

**Report of the Leadership Conference
Lutheran World Federation Member Churches in
Latin America and the Caribbean & North America**

You send your Spirit, they are Created, and you renew face of the earth (Psalm 104: 30)

Lima – Peru, 10 -14 May, 2019

Friday 10 - Opening Worship and COL

The opening worship was in charge of the IL-P and motivated to pay attention to the "creation time" based on the reading of Romans 8: 19-27. The message focused on the biblical basis that humans are created in the image of God. It invites to rethink creation as a whole and to engage in its renewal.

After installing the Complaint Management Committee for the Code of Conduct for participants in events organized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) through Pastor Angela Trejo of the ILM and Bishop Larry Kochendorfer of the ELCIC, the agenda was approved .

All persons participating in the COL for first time were welcomed. in the COL, especially to Pastor Silvia Genz of the IECLB, Pastors Presidents Leonardo Schindler of the IERP, Germán Loazy of the EILB, and Nathalie Thöpperwien from Church of Sweden . Unfortunately, in this opportunity, the COL Moderator Rev. Roberto Trejo because from the ILM could not participate. On his arrival in the airport in Lima, not having a valid passport for six months, he had to return to his country. The LAC Vice President Nestor Friedrich and Patricia Cuyatti led the COL.

Saturday 11: Session I – Context Analysis

The COL counted with two presentations, outside resource persons, for the context analysis: Dr Linda Thomas, an anthropologist at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. While involved in education for more than 30 years, Linda teaches at LSTC for 18 years and has several publications. Her call as a womanist, constructive theologian and as a socio-cultural anthropologist takes her to global contexts to find people living in contexts of oppression finding for daily resurrection. Dr Jonathan Pimentel Chacón, a Costa Rican. Professor at the National University of Costa Rica. Jonathan studied his doctorate at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago and focuses on the line of investigation between sciences of religion and theology.

A Socio - Political Analysis of Changes In Democracy, Gender Rights and Migration Rights Intersecting with Global Populism and Rising Nationalism in Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America by Dr. Linda Thomas

On April 15, 2019, Notre Dame cathedral caught fire. France collectively began to mourn. Pledges of support began to flood in from well-meaning white liberals in the United States aghast at a European cultural icon's existence being threatened. Yet, black churches in Louisiana were also burning and said white liberals were not opening their pocketbooks to repair the damage. And, how often this is the case! People of color have our sacred spaces decimated frequently and white culture either looks the other way or expresses white fragility by saying things like, "the world has too many problems for me to keep up with! I just cannot handle the stress of keeping track of all the latest catastrophes." Who would Jesus stand with? The temple that is the symbol of cultural Christendom, or the churches on the margins of society not deemed worthy of white sympathy and white tears? And, amazingly, black churches raised nearly \$2 million to support Notre Dame cathedral in the midst of their own worship spaces being destroyed!

This leads me to a story from Good Friday. I attend Trinity United Church of Christ, the largest African American congregation within the United Church of Christ, a predominately white denomination. Every Good Friday, The Seven Last Words of Jesus before he dies on the cross are preached by seven different pastors. Rev. Shannon Kershner, of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago was assigned the first word, Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." The first words of Rev. Kershner's sermon, a white minister were, "How can I, a white woman, preach to all of you, an African American congregation, about forgiveness, when my people enslaved your people for centuries? I should be asking for your forgiveness." Here is an example of a white person being willing to put aside white fragility and speak openly about the harm done to black bodies by white people, both historically and currently. This person is someone I want to work with in the future. I want this person "on my

team,” so to speak. This story is profoundly different from the responses I saw related to Notre Dame and white cultural Christianity.

Black and brown people are part of the prison industrial complex, where jails and prisons are for profit. We have a “New Jim Crow” and, therefore, “Slavery by another Name.” With these introductory remarks, let me state my intention for this talk: I am presenting a socio-political analysis of Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America related to changes in democracy, gender rights issues, and migration rights issues as they intersect with global populism and rising nationalism.

I stand before you as an African American woman. I am mindful that all of you are from different places in Latin America, the Caribbean, and perhaps North America. As I understand it, you are all elders or leaders. Like the white American preacher in my Good Friday story, I must say “how can I, as a U.S. citizen, bring meaningful data about the state of Latin America and the Caribbean?” It is only when I step into what it means to be a marginalized black woman in the United States, whose story emerges from a people who were enslaved, and for whom the so-called privilege of being a U.S. citizen can at any moment lead one to be harmed by people who are supposed to protect me. I am related to people, through blood lines, as well as church families and other friends, whose daughters and sons have been killed because they are black.

My method is always related to asking a series of questions: who are the most vulnerable? I do a power analysis, assessing the social-economic context in which people find themselves. Who has access to health care? Whose ancestors had their land taken from them? Whose ancestors were enslaved for the economic gain of capitalists, most of whom are white? Who is isolated as a result of claiming their identity as Queer, Transgender, LGBTQIA+? Who are the disabled/differently abled?

Immigrants are fleeing from violence in the places they call home to violence in the place they hoped was the “Promised Land.” Migrants from Africa and Asian nations are coming to Latin America. “Fake news” presents those who so desperately need help as villains and dangerous people who will bring some kind of insurrection. One diamond in the rough is Costa Rica. Their government suggests 20,000 African nationals came through their country to go to North America. This is because of Europe’s restrictive immigration policies. Even though Costa Rica is typically hospitable to immigrants, nationalistic xenophobia has made its mark and “selective xenophobia against Nicaraguans is not new, but it has never before reached the level of organized violence.”¹ The threat to democracy and the rise of Populism must deal with the reality that the democratic regimes that were supposed to be perfect were, in fact, not so. For example, in the United States, the Democratic party, of which I am a member and which successfully elected President Barack Obama, had elitist tendencies and left out vulnerable people across races, genders, and sexualities that were economically threatened. President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, began, encouraged and helped grow the prison industrial complex, which was and is private ownership of prisons.

Michelle Alexander, who authored *The New Jim Crow*, began to articulate the problem with Hillary Clinton quite early and with a level of authority that people could not ignore, especially black people. She noted that, with prisons being for-profit, they had to be filled with people in order to turn a profit. A nursery-to-prison pipeline opened for black and brown children, particularly males. To determine how many prisons needed to be built, those doing the calculations simply counted the number of black and brown children there were in nursery school through high school. That gave them the data they needed to fill the prisons. This vile strategy marked these children as targets for the primarily white police to arrest without due cause. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas’s book *Stand your Ground* further comments on the state of the prison industrial complex, as this text is a case study of Douglas’s son being arrested in the Eastern shore of Maryland and having to pay penance for a crime he did not commit.

With this kind of behavior from a party that many people of color turn to, it left a set of circumstances where black people did not go to the polls to vote. Candidate Trump said “you might as well vote for me.” The moral of the story is, when so-called progressive political parties ignore their base, then, at some point, their base turns to an alternative, or chooses not to participate. This is what has the United States in the situation with a ruthless president who disregards and disrespects the very people who need the most support. Trump’s actions affect

¹ Gustavo Fuchs, “Latin America’s migration problems,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2, 2019. Accessed May 2, 2019. <https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/latin-america-s-migration-problems>

Latin America, Puerto Rico, and especially Mexico with immigrants wanting to enter the Southern US border. Trump has demonized people who have every reason to leave places where they face death. They are bringing their children because they want their children to live. The government separates the children from their parents. It seems there is no one to hold the government accountable. Now we have a generation of lost children. Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, and its citizens are citizens of the US. The inequity is they do not get to vote for the US President. They are treated horribly by the current president. The island is still devastated with the news not covering the ongoing problems from the hurricane in September 2017 that have caused death and hardship.

Similarly, in Latin America, the New Populism was not about the economy, but about the injustice people experience from the political establishment. Like recent events in the United States, people voted in so-called “outsiders.” And, like the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Latin Americans are overturning democratic “norms.” In Mexico and Brazil the political establishment is corrupt and justice is not served. People do not think democracy is the best answer to their difficulties. The two largest economies in Latin America have elected outsiders who disdain the press, any kind of legislative oversight, and even question the so-called “will of the people.”

I will now address an important contrast that needs to be stated: the difference between immigrants and refugees. Refugees are asylum seekers coming to the United States from Latin America, especially Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala). There is gang-related violence and economic and political instability. Those who are fleeing are women, children who may or may not be accompanied by adults, and LGBTQ people. When the US turns these individuals and families back, or deports them to their home countries, sometimes “after criminally prosecuting and sentencing them to time in the US prison,” means these people go back to face persecution, displacement, and even possibly death. An interesting example of this is El Salvador, which had a growing number of deaths in mid-2017 that targeted relatives of security forces for enforcing tough measures in the prison systems. This happening raises a question whether the downward trend and violence is reversing. In El Salvador, in the first quarter of 2018, murders were up 14 percent compared to the same time in 2017. (One must note, faith-wise, that this was where Oscar Romero was assassinated.) Nationalism and immigration problems are impacted by populism, where societies were being led by people who were corrupt, and authoritarian-like leaders were continually being elected. People who are seeking asylum are in the midst of this social-political challenge. We also have labor migration. It is important to distinguish immigration by those who are seeking asylum (what people are reacting against) and labor migration, where the United States is the main destination for migrants from Latin America and other parts of the world.

According to data released by the small-arms survey, “El Salvador and Honduras were among 2 countries who were not involved in armed conflict.” Interestingly enough, those two countries had the highest rate of murder of women in 2016. This is called “femicide.” Therefore, we must conclude that one of the most vulnerable groups are women. They are at risk whether or not their country is in armed conflict. For example, in El Salvador, more than 9 women and/or girls were killed every week in 2017. This is alarming. The caravan that was coming to the United States included people whose narratives are those of women, children, and LGBTQ people who had experienced sexual abuse, severe stress and fear, domestic violence, and rape in their countries. Silva Mathema from the *Center for American Progress* observes, “These [narratives] include Nelda, a teenager who left Honduras with her mother and little sister to escape her sexually abusive uncle, a man with gang ties. He threatened to kill them if they did not withdraw their police report against him.”²

It is important to note the Northern Triangle area has thousands of people who have sought asylum elsewhere during the past few years. According to the UN high commissioner for refugees, these applications for citizens of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala increased eleven fold from 2011-2017. Of course, we would want to look at what was going on during those years. This is called “following the blood.” During that same time frame, there was a 1500 percent increase of people from these seeking asylum in Central America (Belize, Costa Rica,

² Silva Mathema, “They Are (Still) Refugees: People Continue to Flee Violence in Latin American Countries,” *Center for American Progress*, June 1, 2018. Accessed May 2, 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2018/06/01/451474/still-refugees-people-continue-flee-violence-latin-american-countries/>

Nicaragua, and Panama). If we were going to be concerned about the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, I think we would have to look to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

What would be important would be to trace the violence in those countries, and the impact upon the citizens across a number of years. A question might be raised why intervention was not made and what political ties government officials had with other governments. I could assume these countries had nothing that would cause the United States to be concerned for its own self-interest. Asylum applications from these countries increased 1,970 percent for people entering Mexico. The United States experienced an increase of 1,089 percent. Latin Americans are attempting to escape countries dangerous for people's everyday lives. We honor those who are sitting here who have had to know the conditions of constantly being on the move, yet not being a nomadic people by nature. Constantly moving around is profoundly disorienting, especially for LGBTQ youth, who tend to have movement from place to place for purposes of safety, sometimes to places where their language is not spoken.

The authoritarian rule of Venezuela's President Nicholas Maduro has devastated the nation. Venezuela was a middle-income, rising country that is collapsing. Along with that are exorbitant levels of violence, which in turn impacts food and medicine not going to the correct locations. The increase in murder of women and girls grew by 24.5 out of every 1,000 women. According to the United Nations "HCR," the number of Venezuelans applying for asylum increased from 963 in 2012 to 34,348 in 2016, a 35-fold increase. It is reported that at least 1 million Venezuelans fled to the neighboring country of Colombia, where they lack legal states. Another 52,000 reached Brazil in 2017. Those seeking asylum in the United States increased nearly 2500 percent from 2012-2016. Venezuelans are one of the fastest growing groups seeking asylum in the United States. Venezuelans are reaching circumstances of salvation, and the Maduro government is not accepting direct assistance from any other countries.

This data leads me to inquire about the correlation between countries like Venezuela, a middle-income developing country with people seeking asylum, versus countries like El Salvador and Honduras, who for generations have had people seeking asylum. (Indeed, this is one of the reasons we have "Dreamers" in the United States.) People were leaving these other countries long ago. What does it mean that Venezuelans who are seeking asylum are getting more news and attention? The United States announced it will provide \$ 16 million in humanitarian assistance to help Venezuelans who have fled their country. Some of this is money that will go to the regional branch of the United Nations. The question is if Trump will, in fact, weaken the US asylum system for those seeking protection, by providing the funds to Venezuela. If so, does that contradict Trump's promise that the US would stand with the people of Venezuela? This is "Double-speak," as George Orwell would say. Do the so-called "new kids on the block" merit more attention, especially those that may have something serving the interest of the United States? (While I am not specifically supposed to theologize in this presentation, I cannot help but ask what this means for the church.)

Now, to LGBTQ rights in relation to immigration: Argentina has made advances on gay and transgender rights. It is becoming increasingly popular as a refugee destination for LGBTQ+ migrants. It has a number of legal protections, including same-sex marriage and recognition of gender identity. Clearly people from countries with anti-LGBTQ laws like Jamaica and Russia do not need visas from Argentina. They can enter the country as tourists and then apply for refugee status. Mexico, Uruguay, and Brazil have recognized gender identity and sexual orientation as grounds to seek asylum.

Another essential element to explore related to immigration is the activity of African migrants. There are some odds against African migrants being able to establish themselves in South America. 53 percent of African migrants move within the African continent. Others have come to North America. Since the mid-2000s, a growing number of African migrants have pursued Latin America as their destination. These migrants have benefited from progressive migration policies and relatively welcoming public attitudes toward foreigners. These policies were not necessarily prompted with Africans in mind, but they have created space for Africans to form communities in Quito, Buenos Aires, and other cities. Some members of these communities are pleased to call Latin America their new home, and others see Latin America as a waystation on the way to the United States. Immigrants from Africa have a complicated life. There is no secret that racial and ethnic discrimination remains a contentious issue across Latin America. African, Asian, and other immigrants of color have historically been the most discriminated in the region. These countries may have wonderful openings, yet there are still particular overlapping oppressions

making things difficult. If you are an LGBTQ+ African or Asian, safety is compromised even in places that are supposed to be safe. Some Latin American governments know the significant increases in migration can complicate their relationship with the United States, particularly because a large number of African migrants continue their journeys to Canada and the United States.

