



Theme:
We are liberated by God's grace.

Introduction:

Nestor Paulo Friedrich

Son of Lebrecht Teo Friedrich and Helmira Laura Lüdtké Friedrich.

Born October 26, 1957, in Agudo/RS, Brazil.

Married to Sofia Grau Friedrich (teacher), father of Paula and Laura.

Education:

- Instituto Pré-Teológico (1971-1977)
- Bachelor's degree in Theology (1978-1982)
- Doctorate in Theology: Bible (1995–1999)

Parochial ministry in the following parishes:

- Canguçu/Piratini/RS – Church District (CD) Rio Camaquã/ Church Region (CR) IV: 02.1983 – 12.1989.
- Maurício Cardoso/RS - CD Buricá/ CR III: 07.1989 – 02.1995.
- Nova Hartz/RS – Sínodo Nordeste Gaúcho: 08.1999 –02.2003.

Other ministerial obligations:

- Guiding Pastor to the Women's League of CD Extremo-Sul.
- District Pastor of CD Buricá/ CR III.
- Deputy Guiding Pastor to Evangelical Youth - CD Buricá.
- Guiding Pastor to the Women's League of Sínodo Nordeste Gaúcho.
- Deputy Synodical Pastor of Sínodo Nordeste Gaúcho (Term of Rev. Homero S. Pinto).
- Lecturer at Faculdades EST/São Leopoldo and ESTEF/Porto Alegre.
- IECLB General Secretary: March 2003 through December 2010.
- IECLB Presiding Pastor, since January 2011.

I want to emphasize that by now I have a new love!

Recently I have experienced God's grace in my life in a new way. I have been seized by a new passion. Passion for a new woman! Her name is Helena! That is a woman! She is 34 days old. A gift of God! Experience of grace! Enchanting! If we are surprised by the power of life, at the same time we are confronted with the fragility. Helena has need of care. She yielded me a new perception. Until a short time ago I didn't see so many children as I see today. So many pregnant women as I see today. And fathers carrying a child in the grocery cart, and children running about. I got new glasses, a new frame of reference.

I think God's grace wants to bring about this miracle also in our lives! God's grace actually realizes this miracle in our life. Because that is God's answer to our ill, harmed, divided world, groaning in childbirth, longing for love.

The question is: do our glasses allow us to see such miracles?



I want to thank for the today privilege to share with you some reflections about our walking as Lutheran church in Brazil in the light of the 500 years jubilee and the theme of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF): “We are liberated by God’s grace.”

The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (further on: IECLB) understands itself as church of Jesus Christ. Therefore we walk in association with others and work in partnership. IECLB is member of the LWF and of World Council of Churches. In Latin America we belong to CLAI, the Latin American Council of Churches, and are supporting it in the efforts to recover. In Brazil we are members of CONIC, the National Council of Christian Churches, whose general secretary is a woman-pastor of IECLB. Countless are the ecumenical relations we maintain worldwide. Where and whenever possible, we try to get motivations from partnership experiences. In the same way, whenever invited, we are willing to give support and to look together to the horizon –together under God’s grace, liberated to take care!

Regarding the countdown to the 500 years, someone remarked: Do you realize that we are the generation which has the privilege of celebrating this penta-centenary?! It is an exciting opportunity!

I am going to develop my presentation in the structure as follows:

First part: The face of a crisis.

Second part: Grace, the face of God.

Third part: Moved “by God’s grace”, some experiences...

Final part: Guilt and repentance.



(1)

First part: The face of a crisis

The last Olympic Games happened in my country. It was an event gathering people from the world over. Appealing in this event was the “team of refugees” parading with the very Olympic flag representing a population of 60 million refuged people.

I must confess that we awaited this Olympiad with great expectancy and apprehension, mostly due to the worriment we are living in my country.



I point out the political scenario as one of the embarrassing elements. We are accompanying the impeachment process of the president Dilma Rouseff. I belong to a generation who believed, lived, proclaimed, and defended a political project that would make a difference in terms of exerting power in terms of democracy. Today we are, literally, watching a show with politicians whom we do not recognize as representatives of the Brazilian people. Ethical values as justice, transparency, democracy, responsible management of public resources are in crisis.

I have qualified our time as a walk through the desert. Moment of reconstruction of hope, confession of guilt, resistance, and commitment to building a new culture of life!

Jaci Correa Maraschin describes this very well in the song he composed “*Como vamos cantar - A canção do Senhor na terra brasileira.*”
How shall we sing - The song of the Lord in Brazilian land.

