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THE JOURNEY FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION IS IRREVERSIBLE

LWF President Musa meets Pope Francis and calls for “pastoral ecumenism”

(LWI) – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa today met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. During the audience he expressed gratitude for the deepening ecumenical relationships between the two church traditions. In his address, Musa thanked Francis for supporting an ecumenical approach to the 500th Reformation anniversary.

“Your presence and participation in the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund was a precious gift for us. It marked the significant turning point at which Catholics and Lutherans are today: the conflicts of the past no longer determine our relationship, but unity as a gift of the Holy Spirit,” Musa said.

Referring to the Joint Commemoration in Lund, Pope Francis said “It was important for us to meet first and foremost in prayer, for the gift of unity among believers takes root and blossoms not as a result of human projects but by the grace of God. Only by praying can we care for one another. [...] Prayer is like the fuel of our journey towards full unity.” After the greetings Pope Francis invited all those present to join in praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Musa, Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) was accompanied by the Vice-Presidents of LWF’s seven regions, General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge and other Communion Office staff.

The LWF president said it was encouraging to hear stories from around the world about joint prayer services and new ways of witnessing together, following the Joint Commemoration. “We praise God for all these gifts,” he added.

Referring to the commitment made in Malmö, Sweden, in October 2016 to serve those in need through closer collaboration, Musa cited Colombia where LWF World Service and Caritas “are serving those holding fast to an elusive peace,” and expressed confidence “that this joint service will continue to grow in the future.” Unity of the Body of Christ, he noted, “reaches its deepest expressions when it transforms us to live out the double commandment of love.”

Pope Francis said that in order to come closer to Jesus there was a need “for concrete steps and outstretched hands. That means above all, spending ourselves in charity, looking to the poor and the least”.

Musa said the Lund event offered new signs of hope especially for many inter-confessional families “who share everything in their lives but cannot share the bread and wine” at the shared Eucharist table and thus “remind us in particularly painful ways of this open wound.”

Further engagement in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, he noted, would be enriched by “pastoral ecumenism,” that is “informed by our shared vocation to walk with our people, listen to their life stories and prayerfully discern God’s call to the Church, sharing the gifts of God to nurture the people of God.” The Eucharist, he added “is not only a goal of our shared journey but the crux of our relationship, and a provision for the faith journey,” especially for such families.

Referring to the commitment made by the LWF and Catholic Church during the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation in 2016 the LWF President said “We have begun our irreversible journey from conflict to communion and we do not wish to let it cease ever again.”

Pope Francis said “We are also called to be on the watch against the temptation of halting along the way. In the spiritual life, as in ecclesial life, whenever we halt, we are turning back.”

Musa was elected as LWF President at the May 2017 Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia. The Assembly also appointed Council members who include the regional Vice-Presidents—Rev. Dr Jeannette Ada Epse Maina (Africa); Ms Desri Maria Sumbayak (Asia); Archbishop Urmas Viilma (Central Eastern Europe); Pröpstin Astrid Kleist (Central Western Europe); Archbishop Antje Jackelén (Nordic Countries); Rev. Dr Nestor Friedrich (Latin America and the Caribbean) and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton (North America).