Socio Political Analysis On The Fast changes in Latin America and the Caribbean By Jonathan Pimentel Chacón

This presentation aims at introducing some basic considerations for the study of the current situation in Latin America (2000-2018). It divides into two main parts. In the first part brings "General" data that allow to approach the region. Some of the data provided show significant improvements in indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy. However, these social achievements are threatened by structural trends of lack of protection, impoverishment and ecological destruction. In addition, the asymmetries between sectors of the population, and in particular between women and men, are accentuated if other conditions are considered and prevent the region from producing welfare for all. The region experienced an improvement in the reduction of undernourishment, but fails to guarantee education and quality jobs, or life projects for youth. Not only that, impoverished Central American youth flee the isthmus under precarious conditions to protect themselves from organized crime, hunger and the indifference of failed states. This happens in a region, Latin America, where according to recent data the 10% richest own 74% of the wealth, and they tax less than 5% of their income. This means that the "highest decile of income distribution in Latin America pays an exceptionally low tax rate" (CEPAL, *Taxation for inclusive growth*, 9). The situation of tax injustice associated with tax havens and corporate taxes is, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, CEPAL, "destroying the social contract between the government and citizen" (14). This last statement means that regional governments tend to govern to protect and intensify the enrichment of the richest sectors and therefore the confidence on the institutions, political parties, and government regimes is increasingly lower³.

The very experience of citizenship is subordinated to corporate interests, traversed and blocked, according to the report *The inefficiency of inequality (2018)*, by exclusions and constant discrimination. From a political point of view, "the social contract" is sustainable only if they meet a minimum threshold of needs and expectations that allow personal and collective satisfaction. But, that is impossible given the systemic violence expressed in racial discrimination, logistic on landlord, and the voracious enrichment of few. Nor, if one takes into account that, as a whole, Latin American external public debt represents almost 41% of GDP. Since 1970 the regional debt has increased 53 times. It means that the region is increasingly dependent on foreign markets, currencies, and on the export of raw materials. An issue entirely contradictory in regards to the possibility to diversify production and the scientific, technological and informational innovation linked to education and quality jobs. If we add to all above that Latin America is one of the regions in the world with the highest debt through credit cards, it must be admitted that we live in a time in which the debt could consume the necessary energy to make politics.

In the second part of the presentation, "Political Religion", it offers a basic introduction to understand the political character of religion and, specifically, the political specificity of certain tendencies of Christianity, and groupings linked to them that exist in the region.

General aspects

³ According to a study by CEPAL published in 2018, three out of every four citizens in Latin America have little or no confidence in their governments. In addition, 80% consider that corruption is widespread throughout the public sphere. This distrust and apathy towards public institutions and projects is also expressed in the dissatisfaction that, with respect to health systems, judicial circuits and public health, manifests the population. All this means that, from a point of political life, those who inhabit the region do not identify themselves because they have been excluded, betrayed or persecuted by their governments and States. The impoverished in Latin America do not find in existing institutions and government regimes recognition or protection (*Economic Perspectives of Latin America 2019*). They are devoid of homeland. In Costa Rica, 7 out of 10 people consider that public institutions - their officials - behave in a non-transparent manner.

Latin America has, according to the latest estimates, an approximate population of 630 million people. This means that since 1975 the global population of the area has grown approximately one hundred percent (in 1975 it was estimated a population of 315 million). According to recent ECLAC estimates, the population of the region is aging, which could mean that, by the year 2050, more than 198 million people will be over 60 years of age. The population of women was, until 2014, greater than that of men. Some studies project that, despite the increase in population, the region, especially its large urban centers, will reach by 2050 its "population peak". This is relevant since Latin America is a region whose majority population (80%) lives in urban areas and is also the most urbanized region in the world. The growth of the "megacities" and the "meso-cities" of Latin America has as a correlate the displacement, often forced⁴, from the rural areas or neighboring countries. On the other hand, the world tendency, since 1960, has been the decrease of the so-called "rural population". Our region is mostly urban, and concentrates high amounts of aging population with unequal access to basic services. It is important to point out that the regional population is mostly concentrated in South America and, from a political and cultural point of view, includes, only in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 36 different nations or peoples. According to the sociolinguistic Atlas of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, there are 522 indigenous populations that use 420 different languages. Some data estimated that the indigenous populations were approximately 42 million people. Recent information, derived in part from the improvement of the instruments used in national censuses (Population Notes, 2018) affirms a notably increase in the indigenous population through the criterion of "self-identification". "Self-identification" is important because it refers to social, cultural, civilizing desires and political identities. In short, it means that giving indigenous and Afro-descendant personal identity opens up to a complex horizon of demands, mobilizations and tensions. Indigenous and afro-descendants experience resistance - as I will point out later - the evident situation of impoverishment and exclusion. In some cases, such as in Mexico, indigenous people double the percentage of poverty to the rest of the population. In Brazil and Ecuador, the Afro-descendant populations experience the worst socioeconomic conditions (ECLAC, Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: sociodemographic information for policies and programs).

With the demographic growth, life expectancy has extended to an average of 75 years. However, some differences between countries are remarkable. According to the Demographic Observatory (ECLAC), life expectancy at birth in Haiti is less than 64 years, while in Cuba it is almost 80 years. Costa Rican has a life expectancy at birth similar to that of Cuba while, for example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia it reaches 69. Since 1960, the world trend has been the growth of the expectation of lifetime reaching an average of 73 years. The region has managed to reduce the projected infant mortality by 35% in two decades (Peruvian case). This decrease is not necessarily associated with other indicators, but seems to correspond to policies focused on maternal and child health. In spite of this, the increase of schooling in mothers is a positive factor in the reduction of infant mortality. In accordance with the global trend, the reduction in infant mortality occurs at the same time as the birth rate has been reduced. In a period of four decades, the birth rate of the region has come to be "below the replacement rate" in some countries and decreased in all of them. However, infant mortality rates among indigenous peoples are, in many cases, higher than the national average (*Infant and child mortality of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of Latin America: Structural inequalities, diverse patterns and evidence of unfulfilled rights.*)

This means that being an indigenous child in Panama and Paraguay increases the chances of dying before the first year between three and two times (13). According to a UNESCO report, in Guatemala indigenous children suffered, in 2015, 47% of malnutrition (*Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2). It is estimated that around 7 million children in the region suffer from chronic malnutrition. Once again, the so-called "ethnic gap" - in the language of ECLAC - or systematic discrimination produces that chronic malnutrition is even twice as many among indigenous children as among non-indigenous (Colombian case). A fundamental criterion to avoid malnutrition is "food security" (malnutrition in children in Latin America). With regard to this, the region has managed to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in 25 years Latin America has managed to reduce by 60% "the proportion of undernourishment of its population" (ONUAA, Food and Nutrition Security in Latin America and the Caribbean).

⁴ In Paraguay, land grabbing has displaced 585,000 people from the countryside in the last 10 years (*Desterrados: tierra, poder y desigualdades en América Latina*, 8).

However, in the last five years (2014-2018) the number of people undernourished has increased in some countries (Argentina, Venezuela). The Panorama of Food and Nutrition Security in Latin America and the Caribbean (2018) reports that more than 39 million people in the region are undernourished. It is constant in Latin America that food insecurity affects mainly women, indigenous people and people of African descent. If food insecurity adds to the insecurity women suffer, the region is hostile and brutal against them. This brutality cannot be ignored when compared to other data: according to the UN, Latin America is the region with most of the women in parliamentary positions in the world.

Latin America concentrates approximately 23% of the forest area worldwide. According to the Latin American Water Tribunal, 33% of the world's renewable water resources are located in the region. It means that our region has a "per capita" water availability index that doubles the world average. The region concentrates the majority of the countries denominated "mega-diverse" due to its high biodiversity. However, Latin America, especially South America, is one of the regions that, according to recent information, has lost most (destroyed) of the primary forest. The relationship between availability and access to water is an example of the political inability to satisfy basic needs of the population. The most recent information indicates that approximately 77 million in Latin America do not have access to drinking water and 51 million live in "rural areas" (*Latin American Water Tribunal*). Person in rural areas are forced to leave their places and survive. Access to potable water is a challenge for some 26 million urban inhabitants and 23 million people have no access to electric power (UNDP, *Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean* 2016). The Pan American Health Organization, PAHO, considers that air pollution is the main environmental risk to health in the Americas. Pollution links to the high demand and consumption of inefficient energies (fossil fuels) to make human mobility possible. Reversing the high pollution is a factor regarding infant mortality to avoid the 847,000 deaths attributed to pollution (WHO, *Impact of the environment on health*). The social and cultural programs deriving from environmental health care policy requires transformation. Information from the World Wildlife Fund about the Amazon (the largest rainforest in the world crosses eight countries and inhabits more than 34 million people) presents a situation stressed by contradictions. The Amazon contains one tenth of the world's species giving an ecological relevance to the region. However, evidence demonstrates effects of the destruction of rainforest and territories mainly in Brazilian given to monocultures and cattle breeding and deregulated mining practices. Land tenure in Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal practice in the planet, especially in the South.

OXFAM published in 2016 evidence that "1% of farms use more land than the remaining 99%" (5). This means that in Latin America, landowners predominate despite being less productive than small and medium-sized farms. To this scheme adds the fact that corporatist of land tenure allow transnationals to be "above" the international agreements and national laws related to the distribution of land. A recent document produced by La Vía Campesina reports that land grabbing in Latin America is a process in which States and transnational organizations and economic and political elites (La Vía Campesina's struggles) participate in agrarian reform, the defense of life, land and territories. It is insufficient to think that the solution to the hoarding will come from the state policies and "international technical" recommendations. The leader of the Brazilian Movement Without Land, Delweck Matheus, synthesizes this point with an explicit thesis:

The State has the task of promoting public policies, but we cannot wait for the State to assume this task because it is no longer the interest of the elites. The agrarian struggle is a class struggle. We have to make an agrarian reform to achieve a correlation of forces that allows changing the nature of the State, so that it assumes its role in agrarian reform: organizing technical assistance, credit, storage and distribution logistics, among others (39).

Matheus' claim has a broad empirical support. In effect, the public policies do not respond to the popular needs of Latin America (Colombian and the Paraguay) regarding a more just and equal land tenure. Since 2011, in the Brazilian case, the distribution of land has decreased considerably. Local elites and their international partners designed policies and laws for their own benefit. The States expresses the landowners' voracity. The State's popular character means that it expresses and tries to satisfy, with its constitution, laws, institutions and actions, the needs and expectations of the majorities. A study on land grabbing in the Peruvian amazon by Dammert (2016)

demonstrates that the establishment of large-scale agro-industrial plantations not only causes massive deforestation. It also facilitates financial and speculative hoarding. The land used for speculation, according to La Vía Campesina and OXFAM, is a trend in the region. The implications of "speculative tenure" are, among others, greater destruction and dispossession of native land.

The relationship between availability and access to water relates to precarious policies to guarantee housing for the population. Without access to housing, peoples' well-being is at risk. In Nicaragua, housing deficit reached, by the end of 2012, 78% and is associated to access to quality services. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua are countries with the highest qualitative deficiencies regarding housing meaning that people live in inadequate housing and without the possibility of repair. Growing of urban areas does not reverse impoverish situations: the disorganized growth of cities prevents that housing forms part of a *habitat* where persons can:

have a universal and quality coverage of basic services, public spaces and urban mobility oriented to social integration. We should also guarantee access to digital communication and connectivity with innovative and intelligent technologies. In particular, urban transport and mobility policies must be multimodal, interconnected and promote integration at the urban and metropolitan levels. In turn, public transport must be planned and implemented in a way that addresses the different needs of men and women (Latin America and the Caribbean: *challenges, dilemmas and commitments of a common urban agenda*, 7).

The goals stated above seem to be difficult to achieve despite the fact that the region has experienced a reduction in its most precarious indicators. In fact, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), despite the fact that the region has managed to achieve important goals like infant mortality, maternal mortality, access to basic services, poverty reduction, extreme poverty and inequality, such achievements are slowing down after 2009 and can be reversed. The data offered by ECLAC, in 2018, confirms a decade without growth and an increase in extreme poverty - measured by income - which now reaches 10% of the population.

According to the Regional Report by the UNDP, despite the (unstable) improvement, a structural revision of the "idea of progress" is needed. The UNDP proposes a "multidimensional theory of development" focusing on: a) universality of social protection systems, b) better public education, c) systems of care, d) equity of access to quality services regardless of income. The approach presented in the UNDP report, to review the "ideal of progress" to reach extensively regional achievements, is based on Latin American behavior between 2009 and 2018. According to a study by Amarante and Colacce (2018), unemployment has accelerated particularly since 2015 and the current macroeconomic conditions sets precarious working conditions especially for women: 60% of young women workers receive a salary below the minimum in their countries and the impoverishment of young people cannot be contained. Data provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2018 shows that the working conditions of women in the region are a determining factor in their "lack of social protection" (ILO, *Social and Employment Outlook in the World: Progress global survey on female employment trends* 2018). The notion of social deprivation defines conditions in which, due to a structural and systematic treatment, women do not get access to pensions in their old age.

Lack of protection is expressed in comparison to the low land tenure that in Honduras and El Salvador does not get over 15%. The impoverishment and lack of protection of women, according to the UN report in 2017, demonstrates that the regions is the most dangerous place in the world because of the systematic violence that prevents collective development of projects for coexistence and well-being. Our region is, according to the UNESCO, the second most "lethal for journalists" worldwide (only 13% of cases of murders against journalists are solved). The Observatory of Journalists Killed by UNESCO shows that in Mexico the number of journalists killed almost doubled between 2014 and 2018, from 7 to 13 murders. Another case is the lack of protection to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from Central America. Amnesty International shows that violence of this sort is an

epidemic⁵ - thousands of peoples fly their countries to preserve - in a very basic sense - their lives. Why young people and women fly Central America is, of course, not a mysterious event.

First, more than half of young people between 15 and 24 years (more than 5 million in 2016) are excluded from the educational system. 30% of Central America populations are in school age (4 - 17 years) and low or no education makes employment and wellbeing impossible. The report shows how the low education – unfinished primary - implies decreasing the possibilities to improve family income and the increase of social vulnerability. Second, the Central America internal wars, extended for decades, failed to reverse the challenge of education. In Guatemala, for instance, average is 5.6 years. The political-military "peace" did not translate, until now, into social and cultural conditions promoting the will to remain in Central America. Third, beside attempts made in recent years regarding national projects that integrate provides self-esteem, happiness, and social encouragement that includes and expresses citizenship, the response has been, as in the coup against the People of Honduras (2009), military violence, clerical, and business impunity. Amnesty International's claim to the countries that expel their inhabitants is blunt:

Urgently address the factors that drive people to leave their country, including the endemic impunity of human rights violations, inequality, widespread violence and the persecution of activists and human rights defenders. • Refrain from closing border posts and undermining in practice the right of people to leave their country. • Guarantee mechanisms to determine if people sent back to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador are in danger in their communities of origin and provide them with adequate and immediate protection (Amnesty International, *Varadas la puerta*, 10).

