

# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Meeting of the LWF Council

Geneva, Switzerland

13–18 June 2013

**Report of the Special Committee**

**500 Years of Reformation**

**EXHIBIT 11**



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION



## Introduction

The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is a powerful focal point for the further formation of the global communion and the reaffirmation of the LWF's ecumenical commitment. On its journey toward 2017, the LWF seeks to affirm and further develop that which distinguishes it as a global communion of churches.

In 2011, the Officers appointed the LWF Special Committee—500 Years of Reformation (SC) which includes representatives from the seven regions of the LWF.

The SC was supported by the director of the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW), the Youth Secretary, Rev. Roger Schmidt (September–December 2012), Rev. Stephen Larson (on an interim basis) and since March 2013 by the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, Rev. Anne Burghardt.

The LWF Council mandated the SC to propose a framework for the anniversary as one of the foci of the LWF Strategy 2012–2017.

The SC's was charged to (a) set the strategic directions, themes and possible areas of program implementation for the anniversary; and (b) to define the basis for program planning with the Communion Office (CO).

In addition to virtual conferences and regular exchanges by email, the SC met 14–15 November 2011 at Budapest and a second time, 28 February–1 March 2013, in Geneva, where it drafted this report which was finalized through series of on-line consultations.

## On-going processes

### Regional plans

In all seven regions of the LWF, plans for the anniversary celebrations are being developed. While in some regions several concrete processes are already underway, others are about to embark on relevant processes.

### Networks and research

The work within the CO is increasingly focusing on the Reformation anniversary. A thematic focus was proposed for 2015–2017, and already now a growing number of initiatives are unfolding within the LWF and its partner organizations. These include:

The **Global Young Reformers' Network**, coordinated and assisted by the LWF, aims to build a strong network among young people, especially young Lutherans, with a focus on the Reformation heritage, Lutheran identity and today's global connectivity. Furthermore, the Global Young Reformers' Network has set several objectives and a timeline for the anniversary celebrations.

The **regional network of the Office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS)** network has embarked on a process of telling the stories of women, who either played an important role at the time of the Reformation, were or still are leaders in churches/communities, or pursued a career in academia or research. Special attention will be paid to the "forgotten" women who played an important role in their churches and/or communities.

Upon the recommendation of the global consultation on theological education, October 2012, Wittenberg, a **network of theological seminaries and faculties** is being formed. It is hoped that plans for joint research on Lutheran identity might grow out of this network.

The **LWF Centre in Wittenberg**, an initiative of the LWF German National Committee (GNC) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), organizes international

conferences. Under the guidance of visiting academics, participants are invited to engage intensively with the most varied aspects of Lutheran theology.

The **Luther Garden project** foresees the planting of 500 trees by 2017 in a designated park in the German city of Wittenberg. This project is a joint initiative between the LWF, GNC and the city of Wittenberg and has already been duplicated in other parts of the world.

In light of the fact that there is a strong thematic connection between **biblical interpretation, Lutheran tradition and interfaith dialogue** and the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation, studies in these areas are being carried out by the Department for Theology and Public Witness (DTPW). Furthermore, the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, is preparing an ecumenical commentary on Martin Luther's 95 theses.

### Ecumenical relationships

**Lutheran–Roman Catholic:** In 2012, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity finalized the document *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, a major Catholic–Roman Lutheran joint ecumenical document, intended for a broad readership. In 2013, the joint Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and LWF working group started to work on producing joint liturgical materials to be used in the context of 2017.

**Anglican–Lutheran:** The Anglican Communion has expressed an interest in joining the anniversary commemorations and the Anglican–Lutheran International Coordinating Committee (ALICC) has been tasked with the development of common plans for the preparation of the anniversary.

**Lutheran–Mennonite:** The LWF Mennonite Task Force, meeting for the second time in July 2013, will also discuss the Reformation anniversary.

**Lutheran–Reformed:** The LWF and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) have entered into discussions on possible joint processes related to the Reformation anniversary.

