

Message of the North American Pre-Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation Paramaribo, Suriname, 29 August–3 September 2016

We, as delegates from North America, are grateful to have joined together for the first time with the Latin America and Caribbean region for our pre-assembly in Paramaribo. This was an historic event as our two regions worked to prepare for our Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2017 under the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace” with the three sub-themes of salvation, human beings, and creation not for sale.

We give thanks to our host church, the Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk Suriname (ELKS), the Rev. Marjory Slagtand, President of the ELKS, Henk Rahan, ELKS Pre-Assembly Commission Chair, for inviting us to participate and welcoming us with warmth and hospitality. We express our gratitude to the Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti, Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, for her work in coordinating the joint meeting of our two regions. It was truly a gift to gather together, to worship and to pray, to hear one another’s stories, to learn, and also to be challenged by one another.

The Movement of Peoples – Refugees, Migration, and Human Trafficking

As we engaged the theme and sub-themes together, we acknowledge the neoliberal and free-market economic system as a root cause of the movement of peoples today. We recognize that we are accountable to our neighbors in the beloved community both through things done and left undone. War, environmental degradation, natural disasters, human exploitation, and injustice have created the largest migrant crisis since World War II. We have a responsibility to welcome migrants and refugees and to work to end the international and intra-national crime of human trafficking, which is one form of modern day slavery. Together we work toward peaceful and just societies

Right Relationship and Human Community

As Lutherans living into our baptismal covenant, we are empowered by God’s righteousness and called to live in right relationship with our neighbor. Racial justice, gender justice, full participation of youth and young adults, and indigenous rights will continue to be key concerns in our work as churches. We need to acknowledge and repent of the harm done by colonization and continue in the work of reconciliation.

Environmental Justice

We recognize the urgent need to care for God’s creation. As disproportionate consumers of natural resources, we must work actively to ensure clean, accessible water for all, mitigate land and soil pollution, manage waste appropriately, and implement solutions for sustainable energy sources. We are called to be caretakers of the earth and to listen to the wisdom of indigenous persons related to life on the land.

Leadership

We affirm the LWF for fully embracing the call of baptism as the priesthood of all believers,¹ and hope for a deepened emphasis on the ministry of all the baptized alongside that of ministers of Word and sacrament and ministers of Word and service. In a time of rapid societal change, we need to envision and implement new ways of engaging in theological education and leadership formation, for both lay and ordained, that prepare leaders for the church of the future rather than the church of the past.

Governance and Life in Communion

In the spirit of a church that is *semper reformanda*, and recognizing the importance of structures of governance and organization in strengthening our life together and our public witness to the gospel as a communion, we recommend that the LWF:

- A. develop a process for accompanying churches, especially in times of conflict, and a mechanism for consultation and discernment over issues of importance to member churches.²
- B. add gender justice to *Section III. Nature and Functions* of the LWF constitution, as follows:

[The Lutheran Federation]: furthers worldwide among the member churches diaconic action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, **gender justice**, care for God's creation and sharing of resources;

- C. examine issues of fair voice and participation of all members of the communion through our governance structures, including the composition and design of the LWF regions.
- D. consider the matter of dual membership in ICL and LWF and how it affects our self-identity and life as a communion.

In deep gratitude for the rich theme of the 12th Assembly, "Liberated by God's Grace," and the sub-themes emphasizing that salvation, human beings, and creation are not for sale, we challenge ourselves and the communion to implement a life of "not for sale" in our home contexts, living fully into our freedom in Christ to love and serve the neighbor.

¹ "The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Study Document" (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2015), 20.

² "Self-Understanding," 15, 16, 22, 24.