The request to States challenges the systematic abandonment of their inhabitants, forcing them to escape, the tendency to ignore and violate human rights. Fighting for human rights implies persecution, harassment, and murder. In 2018 in Guatemala, 18 murders and 135 attacks to social activists were documented which is 147% more than the previous year. In Colombia, between 2016 and 2018, 257 social activists and human rights defenders were murdered. The Frontline Defenders report (2018) documents that this is the most dangerous region in world for human rights defenders. It also notes that Nicaragua introduced a legislation "against terrorism" turning those who "damage property" into terrorism. As a result, dozens of protesters are in prison facing sentence up to 20 years. It became common in Latin America that human rights defenders are insulted, threatened and persecuted (40% of them reported), criminalized and incarcerated. The Frontline Defenders reports that in Mexico the case of 61-year-old Dominga González Martínez who sentenced to 50 years in prison for her fight to access to water for her people. In addition, intimidation plays a strong part in violating legal process and often used fabricate accusations. The recommendations given by Amnesty International ignored or harassed by states, governments, institutions, military, and paramilitary groups. Persons escaping from Central America are in search of protection when their States are not capable of it. The, human right defenders in the region and their organizations face political and cultural conditions of expulsion, harassment and murder. This challenge is cultural, since violence in Latin America extends to all areas. According to UNESCO, bullying reaches an average of 30% of children and young people. The report on mortality due to suicide (2014) concludes that suicide is the third cause of death among young people from 10 to 25. To make the region a better place to live requires more than improving the income a structural transformation. Transformation, whose specific characteristics must vary by sub-region and country, currently faces a strong opposition expressed during the electoral processes.

Both the UNDP and ECLAC (UN) indicate that the current regional conditions require, as suggested in the so-called "Agenda 2030", a change of political-structural in order to achieve, according to the institutional language adopted by the UNDP, a "multidimensional progress". For Latin America, it means that the present and future must

⁵ In 2014, Central America had the highest homicide rate in the world. Even Costa Rica, in that year, surpassed the world average (6.2 murders per each hundred thousand inhabitants), reaching 8.5 murders per one hundred thousand inhabitants. In 2018, Costa Rica reached its highest figure in history (12.1) while in other countries (Guatemala, El Salvador) the number of murders has decreased. In spite of this, Central America is one of the most violent regions (when using murderous murders as a criterion) of the world.

have a common project that expresses the needs and dreams of the population that mostly was not able to practice citizenship. The UNDP Report includes care systems within a broad project and should focus, says the document, on taking care of children, elderly, sick persons as public issue and not as private, family and feminine aspects. It means that instead of understanding others and oneself as an "economic actor" in competition against other "actors" to obtaining resources, the UNDP points out that achieving a better life depends on, among other factors, the life of children and adults through shared responsibility. It implies that efforts and institutional resources where both men and women, without detriment of their lives, can accompany and care for others making use of public networks that are collectively sustained and evaluated. The project that should be adopted in the region implies a greater autonomy and possibilities for personal deployment (agency), for women who are fundamental actor for the well-being of the region. If women's lives improve, poverty and inequality will be reduced (*The inefficiency of inequality*, 136). The increase in quality of life is not only linked to income but also to autonomy and the rights in place. That is why the social movements of women (Chilean students, Honduran ecologists, Brazilian activists as three cases) announce the possibility of another Latin America.

Religion and Politics

It is important to mention that, according to recent estimates published by *Latinobarómetro* in 2018, with the title *Pope Francis and religion in Chile and Latin America*, the perception of the Catholic Church among the population, with the exception of Chile and Uruguay, is positive and higher than 50%. On average 59% of the Latin American population identifies as Catholic - Paraguay (89%) and Honduras (37%) are the extremes. Among the data from the survey highlights that, regionally, the level of people identified as "Evangelical" (19%) and "None, atheist, agnostic" (17%) is almost equal.

However, the differences between countries and sub-regions are greater: in Central America an average of 30% of the population is considered evangelical. The difference between Honduras (39%) and Costa Rica (25%) is significant. It is in the Central American sub-region where the identification with the Catholic Church has declined the most and their link with Churches, personalities, and the imaginary evangelicals has increased. It has also increased particularly in Chile (35%) that do not identify with any religion. The intensity of the link with the professed religion - which is measured from the question of "practice" - is similar throughout the region. Approximately 43% of people consider that he/she is a practitioner of his/her religion. A notable difference is that when differentiating between Catholics and Evangelicals the percentage varies: Evangelicals practice on average 20% more than Catholics. The bond of the believer with religion, and the set of practices that integrate it, is affectively more significant among the evangelicals. This may mean that the general behaviour: party ascriptions, perception of reality, and social participation are closely linked to the "religious horizon."

A conceptual precision: whether it is expressed in a clear or diffuse all "religious practice" is political. This means that it contains an evaluation about the relationship between human beings and God that affects the relationships that human beings have with themselves, with other human beings, other forms of life and, in general, with the environment. It is probable that, among the multiple and diverse groups that make up "the evangelicals", there is no homogeneity with respect to their political position or, even more, that their religious self-identification is not considered as politics, in some cases. However, in other cases, the political matrix of religious practice is explicit and forms part of a specific program, in many cases one of an electoral nature. Another conceptual precision: it should not be confused "evangelical" with evangelical organizations, parties and evangelical churches. Although they have relationships, they cannot be extrapolated. Without further details, "evangelical" can be the name of a personal posture supported by a religious faith. It is a feeling that informs the whole of personal life - and may even be linked to the Gospels - which may or may not be present or encouraged by organizations, parties and churches. The multinational networks of "evangelical" media are not comparable to the evangelical religious practice of an unemployed Honduran mother who finds in the "evangelical" an expression of her identity. Largely, the multinational is opposed to the identity of that religious believer.

It can be said, particularly if Central American is taken as an example, that the growth of "evangelical" did not contribute to the improvement of social and political violence affecting the sub-region. While the Central American population became evangelical, at the same time, the region became impoverished. According to the Fifth Report

of the State of the region (2016), in the chapter entitled "Social Panorama", in 2013 Honduras - the country whose evangelical population has grown the most in the last 15 years - had 48% of its population living in extreme poverty or indigence and 70% in poverty. Central America, whose population mostly identifies as Christian, reaches almost 50% of poverty and 18% of them are indigents. It is striking that, according to indicators of subjective well-being, a high percentage of the population (up to 90%) is satisfied with their life. To the last, one can add that Evangelicals in Latin America tend to have a lower education level than those who do not profess religion. That implies that the evangelical people, mostly women, are in structural situations of social vulnerability. There is a relationship between social deprivation and religious ties. Religious organizations within the evangelical profile - churches, soup kitchens, prayer groups and political parties - are places that can provide identity brands, security, and even shelter. Violence within them is tolerated, subtle, or brutal as in most areas of Latin American societies. The transit of significant percentages of people towards evangelical organizations suggests that they are capable, at least, of offering themselves as interlocutors of social and personal needs or desires. By becoming or being part of an electoral project, the evangelical organizations tend to offer (as the National Restoration Party in Costa Rica) the promise of a "new type of ruler" without ties with the "traditional politics," "clean hands" which honesty -as prognosis- is based on the "testimony" of the renewal of the leader's life, which announces that the "welfare" of a society depends on the defense of its foundations: marriage, family, sobriety, "honesty". With this ideological minimalism, to which they add an emphasis on the need for a "strong hand" against common crime, they have managed to move a population that deeply distrusts its institutions.

A religious and impoverished population seems to find satisfaction, which in this case follows from the vision of one owns' life - not through access to quality services and the growth of the citizenship character, but in its religious experiences which coexist linked to situations of systemic exclusion that make the production of just societies impossible.

Questions and Plenary Dialogue

Question for Jonathan: Looking seriously to the idea of progress, can the church, with mystical and symbolic accent, contribute to this development in the region? Question for Linda: The US policy increases the levels of poverty. The Pope indicated that polity that does it is sin. Do these policies affect the United States?

Question by Danielle to Linda: Your presentation is strong, and at the same time, for the reality in Suriname it brings implications regarding the ignorance of being a church in the sense that the church will not change the socio-political landscape. If this is the case, what is the necessary change that as churches need to be done more effectively in this socio-political landscape?

Gilberto Quezada: Two comments a) Latin American martyrdom grows and not precisely in the churches. This aspect poses as question to us. b) After what we have learned, it would seem that the Lutheran churches in LAC have not come out of welfare mentality. Question: Where is the LGTBIQ component in such rich analysis? Silvia Genz comments: If, as a church we do not respect people in their situation, someone will go to meet their needs. There will be churches with political ideologies or politicians. If we do not help understanding that wealth results from people's suffering and daily hard work; even more, from women who even face domestic violence. Who can help to reduce these suffering realities? As churches how can we demand more from them while they reach the end of the day with heavy loads, and even we ask them to fight, what strength can they have. We have no strength to fight but we can work on the commitment not to accommodate to such situations but to learn to be humans created with gifts and capacities. How to help showing that there is a future, affirming it wherever we are; especially for young persons, affirming that there is future either in the countryside or in the cities.

Linda Thomas: On Trump, what he does is a reaction to President Obama. I call him 45 because costs us tears. I will do my best so that in the next election, we can bring a change. I do not have an answer that can satisfy the question about the development and policies of the USA. However, the church can do something. I congratulate and acknowledge that this organization of churches sees it as important to obtain ideas starting the conference understanding what happens to the most vulnerable people. The analysis situation for theology is important. Jesus surprises me and I see what he did in his ministry. Three people want to get a place of privilege at the top of the mountain as a reflection of what I do. This narrative makes clear to what we have been called, to be followers. Seeing the needs of vulnerable people is a first step. This task implies to start again. You can say that there is

fatigue to participate again in this. From the perspective of a community organizer, action means to find the pearls; that is, what motivates and interests people.

The churches should have more conferences like this one that starts with a political-social analysis of the context. The Lutheran theology is a phenomenal theology. Martin Luther King's father traveled to Germany to see and meet that place. Returning to the USA, he changed the name of his son from Miguel to Martin given the Lutheran influence. We already saw that Martin Luther King faced the challenges of injustice. Today we have to advocate for people, we have to act. The methodology of being community organizers, we first use the Bible as source of power. The Bible has the "Transforming Power" because it is reference for justice. Second, on the LGBTQ aspect in Costa Rica, I appreciate the comment. In the USA, the ELCA and Methodist congregations start work at confirmation classes and this is the basis for affirming, sowing bases to be inclusive churches.

Jonathan Pimentel: Danielle's question is pertinent; tomorrow you will have time to engage in the theological aspect. As an external person, I offered the general data regarding Latin America aware that Christianity, since the conquest until today, transformed the faces of the population and nothing of this has been relevant in structural terms.

What each pastor does in community has a radical impact in the lives of people. Lutheranism is part of this bringing change in the region, in the lives of persons. Now, still, it (the Lutheran content) has not translated into the region as a whole. Your task is to analyse what happened with your confession, at the same time recognizing that the Lutheran tradition is rich and has more to offer. Since the 70s, the bases for liberation was laid to develop a Latin American Lutheran theology; it is not yet boiling. It is nice to see a young woman from Nicaragua preaching in the morning devotion. Perhaps she will be trained in theology or other science. What I want to say is that the advantage of the Lutheran intellectual tradition is not yet used fully in the region. There is potential to be developed. Using the image of Martin Luther King's father, there will be people who will come to LAC from other countries to change the names of their sons and daughters motivated for what they have seen in the region. This will fill us with joy, but in the future.

Latin America is going through a cultural war. Peru and Costa Rica are fighting against the gender ideology and Brazil is a separate case. This war is not only against communists, socialists, trade unionists but also against anyone who does not express "nature" in its most vulgar sense. If you want to change it, you have to be harassed culturally or in other manner permanently. In Costa Rica, the traditional party, although it did not win, had a triumph, that was the defeat of democracy. This also happens in Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, etc. What I want to say is that Christianity is growing, but it is "the worst side of Christianity". We are witnessing a cultural war that wants to institutionalize hate by revoking what exists, preventing the free expression of sexuality and human desires. I welcome the reflection of Silvia Genz because the changes that the region will experience will perhaps be more visible in the next generations. The situation in Latin America will not be solved by two governments or in five years. It will take time and it will be given in context. The people who organize themselves are harassed, and in this conference, you are contributing to discuss important things like the access to free health services and education systems, water, etc. When these needs are achieved, the Lutherans will have won and with them all other persons.

Sessions II and III – A way of reporting

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) – The church experiences declining in members in the church as well as in the financial support. A more secular society fascinated and increased by fundamentalists. The position we had made is to lose the social position – no a privilege group. When the media wants to have a report, the meaning for church refers to evangelicals (Pentecostals against Roman Catholics). What is God calling us to do: to be true evangelicals in the USA context.

Congregational vitality is key – the congregations make stronger of what we really are. Most USA Lutherans are unable to speak passionately and comfortably of the love of Jesus Christ, and this is a problem. Each congregation needs to strengthen the relationship with God, with other churches, and to the community where they are. The neighbourhoods of churches built by migrants have changed and people moved. The church members drive long distances and have nothing to do with the context of the congregation.

We are trying to do something different. We have some large congregations who become like anchor to this body. One of the models is that congregations with strong ministries, finances, personnel support small congregations and accompany their preaching and ministry to grow. Having a strong relation in the three dimensions will add to

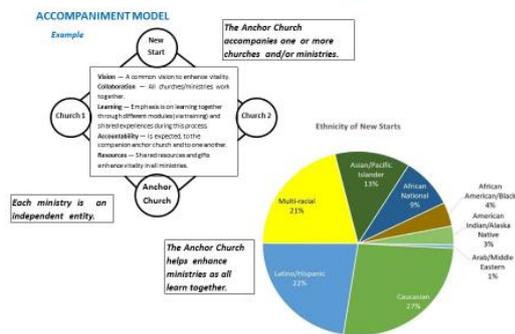
be companion. Being small or large church has the need to be revitalized. In the USA and the Caribbean, we plan to work to be strong, vibrant evangelical using the freedom to be churches in context.



**ELCA:
Future Directions 2025
Congregational Vitality**

- Vital congregations do 3 things:
1. Strengthen their relationship with God
 2. Nurture relationships
 3. Share a strong presence in the community

Two Alternatives: Anchor Churches and Coaching



The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela (IELV) – Last year, it has been impossible to participate in the leadership conference given the internal situation in the country.

The IELV, given the situation we live on, became sign of hope. We share the message that God of life accompanies to all persons suffering many kinds of loss. We identify with the crucified people who live in our country, even more, with vulnerable persons: women, children, LGTB. We continue empowering on diakonia to serve – while sharing / receiving people become agents of change within their communities. We try to give more attention to psico social needs with persons who live the absence of their relatives who fled the country who are young and professionals. Children, adults, and elderly are the ones abandoned and in vulnerable situation. The information says that there is 4 million migrants, but information within the country indicates that for 2019 will reach 9 million. We will not want to fall and be a country living only on welfare but to offer support, knowing our limitations, through food, medications, support. We are thankful to the IELCO (provided with medicines) ELCA (food), OGA (support) and the FLM (church project).

In 2003, we were about 5 thousand members in the IELV. Today, it has drastically reduced. Our big congregations only reach 50 members given to migration. Almost all professionals did emigrate. Our challenge is to continue with this project even our own limitations. The German embassy left Venezuela, German teachers were threaten in Caracas and we still have them in Valencia.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) – The truth and reconciliation commission with the Indigenous Peoples in Canada is one theme in the church. The population in Canada is diverse with different groups and cultures. Indigenous peoples were connected to the nature hunting, living out their spirituality and healthy relation with the land. The schools intended to help them to assimilate to the ones of the migrants from Europe. Children were put to speak English in residential schools for over 100 years. In the early 90s the last one closed. IP lived with challenges like health and issues of alcohol or other aspects. This commission helped the survivors of the schools will speak about their experience. The final report brought 98 actions to happen. We have a book to share as for instance education, health. This is important for the ELCIC because we want to understand our relationship with that population and improve our relationships.

