



# Driven by Christ's passion that all find life

## LWF New Year Message

*I came that they may have life, and  
have it abundantly (Jn 10:10)*

How could the disciples be so confused, that they even chased children away? They thought their role was to protect Jesus. Hence, they prevented children from approaching him (Mt 19:13-14).

Fortunately, as always, Jesus came to help his disciples: 'Let them come', he tells them, 'because it is for them that I'm here right now'.

This was not the first time that the disciples misinterpreted Jesus' priorities. Filled with an unquestionable commitment and zeal for God, they often run the risk of missing what Jesus' mission is all about. A phenomenon we still see today. Jesus' disciples, then and now, end up putting themselves in the forefront. Mission becomes about their own mind-sets, their own sense of what is right and just, often losing sight of what is just and right in God's eyes.

Jesus himself defines his mission succinctly, helping the disciples, all of us, in our doubts and confusion: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10)."



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Life in fullness. A life that enjoys both justice and peace as belonging inseparably together (Ps 85:10). A life that flourishes because of just relationships. Between different people in our diverse human family, and with God's good creation. A life that lets God be God, and humans become what God wants them to be: just human. Therefore, loving God with all their heart, mind and soul, loving their neighbor, and caring for God's creation (Dt 6:4-7).

As I look towards the year that is ahead of us, I sense the urgency for churches to focus on this message of life in fullness while participating in God's mission. Against a backdrop of populism and an increased use of the Bible to exclude and oppress others, to justify harassment or violence against minorities, migrants, indigenous people and other sectors of society, churches are called to continue offering the gospel message that has Christ at its center. In times of exclusionary populism, silence is never an option.

In a context of increasing demagoguery, churches need to sharpen their own spiritual discernment, ensuring that they witness to God's transformative presence in the world. Our call is to "promote Christ" and his gifts to humankind (Luther).

Hence, as those called into discipleship, we will seek to stand for the sanctity of the Triune God by proclaiming the good news of salvation, serving our neighbors, caring for creation, and advocating for those excluded and oppressed. It is by becoming shepherds, holistically caring for others, that we best embrace and express God's mission: becoming a serving community, which carries out God's will so that nobody gets lost (Lk 15: 3-7).

I am deeply grateful for the witness of LWF member churches around the world that emphasize this inclusive focus. I have seen amazing examples of care and love as a faithful response to the one who loved us first. I am also grateful for what LWF member churches do together in this world, showing compassion and love through their joint diaconal presence, the LWF World Service, working for unity, advocating for gender and for climate justice.

A New Year is ahead of us, by God's grace. I invite LWF member churches to receive the New Year as an opportunity to witness vigorously, joyfully and with hope. I invite them to encourage and to support each other in their ministries. I invite them to work together, so that the gift of life as revealed and offered in Christ, is received by all.

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