1. How should we sing this song out of the blue, so far away from home, in a world thus without Christ? The song of the Lord must be true to be praise in Brazilian land

2. How should we sing given such huge wickedness, when there are people crying with fear and anxiety? The song of the Lord must be the prime in opposing injustice in Brazilian land.

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| | <p>3. How should we sing when brothers are exploited, when silenced, when always trodden down? The song of the Lord must be true to be praise in Brazilian land.</p> <p>4. How should we sing, without love and freedom, without being able to share the warmth of equality? The song of the Lord must be herald of ineffable love in Brazilian land.</p> |
|  <p>O jubileu ocorre num momento de enorme crise</p> | <p>(2)</p> <p>The jubilee of the 500 years of Lutheran Reformation occurs in a time of enormous global crisis.</p> <p>I want to highlight some expressions of this crisis in the light of what I have seen in my country.</p> |
|  | <p>(3)</p> <p>AMAZONIA</p> <p>During 50 million years the Amazonian region survived meteors and glaciations, but in less than 50 years it is threatened by human intervention. It is home to more than half of the Planet's biodiversity. It plays an important role in maintaining global climate balance, and represents a third of all tropical forests of the earth. It is the Globe's biggest carbon jailhouse.</p> <p>But Amazonia is in crisis. Illegal deforestation, increased grazing spaces, wildland fire, and expansion of human occupation have unbalanced this resource so vital to the planet. Life in the Amazon, and life depending on the Amazon worldwide, is under serious threat!</p> |



Mudanças climáticas



(4)

Climate changes

I draw your attention to two Brazilian states which specially suffer the impact of climate change: the states of Acre and Espírito Santo. Two years ago there occurred inundations of great proportions, and nowadays they suffer under severe beyond normal droughts. This all worsened by the effects of El Niño, by deforestation, by deterioration of water sources.

Plantations are lost, forcing people to migrate to cities. Cities without proper infrastructure Cities without adequate infrastructure and without basic sanitation to shelter so large rural exodus. all this contingent.



Desastres ambientais



(5)

Environmental disasters

In 2015 we witnessed the disruption of two dams in the center of the country bailing out 62 million cubic meters of mineral waste. The breakdown caused a flood of mud that made homeless hundreds of people, not counting those who lost their lives



Desigualdade social



(6)

Social inequality

Already during a lot of years Brazil is among the 10 most unequal countries of the world. There are indicators showing that has decreased the number of families and people living below the poverty line, that is, on less than US\$ 2 per day (World Bank). But 8.5% of Brazilian people still live below the poverty line and 3.6% of them in extreme poverty on less than US\$ 1 per day.

46% of farming land is in the hands of 1% of land owners. Of the total land escrowed as rural property, 85% is idle, or used for livestock, or underused. Only 15% is used for farming.



(7) **Discrimination**

The differences also are large in gender inequality, racial inequality, age inequality.

According to a major newspaper in the country, the pace continuing, women would earn the same as men in 2085. They would reach the quota of seats in the federal Senate by 2083 and in the municipal chambers by 2160.

Homophobic violence occurrences reveal that cases are much higher than official statistics. 73% of victims are male, aged between 15 and 30 years. Psychological violence is the most reported, with 40.1% of the total, followed by discrimination, with 36.4%; and physical violence, with 14.4%.

Regarding violence against women, 48% of cases happen within their own homes. Of the total complaints, 50% is physical violence and 30/40% psychological violence. As for cases of femicide, 50.3% are committed by family members.

Brazil features as the country with more deaths by firearms among the twelve most populous countries in the world: The national average is 20 deaths per 100,000 people.



(8) **Spirituality**

We are a predominantly Christian nation. 87% of Brazilians are Christians.

Religion moves a lot of money in our country, especially among Pentecostal churches. Small churches, great businesses! They promise help, healing, miracles solutions for any problem you may face, and that with a sermon which commodifies the Gospel. The higher your financial contribution to the church, the greater the blessings and your profit.