Synod bishop initiatives – where is God in the neighbourhood, what is doing and how I can join God? For the future: reimagining the church while reflecting what the church is and the diaconal work. To be missional, diaconal, and prophetic church with a flexible structure. We want to explore new ways to engage while praying, acting, and serving.



Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA) - The context work is the Maya Chorti leaders' formation in diakonia (Zacapa and Chiquimula). The Maya Chortí spirituality is recognized and this interreligious dialogue enriches the church. Their formation focuses on advocacy before the state. We hope to count with more pastors engaged in leadership. SEMLA, EST/Ins and Martin Hoffmann support us and last week Church of Sweden shared the theme on theology done from women's perspective.

Guatemalan Lutheran Church



Biblical and Theological Formation to the Word, Sacraments and Diakonia



Maya Human Rights Defenders

Chorti: Political Agenda and Strategy

- Political advocacy at local, national, and international levels
- Formation with emphasis in Human Rights
- Elders and the rights of Indigenous peoples: defense of land and territory



Bonita Milpa Women's Chortí Moviment

- Gender Justice
- Spirituality and Human Rights
- Advocacy
- Participation in decisión making

Challenges

- Ordination to the Word, Sacrament and Diakonia
- Care of Creation
- Defense of Hunan Rights

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG) - Greetings from Pastor President Rev. Conrad Plummer. In 2018, the ELCG had the convention focusing on "Preaching, teaching, reaching." In 2019, the theme was "In Christ a new Creation: Call to be God's ambassadors and commissioned for that work". With 43 congregations, 7 pastors, 8 deacons and lay leaders, the church faces the challenge of limited human resources. There is low attendance in some congregations that invites us to call for revitalization and to rebuild the church together. Our 176 anniversary did move us to continue working. The women group is strong and the men's group is not. The commitment in 2018 was to resume the work and revitalize the church. The Lutheran Lay Academy reinitiated work with courses on Church Administration, Worship and Liturgy, and Homiletics. The main objective is to have more pastors and deacons equipped in the church. We can have support from abroad to attend congregations that are struggling. In this challenging land fin the ELCG, our trust and faith in God helps is to continue to work and flourish.

Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña (ILS) - Greetings from Bishop Medardo Gómez. The right to water is important to the ILS because it is a human right. This topic includes migration and gender. Being in the process of democratization, we managed to heal our wounds from huge challenges. The church is a sign of hope: the youth has high priority because they live in vulnerability. 2500 young persons were trained on reproductive health given the high rate of young pregnant women (10 and 15 years old) and we work with their families. Trauma attention is vital given the continuous losses today. The program serve people affected by trauma through the center. Women participate in society. Mining, it is forbidden to mine in the northern part of the country. The picture with children of deported or returned families receive accompaniment for their recovery. The ILS will have its 33 anniversary with ordination of 14 persons (8 women and 6 men). The 2019 - 2025 strategy will be developed focusing on the empowerment and active participation of women and young people offering opportunities for participation. With migrants, the conditions require humanitarian assistance.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2021

VISION

To be a sustainable Church that accompanies and makes visible the values of the Kingdom of God in order to reach full life in El Salvador, grounded in the Theology of Life that is rooted in the gospel and the Lutheran confessions.

MISSION

Called and sent by God, we denounce sin and announce the good news, we carry out a pastoral and diaconal work that is prophetic, ecumenical, transformative, and liberating making visible the signs of the Kingdom of God for life in fullness of God's people. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" •Juan 20: 21.

FOR THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER



REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH



INAUGURATION OF THE TRAUMA CARE CENTER



ADVOCACY IN PUBLIC POLICIES



ABUNDANT AND SUSTAINABLE FISHING



Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS) – Greetings from Rev. Marjory Slagtand and church members conveyed. The human and institutional capacity source helped to shape the work of the church. The 278 anniversary helped to confirm that resources are not only finances. Mapping our resources, making an organizational structure and the means to use, not only looking at the quantity (number of persons in the congregations), taught us that in recent years' more people joined the church. This implied the quality of work that equips people to collaborate with God – training lay leaders to preach in church, to lead worship, to train acolytes. The change: one of the children shared something and drove the church to talk about the doctrine of justification. Young people, acolytes and lay preachers talk about the scriptures. There was a person asking why we not read Revelations and only from the Gospels. This engaged persons to rethink again faith. The aspect of the church constitution and governance did allow thinking how we reflect our tradition.



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SURINAME (ELKS)

2 KEYS ASPECTS/ ACTIONS

With the experiences gain from the HICD workshop, we proceeded to do the following:

1. **Mapping the resources of the church through:**
 - The development of an organizational structure (actors and bodies of the church)
 - the Automatization system for registration of all (baptized) congregants
2. **equipping the people of God to partnership with God through:**
 - Indoor short training of lay leaders in the church (lay preachers, liturg, acolytes, altar guild ect.) – this also helps us the rediscover our Lutheran identity
 - Revising the church constitution

2 ALTERNATIVES

2. Education and formation group:

- Allow persons to discover/develop their vocation and gifts
- Prepare the church for meaningful diaconal action

Lutheran Church of Peru (IL-P) – We live in a context of political instability due to corruption: four former presidents face judicial processes and one committed suicide. The church is training leaders that did revitalize youth and adults. With participation of committed youth, we hope that they bring three important aspects to church life: their experience in their communities, work on the local councils, are professionals (bi-vocationally) very much identified with the church. Youth is motivating evangelization in the context of growth. The ecumenical relationship has revitalized the church especially with the Catholic Church. The new archbishop in the Roman Catholic Church is open. The IL-P is part of the Interreligious Council fighting against corruption, violence against women, and the protection of tropical forests that add to our holistic mission. The church is working with migrants from Venezuela bringing change. Nevertheless, xenophobia (all the blame go to Venezuelans) is growing. The principle that each person brings renewal to the country and church is strong. The next step is to continue strengthening the church as institution and its identity strongly acknowledged in the country.

Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICH) – the sister churches accompaniment did revitalize the ICLH (spiritual and financially) and allows the church to continue working with projects. A migration reduction project has started helping persons to see life from another perspective. Gender justice, participation of women and men are strong aspects helping to avoid domestic violence. The church works with couples to overcome local and community violence. The communion office has supported issues of human resources through accompaniment and participation in activities for leadership, Lutheran identity, bible, gender that is replicated locally. The growth of local leadership has strengthened the church, the gospel continues to be announced, and the injustices denounced. Our challenge is to work on joint efforts with other partners and internally, the context of migration, due to social injustices, lack of support of the government, makes the situation difficult. The church tries to contribute to hope that God is the one who acts and act hopping for long run change.

United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) – The church accompanies Venezuelan people and their presence drives and forces the church to test our "diaconal muscle", reorganize our resources, and think about our priorities. This emerging reality has invited to connect with other institutions in our civil society. In various cases, when a fraternal and sororal relationship is in place, the testimony, experiences, and gifts of persons arriving in Argentina benefit all tremendously.

The women's movement has revitalized the church, as well as people with non-binary sexual identities. They did force us to rethink and transform our discourses and patriarchal, hetero-normative macho practices. The women's movement is leading us to redefine our theological and pastoral nature of being church. Today, we live in tense ecumenical relations (given the radical postures), including the state that supposes that evangelical people think

only one way. This is testing our understanding of what is right regarding “guardianship rights” of women's bodies, how valid they are, and who cares about our opinion.

LWF | LAC | COL 2019. Lima, 10-15 May

What revitalize us? What can help us?

United Evangelical Lutheran church
@luteranaunida

2 Aspects/action that revitalized the church

The accompaniment to migran persons (from Venezuela)



The women's movement



2 alternatives/proposals that help in the practice

How do you imagine the “Communion of Saints”



Strengthen dialogue with society through our schools



Lutheran Church of Nicaragua of “Faith and Hope” (ILFE) – The church is involved in an integral mission that makes us feel strong from the pastoral / sacraments and diakonia / development work. Working on food sovereignty and security, the church affirms human dignity. People learn to organize. During emergencies, life assistance is offered. Themes of reconciliation and peace with ACT, and the LWF workshop on mediation and peace were reproduced in the church. The peace aspect helps to strengthen the pastoral task.





Costa Rican Lutheran Church (ILCO) – There are two aspects in the church agenda: the priesthood of all believers (declericalización) and accompaniment to LGBTQ +
 The south-south exchange allows openness in the congregations and alliances. This achieves the Objective 17 of the SDGs.

Strengthening and empowerment of pastoral teams - gender equality (objective 5 SDG)
 Alternatives: The church build a shelter that receives between 20 - 30 people, from Nicaragua - objective 10 SDG -reduction of inequalities. Development of bi-vocational pastoral ministry in order to leave the 100% paid human resource will be difficult, but it can be motivated by vocation - (objective SDG 4 Quality Education.



New actions

17 ALIANZAS PARA LOS OBJETIVOS

■ **1. Exchange between faith communities south-south** (communities that have more resources, or because they are in urban areas, commit to support other communities that are in rural or indigenous territories (SDG 17))

5 GÉNERO E IGUALDAD

■ **2. Strengthening and empowerment of Pastoral Teams** (formation, meetings, thematic liturgies, local organization, resource management (SDG 5))

Alternatives

10 REDUCCIÓN DE LAS DESIGDADES

■ **1. Building of Shelter** (Not only provides attention to migrant populations arriving in San José, the local congregations now have a special location) (SDG 10)

4 EDUCACIÓN DE CALIDAD

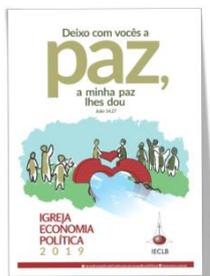
■ **2. Bivocational development of pastoral ministry** (in contexts of financial constraints, it is urgent to leave the full-time paid model and to continue strengthening) Bivocational model: People who work during the week in the secular area, at night or during weekends accompanying the Church. Here the work is developed by vocation and not only by salary.)

Evangelical Church of the River Plate (IERP) in Argentina, Uruguay y Paraguay – The IERP is a diverse church (considering its history of migration). Aspects that revitalized; Youth ministry with aspects of leadership training and university ministry; dialogue and interaction with social and government organizations for diaconal work. The articulation with the state, there was fear given its migrant roots, but slowly is been enhanced.

Two proposals: community building with strong focus on change. The question is why people do not come to the church; we did understand that the church has to go to them. The strategic planning that in an organic was will involve other actors.



Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) - “My peace I leave you, my peace I give you” (John 14:27) is the base for the theme of the year. In a context of much polarization and division, the church is affirming leadership formation at various levels, strengthens women in leadership and in governance - it has 12 new synodic pastors. The new initiatives in health chaplaincy and mission with children. The alternative focuses in the 2019-2024 mission plan, starting to develop a gender justice policy, both approved by the Church Council in 2018. The church will celebrate its 200 years, therefore is preparing a strategy to make visible, market and communicate its work.



Theme for 2019

Igreja, Economia, Política

IECLB – actions that revitalize

- Development of programs that are priority: priesthood of qualified believers, theological studies, interns, ministers, community action, misión, communications.
- New leadership, three women (Church President, Council, and Board). 11 new Synod Pastors.
- New initiatives: health chaplaincy, mission among children.

IECLB – alternatives for the future

- 2019-2024 Mission Plan: 5 mission goals and 15 priority areas for action approved by the 2018 Council.
- Decision to develop a gender justice policy.
- Strategic planning for the 200 Anniversary celebration of the IECLB: visibility, marketing, communication.

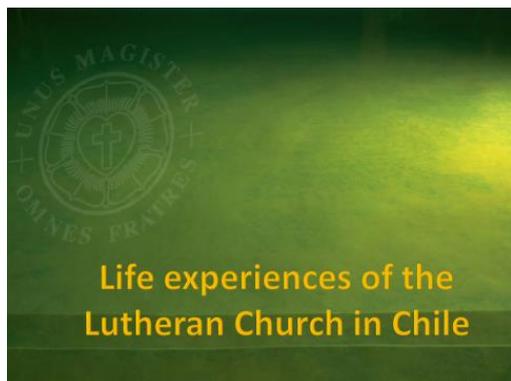
IGREJA, ECONOMIA, POLÍTICA
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you (John 14.27a)



Iglesia Luterana en Chile (ILCH) – Chile experiences change and we are convinced that the Lutheran theology bring rich elements to the changes. Our problem, we are a small church but growth requires empowerment to influence change. God's word influences on its own, then training is relevant. The ILCH is open to different ecumenical and state instances. Our strengths are the camps: Puerto Fonk with youth. The church gains energy and new ideas, especially with the exchange, forming of new generations as leaders. Through the children's camp,

persons know the value of learning for their confirmation. In 2018, the IELCH had a Kirchen Tag with participation of keynote speakers that affected all participants. The ILCH is challenged by migration. From 300 thousand, it went to 1million 200 thousand. Aware that fear was a strong issue, the church is sensitizing through seminars in collaboration with other organizations and the state. The idea is that a high-level awareness action.

Alternatives: Mission - changing the model of being a church rooted on migration. Our goal is to reach different places, and at the same time attending to Lutheran people who have moved to other places. We have financial limitation and working on it to count with self-sustaining preaching points. Outside support would be for a short time. The youth project in La Unión where the church has aged is a good example where young people is engaged in revitalizing the church.



Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELB) – The church is an indigenous Church with Lutheran identity. We are 80 years old and are formed by Quechuas, Aymara and with participation of Chimanes, Matacos, Cambas. Our strength are the children in whom we find God. We are motivated to go toward people ceasing to be pastors of our four walls. We have learned to develop plans together with the people. The liturgy of the word is a toll to be known. We develop God’s mission under the rain and we fall to sleep in places where the night finds us. No pastor in the church receives payment for that work. Our mission is to get in contact with other organizations, the government in order to let our work to be know. The church work implies walking between our place, the community and government entities.



Aspects that revitalize the church

- Children



► Ways to serve God in church and outside the church



Alternatives

- Youth in action
- Our Aymara - quechua roots: chacha - warmi (men and women)
- Ways of walking with the communities and the people

Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILAG) – Greetings in the Quechchi language by Violeta. Violeta arrived by boat to the capital city. What gives life to the ILAG is education in a country with few resources and still in conflict. Education is an opportunity to rediscover what it means to be church in a patriarchal society. Education that liberates is a transversal theme. The eight ministries take the transversal themes adding to the bi-vocational ministries. Most of the pastors are farmers and it did help rethinking the church. In a context of oppression of women, where the main church is complicit, women express their ideas about the impact of violence. This drove the church to the decision to educate and sensitize young children. Three years ago, through the Educational Center, four young women from rural areas were offered vocational techniques based on the value of women, their rights, and building up for a better future. Violeta indicates that the “Miracle” center means a lot to her. She is participating for two years learning with other women from rural communities, changing for better “life is not only to have children, we can have a profession, be active, and engage in entrepreneur activities”.



