Interreligious and Ecumenical Engagement**

Beyond the interrelated challenges of economic inequality, climate change, and food security, the Asian context is dealing with a third crisis: interreligious tension and extremism. As you know, much of the world’s attention has returned to the Middle East with the rise of the so-called Islamic State, or *Da’esh*. I am keenly aware, however, that many of you are dealing with Muslim-Christian and other interreligious tensions in your own diverse contexts. In March of this year, we saw deadly bombings against churches in Pakistan; a mob of Christians then killed a man they suspected of being a Taliban informant.<sup>9</sup> Similar violence has taken place in many other parts of Asia. In other contexts, such as Malaysia, Christians are targeted with specific government policies that limit their freedom of worship and expression. The processes of elevating Hindu and Buddhist community interests above others are continuing in many areas as well, with the result that Christians are being pushed further from the center of society. While not covered in media as widely as spectacular acts of violence, these efforts are no less concerning for us and must be confronted.

Where governments are tolerating or promoting policies of faith-based structures of privilege and power, our global communion has a stake in the matter. In all contexts, we insist on the full implementation of human rights and civil rights, including freedom of religion and freedom of expression, along with gender justice, for the building up of civil society. All forms of persecution and pressure must be identified and confronted. Too many governments are interested in stoking

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<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Theological Position Paper on State and Church,” in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 16*, English ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 522, 525, 526–7.

<sup>9</sup> Farhan Bokhari, “Deadly attack on Pakistan Christians ignites murderous mob,” *CBS News* (March 15, 2015), online at <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/deadly-attack-on-pakistan-christians-ignites-murderous-mob/>.



the fires of religiously-sanctioned extremism to achieve some form of short-term gain. The consequences for such actions can be enormously destructive, especially in this time of rapid global change. In such a climate, the churches have an opportunity to be witnesses of moderation and concern for all communities, not just our own.

Although many of our present challenges are with forms of Islamic expression, we must be conscious that no religion has a monopoly on extremism. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and of course Christians produce various forms of politicized faith and extremist religion. The challenge for us, as moderates, is to put forth a strong case for moderation and coexistence rather than fall prey to the temptations of engaging in our own responses of anger. We must remind our people that while extremist religion can appear to give meaning, it is actually a way of draining all meaning from both faith and public life. The extremist is one who has given up on making a positive change in the world and is only seeking to act through coercion and force. Our vision refuses to allow us to follow or live in fear of that path.

These interreligious challenges remind us of the importance of ecumenical relations. Lutherans have never existed apart from an ecumenical environment, in relation to other Christians. In our increasingly interrelated world, we must not imagine that we need to face any challenge alone. In these times when the church may be heading into a new period of persecution, we need to lean on one another and our ecumenical partners.

As I said in my Easter message from Jerusalem, our sustainability is to stay in our country no matter what pressures are placed on us. In Jerusalem, “we cling to the news of the resurrection as our hope, our strength, and our courage to face the challenges and obstacles in the Middle East today. This is the only thing that has kept us in this Holy Land.”<sup>10</sup> Further, in my sermon preached on Easter morning in Jerusalem, I said to my community that “Marytria is a challenging call, and a difficult path, but God has given us today the hope and strength to follow as the women did, all the way to the tomb. By the power of the resurrection, we do not allow extremism to frustrate us or oblige us to leave. We do not fear any stone which attempts to stand in the way of our future in this place. We will stay in the land of the resurrection by the power of the resurrection.” I pray that those of you who need it will take comfort in these words.

Ecumenical engagement gives us the opportunity to foster strong local and regional relationships. As we work to develop contextual understandings of our callings as churches in Asia, we should not neglect the resources Christian sisters and brothers can offer. All of this will strengthen the ecumenical efforts of our communion as we prepare for 2017 and beyond.

## **Sustainability in Calling and Mission**

Lutheran churches in Asia, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, are the result of mission outreach. Because we are the result of mission outreach, most of us have

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<sup>10</sup> Munib Younan, “2015 Easter Message from Jerusalem—‘Who will roll away the stone?’” *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land* (April 2, 2015), available online at <http://www.elcjh.org/2015/04/02/the-easter-message-for-2015/>.

not developed our own capacities so that we can be fully self-sustaining. In the present global economic climate, we are finding that fewer and fewer resources—both personnel and funding—come from the churches that founded us. They are facing their own limits. Since churches around the world are already dealing with various forms of financial crisis, these changes create complications.