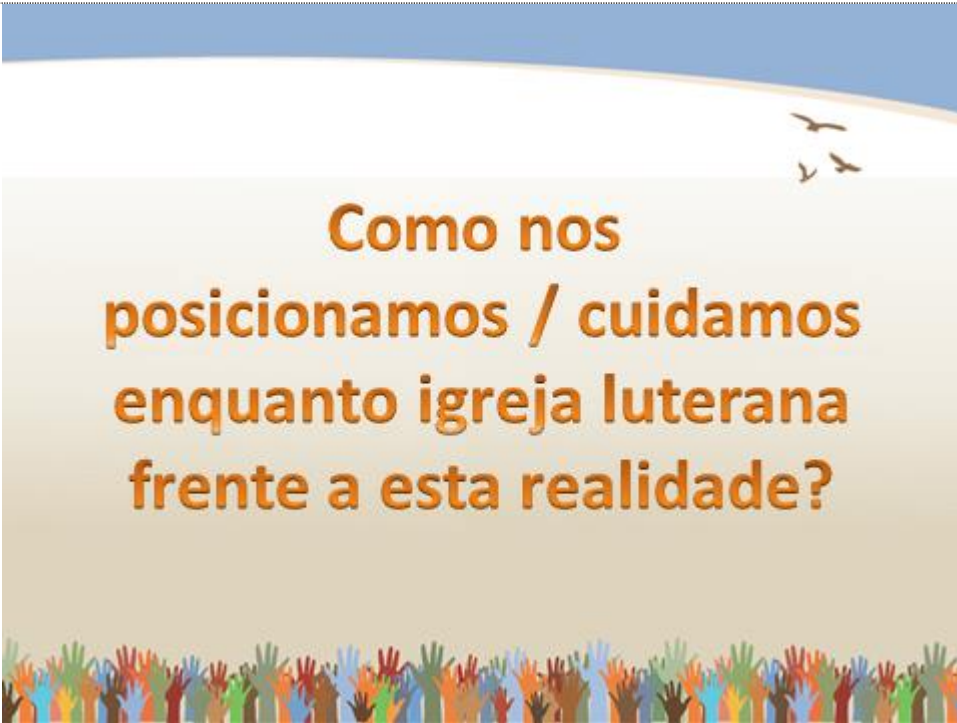
(9) POLARIZATION

Walking through day-to-day life, browsing through social networks, I note that dialogue, mediation, are scarce experiences. And that also in the context of the churches and the ecumenical movement. We live in very confrontational situations! There is hard religious, political polarization. Expressions of intolerance, aggression, violence are growing alarmingly. The different street demonstrations and social networks attest this experience. This is so outstanding that there are even publications on this reality. The philosopher Marcia Tiburi, writer and university lecturer, wrote a book with the title “How to talk with a fascist - Reflections on the Brazilian authoritarian day-to-day.” Her question is: “I would like to know why it’s impossible to dialogue.”

The writer, reporter and documentarist Eliane Brum, in the light of Marcia Tiburi’s book, comments that the current confrontation in Brazil is not a confrontation "between right and left, developmentalists and environmentalists, pro-government and opposition, *machistas* and feminists." That is, she says, a reduction. The current confrontation would be “deeper and also more dramatic: between those who think and those who do not think.” And she continues: “In a country of anti-politics and general anti-education like Brazil you have to move. (...) **Dialogue is an act of resistance.**”

The Brazilian historian Leandro Karnal says that we are not in a moment to listen to anything. We are in a moment to firm position. And the easiest position to be steadied is the Manichean, bipolar, or extremist. According to this author, when people charge an opinion on the basis of either/or, he answers that every problem that has only two positions is fake. Bipolarity is a way of seeing the world. Bipolarity, to psychiatrists, is a disease, is a malfunction and needs to be treated. Disputation, even the bipolar one, is not bad. It isn’t bad that people express their opinions. The bad thing is that there isn’t any disputation. The bad thing is that no one listens to anyone.

Let me remember that an issue on the agenda of our pre-assembly is the document: “The self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion”, whose neuralgic point consists exactly in the matter of dialogue, in the capability to hear the other, to put yourself in the place of the other, to understand the perspective of the other.



Como nos posicionamos / cuidamos enquanto igreja luterana frente a esta realidade?

Second part: Grace, the face of God

(10)

What position do we assume...

How shall we translate the message of God's grace, of his unconditional love, for a social and religious context which has nothing for free? How to sing the unconditional love of God where there is proclaimed the conditional "love", driven by magic, where the human person is the subject and God is the object? How to preach God who created us in his image where there reigns a religious perspective that empties the world of holiness that God has given, thus condemning people to a daily life of senselessness and emptiness? How can the message of "God's grace revealed in Christ" mobilize us and strengthen us in the testimony against the "disgrace" that pervades our daily lives?