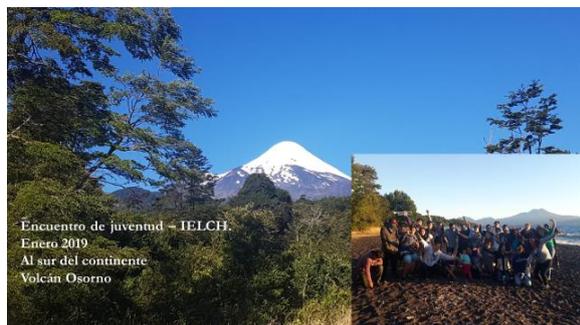
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) – The Church has lived two years in transition with a Synod Council working on recommended changes in the face of the institutional crisis. In May, the election of the Synod Council will receive the report. On the other hand, the youth (persons from 13 to 17 years old) brought motivation. In this line, leaders and pastors are contributing to strengthening the church.

Fixing the House

- The title of this presentation seems perhaps strange. It aims at reinforcing an idea that could deliver a lot. It is obvious that, when we talk about fixing the house, we are saying that it was "chaotic." Two years now, the church elected a new Synod Council giving it the task of taking into account criticisms, observations and suggestions for change. We faced a severe institutional crisis (I will explain it later) linked to correct fraternal relations. Both aspects corresponded to the implementation of a new structure and constitution. Two new positions in place that, in the practice, collided. The changes under these new constitution focus in having a Bishop and President (lay) with a drastic separation on the responsibilities of both positions. This is one of the reasons why in the practices it collided. While facing decisions, everything indicated that only one of the two leaders should express decision (President) and such a decision implied the scope of the other position. The church was not fully prepared for this way of governance. For now, the current Synod council was working to resolve this situation and practiced agreement, through dialogue, in decision taking. The agreement was to be always in dialogue. We began to "fix the house" using the proper time to engage in conversation, understanding mutually, and deciding.

Some moments rebuilding better relationships

- Trainings on various ecclesiastical and administrative topics aiming at renewing "ANEW" leaderships. We were encouraged to promote positive and highly motivated leaders. To this end, participation in training spaces focused on conflict resolution and management following the regional training held this in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil 2018 in the frame of the sustainability processes.
- The Assembly will be informed of two instances to renew the ecclesiological spirit. First, the youth work that bring persons who are vibrate in music, they contact other teenagers in the communities, and organized a retreat, accompanied by adults, renewing the youth pastoral ministry. To date there were 3 youth camps with emphasis on music, care and self-care, citizen participation, and Lutheran Identity. Their new songs and impetus "disturbed" many of us, but it has full support. They are the leaders.
- A "recycling" day with a pastoral – theological emphasis for ministers from the two Lutheran churches.



United Evangelical Church of Cuba – Lutheran Synod (IEU-SL) – The IEU is an autonomous and indigenous church; small and growing, with ecumenical influence at government and society levels. It faces three challenges: high education, the socialism model does not include the church (temples) but the political relations are good; and the new growth of the blockage. Motivations: the church counts with preaching places, evangelization linked to church properties – all legal processes were fulfilled to have them in place. Premises are important for the image and role of the church. Evangelism in the streets, because the Cuban constitution does not forbid it, is a practice even though the Cuban church forbids it. Alternatives: approval of the 2018-2030 strategic plan that includes church growth, theological formation (seminary, local, books) also for lay people. The church has been supported by lay people and allowed organizing the mission in Chicharrones, Havana and Dajao.



Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) – The congregations revitalize the church and, at the same time, the challenges are in the field. Women did energize the project “Empowered to Heal” in response to their needs seeking to improve living conditions. Women are empowered in aspects of justice, conflict resolution. After the agreement of the conflict, the “From War to Peace” focuses with 20 families of former combatants to be incorporated into life through income generation. Families have managed to demonstrate that it is possible to move to civil life without the use of weapons. In Medellin is an example of this action. The IELCO serves the Venezuelan community through a center for migrants. The universal priesthood - motivates to be involved in the IELCO ministries. With the Lutheran School of Theology, complemented with the regional (SEMLA, EST / InS) network adds to theological trainings. The church has moved from the internal crisis towards healing. Reconciliation in different levels is in place. Finally, in time of crisis it is encouraging that the IELCO continues strengthening the accompaniment with sister churches in the global communion.



De la guerra a la paz - Medellín



Community connection

Empoderadas para sanar - Ibagué



Centro de atención a migrantes – Paz de Ariporo, Villavicencio, Bucaramanga y Bogotá D.C.



Programa de Formación Integral al Liderazgo Eclesial



Sanidad de relaciones y Reconciliación



Acompañamiento iglesias hermanas y Comunión Global



Session IV – Group Work

In six groups, the participants follow the questions: considering the context, what actions have revitalized the church and inspire you. The questions are developed deepening the presentations during the day.

Group 6:

- Youth inspires and motivates all churches. Children need to be empowered too.
- Climate change - although it was not one of the topics in the presentations, it was decided to include the topic given its global relevance. Our prophetic voices link to the issue of climate justice.
- Work of the sister churches: not only of big churches, neither the finances; also the human capacity of small communities. This generates greater communion, topics that transversally support and empower knowledge among churches. Support at national level, and also locally and internationally.
- Theological education taking churches to another level, promoting more involvement of people.
- Migration - ILM, ILCO, IELCO, IELU - as theme that revitalized the life of the churches. It is a continental reality and represents the challenge of how to respond to the humanitarian crisis; an opportunity to address this issue.

Group 5

- Challenges: work in a polarized and fundamentalist world. Environment, land and social organization: payments and unpaid. Domestic violence, migration, unemployment. Conflict in the church, climate change and discrimination.
- Goals: Flexibility, each church does everything they can based on constant change. Creativity - different responses and solutions to the same challenges, in evangelization for positive change. Sports, music, cultural activities and agriculture. Accompaniment to historically discriminated people. Diversity in the church and different capacities. The church is not a building but a place that goes towards people. Liturgical renovation (creativity) to encourage growth of communities. Liturgy encourages every person to live faith.
- Theological formation for the future generation is a topic to improve. There are solutions with short distance courses, training along bi-vocational professions.

Group 4

- Strengthening youth leadership that is committed to the growth of the churches
- Maintain balance between diakonia and community life
- Build strategic plans for the medium and long term in order to know the projection and goals
- Continuous training, multiply knowledge
- Give continuity to dialogue regarding conflict resolution within the churches
- Strengthen the participation of a lay leaders affirming the priesthood of all believes.

Group 3

- Women: training and networking
- Hospitality: all the work presented were received. Let people come and find place goes well with going to meet them.
- Church in the public space: how to influence politics and political leaders. The level of influence depends of the context.
- Youth: most of the participants shared how they are prepared for participation
- Ministry: there are different types of ministries and they should contribute to the church/communities revival.
- Theological education: an emergent theme in various churches and it links to the meaning of ministerial formation, which embraces lay people.
- Children: We believe that, for the region, it is important to empower children to grow up with strong identity and get involved in church and will serve in society in the future.
- Indigenous peoples: being inclusive the church is open and welcomed.

Group 2

- Common aspects: tensions / reconciliation, rethinking / reforming, vulnerable groups (women, children). There was no specific discussion because much of what is done is reacting and not planned. Bi-vocational as a need for sustainability, environment, education as transversal theme, native peoples.
- Empty spaces - in the sense specific actions are needed: elderly, LGBTBI because it is not visible, urban mission, young children - there are intentions and projections, but not actions, women (in the sense indicated above). Evangelical, we must declare ourselves as such and identify
- Disagreements: vocation - salary and bureaucracy, Pentecostalism

Group 1

- Bi-vocational participation: different realities - little presence of pastors; we are worried about the future if we do not count with well-trained group performing specific tasks. Why bi-vocational and why not multi-vocational - we believe that there are several vocations and if we talk about this we mean mission work:
 - o To work with indigenous peoples (inclusion) - what is the reason for engaging in this ministry and their participation in contextual theology and accompaniment.
 - o Migration: we wonder how churches are prepared to work with different people to overcome xenophobia and the effects on the economy, how to accompany them and develop networks that serve persons migrating to other countries
 - o Continuous training, develop of human capacity that include persons from different age.

All this needs to be enhanced with a quality theological education/formation.

May 12: Session V – You Send Your Spirit

Theological Reflection on the Context Analysis – *You send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the Earth* Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer, Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice

The task before me is to follow the rich contextual analyses of Linda and Jonathan, and provide strong theological input on the theme from Psalm 104:30, “You send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” I am to source that with input from our Lutheran identity. The only challenge here is not to say too much, as there is no shortage of things to say, because Lutherans are people of reformation and transformation. The truth is in this time we can only scratch the surface of how member churches are called and gifted to transform the identified complex issues.

Before I get to the theological analysis from our Lutheran identity, I am becoming more convinced that we cannot take for granted what we mean when we talk about identity, and theology today. Therefore, I want to encourage us by saying (1) a pastoral word, and then (2) a word about theology, and what it means to think theologically.

First, a pastoral word about Lutheran identity. Each region of the LWF, and many member churches, including LAC, ELCA and ELCIC have been engaged in studies of Lutheran identity for years. The LWF has always been studying identity in different modes, but we are about to engage in a global study together, specifically to find out, where are the leading edges of Lutheran identity today, in spirituality, anthropology and ecclesiology. We are going to approach this through the third article of the creed, given that the Christian life and the church belong to the third article of the creed. So I want to spend a little time on that word, **identity**. As I talk about this throughout the communion, I know that the concept of “identity” can feel confining or exclusionary to some, while “identity” can be embracing and liberating to others. I want to underline the second aspect.

In Scripture, identity is liberating. An identity frees people to be something different in the world. Having an identity as a child of God gives you a positive basis for actively being something other than the oppressive political, social or economic narratives would define you to be. If we look for the central Biblical text about identity, we go to the giving of the Torah. The Torah was given during the defining act of liberating God’s people. At that moment in

history, the Hebrew people had been defined by the world's oppressive systems (political, military and economic) as slaves, means to the ends of a political and economic empire. So God called them up, and gave them a new law, with new ideas about how to live on the land, how to establish the Sabbath ideas of economic and ecological sufficiency, and new political laws to welcome the stranger and care for the vulnerable in your midst. This identity gave them the freedom to have, as Walt Brugemann puts it, a new moral imagination. Their identity was not necessarily exclusionary, nor restrictive. In fact, they God identified them as a light to **all** nations within creation. Their identity freed them from the prevailing economic and political definitions to imagine what it would look like if they could live as the creatures God created us to be. Their new identity liberated them to be that example in the world.

Now fast forwarding, it turns out humans are very bad at that kind of thing. So, Christ embodied the cosmic reconciliation with all creation, and the Holy Spirit becomes the pedagogue, in lieu of a law. That is the meaning of our baptismal identity. In our baptism, we are marked and sealed by the Holy Spirit as the guide and source of our identity. Baptism is a liberating covenant for all people of all nations.

So when we speak of Lutheran identity, we are not talking about defining parameters of a normative identity where we all need to be 16th century German men. Rather, we are talking about being freed to be our authentic self – as a beloved creature of the Creator. To be Lutheran is a mode of understanding how we are liberated by God's grace from the oppressive political, social and economic narratives that create the situations of vulnerability and modern slavery that Jonathan and Linda have analysed and seek to define people as economic or political instruments. A positive identity provides the moral imagination to live liberated from the constraints of those prevailing systems, and in fact to reform and transform them. That liberation is the goal of a Lutheran identity. This is why the Lutheran reformation, which began with the theological idea about grace and freedom ended up reforming/transforming not only the church, but the social, educational, and political system of the day, and beyond. So today, "Lutheran" is a mode of being part of the body of Christ, and we want to ask, what are the theological tools that Lutherans use to cultivate that moral imagination to address the issues that Linda and Jonathan have named?

Now, I want to make two methodological comments about theological tools. First, theology requires three different kinds of "data". (a) Luther and Lutherans have always understood the Bible as normative. (b) Confessional documents (CA, the catechisms, the Book of Concord, etc.), which explain or interpret Scripture, and worship form part of our tradition. (c) But we have also always looked to personal or religious experience as a way to "test" or make meaning. Anselm defined theology as "faith seeking understanding", and Luther claimed that one becomes a theologian by living and dying. After praying and studying, one must try out what we have learned to see if it results in transformative love. Much of Luther's theology was pastoral and occasional, often responding directly to the experiences of life, including religious experience. In other words, Lutherans maintain the primacy of Scripture as the witness to Jesus Christ who is the Word. But Lutherans modulate between the "data" of Scripture, confessions and experience as part of a *hermeneutic* or interpretive theological cycle. We seek understanding by constantly discerning what scripture, tradition and experience mean in light of one another. This is what it means to "do theology". But in keeping with the theme of this COL, we ask what makes it transformative?

The theme of the 2017 CWME was Transforming Discipleship. One of the key contributions, in my opinion was the role that spirituality should play in "doing theology." Commenting on the importance of storytelling in feminist and womanist theology, Dr. Mulenga-Kaunda Mutale quoted Brene Brown as saying, "stories are data with soul." Dr. Mutale and others remind us that the trans-formational data of theology is not always the in-formation. But rather the trans-formational quality of theology, that is, the formation that moves us from common to critical sense – or gives us that new set of eyes to see and read the signs of the times – is the encounter with the reality of the other. A person's story isn't information about what happened. A story is an invitation to encounter a new reality revealed by their story. Narratives have ethical significance in developing moral imaginations. The CWME proposed that narratives should be one such source of transformational theological "data". Dr Dimitra Koukoura suggested that if theology is faith in dialogue with reason, as Anselm and Luther affirm, then institutions of Higher Education need to legitimize revelation and spirituality as acceptable sources of data along with natural and social scientific empiricism. If narratives about revelation and spirituality are accepted in theological discourse, theology and ethics can motivate a transformation of the learner's capacity to critically interpret the logic of dominate narratives in their

full social, economic, spiritual and ecological dimensions.⁶ We deepen our understanding when we use the full range of “data” to inform theological conclusions about these contextual issues that Linda and Jonathan outline.

Secondly, we need to be clear that Lutheran theology has three different modalities. (1) The first mode is Luther’s theology. What did Martin Luther say about the Bible or politics or family or beer? (2) The second mode is the Lutheran confessional tradition. What documents are in the Book of Concord, and which ones are authoritative for our churches. Luther wrote some and some of them were conciliar texts negotiated across decades and for very different contextual purposes. We do well to remind ourselves that every document does not hold equal weight within the constituted or traditional identity of LWF member churches. (3) The third mode is that we do theology today as Lutherans.

Our contemporary theological reflection is always rooted in the first two modes (Scripture and confessions). But when Lutherans “do theology” today, we rightfully inform our reflection and moral imagination with the full diversity of our ecumenical, indigenous, and inter-disciplinary perspectives, personal intersectionalities of gender, race, culture, age, language, ability, etc., and in light of contemporary interfaith, political, economic and ecological realities. So when we speak of transformative theology, we are talking about bringing our theological tradition, the practice of faith, and our lived experience into a critical dialogue with one another. Within this integrated, interpretive, hermeneutical cycle of text, tradition and experience, the Spirit can move, enlighten and free us to make meaning. In practice, this is spiritual theology.

The LAC/NA contexts and the work of the Spirit...

