

With Passion for the Church and for the World

Message from the LWF European Church Leadership Consultation held in Ostrava, Czech Republic, 10 - 15 May 2012

The LWF European Church Leadership Consultation was hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. 80 participants from 38 member churches in the LWF Central Western, Central Eastern and the Nordic European regions attended. LWF General Secretary Martin Junge offered the keynote address entitled “On the Way to 2017: Church in Transformation in Changing Society.” This served as the foundation for subsequent discussions of the following themes:

- The nature of the 2017 Reformation Commemoration. Lutheran identity and ecumenical accountability;
- The Road to Emmaus as a model for LWF Conversation and Dialogue;
- In the Image of God (*Imago Dei*): Re-Forming Diakonia: Passion for the Church and for the World;
- Proposal for organizing European regional expression of the LWF, in the years to come.

The Nature of the 2017 Reformation Commemoration. Lutheran Identity and Ecumenical Accountability.

Within the three European regions, there is a great diversity in the preparation for and the public awareness of the 2017 commemoration of the Protestant Reformation. Lutheran identity and heritage is both a challenge and a treasure. For some majority churches in Europe there has not yet been a need to focus on Lutheran identity, although they recognize the historical significance and timeliness which 2017 offers. In contrast, this remains a central tenet for the many minority churches. While recognizing the ecumenical sensitivity of the 500th anniversary, we believe as a European region that it is important that we honor the Lutheran treasure and heritage of *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia* through *solus Christus*. As a worldwide communion, we recognize that no one church, nation or tradition possesses the Reformation. We choose instead as global citizens to walk together with Lutherans from other LWF regions. Assisted by the LWF Communion Office, we believe that we should embrace and support an integrated and inclusive approach to the three years of 2015 to 2017, so that we can share resources and strategies across the communion, and with other Christian Churches. We ask that the Communion Office develop an electronic resource data base of existing 2017 commemoration resources. We believe that special initiatives should be highlighted for children. Youth participation is important to the 500th anniversary, and we lift up the “Young Reformers Network” as one model for engagement of youth. Finally, we believe that the 2017 commemoration planning should include the role of female Reformers as highlighted in the presentation of “Gender Justice and Empowerment.”

The Road to Emmaus as a Model for LWF Conversation and Dialogue

We believe that the image of Jesus' disciples' and their Master's journey on the road to Emmaus is an adequate approach for controversial issues within the life of the LWF, and is the appropriate next stage of the journey in the LWF Council meeting in Bogota 2012. The discussion of the 2007 LWF Lund Paper, on *Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality* has not brought consensus. Member Churches of the communion speak as individual voices from different theologies, contexts and legal realities. We underscore the need for continued discussion and careful dialogue. This process does not and should not lead to decisions. Together, however, we must invoke the wisdom of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and draw insights from the Scriptures and Confessions to reach, if possible, a common understanding of the controversial issues. In claiming the gifts of communion we acknowledge that there will be times of disagreement. There are and will be divisive issues which we will continue to face, but in the spirit of tolerance, and in the image of Jesus' disciples on the road to Emmaus we must walk together in hope, speaking and listening carefully, and being ever open to the appearance of Christ in our midst. Sharing Christian fellowship must remain an important mark of our conversation and dialogue.

In the Image of God (*Imago Dei*): Re-Forming Diakonia: Passion for the Church and for the World

We commend the work of the LWF on "Seeking Conviviality: Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe." The European regions have a strong tradition of providing professional diaconal services, but the capacity of work is being challenged today. Increasing indebtedness, rising unemployment rates especially among the young, and diminished communal resources have caused an increased demand in social, diaconal services. Although Europe may appear to be one unified, social, political and economic region, there are emerging economic gaps between rich and poor and especially among migrant workers and marginalized populations. Many people lack the economic literacy to use the societal supports available. The lack of viable funding has forced Churches and diaconal programs to re-examine a tension or bias towards professional competency and the engagement and willingness of faith-based volunteers. It juxtaposes expertise and compassion. Even within Europe, there are a variety of traditions for volunteer work. In some parts of Europe, however, people are forced by economic conditions to choose their own financial livelihood rather than volunteering to serve those in similar need.

The biblical and theological focus of human beings created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*), however, challenges and inspires the European Churches to examine diakonia from a renewed perspective. How is the individual, the congregation and the Church called to care for the neighbor as a part of their very being? And how do the church and all its members act as servants and stewards of God's transformation in caring for the neighbor and all creation? We believe that diakonia within the LWF European regions should include the active role of coordinated advocacy on behalf of the neighbor around the world. We continue to feel ourselves committed to the gospel's preferential option for the poor. Therefore, we are committed through the ecumenical dimension of diakonia to empower the poor and advocate for fair economic standards and the cancellation of debt in Europe. We ask policy-makers to take decisive action to eliminate the causes of the current crisis (indebtedness, insufficient regulation of financial markets, insufficient social standards).

We are called to keep alive the passion for our neighbor in our own communities, without losing the passion for neighbors in communities around the world. We strongly support the ongoing reflection on the respect, dignity and interdependency work which has developed through the process of “Re-Forming Community Diakonia”.

Regional Expression

Because no church in the LWF is too old and too numerous or so young and new, deprived of resources that it can't contribute to the life of the Communion, the three regions of Europe agree to strengthen the exchange and cooperation in the regions. There will be an annual contact on the pan-European level to complement the two church leadership consultations between the LWF Assemblies (apart from the pre-Assembly meeting). The meetings will focus on themes that are relevant to the European regions and are related to the global communion. In all these meetings the regions emphasize the importance of respecting the 20% quota for youth participation.