Against this background of general crisis, how do we position ourselves as a Lutheran church?

How do we respond in the light of our faith? What drives us?

We have affirmed and confessed the freedom that springs from God's grace!

(11)

What does us drive to witness that

- Nature is not for sale.
- Human beings are not for sale.
- Salvation is not for sale?





(12)

The Mexican theologian Elsa Tamez, in a writing in honor of Pastor Milton Schwantes, a Lutheran biblical scholar, in a text entitled "Thoughts about grace from an impoverished continent," makes the following observation:

"'Grace' is a dense, deep word. It does not permit an easy definition. When we want to define it, a thousand things come to our mind. Ugly and beautiful ones. It turns out that this concept is born not only of significance, but also of division, of history, and discussion, of enmity and also of goodness." (p. 125. Our translation)

This, according to Elsa Tamez, "is a problem; because, due to the difficulty in the definition, this word, dense and deep, can become an empty and incomprehensible term." (p. 126) Dietrich Bonhoeffer will say "The cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church." (Dietrich BONHOEFFER, *Discipulado*, p. 9. Our translation.)

The celebration of the 500th anniversary of Reformation is a unique opportunity to rescue this central concept of our theology, as counterpoint opposed to what we have called in Brazil "religious market", where the term "grace" is deliberately omitted, because the market goes in the opposite direction, making faith and religion a business.

"If the Market does not know grace, because everything is for sale; does not know no mercy, because it is not profitable, then grace (as well as mercy) may be a term with subversive implications" (our translation). I think, to rediscover this transforming strength of the grace that is our big challenge!

"Where does come from the need to speak of grace? Grace is the theological response to a particular, also theological, reality: sin in the singular. This doesn't mean little sins: sin in the singular is an unsustainable reality, a deadly power. This is not an abstract or invented reality, nor demons flying through the air. It is a power with presence within all those systemic mediations that produce harm to humanity, damage to the environment, abuse to honest and sincere souls who strive hard thinking that this way they reach God's

kingdom. Wounds, sufferings, desperate cries for justice, wars - holy or pagan ones that produce deaths; these all are visible marks of the sin. This reality, on the one hand, and the reality of fascination being created by the market culture on the other they tread opposite ways.” [p. 128-129]

“The experience of grace makes things happen: it illuminates the dis-graces of the world, that is, reveals them in order that we become aware of them and of our responsibility to them.” (p. 132)

"The love of God is judgment against the brutality in society, against the lack of love, against the cynicism in human relations. The favelas, the beggars, the victims of violence - they denounce the idolatry that surrounds us. For the God of Jesus Christ does not allow this." (BRAKEMEIER, *Tesouro em Vasos de Barro*, p. 95.)

The grace of God unmasks theologies (as that of prosperity) which **do not seek** the structural roots of poverty and unemployment, which put under the responsibility of the demons all that which can be clearly attributed to the interests of persons, groups and associations (cf. Professor Uwe Wegner). These beliefs individualize the discouragement and the socially produced anxiety, reaffirming in a very incisive way, precisely among the most disadvantaged, the faith in the individual merit that legitimizes all the inequality that befalls them! (cf. Jessé de SOUZA, *A Ralé Brasileira*.)

The grace revealed through the One Born in poor Bethlehem wants to reaffirm exactly the opposite! It does not lessen those realities, but exceeds them and encourages us to faith through which the reign of God is possible, a reign where, also due to gratuity, you may celebrate beforehand the signs of the kingdom, affirming the concrete life, without turning away from death.

[p. 132. Elsa TAMEZ, Pensamentos sobre a graça a partir de um continente empobrecido. In: Profecia e Esperança – um tributo a Milton Schwantes. Oikos, São Leopoldo, 2016, p.125-135.]

*Pela graça de Deus,
livres para cuidar*

*As salvação,
as pessoas
e a natureza
não estão à venda*



(13)

In IECLB we affirm that through God's grace we are free to **care!** Grace is God's response to human suffering, as revealed in the fact that he is a God who sees the misery of his people, who hears the cries of his sons and his daughters, who is concerned about their suffering, and comes down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7-12). He reveals his face in Jesus, who walks at the side of us, and overcomes death by the resurrection.

God affirms life in every way! His grace is experienced as the affirmation of life, and not of death! Grace creates freedom that manifests itself in a caring attitude!

For all this the word CARE has come along with IECLB in the last years!

