

Message of the Leadership Conference
Lutheran World Federation member churches in
Latin America and the Caribbean
La Paz, Bolivia 07 – 10 April 2015

The Leadership Conference (COL) of the LWF member churches in Latin America and the Caribbean was held between April 07 to 10 in La Paz, Bolivia under the central theme “Liberated by God’s Grace to Serve: Diakonia in Practice”. The theme guided presentations, devotions, and worship making use of the LWF three sub-themes: human beings not for sale, creation not for sale, salvation not for sale. Three members from the North America Region participated as guests in order to get to know one another better and to strengthen relations regionally.

With joy, the Lutheran Churches in the region welcomed the Guatemalan Lutheran Church (ILUGUA) that became full member in the LWF upon decision of the LWF Council held in Indonesia in June 2014.

Considering the pastoral and theological aspects of diakonia, the churches in the region have affirmed diakonia as part of their mission that is inspired by God’s grace to serve the neighbour, especially excluded persons. Based on the fact that Christ came to serve, the churches have motivated to announce the good news in an integral way (spiritual and material) and to live out the practice of only one table sat by Jesus who invites to embrace and generate signs of inclusion with all people. The churches in the region recognize diakonia as a key profile (una marca), self-expression, and identity of the Christian church.

Rooted in these bases on which diakonia is anchored, the churches in the region rejoice for the opportunity to continue investing efforts in pastoral and diaconal training in order to count with gifts and resources able to plan, develop and make visible their work in God’s mission. The Lutheran churches in Latin America and the Caribbean agree to strengthen the Lutheran identity, growing as communities of faith, and make stronger the flow of information between the existing networks and their central areas in order to reach equality in activity and scope, to have and enjoy equitable spaces for participation in decision making, and equal opportunities in education.

Analyzing the multiple contextual challenges, the churches in the region have verified corruption, violence against women, unemployment, human rights violation, femicide, migration, labor and sexual exploitation, displacement of indigenous peoples, plundering of natural resources especially the extractive model and mono-agriculture as challenges that call to continue serving. Likewise, churches see scenarios where the relationship between the churches and the state become difficult by bureaucratic and unfavorable tax regulations for evangelical churches. Faced with these realities, the churches in the region affirm God’s grace as main element to explore and develop networks and strategic partnership among them and with other Christian and non-Christian organizations to develop further their diaconal work.

Amid the described challenges, the churches in the region affirm the desire to articulate and share experience and lessons learnt from their journey making use of tools to evaluate their journey using the sustainability concept to manage networks and develop capacity for advocacy on children, youth, STDs, and suicide issues. The HIV and its stigmatization has challenged the churches to critically review understanding of our traditional and daily practices of being and living as churches.

Approaching the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017, the Lutheran churches in the region have taken note of the preparations towards the Assembly in Namibia. As a region, we intend to continue to develop the theme *Liberated by God’s Grace*

in the conviction that God's grace is not for sale. In this journey, we propose to celebrate God's Grace in a Lutheran - Christian and ecumenical way. In this journey, we consider the ecclesial and academic areas bearing in mind diakonia and caring for creation as a gift from God.

The churches in the region are challenged to work in concerning social realities, but in these contexts where churches are present, we are called to continue our prophetic action.

The LWF member churches gathered in this Leadership Conference are grateful to the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELB) for its commitment, warmth, and hospitality shown in the organization and development of this event. We are as well thankful to the Lutheran communion globally for making possible the realization of the 2015 Leadership Conference.