So now, let us think about the cultural and social lenses that we bring into this process of theological reflection in LAC and NA. I was recently in Hong Kong for the Asia Lutheran Identity Seminar, where we were analysing Lutheran understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit. In this LWF region, there are two distinct sources of pre-Christian and pre-Islamic influence on the understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the anthropological implications. The first influence is Hinduism and Buddhism (Atman). The second is Daoism and Confucianism. The extent to which these views affect the ideas about God and the work of God’s Spirit, and therefore our call as Lutherans to engage in this work, is amazing. Lutheran theology sounds so different in those two sub-regions because of those foundations.

There is no space in this presentation to unpack the depth of this conversation. However, the reason I bring it up here is that throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, there are distinctive indigenous beliefs and value systems that shape the way we hear and interpret different theological ideas. Those indigenous or ancient wisdom traditions are all legitimate theological “data” for answering Luther’s question, “what does this mean?” That is not to say they are all equally valid in light of the Gospel. Somehow, they all influence the questions we ask, and the interpretive path that we take towards understanding. That is why moral discernment and theological ethics is so complicated. You are the experts of your culture and identity. I only point you towards that reality because as I present theological ideas for us to use them our intergenerational dialogues, please acknowledge how your perspective influences, positively or negatively, our freedom to imagine God’s Mission, and the way the Spirit equips you to transform these realities.

Finally, let us get to the theological reflection on the context analysis. I will make two movements. The first is conceptual. I will provide a theological frame for interpreting the context analysis. The second is tactical or pedagogical. I will outline some theological tools that we have for addressing the analysis as a communion of Lutheran churches.

Theological reflection on the Contextual analysis.

Linda and Jonathan’s contextual analysis was actually overwhelming. They have outlined injustices due to urbanization, food insecurity, human rights violations, violence, crime, wealth disparity, racial and gender based

⁶ For more on this, see Rimmer, *Transforming and Moving: Two lessons from the 14th Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, delivered to the GlobeTheoLib Consortium, Geneva, 13 April, 2018.

violence, underemployment and a lack of access to quality education that disproportionately affect women and racial minorities particularly of Afro-descent in our region. It would be tempting to prioritize some of the issues named. Some churches do engage one or more of these issues depending on the identity and capacities of our members. For this task, we would need to identify indicators for measuring transformation related to health, access to education and social protection, and determine different strategies and tactics according to our local context. That may be a task for the dialogues and small groups.

For my part, I want highlight the multidimensional and interdependent nature of these problems. There is a political, economic, social and ecological intersectionality of exclusion and oppression at work across the issues identified. Where a person or people group is affected by more than one form of oppression, the experience of vulnerability and exclusion are multiplied. In some disciplines this is known as poly-victimization. In order to respond to the root causes of poly-victimization, we have to take an integrated, holistic view. As people of faith, the most integral and holistic Christian theological framework is also the most fundamental - the Trinity.

The whole of history – creation, redemption and sanctification, or transformation – happens within one Trinitarian *economy*. If we ever disintegrate any part of our diaconal work, advocacy, or spirituality from its rightful place within the Triune God's single creative, redeeming and sanctifying/transformational work, we run the risk of these elements of our life being co-opted or commodified by other discourses. For example, governments are happy to host interfaith dialogue as a way to promote national security, and publishers are happy to promote books on popular spirituality for profit. There may indeed be positive consequences to these efforts, but the point is that self-interested parties are happy to isolate any one of these issues and take a shallow approach for a short-term gain. By contrast, a Christian faith based perspective, should root our public witness regarding gender justice or climate change or economic justice within our larger theology of creation, justification, and vocation. We can guard against ideologies that seek to commodify human beings and non-human creation as means to another end. This holistic view of context analyses is already a significant contribution to the discourse in the public space. This brings us back to the themes of the 2017 LWF Assembly, Creation, Human Beings and Salvation Not for Sale.

Our work to seek justice in every sector is part of the Trinity's economy of grace. The same Word that Creates is the same Word that became flesh to Redeem, and is the same Word of Promise by which the Holy Spirit gives the freedom and moral imagination to transform. So our voice in the public space should bear witness to that economy of grace, in which our prophetic proclamation cannot be devalued as mere words, nor can our diaconal ministry be given instrumental value as mere acts. Our vocation to do justice and seek peace is a call to participate in the Trinity's unified economy of grace.

It helps to take an ecological look at a word group. The Greek word for "the whole inhabited earth" is *oikoumene*, from which we derive the word "ecumenism". The root of this word is "oikos", which means "household". The word *oikonomos* means "the law of the household", or, the way our common home regulates itself. *Oikonomos* is the root of the word, economy. So economics should serve the nature of the household, and should be derived from the logic of the home. The Greek word for the logic of our common home is *oikologia*, or "ecology". So we can see in the words themselves that the created earth, the economies that regulate relationships between beings and the health of earth's ecology are interdependent. If a political structure, economy or ecology is disintegrated from its holistic, integrated reality, they will break down and become more vulnerable to corruption or instrumentalization, as we see operating in Jonathan and Linda's contextual analyses. From a Trinitarian perspective, there can be no market economy that is free from ecological, social and political realities. The political and social injustice that results from this disintegration is evident in economics. And it is now evident in ecology.

We see the effects of dis-integration operating within ethno-nationalist populist movements such as the PSL in Brazil. At a time when Brazil was to host the 2019 UNFCCC Conference of Parties, which will focus on the theme of biodiversity, President Bolsonaro is promising to exploit the rainforest for economic growth. His discourse ignores the fact that the economy is embedded in the ecology whose health is completely dependent on biodiversity. Biodiversity with a local ecology may seem like a less pressing issue on the order of Notre Dame burning, as illustrated by Linda. It can be difficult to think about mobilizing resources to protect forests when black and female bodies are violated and imprisoned. Nevertheless, we know that the effects of climate change

disproportionately affects those who are already most vulnerable and marginalized including women, children, and those who live day to day. Ethno-nationalist discourse about land rights and usage goes hand in hand with narratives that dehumanize minority, indigenous, and LGBTQ+ communities. Ethno-nationalist discourse questions diversity in most forms. Whether the suspicion is cast in terms of philosophy or sociology (“pluralism” or “gender ideology” for instance), promoting uniformity as the only guarantor of social cohesion denies the life giving harmony that drives the poetry of the creation narrative, and the biological and ecological health of ecosystems.

The latest IPBES report on biodiversity shows that 1,000,000 species are now threatened with extinction. It calls for transformative change. There is that word again. The report suggests that transformation requires a holistic approach to the issues, whose causes are not discrete, but related in one causal economy. If we look for the theology, or the God-logic to motivate a holistic response to a holistic problem, the Trinity is the most fundamental theological category to apply to inter-related contextual realities.

Psalm 104 is the basis for our theme of transformation and renewal. Scripture conceives of the Holy Spirit as Holy Wisdom. God’s breath, *ruah*, or wind, was the dynamism of *creatio originalis* that brought forth the earth’s creative agency. Psalm 104 testifies that this life giving Spirit is present in and among every creature and creation itself as the renewing, transformative dynamism still that is active in *creatio continua*. Renewal, sanctification, or transformation is part of the unified economy of the Trinity. Unified because God is love and love is both being and action. Love is the source of our salvation and the means of our sanctification. Love is the source of our creation and the driver of our vocation.

When we talk about transformation, we are talking about the logical result or working out of our justification. Justice is the result of justification. Paul asks the Galatians to consider, you are freed for what? You are freed in order to participate in the imaginative, creative work of the Trinity. A Trinitarian approach is the most fundamental theological concept to apply to this suite of issues in the economic, social, political and ecological estates.

The second observation that I would like to make about the analyses was the perception of a lack of trust between citizens, governments and civil society sectors. The wealth imbalance that Jonathan described and the power imbalance between those who have means of wealth production, particularly the gap between those who have ownership of the land, creates distrust about most efforts for meaningful agrarian reform and social protection. Moreover, when those leaders are associated with the religious horizon that Jonathan refers to, that can erode trust in the church’s legitimacy to be an upstander, or a guarantor for social protection. For this reason, churches must look to our theology to maintain a critical distance from narratives that oppose the truth about power, liberty, justice and peace.

Hanna Arendt was a philosopher before and after World War II. She covered the Nazi war trials in Nuremberg, particularly the trial of Adolf Eichman. While listening to the testimony of those who took part in the bureaucracy of the Nazi government, she described what she called the banality of evil. Evil, she suggested, was not necessarily a generative force in itself. Rather, evil happened when there was a vacuum. She wrote that the Nazi experiment demonstrated that when one follows the bureaucratic will, and gives up their liberty to maintain a critical distance from those in power, one gives up the capacity for critical reflection. Paulo Freire called that capacity “critical consciousness”, or “conscientization”. During a workshop on transformative pedagogy that I led among teaching theologians from the Africa region last year in Rwanda, we experienced again the way this banality of evil operated in the lead up to the Rwandan Genocide. When people let go of their liberty to critique the political regime’s dehumanizing narrative about the ethnic “other”, masses of citizens conformed to the dominant narrative. In other words, they let go of the gift of moral imagination, or the freedom to imagine the alternative to these issues.

Ideally unjust social, political and economic narratives will fail on their own logic and loose political support, if citizens are encouraged to open, honest debate in a society that fosters critical reflection among its population. However, we see that conformity, and the lack of critical distance from ethno-nationalist discourse is at the heart of many of the issues that Linda and Jonathan identified. So, what theological tools do we use to maintain that distance? First of all, as Lutherans, we need to revive our understanding of the Two Realms. Rather than creating a simple secular sphere that was arguably part of Augustine’s theory, or deferring to the temporal

power of the state as was the case with later Lutheran quietism that led to the relationship between the church and Nazi government, Luther understood the Two Realms as a way to avoid spiritualizing politics and politicizing religion. The point was to avoid the situation that Jonathan describes, where the church is associated with the political realm to the point that there is a religious horizon to state sponsored injustice. This leads to the abuses of power and economy that Linda identifies functioning in the industrial prison complex.

Maintaining a critical distance from state power helps the church guard against the perception of distrust, and safeguards a place where people of faith are called to live out their vocation and engage in moral discernment – namely the church, the state and the home. Today, I advocate for adding a fourth estate, the ecological. The point is that these estates are the places where we are called to live our faith, to realize justice as the outcome of our justification, and to participate in the transformative work of the Spirit.

Understanding the Two Realms and the Three (Four) Estates helps us maintain a critical distance to critique the logic of oppressive or unjust systems. This distance will help the church and people of faith avoid the distrust that comes from being associated with abuses of power. Maintaining a proper posture towards the state also maintains the church as the place to discern the theo-logy, the God-logic to reflect on the logic of oppressive systems, and shape our authentic, faithful voice in the public space that operates with transparency and trust. I will speak about a methodology for doing that in a moment. But I want to make one more point. Maintaining this critical distance helps us to have room for moral imagination about being the alternative that the world seeks.

As an instrument of grace and the in-breaking of the kingdom wherever Christ is proclaimed and the sacraments administered, the church should offer the imaginative alternatives to systems of oppression. For this reason, the LWF study document *The Church in the Public Space*, not only suggests that the church advocate for open, safe, inclusive, transparent participatory spaces in civil society. The document reminds us that churches themselves need to just, open, inclusive, safe, inclusive, transparent participatory spaces, because churches are public spaces.

But the church is also a body, a people, which in both the classical Greek sense and the Pauline sense, make the church a polis – a political body in the world. In his book *Torture and Eucharist: Theology Politics and the Body of Christ*⁷, William Kavanaugh documented the way that worship was a form of resistance to the political injustices exercised during the Pinochet regime in Chile. Under Pinochet, the state's main tactic for shrinking democratic space and oppressing dissent was to disappear bodies. In this context, (*and in the context of a theological exploration of ex-communication versus communion*) Kavanaugh brilliantly demonstrates that the public act of Eucharistic worship is a political act of embodiment. Not only does being the church incarnate the body of Christ, in the liturgy of word and Sacrament, but it incarnates the body of Christ as a political body in the world. Those who are re-presented by their bodies' membership in the body of Christ have their agency and dignity as political beings publicly recognized. In the face of a political body who utilizes its power to dis-appear bodies, the Church is an act of resistance insofar as it appears, embodies, realizes those bodies in the public space as creatures with inherent dignity. Kavanaugh is a Roman Catholic theologian, but this theme of the political nature of worship is the focus of Lutheran Bernd Wannewetsch's book, *Political Worship*⁸.

Linda pointed out that we are in an age where black and female bodies are disappeared, either through violence or incarceration, and Jonathan has demonstrated the ways in which human rights defenders and journalists are also being disappeared. In our age of shrinking democratic and operational space, reclaiming the political nature of the body of Christ as a people and a public space in the world is deeply significant. Of course, we need to bear in mind the feminist critique of the public space as a masculine or discursive space.⁹ Jesus reveals the non-violent, relational nature of his body's being in the world. The incarnation and passion of Christ as such is a critique of patriarchal power structures that resonates with contemporary feminist and womanist theological perspectives. The presence of his body in the public space was a reality that the powers-that-be had to deal with, just as the church can be when it re-presents disappeared bodies of black, immigrant, LGBTQ+, female, children, etc. in the

⁷ William Kavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist : Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Wiley) 1988.

⁸ Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship : Ethics for Christian Citizens* (Oxford) 2004.

⁹ Specifically, this is a critique levied against Jürgen Habermas' discursive theories of public space.

public space.¹⁰ However, as Christ shows us in the midst of his passion, and as articulated by theologians such as John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink, this presence is by nature a non-violent resistance that transforms the powers and principalities through the public exercise of love.

Methodology for a response – methodological implications

The public exercise of love is a good way to frame a discussion of methodologies by which the church can be these public spaces of critical reflection and resistance. It begins with recognizing that while faith is personal, it is never private. Faith is personal, but it is always public. This is why James writes faith without works is dead, and even Luther says that faith should always be busy and active. Grace is given “for you”, as we say in the two most precious words of the liturgy, but as already mentioned above, your personal faith informs your public vocation; your justification always moves you to justice.

Lutherans also affirm the priesthood of all believers, where every member is embraced and empowered for their vocation. Therefore, churches need to do the internal work of self-critical reflection. Every church should engage in power and gender audits, such as Linda suggested. If our churches are not open, transparent, and safe participatory spaces for women, youth, LGBTQ+, indigenous, children, immigrants and all, then we must transform and reform our structures that exclude, until they embrace and equip the priesthood of all believers for their vocation.

The practice of being the church as a public space where every human being can participate in the Spirit's transformative love makes spiritual theology an act of resistance. A lived spiritual theology also creates a living alternative to exclusionary forces. One example of a radical act of embrace is the Hunkapi Ceremony of the Lakota Nation of Native Americans. The ritual of Hunkapi is an act of incorporating non-kin into the tribal body. This ritual of incorporation is a public act of embrace that strengthens social cohesion. Native American artist Oscar Howe Tour describes this ritual in the following:

“Strong kinship relationships were the heart of Dakota and Lakota families and communities. As a result, Lakota and Dakota people made use of the hunkapi ceremony for multiple purposes. One such purpose included building and reinforcing trade and exchange alliances with other Native nations and their people. The making of relatives ceremony further strengthened bonds between persons and families who were not related in the non-Native context of families and relatives. The hunkapi ceremony was the process by which individual persons and their families were joined together as family with other individual persons and their families. The ceremony formally created new extended families. The hunka (child-beloved) was the person being adopted. In traditional Lakota and Dakota culture, the hunkapi ceremony was usually performed to unite a younger person with a family. The ceremony was often a way of solidifying relationships with other individual persons as well as with Wakan Tanka (Great Spirit or Creator).”¹¹

We see in this example how rituals such as Hunkapi, or baptism and eucharist can serve to strengthen social cohesion, embrace and inclusivity. The church is by nature the eschatological place of hospitality and cosmic reconciliation. It is the primary location for the people to be reconciled to the Holy Trinity, and participate in the Spirit's liberating, and transformative work. The Church, and specifically the Eucharistic communion, is the place where Holy Spirit works to make us more human.