(14)

When we love, we care; and when we care, we love (...); care is the central category of the new paradigm of civilization that seeks to emerge around the world... Care takes on a dual function, of impeding future damages, and of regenerating damages of the past...

Leonardo Boff

Quando amamos, cuidamos e, quando cuidamos, amamos (...); o cuidado constitui a categoria central do novo paradigma de civilização que procura surgir em todo o mundo...O cuidado assume uma dupla função de prevenção de danos futuros e regeneração de danos passados...

Leonardo Boff

Dois foram os impulsos principais que deram origem ao Tema do Ano com o seu respectivo Lema bíblico

1

O tema da Federação Luterana Mundial (FLM) para o triênio 2015-2017: *Livres pela graça de Deus*, acompanhado de três subtemas: a) *Salvação não está à venda*, b) *Seres humanos não estão à venda* e c) *Criação não está à venda*, é acolhido pela IECLB e contextualizado para a dimensão do cuidado

2

A preocupação crescente com a ética, como o esforço diário por discernir o que é certo, para agir de forma responsável, tanto para o rumo de uma Igreja missionária quanto para o futuro da sociedade, está presente no Lema bíblico de Amós 5.14a



(15)

Two main impulses have been the motives for the Theme of the Year and the respective biblical motto:

(a) The theme of the Lutheran World Federation for the triennium 2015-2017: *We are liberated by God's grace*, with its three subthemes: a) *Salvation is not for sale*; b) *Human beings are not for sale*, and c) *Creation is not for sale*,


is accepted by IECLB and contextualized to the dimension of care!

(b) The second impulse is given by the concern regarding ethics as a daily effort in order to discern what is correct, and to act in a responsible way, both for the route of a missionary church and for the future of society. The text that inspires this focus is the biblical motto from Amos 5:14a - "Seek good, and not evil."

(16)

The God of grace acts and comes in Jesus Christ to meet us, as people with restricted freedom. In the Apostle's words: "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:21-24).


God discerns our desires and intentions, and uncovers the depth of our heart. At the same time he covers our faults and failures, so that nothing condemns us. His grace sustains us and renews us, enabling new chances for life. That is what Paul says to the Galatians: "(...) God sent his Son (...) to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." (Galatians 4:4-5).



A graça de Deus, recebida pela fé, liberta de um viver como pessoa devedora e conduz sua vontade e motivação para o amor, inspirando-a a viver da gratidão.

(17)

Through faith the human being acquires the grace of God manifested as unconditional love in Christ crucified and resurrected, as the Scriptures teach us: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8). The grace of God, received by faith, releases you from a living as debtor, and leads your will and motivation to love, inspiring you to live in gratitude. As the apostolic word says: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10). Thus the person, as justified sinner, is free before God. You are no longer indebted, being charged, but you are beloved, grateful and free. Now, by the grace of God brought through the work of Jesus Christ, we have our freedom back. As Paul exhorts the brothers and sisters: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1).



Libertada por Cristo, a pessoa sabe-se livre. E essa liberdade estará configurada do querer e ir como Cristo quer.

(18)

Liberated by Christ, we find ourselves free. And this freedom will be configured by willing and going as Christ wants it. This new will is motivated by love, because, as the Apostle teaches us, this liberty consists in love. “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” It is the love shown in, with and through Christ that takes us out of selfishness and brings us on the path of responsible freedom. A freedom that makes us to take care of ourselves, and to care for others and for all creation. In other words, through grace, God regenerates the freedom of the person who by faith accepts his love. Consequently, in gratitude, man builds his life project with creativity, inspired by the love of God. By grace, the Christian person is invested with responsibility. In Christ, the person is free for being responsible, for living ethically.

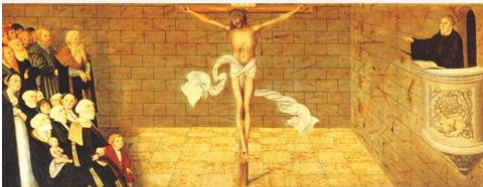
Buscai
 O BEM
 e não
 o mal
 Amós 5:14a



(19)

As Christian congregations and people, we are free for caring, for doing good and for avoiding evil. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10). This means that good and evil are not values among others. According to the Bible, good is life, and evil is death (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). Therefore the distinction between good and evil is that important as the distinction between life and death. However, through faith, the exercise of ethical judgment, the option and the practice of good, although not easy, are under the impulses of God's grace. It is the love of God in Christ which motivates us, nourishes us and shapes us in order that we search the good and refuse the evil in the tangle of modern life, in order to be ethical people!