**Lutheran–Orthodox:** In light of the anniversary, it would be interesting to explore the understanding of the concept of “renewal” in the dialogue with the Orthodox Church. The term “renewal” would also speak to the Orthodox (see the WCC’s Faith and Order discussion on “Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community”).

**Lutheran–Pentecostal:** At this point, only preliminary contacts have been made with the Pentecostals in relation to the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. It is important that the possibilities of cooperation with the Pentecostals are further explored.

### Goals

With the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation the LWF aims to:

**Strengthen** the communion among the member churches as it lives and works together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world

**Explore** the meaning of Lutheran identity

**Strengthen** the ecumenical commitment

### Values

The following values are important as we commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation:

**Unity in diversity**

**Catholicity and contextuality.**

These values are based on the LWF's self-understanding of being liberated by God's grace and on the following values identified in the LWF Strategy 2012–2017:

- Dignity and justice
- Compassion and commitment
- Respect for diversity
- Inclusion and participation
- Transparency and accountability.

## Principles

### Content principles

**Reformation as a global citizen:** The celebrations of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation must include a global perspective, and it is crucial that the perspective of minority situations is not overlooked. It is vital that we not merely look back at our theological heritage, but also at the way in which the evangelical insights of the Reformation gradually unfolded in different settings and were embraced in different situations and epochs, enriching this movement and turning it into a global communion.

**Ecumenical accountability:** The approach to the anniversary needs to be ecumenically sensitive and accountable. It constitutes an opportunity to make visible the fruits of the ecumenical processes and achievements. As a Lutheran communion we confess to being part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Therefore, as we remember with gratefulness the theological heritage of the Reformation, we do not simply celebrate our particularity, but together with Christians of other church traditions we wish to respond to the calling of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior—a calling which we share with our Christian brothers and sisters.

**Churches of Reformation are churches in ongoing reformation** (*ecclesia semper reformanda est*). We affirm that the church must be open to constant renewal, always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in face of contemporary challenges.

### Formal principles

**Sustainability:** While the actual anniversary of the Reformation is a one-time event, it offers an excellent opportunity to identify processes and activities which strengthen the LWF communion beyond 2017.

**Strategic fit:** Activities that build on the strengths of the LWF communion and are based on the LWF Strategy 2012–2017 are prioritized.

**Benefits for member churches:** Activities that create clear benefits for and build sustainability among member churches of the LWF are prioritized.

**Process orientation:** Activities prepared by the Communion Office are part of the processes and not stand-alone events. They connect to earlier work and are oriented toward meaningful impact in the member churches and society.

## Theme and Subthemes

The SC devoted considerable time to identifying themes and subthemes. It is the SC's understanding that the Council will consider the proposed theme and subthemes as theme and subthemes for the next LWF Assembly, in order to avoid parallel and competing processes.

The SC examined a variety of possibilities and agreed that the theme should refer to the very core of gospel and the Lutheran identity, as well as speaking to a wider audience "in the world." It should be positive, affirmative and focused on the concept of "grace" as well as on the consequences of God's gracious gift to the humankind in the life of those who come to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior.

## Theme

Inspired by the LWF Strategy 2012–2017, the SC proposes the theme ***Liberated by God's Grace*** for the Assembly and the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation (related readings: Isa 55:1; Rev 21:6; Rom 3:24; Eph 2:8-10; Gal 5:1; Lk 4:16-21). This theme offers various possibilities for reflecting on such questions as, "Liberated by God's grace from what? for what?," enabling us further to explore the Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of justification and being free to serve the neighbor, of being a responsible citizen in the world and stewards of God's creation. Thus, the concept of the freedom of the Christian, so dear to Luther and so relevant at all times, is also highlighted.