This kind of transformative humanization is a critical aspect of Paulo Freire's methods of transformative pedagogy. Paulo Freire believed that education did not transform the world, but that education transformed people, and people transformed the world. Transformative requires a certain kind of pedagogy, however, that does not perpetuate

¹⁰ For more on this political reality of Christ's body, see my chapter “What is Truth?” in *Resisting Exclusion*, eds. Simone Sinn and Eva Harasta (EVA) 2019.

¹¹ <https://oscarhowetour.wordpress.com/mobridge-murals/hunkapi-ceremony/> . For more information on the Hunkapi practice of the Lakota, see Joseph Brown, *Account of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Penguin Books) 1972, Ella Cara Deloria, *Waterlily* (University of Nebraska) 1988, and James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (University of Nebraska) 1991, and *Lakota Society* (University of Nebraska) 1982.

models of domination, colonialization or extension that views the student or learner as a passive recipient. A transformative pedagogy must necessarily humanize the learner as an active participant in generating knowledge. Transformative education begins by posing problems that communities are dealing with. A transformative pedagogy engages in a dialogical, generative thinking that values indigenous, traditional or latent knowledge in processes of meaning making and finding creative solutions.

Transformative pedagogical methods are themselves an act of resistance to exclusionary or colonizing philosophies of education, and for that reason have been vilified as controversial. However, they are critical for empowering people to read the word and critically interpret the world in culturally meaningful ways. In her article “The Sources and Resources of Our Indigenous Theology”, Dina Ludeña Cebrián offers a case study from indigenous Peruvian cultures. The traditional practice of living day to day resists exclusionary monetary, food and trade economies. Hers is one brilliant example of the ways that indigenous culture, knowledge and traditional social practices provide examples of ways to re-imagine churches as communities that are free to resist commodification and be alternatives in the world that offer social protection, and economic transformation.

The dialogical methodology of transformative pedagogy also has theological applications. Transformational theology implies a hermeneutical cycle, or interpretive cycle between different aspects of our lives. I mentioned above that Lutherans hold to an interpretive cycle between scripture, tradition and experiences. But we also hold together a dialogue between the catholicity of our shared Tradition and the contextuality of our lived traditions. Additionally, the LWF Communion offers another dialogical gift. Because we are in communion with Lutheran sisters and brothers from every region, and a tremendous diversity of political, economic, social and epistemological contexts, we can engage in a rich dialogue of trans-contextual reflection. This keeps our catholicity from being disembodied, but also guards against domesticating the gospel in our local contexts.

The trans-contextual reflection that we find in our LWF Communion is a gift that offers tremendous potential for transformative moral imagination. Reconciling the diversity of our global communion is always a challenge that must be negotiated. Nevertheless, our diverse communion is a very real gift. Our communion is a horizon of hope in which we can enter into dialogue and critical reflection. The Communion’s role is to convene those theatres of interaction, those holy meeting places where two or more are gathered so that the living Word can come from beyond us, the *Verbum extra nos*, and transform us so that we can transform the world. In this sense, being communion is a methodology of transformative pedagogy.

And in communion we find allies. And here I refer to Linda’s story of the Pastor that she viewed as an ally. In communion, around the Word and at the table of reconciliation, we can make bonds as allies, speak a public word of solidarity, and display public sign acts of resistance and embodied witness with and on behalf of one another. Dr Richard Perry at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago has written about the importance of “physicality” in theological ethics. Engaging in deep moral imagination, or critical theological reflection is not only a cognitive exercise. Critical reflection is transformed by physical presence and the experience of sharing life in solidarity. This is ultimately the radical nature of the doctrine of the Word. The deep incarnation of the Word in the stuff of creation was a cosmic reconciliation, the Divine dwelling with our nature. The incarnation of Christ fundamentally transforms the relationship between the Creator and creation. This is the good news of Emmanuel, God with us. This is the way that Luther speaks about creation as *larvae dei*, a “mask of God”. The real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of Holy Communion is not only a liturgical confession, but it is based in the larger notion that the Spirit is at work in the creation because the finite can contain the infinite (*infinitum capax infiniti*).

What this means is that the Spirit is still moving in, with and under creation to transform us. And when we enter into physical communion with one another, we invite the Spirit to move among us. My own two children are examples of the transformative nature of this kind of transformative physicality. We lived in Sénégal for four years. The population is 95% Muslim, and culturally Islamic. During our years, my two boys were cared for by a dear Muslim woman named Néné Gadio. We lived together, shared words, meals, and cared for one another. And so, in Europe and North America where nativist discourse seeks to conform us to a fear of Islam or a negative image of women or black bodies, particularly of African culture, there is no way that my two boys will be conformed to those narratives. They have been transformed by the renewing of their minds through physical communion.

Through the lived experience of interfaith and cross-cultural care, my two white, American boys have been transformed into allies with Néné Gadio, a black, Muslim woman.

So, to conclude, the experience of communion is itself a transformative methodology or pedagogy that critiques, resists and offers alternatives to exclusionary and oppressive logics. And this brings us full circle to where we began – the Trinity. The Trinity is a communion of love. Theologically this is called perichoresis. The life giving, synergistic communion of love, and mutual interdependence begets life. As a perichoresis of love, the Trinity does what it is. Communion resists verbalism, because the Word becomes act. Communion resists activism, because its life is always nurtured by the critical and constructive Word of life. And in this balance between act and being, as Freire urges, we find true transformation.

Where our congregations are a perichoresis of love, the Spirit that creates, redeems and transforms is active in our communion. In communion the Spirit of the Triune God is the basis of our identity, received in our baptismal liberation. And where that Spirit lives among us, it is the pedagogue that opens our minds to the moral imagination to live as the life giving alternative which God intends. To courageously work out our salvation in a manner worthy of the calling that we have graciously received.

Liberty and Moral imagination as a fundamental mark of Lutheran identity

As Lutherans, we have an identity in this world. Wherever we encounter systems of oppression or narratives that operate with a death dealing logic of exclusion or disintegration of creation, we claim our freedom to participate in the Spirit's reformation and transformation. Latin American Lutheran theologian Walter Altmann reminds us that Luther was a liberation theologian. The trigger that launched his reformation was the realization that people were burdened by fear and systems of unjust power. He translated the Word of grace and wrote new catechisms so that the good news could speak to the heart. Rooted in this identity of being liberated by God's grace, people were free to imagine theo-logical alternatives to the prevailing logics of the day. Thus began a dynamic reformation of the political, economic, social and ecclesial status quo.

However, we must remember that at its core, Luther's reformation was never an iconoclastic change for change's sake. It was an attempt to follow the liberating theo-logic of love to its liberating and life giving end. Of course, it did not always hit the target, and the reformation unleashed new political, philosophical and economic systems that we struggle to resist today. But what remains is the courage that we can resist, and we can continue to imagine alternatives to the situations that Linda and Jonathan revealed in their contextual analyses. As a communion of Lutheran churches, we are free to imagine new ways to catechize, educate and proclaim the liberating word in ways that speak to our hearts today. And insofar as we return to the non-violent source of life, then our communion can encourage and equip us to resist conformity and commodification, and imagine new ways to participate in the Spirit of Love that creates, renews and transforms the face of the Earth.

Questions and dialogue in Plenary

Idalia Negrón: In a polarized world, we have to talk about the interrelation between who we are and how we act.

Pedro Bullón: Being and acting are two aspects that involves knowledge. You referred to the ontological aspect along linked to act. I mean, knowing in John 8:32 refers to "without forgetting." It puts the person in the image of the encounter. Being able to talk about the truth, in times of post truth, is a difficult narrative, how do we do it in a post-modern world/ context in which, as Lutherans, it is difficult to develop community without accepting others?

Chad Rimmer Response/reflection: This brings us to the depth of philosophy and theology. There is a movement in the question about the connection between being and acting which is ontological and is significant in everyday life. The philosophical aspect is the connection between who we are and what we do - a moral discernment. Paul makes the distinction in 1Corinthians 13 and St. John affirms that God is love. 1Corinthians is not a text about emotions or romance; the theological virtues speak of the work produced by the Holy Spirit. When we are in God, we are in love. This is the reason why love is eternal and endures. Love is the character of God and his actions. It covers healing, reconciliation and the character of the church. The Lutheran way of speaking about this is (Luther) that we do not find it through our own wisdom because Jesus reveals it to us in words and actions. Here is the answer to the second question about the truth and the later truth. The LWF will develop a work on what it means

to proclaim the truth, going to dark places and from there living the incarnation. To be the political body in the world, as Jesus faced the political system, we have to get involved in civil society with good arguments in defense of that loving body. Against those narratives, we refuse to be exclusive; that is, the body of God maintains the unity of the body. Of course, this is difficult! I recognize it and see it as an opportunity to say, look at us; this is how we affirm / say that diversity is reconciled for a global communion. This is difficult at all levels, but this is the global.

Ángela Trejo: When talking about public space, space for men, feminist theology and gender studies made the leap. I like the idea of recovering the church as a public space because in Mexico the reference to a monopolistic space was established. The church as a right space for women brings a theological approach not because it is a political fact but because of gender equity.

Karla Steilmann: To be liberated by God's grace to, in that freedom, transform realities (internal, external wide). Freedom comes with commitments - free to transform and the public space leads to the doors, to the outside. Our church is already a public space and the transformation has to be leaved from there.

Silvia Genz: Two aspects, the Trinitarian God linked to the politicized unit that divides the church and families; and the appearance of unity.

Chad Rimmer Response/reflection: We must use freedom to transform ourselves; this leads me to Luther's formulation of being free not for ourselves; but to serve and love, for institutional transformation. The theology of the cross, yesterday I observed its link to the good news about the incarnation in which God is shown here, refuses to leave, and accompanies us in a broken world. For me, as a Lutheran, I see the difference with respect to other theologies (prosperity gospel, etc.) and it means living the theology of the cross under the law of the gospel. This is often difficult because people want to hear it. Going to the margins and communities can be interpreted as a political act. Regarding the question where churches are considered political and during a visit of a group from Denmark, Martin Junge said: "It's not about being political, it's about being in community and serving vulnerable people. And when they are seen to serve vulnerable people they are considered political, but they never ask to be vulnerable."

Victoria Cortez: Thank you for such an important contribution on spirituality that we do not give space rather focus on the gospel. The ILFE works with communities that have their spiritualities, but in dialogue, it is transformed. For me, the peasants are theologians because they have a conception of God. The important thing is that God of love encompasses all.

Chad Rimmer Response/reflection: There is a spirituality in Luther and even in Luther's writings. Luther was a pastoral theologian and wrote as a pastor. His main theme was justification. His letters express love and care (letter to a woman who loses the child). In the area of spiritual theology, we have much to say as Lutherans. In his letter to the Holy Communion against the fanatics, it is affirmed that the Spirit of God can be found even in a rock, river, and fire. God reveals God Himself in the Holy Supper. What Luther says is that revelation is how God decides through the gift of the Spirit. It is not a conflict situation but an invitation to people to turn to revelation.

Danielle Dokman: while you talk about identity, I think about church at home. We agree that we are not who we want to be. A church of 278 years with identities, in the last couple of years, education was not used to develop a form of moral imagination. In a world where love is mostly temporary, not lasting, how do we address/get the moral imagination to be very effective?

Chad Rimmer Response/reflection: We cannot answer the question because we operate with a horizon of hope. Sanctification and the process of transformation means being simultaneously sinner and freed. The question makes me think that the word and sacraments drive us to the world and bringing out experiences of wins and losses. We cannot escape traditions. The practice of education needs to bring change – this is the promise of the Spirit. If grace is God's initiative, then we stay with the Spirit that will drive the moral imagination.

Gilberto Quezada makes the following comments: I stay with images: a) the need to recover the rejected bodies in the Eucharist, and b) the image of your children in the end of the presentation, a powerful narrative about what they received becoming source of wisdom that will keep them aware in the future.

Sessions VI and VII – Intergenerational Dialogue

The youth network explained the methodology for the intergenerational dialogue. Five groups lead to work on, how does context analysis speak to the experience of life in the church. How does theological reflection speak to the context of churches? The objective of the dialogues is to enrich oneself, by sharing knowledge between generations, and having a tool to expand dialogue and participation

Group Blue

To the question: How to be relevant? Contextual theological education is important for church growth. The church can and must fill in the gaps. From the foundation of love, the church is close to vulnerable and historically discriminated people. How? Using existing systems, we are one as a Communion, the inter-American human rights mechanisms, a network that uses communication and makes visible the problems and actions, making people's stories and experiences visible and true rather than counting them only as statistics.

The church is one of the few spaces where people of different ages participate. Conflicts - church is a community voice that wants to maintain its environment, rights such as respect for land, climate justice and how to fight against mega-enterprises and life-threatening politics. The message of the gospel must be clear which means incarnation and resurrection. We have to open ways to act without falling into fear. Fundamentalists say that we are the devil. Hell is present today and we are called to transform it. Defense of human rights and rights defenders are at risk, we have to communicate, pray and protect. Share stories of people when talking to politicians. Do not bring only numbers but stories to change peoples' minds. The church is close to the most vulnerable people, we have to recognize who is vulnerable. An antithesis: those who want growth, with large temples, money or in incidence, have to be the voice of the voiceless and seek justice (no agreement was reached on this topic).

Intergenerational aspect: needed to involve the generation in the 20s and 50s. Gender and equity invites to pay more emphasis on masculinities.

Defining the central aspect of action needs the link to the Lutheran identity. The churches develop advocacy as signs of hope even in the middle of threatened and risk. When the church embarks on justice, the risk is present, as the context analysis expressed. Need to identify actors to strengthen protection to right defenders and advocate with them. The Human Rights Commission informed that they wanted to listen to the churches, in the face of this call; ILUGUA is planning a hearing following the state mandate to protect human rights defenders.

Protection as justice is relevant to all churches. People leave after Jesus tells the truth in John 6. In the 60s in the USA, people went to church; today in the ELCA, people still support justice issues.

Group One

The group decided to share their dialogue from the generational perspective:

Older persons: face challenges and struggles in developing / building their Lutheran identity in contexts where the church is minority. This impact in building church, communities, opening spaces for other people.

Persons in intermediary age: Face the dialectic between maintaining what is there and changing into new. They see themselves in the challenge of tradition and change. Proposal, learning about the changes in church during the last 30 years.

Young persons: The question brings to self-reflect, what do we do? We are expected to change, but what do we change? How do we do it, and do we change everything or what we like or leave as it is? What should we do now?

The three generations can find ways of how to do and where to go as churches.

Group Two

How the context analysis speaks to your experience today:

- The church must respond to the needs of the communities.
- The context in which the churches develop their work is changing rapidly and, in most of the times, we only react. There is lack of a preventive plan of action.