As I have discussed already, we must nevertheless have confidence in our mission. Diminishing financial support from the Global North is evidence neither of those churches' lack of interest in our work nor in the importance of what we have been called to do in our contexts. Money is not the proof of mission! In this time of change, I commend to you the LWF resource, "Mission in Context." Read it again in the near future. Find there the comforting strength validating the good work your church is doing for the sake of the Gospel.

Within the field of mission, the question of relating to Muslims has special importance for our region. The question we must ask, I think, is how we can be a living witness vis-à-vis the Muslim world?

The question of witness is quite different from the challenge of proselytizing. Indeed, we are called to living witness, not to create battlefields of religion. Our witness as a communion in the Muslim world is not an evangelism campaign. At the same time, if anybody wants to hear the message of the Gospel, they should not be denied; we stand ready to respond with specific Good News of the Cross. Instead, we are known as a communion working in many Muslim countries, seeking dignity and sustainable development for all. We are known as a communion of churches that respects the faiths of others. We promote the freedom of religion, commitments to interfaith engagement and dialogue. Specifically, we promote efforts that strengthen comprehension of Islam and relations with Muslims. Our witness, faithful to Christ, is one of hospitality and openness, not exclusion and controversy. Our presence in itself is a witness to the Gospel of Christ's love.

From this foundation, we can faithfully and effectively engage in difficult conversations with Muslim neighbors. In Malaysia, for instance, where political and judicial leaders have sought to ban Christian use of the word "Allah" for God, Lutheran leaders have engaged critically but respectfully. From my perspective in the Arab world, I know that Christians used this word 600 years before the religion of Islam itself. We confidently use the word Allah to name our Triune God. We respect freedom of religion when we do not deny others the ability to worship, sanctify their holy places, and name God in the way they want. From Indonesia, and in support of the Malay churches' basic human right to worship and name God as they desire, I call on all governing bodies within Malaysia, including the Parliament, to reaffirm the commitments of religious freedom. I call on each governing body to allow for the unimpeded distribution and use of Bibles where Allah is used in the local language.

By considering these important questions, we accompany one another in providing sustainability in mission. We Asian churches must accompany one another as well as other churches in providing sustainability in mission.

## **Sustainability within Communion**

It is good that we can gather here in a spirit of accompaniment and mutual support. As President of our global communion, I am able to see the wonderful ways Lutherans around the world connect with and sustain one another in their difficult work. And as President, I am aware of the many disagreements that we have within our diverse global body. Just as with the first Christian communities, we are not all of one mind on a host of issues. Part of my role as President of this diverse communion is to help ensure unity while not seeking uniformity.

Since we believe, as I mentioned earlier, that the “one holy, Christian church ... is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel,” our communion is bound together by pulpit and altar fellowship. We are not separated by secondary questions, including disagreements about social/ethical issues or the style of mission engagement. What binds us together is far greater than what would threaten to separate us from one another.

What binds us together is the blood of Christ, which has set us free. This is our theology of justification by faith. For us to have sustainable unity among Lutheran churches, however, we must ensure that we are speaking in terms we can recognize with one another. We have many seminaries throughout Asia. But what is the common line from which we are teaching our emerging leaders? How can we be sustainable if we are producing generations of leaders who do not comprehend one another theologically? The unity and sustainability of our churches will be strengthened with some form of theological coordination.

In conclusion, my sisters and brothers, I remind you again that the passion of God and of our global communion is for the church and for the world. When we consider the topic of sustainability, I believe as well that sustainability for the church *is* sustainability for the world. In our engagement with theology, spirituality, society, and relationships, we are called to seek sustainability not for our selves alone, but for the sake of the One who has sent us and for the sake of those who need our prophetic diakonia. I am proud to be a fellow laborer with you in this vineyard and look forward to seeing what more God will do in our midst in order that we will always work together for sustainability.

May God bless you.