## Subthemes

The SC agreed that the theme must govern the subthemes as the overarching theological key. The subthemes were phrased in such a way that they address the contextual challenges the Christian community faces in today's world. For instance, they could identify certain concepts, attitudes and global policies that people "liberated by God's grace" reject since they are incompatible with the gospel. The Lutheran Confessions, particularly the Augsburg Confession, clearly point to misconceptions which, when confessing one's faith in challenging times and contexts, one is compelled to reject. The SC decided to select the following three subject areas: salvation; human beings; and creation which were linked with the expression "not for sale," to express the gratuity and sovereignty of God's creation:

***Salvation—not for sale:*** Conveys the central message of the doctrine of justification—a message that salvation is God's free gift—and express a clear critique of contemporary practices and concepts that treat salvation as a commodity on the "religious market" i.e., prosperity theology which is in clear opposition to Luther's theology of the cross.

***Human beings—not for sale:*** Underscores that every individual is a unique person created in God's own image and must therefore be fully respected in her/his dignity and integrity. On this basis, issues of particular social relevance such human trafficking and economic policies that create or increase poverty can be unfolded and receive due attention.

***Creation—not for sale:*** Underlines theologically that nature has to be fully respected and protected as God's good creation, entrusted to human care. Therefore it cannot be subject to exploitative human domination nor can its resources be concentrated and exploited as commodities, for example in relation to water. Policies must aim at sustainable development.

## Further suggestions regarding the theme and subthemes

These reflections should be complemented throughout the reflections and actions leading up to the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation and the LWF Assembly. The SC considered that combining the theme and the subthemes in the way proposed will preserve the theological integrity of our Lutheran confession, speak prophetically to today's burning issues and be meaningful and relevant internally to the LWF constituency, the member churches as well as to an "outside" audience. The period from 2015—2017 will be the core time for commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. The subthemes can help the member churches (also those who have just started to reflect on ways in which to commemorate the anniversary) form their own respective thematic foci. Specific subthemes could also be developed by the regional councils or churches as has already been done in several cases. All the member churches are invited to understand the processes and plans regarding the anniversary as part of their common journey as a global communion.

Finally, the SC appreciates the association of the three periods of ecclesial year within the broader thematic context for the year of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary:

**Advent** as symbolizing the receiving and celebrating of the renewing power of the gospel

**Lent** as the time for repentance and the healing of memories

**Pentecost** as the time to rejoice in anticipation of the unity of the church as God's gift.

## **The 2017 LWF Assembly and Reformation Day as focal points of the commemoration**

**The 2017 LWF Assembly** will be an occasion for the joyful celebration of the power of the Lutheran witness to the gospel and, at the same time, a space for the self-critical acknowledgement of failures in faithfulness and the continuing pain of division among Christians. Ecumenical partners will be involved both in planning and observing the anniversary. The SC has placed the LWF Assembly at the center of the overall anniversary structure:

The Sunday within the Assembly will provide a special occasion for worship celebrating the renewal through the gospel in the Reformation. This worship should be a common celebration, elaborated by the LWF, and demonstrating the richness of the Lutheran world. Good media presence is crucial in order to broadcast this central commemoration around the world.

“What does the world see when they look at the Lutherans?” The LWF principles of gender balance and youth participation as well as the whole richness of the Lutheran world in all its diversity should become clearly visible. The presence of ecumenical guests will underline the ecumenical commitment of the Lutheran communion.

The Assembly offers a good opportunity for creating a mutual commitment in the communion also beyond 2017, enabling the continuation of the common journey with a clear sense of direction.