A difficulty lies in the fact that the exercise of discernment and the choice between good and evil presuppose that the person is free to make her own choices. However, if you will it or not, everyone is born and grows up in a community that has its history. Therefore, everybody inherits something and contributes with something to his/her life and life in community. In this context, the greatest illusion is to believe that freedom consists in being the very person the reference for its existence. Therefore, if the freedom to discern and choose what is right is tainted, it is necessary to liberate freedom.



(20)

God’s grace has a name: Jesus Christ!

In him is concentrated the good news about the love of God who grants grace, mercy, and has compassion on the misery of the creature.

Received by faith, the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ promotes and sustains discipleship!

Experiências a compartilhar

Ações conjuntas



Third part: Moved “by God’s grace”, some experiences...

(21)

How do we as IECLB live this theme? How the freedom that springs forth from God’s Grace is expressed in actions of care? Care that builds a culture of life?

Let me highlight some initiatives.

(22)

The communities are in the focus of that caring! The catchword has been: “cuidar bem do bem da IECLB” “take good care of the good of IECLB”. This care is focused on building communities, but especially on the care for people!

Therefore, at this moment, IECLB reinforces 5 joint actions, valid for the whole Church:

- The Theme of THE Year.
- The Campaign Go and Come.
- The Missionary Action Plan.
- Faith, Gratitude, and Commitment.
- Continual Christian Education.

These actions are the axis for articulating the work and the mission of IECLB with a view to strengthening the unity, to the witness of Jesus Christ, according to our Lutheran confessional identity, in contexts crying for the evangelical witness, for transformation and empowerment.



(23)

One of the means to strengthen the unity of IECLB is the yearly theme - chosen together to be dealt with for one year in all communities and sectors of IECLB.

The yearly themes are a challenge to rethink community models, to search for new, contextualized ways of living inclusive community, with clear **evangelical Lutheran identity**; a common theme which may serve as guidance to members in their daily lives as citizens, in a reality that reinforces individualism, and weakens collective actions.

The Yearly Theme is an initiative of the church's Direction, since the 80s. It is not imposed from top down. It is, first of all, the crystallization of demands that come from the communities and synods themselves, as a proposal for joint reflection within one year. Reflecting on the Year Theme, communities and synods express visibly the ties that bind them together, establishing a common identity and thus strengthening the whole of IECLB. This is most important in the context of a church identified by a decentralized structure.

In recent years, we have looked for a relation in the sequence of the themes, in order to give the communities, and also the members, conditions to **perceive an action line, an intentionality**, most important nowadays with so many scattered actions.



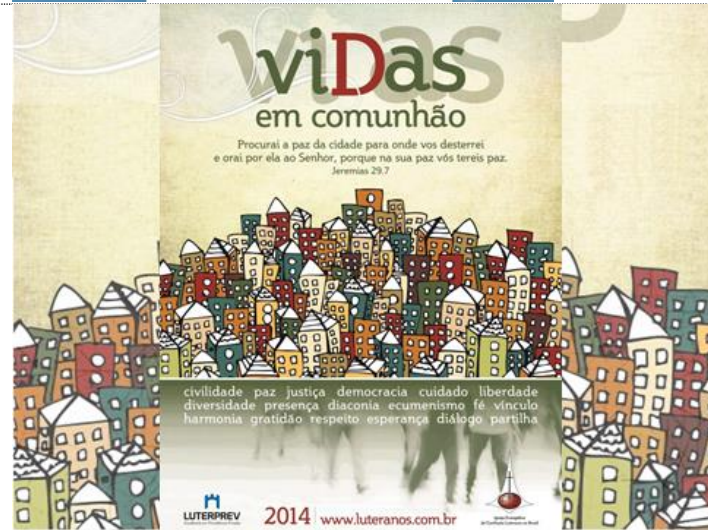
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The Theme 2012 *Young Community Living Church* was an invitation to all of us to deepen the conscience of being and living evangelical community of Lutheran confession, where all generations are equally important. We tried to reflect on the challenge that, even being a historic church, there is need of being a church with joviality, open to new "adventures". The theme sought to point out the potential of youthful vivacity inherent in a Christian community.



