

Message of the delegates from the Pre Assembly of the Latin America and the Caribbean member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

Paramaribo - August 28 to September 02, 2016

The delegates of the Lutheran World Federation member churches in Latin American and the Caribbean churches have gathered to prepare for the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation to be held in Windhoek, Namibia in 2017, year of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

We have had the joy of meeting with brothers and sisters of the North America region, with whom we had our Pre-Assemblies simultaneously, sharing devotional and celebratory time and moments of study and fraternal communion.

We began the meeting recalling and reaffirming the diaconal, missionary, theological and ecumenical vocation LWF originally registered.

We reaffirm that being free by Grace calls us to be a Communion working for justice, peace and reconciliation. And this connects us to the global nature of the reform, which is a "global citizen" and not property of Lutherans.

We joyfully checked the progress done regarding the proportion of participation of women in instances of deliberation and decision in the Communion, as well as the challenge to be a church in constant reform.

We therefore reaffirm the ecumenical and inter-religious responsibility of Communion, which has found expression in the pardon request to the Mennonite community and in the move from conflict to communion in our relations with the Catholic Church. We celebrate these testimonies of unity as reconciled and diverse communities in the midst of a fragmented world.

We recognize the challenges that our churches face in achieving sustainable development, and reaffirm that interdependence and mutuality are an inseparable part of a sustainable communion. In a broader spectrum; the emergence of climate change and environmental damage forces us to address it in a framework of interdependence and mutuality, which certainly includes intergenerational solidarity. We celebrate the diversity of knowledge that enrich the experience and collective responses to these challenges.

We also express our pain and our solidarity with refugees and displaced persons caused by both: the situations of violence and deterioration of their environment. We are sure that the Lutheran Communion, precisely because it emerged as a tool to assist displaced persons after II World War, cannot ignore the fate of migrants and displaced people today.

We, the churches shared our work during this time, and the challenges we face in the call to respond to the needs of our context in fidelity to the Gospel. There, we verified important coincidences in our agendas and challenges: The relevance of diakonia as part of integral mission, the common pursuit of sustainability, and the rich contribution provided by participatory strategic planning to healthy governance.

Ongoing initiatives in each country preparing for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation were also shared without dismissing the challenges that will be waiting for us on 1 November 2017, when the lights go out and the celebrations and commemorations are completed.

The Pre-Assembly devoted time to consider what it means to live as communion through the reading the "Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion" document. After reflection on this material, it clearly emerged that communion is certainly a gift. But it is not a simple gift. Therefore, it was considered essential for the health of the Communion that all parts take serious responsibility of mutual accountability in decision-making processes and its results. To take part in a common table means that no party can or should simply modify the agreements that were reached collectively. The franc, intentional and sustained dialogue is essential for the life of communion.

Free by the Grace of God

The path to Windhoek led churches to deepen the theme of the Twelfth Assembly. These considerations led us to affirm dialogue as a condition for freedom, and as an act of resistance against the logic of hegemony. Our reflections have challenged us to encourage in dialogue with different people and to be alert when dialogue is only done between equals.

We understand that freedom also means that we are free to love and embrace the church that really exists, more than comfortable idealizations about church. But we are also challenged to recognize what practices in our churches should be called to repentance and transformation.

Salvation, creation, and human beings are not for sale!

Reflection on these statements pointed to see how our consumer societies and unacceptable inequality can consistently link to concepts like "sustainable" and "sufficient". We recognize that we are responsible to care for creation and not the owners. Therefore, we denounce that those who sell what are not theirs, they are stealing.

Secularized and disenfranchised societies where we must bear witness to the grace challenge us to rethink what we mean when we speak of salvation, and to recognize that we do not always manage to share this Good News in a language that is challenging and understandable that appeals to people.

Our way to Namibia

The churches of the Lutheran Communion in Latin America and the Caribbean denounce the painful reality of millions of enslaved people by unjust economic models. We are urged to live the gospel of Jesus Christ defending the human rights, especially the rights of indigenous communities, migrants, and victims of trafficking. We also call to work for gender justice, creating mechanisms of implementation and contextualizing of the Gender Justice Policy of the Lutheran World Federation and promoting mutual accountability. We commit to the care of creation and commitment to climate justice. We stress that a fundamental tool to advance on these tasks is the access to theological education faithful to the Word, confessional solid, and contextualized in our realities.

It is our duty to express our deep concern about the deterioration of democratic processes, the situation of the human rights and rights' defenders. This process began in Honduras and Paraguay, and recently intensified with the rupture of democracy in Brazil and the difficult situation in Venezuela.

We also ask the Twelfth Assembly to consider organizing a working group to study all aspects of women in the ordained ministry. As churches in Latin America and the Caribbean we affirm that not step back on the agreements reached in this regard should be taken.

We want to express our gratitude to the Evangelic Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS) for receiving us so warmly and for letting us to know their challenges and the rich cultural diversity of the context in which they announce the freedom for all including freedom for creation by God's Grace.