**Reformation Day—31 October 2017:** Besides the LWF Assembly the other focal point of the commemoration of the anniversary should be Reformation Day which most of the churches are celebrating on 31 October. The Communion Office will provide materials that can be used by the member churches when preparing worship materials (liturgy, hymns, prayers, homiletic tools) for services to be held on that day. These should contain universal elements that transmit the sense of belonging to one global family while being open to contextual elements in order to highlight the relevance of the gospel of God’s grace for today in diverse contexts. Church bells should ring in remembrance of the Reformation and as a call to prayer. In order to strengthen the symbolic character of this action as well as to facilitate media coverage, the bells could be rung already at 15:17 and again at 20:17 hrs, when the commemorative service will begin. The ringing of the bells of the *Stadtkirche* in Wittenberg could be shared by the LWF and then used in the services around the globe. The LWF should also identify the locations of the services to be transmitted via internet. The transmissions should move around the globe, so that during 24 hours people can follow the commemoration in very diverse settings around the globe. The services should not be longer than an hour, so that the transmission can be replaced by a next service in another location.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Encourage the member churches/regions to develop their own themes and subthemes along the lines of the ones proposed by the SC
- 2) Encourage the member churches to make use of the LWF Web site dedicated to the Reformation anniversary and other existing forums for sharing with other member churches their own Reformation stories, local processes and ideas. However, while encouraging the use of the internet attention must be paid that regions where access to internet connection is difficult are not neglected
- 3) Be aware of major member church projects such as the Luther garden and other events happening in Wittenberg; the EKD Luther-decade; the Hungarian Luther animation project; Sixtieth anniversary of Marangu in Africa; publication of Luther’s writings in Spanish in Latin America; plans to collect women’s stories in Asia by the West-South Asian Lutheran Communion women, etc.
- 4) Use existing networks, e.g. youth and women networks, but also of the networks of

representatives of theological institutions for sharing or collecting ideas for the Reformation anniversary

- 5) Share the symbolic action of tree planting around the world
- 6) Collect daily readings from Luther and other Reformers/contemporary voices, linking to the subthemes and encourage member churches to make more use of Luther's writings or to provide new updated translations
- 7) Organize the main LWF communion-wide commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation during the 2017 LWF Assembly since the Sunday during the Assembly will be a particular focal point which ecumenical guests will attend
- 8) Develop a common liturgy for Reformation Day 2017 commemorations and services in the Communion Office. These should include some common and some contextual elements and be open to contextualization
- 9) Pay attention in the LWF's ecumenical engagement to the fact that the history of the Lutheran church goes beyond sixteenth century, being as long as the history of Christian church
- 10) Pay attention to developing interreligious processes, particularly involving the Abrahamic religions, with a special focus on Islam
- 11) Bear the question, What happens on the „32nd of October“? in mind, i.e., how to achieve sustainable goals and values formulated in the context of the anniversary, yet meant to carry the whole communion also beyond this date.

### **Share of responsibilities**

The LWF member churches are invited to share information with the Communion Office about their initiatives, plans and processes for the anniversary celebrations. All member churches that have not already done so are invited to nominate individuals as members of the LWF Global Reformation Anniversary Network for 2017 preparations, in order to ensure an effective sharing of ideas, plans and initiatives. The Communion Office acts as a facilitator in the communion's involvement in the Reformation anniversary by: engaging the communion; coproducing; providing a global framework. The Communion Office will strengthen networking and offer a platform where ideas and plans can be shared and new impulses received.

Events and processes to be organized by the Communion Office:

Offering a virtual space for sharing the information about the commemoration of the anniversary

Regional gatherings

LWF Council 2016 in Wittenberg

LWF Assembly 2017

Follow-up processes/events of ecumenical dialogues

Women's stories—study process in WICAS

LWF Global Network for Young Reformers

Study process on Lutheran hermeneutics

Interreligious dialogues

Special events and materials that link to the three principles of the Reformation anniversary commemoration and the SC's suggestions

### **Next steps in the process**

When planning and conceptualizing ideas for the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation celebrations, a broader vision and main principles should always be borne in mind. This will contribute to the common understanding of the anniversary among the member churches.



After the Council's action on the SC's report, the Communion Office will use the report as a basis for further planning concrete processes and activities for the years 2015–2017. These plans and activities will be submitted to the LWF Council in June 2014 in the form of the Communion Office Operations Plan (COOP) for the years 2015–2016.

## **Conclusion**

The SC wishes to express its gratitude to the LWF Council for the confidence entrusted to it. In our meetings and virtual contacts we experienced what it means to be a global and ecumenically committed Lutheran communion "liberated by God's grace" and called to care for creation and to serve all human beings. We look forward to the commemoration of the Reformation anniversary in 2017, praising God for God's abundant and gracious gifts to us.

Respectfully submitted by:

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