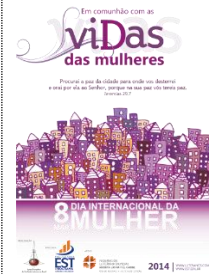
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The Theme of 2013 (*To be, to participate, to testimony I live community*) underlined with the verb *to testimony* the evangelical imperative inherent in the truth that a Christian community cannot live closed in on itself, but needs to open its doors, to tear down the walls which hamper contacts with the surroundings the community as a positive space, protection, security, source of courage to face the challenges of personal daily life. The 2013 Year Theme emphasized the identity of the members and their leading role in the mission, reinforcing a precious value for biblical and confessional tradition the community.



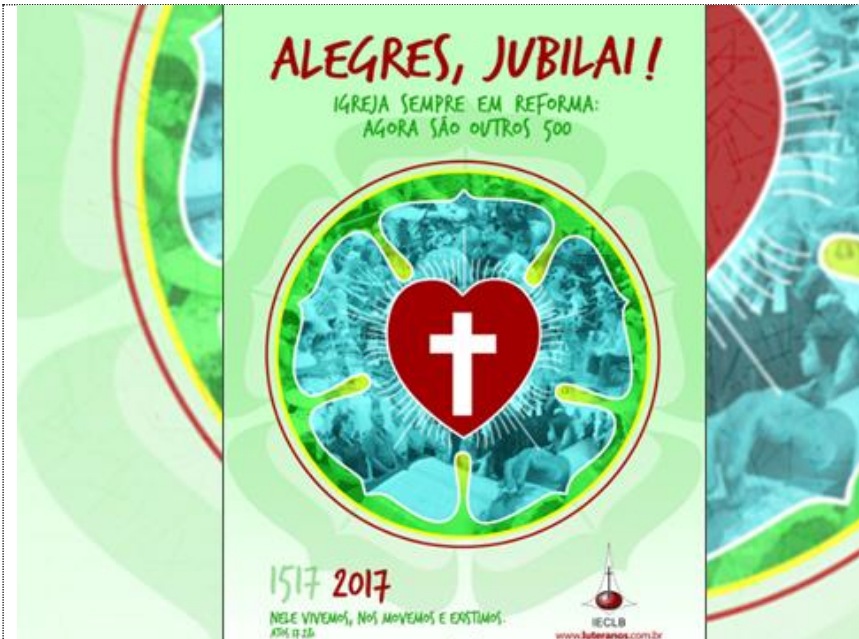
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The 2014 Year Theme *viDas em comunhão* (vidas = lives; vias = ways, roads) emphasized the missionary task in the urban context. This theme does not address a novelty, but focuses a challenge which, for decades and routinely, accompanies IECLB. What does it mean to be church in the city? How to be church there? How to be church of Lutheran confession in realms of religious market selling grace, for example?



(27)

With the 2015 theme *Church of the Word - Called to communicate* we learned a lot! We learned that we still need to learn more, to ask more, to hear much more! We stated that the posture of Jesus, to approach, to walk with, to ask, to listen, to insist on the answer, getting people to verbalize what they experienced, and not to comply with the first version of the facts these are approaches of crucial importance for a church concerned to make a difference in the life of people, in society; a church which has an imperative task in faith education.



(28)

The 2017 Year Theme will invite us:

Cheerful, joyful! (“Dear Christians, one and all rejoice”, Luther-song)
Church always in Reformation: now another 500*.

(* “Ai são outros 500” is a Portuguese idiomatic expression designating something new and different than business as usual.)

The biblical motto will be Acts 17:28: “In him we live and move and exist.”

Being a church that bears the marks of Reformation, our heritage and the IECLB’s facial features encourage us to look with confidence into the future. The power that will move us is the Word, understood as the communication of God’s love, what happens in the missionary witness of faith (Evangelization), in the concrete experience of Christ’s body (Communion), in the restoring and healing work (Diaconia), and in the celebration of divine love (Liturgy and worship).



Prioridades

(29)

The management priorities are the most important and strategic fronts for the sustainability of the whole church, and for this reason owe to be present in the whole national activity, challenging the participants at all levels.

The need of investments in **monitoring the students of Theology** (Theological Education) had already been detected a long time ago and has become more urgent in recent years, once the recognized training centers have opened the range of theological teaching to beyond of the Lutheran confession. This priority has connection with the Qualification Program for the Ordained Ministries. In joint efforts has been elaborated a profile of ministers needed by IECLB, allowing that this profile can be worked on with the students as from their training, thanks to this monitoring program. What we intend is to build strong ties between the church and its future ministers.