How theological reflection speaks to these realities:

- People are looking to feel the "magic" (connection) to feel safe, protected, etc. The question is what the church is willing to offer the community.

Theological reflection is practical for contextual challenges:

- We need clear and simple language that most of us can understand.

- People understand the meaning of each step in worship.

The contribution to the growth of the church (dialogue between strategies and methodologies)

- Be proactive and not reactive.
- Respond to social needs and not to the church's agenda.
- Reveal, explain, and invite people to worship.

Conclusion: Justification by grace = unconditional inclusion

Group 3

Analysis of the context for today

- Essential issues that continue to lead us to the ways God works and the experience of continuing engaging in the kingdom of God.
- Social reality affects the churches since there are many challenges such as violence, lack of education and migration.

Theological reflection to these realities

- It teaches us to put theology into practice in the personal, church, and community levels.
- Reflect on the word of God must link to the context of current realities to offer a message of hope: human rights, environment, and migration.

Practicality of theology to the challenges

- Evangelization through sports, recreational games, debates, brochures on the Bible, music.
- Resist the challenges.
- Accompaniment to the community in their day life.

Methodology and strategies

- Train lay people who are future leaders.
- Strengthen the work in the church.
- Promote confidence and opportunity among new leadership.
- Strategy to replace persons - intergenerational approach (group of children and young people)

Reflections generated by the Intergenerational Dialogues

Bishop Ismael Laborde: I have seen that, in the continent, several resources were produced in written. For instance from Guillermo Hansenen which needs to be read and contextualized in the churches.

Bishop Alexis Salgado: Something strange is happening to us. It is like being here, our ideas were challenged/ confused, and we do not know what to do because this bother us. We have a serious problem and I appreciate this theme is on the table because we have not addressed it in the communities. The intergenerational dialogue unveils the changes our churches face: the ones from the third generation fought the fight, and the youth will fight for other things today. We do not understand each other because we face diverse struggles. We did open this conversation and it will have to continue. For example, we touched on liturgy. It is said that there must be changes. It is perfect and we forget the elderly who still love hymns and music with which they grew up. We have to work on the issue of how ALL of us are part of the church and have space. To learn to live together is another task. I am grateful that this dialogue was opened because we have a lot to talk about it.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton: Another challenge we have is a space dedicated to youth up to a certain age, and another for us adults. We have an age gap between them. Another aspect is young women who need to decide when they qualify to be young or both. It is difficult but we have to see this reality.

María Hermosilla: It is very difficult to see how generations will live together and what they want. This is not new; we are not the first people old or young. In my group, we have reflected that it is important that we all understand the meaning of grace again. This gives common elements, and each generation needs to understand it again to experience what is the common element that guides the work in the churches. It is clear that the needs are different; for example, if I can listen or if a girl will find work or not.

Pastor Karla Steilmann: The concerns among persons are not the same and that is why we call it intergenerational dialogue. I appreciate this space because it allows us to know what is happening in the present. I thank Bishop Eaton because in the list of participants, we identified last night there are only two persons in leadership between 30 to 40 years (Danielle and Atahualpa) and between 30 to 48 years, we have four. The rest

of the ages have more participants. This should wake us up. What about youth of 31+ (where are they and what is their place). The time I will finish the period as a council member in the LWF, will I have to wait until I am 50 years old.

Before thinking about deep theological concepts, we have to think about what we do every day. How many people from 30 to 45 are in the congregations? How many generations did ask to raise the age of the youth group because the other generations are gone? What affects us every day in practice and what happens when some are missing, or what are they looking for? This is a topic is of concern and we have to bring it back to our churches. This cannot await until later, we have to address it now.

May 13: Session VIII – Themes from the Communion



Nestor Friedrich, in his role as Vice President of the LWF, offered a general information regarding the tasks of governance in the LWF Council. The new Strategy offers direction to restructure the Communion Office. In this regard, he invited the members of the Council from both regions to introduce themselves, especially in the gathering of two regions. Council members offer information, listen in the COL, and bridge information on issues to the Council and vice versa to the region.

Arni Danielsson, head of the Communications Office, shared the contents of the LWF Strategy 2019 -2024 “With passion for the church and for the world”. The objective of this sharing focused on providing information so that networks deepen and work defining issues / priorities for the coming years





*Liberated by God's grace,
a communion in Christ
living and working together
for a just, peaceful, and
reconciled world.* LWF vision
statement

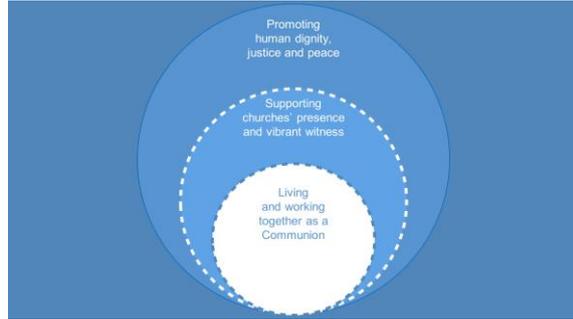
Our values

- Dignity and justice – Am 5:24
- Compassion and commitment – Lk 10:33
- Respect for diversity – 1 Cor 12:12
- Inclusion and participation – Mt 22:9
- Transparency and accountability – Mt 25:40



Living and working together as a Communion

The overarching framework for our ongoing witness is provided by the calling of LWF member churches to live and work together as a communion of churches in ongoing need of reformation.


Priority 1

Supporting churches' presence and vibrant witness in the world

What will we be doing?

- Theological reflection on being Lutheran churches in communion
- Live out communion relationships
- Work together to further God's holistic mission
- Ensure promotion of gender justice at every level
- Ensure the meaningful participation of youth in church and society
- Engage ecumenical partners
- Engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation

Priority 2

Promoting human dignity, justice and peace



What will we be doing?

- Respond to people in emergency situations
- Support local communities in sustainable development
- Equip member churches for diaconal action
- Collaborate with ecumenical partners, interfaith actors
- Strengthen efforts for climate justice
- Strengthen local and global advocacy

Our ways of working

- Theological reflection and discernment
- Accompaniment with member churches
- Convening and facilitation
- Direct implementation
- Advocacy
- Connecting local to global
- Working with others



Partnerships

- Member churches and related organizations
- Ecumenical and interfaith partners
- Local communities, civil society, development and humanitarian organizations, state actors
- The UN system





Organizational sustainability

- Strategic leadership at all levels
- Strong financial management and resource mobilization
- Alignment of structures and systems
- Investment in people
- Effective internal and external communication




Continuity and Innovation

- With roots in history and an openness to the future
- Diakonia, ecumenical dialogue, inclusion of youth, gender justice, women in the ordained ministry
- Climate justice, theological education and formation



The strategy and the churches

Where do you see your church becoming part of and contributing to the realization of this strategy, as it sets out with the other 147 churches of the communion, to live and work together around these priorities and commitments?




Liberated by God's grace, a communion in Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

Christ the King Statement

Sessions IX, X, AND XI – Networks and Plenary

Youth Network

The network mentored each other and to participants who come for the first time to this platform. Each young person shared about his or her reality and work. The realities of youth in LAC and NA are different at organizational levels and coordination: large, constituted, other small churches and others even starting work with youth. This did not prevent them to work and make their action visible. Dreams are in place and it is know that they will not be achieved in the short term. The idea is to give continuity to an agenda and not duplicate the work. This will help setting some paths for generations to come. Through a mutual agreement, the youth decide to support themselves by using technological means to coordinate (every three months), share and follow up on the projects they carry out. Using WhatsApp they will update on their contextual realities. The network decided to be prepared for COP25 in Chile through an online training.

Women and Gender Justice Network

Empowerment, improve capacity and multiplier effect:

Resume the task of mapping resources developed in the region (following the agenda for 2018). Training cannot be framed to a specific period but. It must be permanent and through long-term process. The topics should be open to all persons in general: leaders of the network.

Ongoing training with a coordination that helps to share/disseminate information on specific issues (which is prioritized every year), that accompanies and follows up with persons that have been trained. The sustainability in training relays on the strategic alliances on topics like: sexuality, justice, rights, etc. and that congregations prioritize. The support from the LWF Office of Communion is relevant.

As Lutheran churches, the network can support other organizations - sustainability (will generate income or exchange of affairs).

Bishops and Pastor Presidents

Theological Education and Formation: there was consensus that the region will work in a regional way through a project that will be prepared to continue strengthening formation of future leaders, leaders to be ordained, and lay persons. The project must build ways to strengthen the process already started.

Since 2013, the participation of the North American region has been considered. At the beginning, the Vice President was present and later, youth and female persons from the council joined. This COL reached the consensus to strengthen the participation of the two member churches from the North America region. On this basis, the Leadership Conference, from 2020 onwards, will be called “Conference of the Americas.” Themes decided: It was verified with the other networks that there are various themes, but the ones of concern are migration and climate justice. Both will be worked having education and gender as background. The Conference will bring the proposal to the LWF Council the following statements: Statement on the situation of Venezuela and Nicaragua. Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala. Advocacy regarding peace in Colombia.

May 14: Session XII – Theological Education and Formation

Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer, Study Secretary for Lutheran Theology and Practice shared the way in which the Global Network for Theological Education will engage into the process that is already happening in LAC. In that respect, it was affirmed that this network will contribute and nourish other experiences.

The Area Secretary, Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti shared the presentation in relation to the development of the theological and ministerial formation process in a network. The goal of the presentation was to provide the historical basis that led this action to respond to the educational needs in the churches. It also aims at affirming the engagement of the churches, which resulted in the practice of network for formation. The Communion Office in Geneva / LAC has facilitated the dialogue processes since 2012, has strengthened, and has guided (along with church leaders) the formation of a network, which work link to the formation plan in the churches. The following power point describes that process.

<p style="text-align: center;">Information Sharing – Building Up the Theological & Ministerial Formation from the Practice</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">2019 Leadership Conference</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">2012 – Florianópolis, Brazil</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches request theological formation for contextual ministries that include management and leadership. • The churches propose to develop training plans linked to their strategic and mission plans. • Churches decide: to approach the centers of theological formation asking to make more visible support for training for mission. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">2013 – Managua, Nicaragua</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on formation and the critical thinking. • The churches actively promote the participation of women and youth in ministries and formation. • Agreement: considering the sustainability processes, to define a space for training using the acquired experiences gained in the program • Request: in dialogue with the IECLB and the Faculty EST, the Sustainability Institute (InS) for Latin America and the Caribbean was launched in October 2013 		<p style="text-align: center;">2014 – Mexico City, Mexico</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COL focused on theological formation • Agreement to increase research in the academy and theology made by women, including her stories. • Theology must affirm vocation and service. The academia reconceptualizes them and bring systematized issues back to the churches. • Use of participatory methodologies, include bi-vocational training for the ordained ministry. • Great knowledge in training by SEMLA. • Agreement: respond to the needs for formation in the member churches – to be worked out by the areas secretary and EST/InS. 	
<p style="text-align: center;">2015 – Weaving links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and approved the EST/InS founding document. • Developed of curricula and online courses in the EST/InS. • Requested by the IELB, the EST/InS carried out the course “Good Living, Lutheran Identity and Sustainability” (September/2015). • Dialogue with SEMLA to get involved in the proces of ministerial formation. 		<p style="text-align: center;">2016 Enhancing the Work of Theological Formation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue in the context of the workshop on Human and Institutional Capacity Development between IELB, ILFE, ICLH and SEMLA seeking alternatives to the ministerial trainings. • Agreement: to walk together with the churches and meet their needs on theological formation. • The area secretary in charge of building connections and concretizing specific training requests 	

2017 – Enriching Theological Education and Formation

- The 500 years of reformation gave SEMLA a new opportunity to work on theological formation.
- ✓ May: "Introduction to the Old Testament" in ILFE (SEMLA)
- ✓ June: "Church in mission and ecclesial management in perspective of sustainability" in IELB (EST/InS)
- ✓ September: "Introduction to the Lutheran Identity" and "Introduction to the Reformation History" in IELB (SEMLA)
- ✓ November: "Introduction to the Bible" in ICLH (SEMLA)
- ✓ December: "Diakonia and Lutheran Identity" in ILUGUA (SEMLA)




"Church in mission and ecclesial management in perspective of sustainability" June 2017 by EST/InS in the IELB

2018 - Including more Actors

- IPC – Pastoral Contextual Institute integrates to the ministerial formation through network.
- 15 courses offered during the year
- Transversal themes: Faith and Resistance, Gender Justice and Equity, Masculinities, Theology of the Cross, Agriculture and Creation, Youth.



Fecha	Curso/Taller	Iglesia	Responsabilidad
Febrero	Introducción a la Biblia: historia y formación	ILUGUA	SEMLA
Abril	Introducción a la Biblia II	ICLH	SEMLA
Abril	Hermenéutica y homilética	ICLH	SEMLA
Mayo	Liturgia	ICLH	EST/InS
Mayo	Sacramentos: Santa Cena y Bautismo	IELB	EST/InS
Mayo	Catecismo Mayor, Catecismo Menor y aspectos doctrinales de la identidad luterana	ICLH	EST/InS
Julio	Hermenéutica Bíblica (con énfasis en la lectura popular)	ILUGUA	EST/InS
Julio	Introducción al Antiguo Testamento	ILFE	SEMLA
Agosto	Historia de la Iglesia	IELB	SEMLA
Agosto	Liturgia y Homilética	ILUGUA	SEMLA
Agosto	Identidad luterana	ILCH y IELCH	SEMLA
Octubre	Liturgia y Culto	IELB	EST/InS
Octubre	Todo lo que haces es misión	ICLH	IPC
Octubre	Seminario de Facilitadores/as	IELB	IPC
Noviembre	Historia de la iglesia e identidad luterana	ILUGUA	EST/InS

2019 – Having a Ministerial and Theological Formation Plan

- EST/InS, SEMLA, Instituto Pastoral Contextual (IPC), IELU, Escuela Luterana de Teología - IELCO (newly joined to the network), and Red Ecuiménica de Educación Teológica (REET) IERP – IELU.
- Courses offered contain: objective, description of the content and method.
- Plan of online courses and in country.
- 24 in country courses and 9 on line (for groups and for individuals).
- Eleven churches participate in the training proces, either offering or receiving courses.



The entrepreneurial commitment for change starts in small steps, it is an opportunity to reform processes of formation as a strong vocation to serve people and validate meaningful goals. The challenge is how to create space for this reformation movement...

Luis Velásquez – ILM (COL 2014, Mexico)

Session XIII – COL Message and Closing Worship

COL Message

The writing team, formed by Karen Castillo, Alexis Salgado and Erika Rodning, read the message from the two regions (LAC and North America). The message was received and approved.

2020 Conference of the Americas

After following up on the first option that the 2020 COL could be carried out in Guatemala and having received a recommendation from both churches to wait until another moment; the venue turned out to Costa Rica. After consultation with the ILCO, country that also was nominated in 2018 as a second option, it was agreed that the ILCO will to receive the COL. Upon this agreement, the decision is as follows:

- The COL of the Americas will take place in Costa Rica from 15 to 19 May, 2020.

Closing worship

The closing worship was vivid and led by Rev. Consuelo Preciado from the IELCO and Rev. Gerardo Hands from the IELV.