

**Message of the Leadership Conference
Lutheran World Federation Member Churches in
Latin America and the
Caribbean & North America
Buenos Aires, Argentina
09 – 12 May, 2018**

The Leadership Conference (COL) of the LWF member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean & North America took place from 09 to 12 May in Buenos Aires, Argentina, centred in God's mission under the theme *Let's go! Lutheran Churches on the Move in Mission*. Representatives of the United Evangelical Church – Lutheran Synod (IEU-SL) in Cuba and the Agustina Lutheran Church in Guatemala (ILAG), who are in the process of becoming members in the LWF, participated as special guests.

From the presentations of the convened churches, we were able to learn about the churches' missionary work, as well as current challenges and alternatives they face. Among the challenges are: sustainability, climate change, growth and missionary advancement, institutional strengthening and leadership, Christian education at different levels (theological formation etc.), revival of youth ministries, mission in context, Lutheran identity, migration, social violence and violence against women. We see with concern the loss of members in different churches.

The churches in the region are confronted with the need to work in challenging social realities but these realities call us to continue with prophetic action in contexts where we develop our mission work.

We have heard central aspects of the mission work of the churches in LAC and North America and how they carried out mission in different geographical contexts and at particular times in history. In this way, reflecting on the way in which we arrived at the current mission work, we appreciate how, through the history of each of our churches, we find that the Lutheran doctrine is the same but the social contexts different. This allows us to see the historical richness in each country that participated in this conference. Theology differs according to how mission is done at each moment in time. We have seen how the theology of conquest, accompaniment, liberation, life, sacrament, and of mission have been the basis for the mission of God. We have noted that the commemoration of the 500 years of the protestant Reformation was an opportunity and moment to heal memories, establish relationships, and walk ecumenically, as well as to re-signify our Lutheran identity. At a general level, we conclude that it is necessary to have a self-critical reflection on matters of liturgy, theological formation, and the growth and strengthening of the churches.

As the Women and Gender Justice Network, part of the leadership conference, we express our concern and rejection of the growing manifestation of violence that is arising in our countries, violating the rights and dignity of human beings, especially

of women and children. As churches committed to God's mission, we denounce violence as sin and demand that public and ecclesiastic policies be created, implemented and applied in order to guarantee life, security and equity in society.

As a Youth Network, we will work on the three themes agreed in the last Pre-Youth Assembly held in Namibia in 2017: education, revival of churches, and equity. The first theme is oriented to systematize and disseminate all courses and workshops in the region for youth formation. The aim is to promote digital spaces to share materials produced. Regarding the second theme, we propose resuming the day of prayer for young people, strengthening pastoral work in universities, and to encouraging discussion on contextual and actual themes in our churches. We also recommend the practice of equity both in the network and in our churches. As young Lutheran persons, we commit to the mission of God as protagonists aware of the context in which we live and act in our communities, congregations, churches and in the world.

Theological formation and education has been a constant concern in the region. Different actions from the academia were presented by theological institutions sharing the levels of education and actions in ministerial formation through network. They respond to the needs of the churches given their relevance to mission work. Issues such as the modality of online and short courses in different levels, according to the needs of the churches, are received with gratification, as well as the facilitators' willingness to travel to different churches and, over all, the possibilities of financial support. It is satisfying to see that there is a dialogue between the churches, the training institutions and the LWF to continue promoting networking. The regional ministerial and theological network can become more solid, dynamic and participatory in its journey, allowing exchange of knowledge and experiences. It has been six years since 2012, in which different aspects were considered: needs related to formation in the region, mapping of institutions of formation, dialogue between the churches and centers of formation, developing different curricula and guiding documents with strategic focuses. The churches gathered in this leadership conference have commissioned the area secretary to follow up on the recommendations that affirm the intention to work together in ministerial and theological formation.

Finally, the LWF member churches gathered in the leadership conference offer their gratitude to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) and the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (IERP) for their commitment, friendliness and hospitality in the organization and development of this event, as well as the Lutheran communion worldwide for making possible the realization of the 2018 leadership conference.