The **follow-up to the ministers** figures as another strategic priority. The intention is to improve careful support to ministerial management through initiatives such as courses, meetings, ministerial staff support, support in the areas of health and social security.

In order to complement a better ministerial management, there is need of investments in terms of **training in administrative management**. In this sense, teaching materials are being made available. Training courses and training meetings are offered to promote capacity building. Here deserves to be mentioned the Sustainability Institute (LWF + EST + IECLB).

Absolute priority is the missionary outreach. For the purpose to make more comprehensive the missionary activity of the congregations, our main tool is the Missionary Action Plan (PAMI, Portuguese acronym): No congregation without a mission No mission without a congregation. There are promising indications that the Strategic Planning is being assumed with more determination and conviction.

Another priority is **communication** as a joint effort of all people involved in God's mission, each in his action field.



(30)

What we want to achieve with all these actions is the realization of the vision outlined by PAMI, that the IECLB be recognized as *Church of Communities which are attractive, inclusive, and missionary, acting in fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially by the testimony of God's love, through service in favor of human dignity and respect for creation.*

This is not only a catchphrase. It expresses the commitment taken over by all of us in church assembly, and therefore it has to be defined as goal in all kind of planning and in the development of the missionary activities in whole IECLB always considering: What am I doing today, what is fruitful toward the goal of attractive, inclusive, missionary communities?

The effort is to promote dialogue and planning so that all initiatives be focused on the proclamation of the Gospel, to solidify communion, expand diaconal service and reinvigorate the celebrative dimension, so that, in each way, the communities create more and more spaces to welcome the growing diversity and be able to fascinate people by preaching and living the Gospel, to witness God's love in society, contributing to invigorating the relations which dignify all creatures of God.



(31)

A concrete example of expression of grace that reveals its diaconal face is the CAPA-Centro de Apoio ao Pequeno Agricultor -Center for support to smallholders.

Our Support and Promotion Center of Agro-Ecology in the Lutheran Foundation for Diaconia develops the program *Comida Boa na Mesa Good Food on the Table*. It calls for recognizing the role that family agriculture has in the production and consumption of healthy food, of fairs and cooperatives, in promoting fair trade and support organizations. Furthermore, it is a space for joint public advocacy actions.



(32)

CONGRENAGE-Congresso Nacional da Juventude Evangélica - National Evangelical Youth Congress: Luther's Rose!

The 2016 CONGRENAGE was a feast of Pentecost. If the world disperses and breaks communion and this is done with great competence the Holy Spirit connects and gathers, unites and fortifies. In this youth gathering, the Word of God, prayer, and sharing again have been fundamental marks. I am grateful to LWF for having enabled the participation of a significant group of young people from the Lutheran communion in this event!

(33)

"The challenge we face is, so to speak, that we are all in the same boat; we have a common destiny, and our survival will depend on the cooperation or fight between us. Of course, sometimes there are great differences between us in some vital aspects. We have to develop, to learn and practice the art of living with differences, the art of cooperating without the cooperators losing their identity, to be mutually beneficial, not despite, but thanks to our differences."

Zigmunt BAUMANN, interview IHU, 17.07.2009: "*O velho mundo está morrendo. Mas o novo ainda não nasceu.*" *The old world is dying. But the new one is not yet born.*

(34)

Final part: Guilt and repentance.

The first of Luther's 95 theses says: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, 'Repent ye, etc.,' intended that the whole life of his believers on earth should be repentance."

This first thesis invites us to a profound reflection. To do penance, to repent, in the current context we are living in in which self-criticism, the perception of personal guilt and responsibility, the perception of what means justice and common good are in crisis. This seems me to be a huge challenge and an urgent need.

Such considerations are of key relevance for our process of humanization in an inhuman, indifferent society, with extreme difficulties to confess evil and to do good. I dare to affirm that Luther's first thesis is a central element of the Gospel that we must reaffirm in loud and clear voice as LWF!

The Gospel raises the prophetic voice to call to repentance, to liberation and radical change (Mark 1:15). The Gospel is Jesus Christ himself, who suffered the fallen world to liberate the sinner (Luke 4.18-21). In his cross we confess God's acting (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). The denounced reality of suffering and injustice is not a fatality, much less the will of God, but the result of human ambition and concentration of goods and power between individuals, groups and nations. As church, we recognize that we are participants in this guilt. Therefore, in this context, we are obliged to confess this guilt, but above all: to confess our faith, our hope and our commitment, based on a God of justice and peace. (Manifesto de Chapada dos Guimarães, 2000)