

**Address of the General Secretary elect to the Eleventh Assembly of the LWF
July 26, 2010**

Rev. Martin Junge

Dear sisters, dear brothers in Christ,

At the LWF Council meeting, during which I was elected the LWF General Secretary, I addressed the Council with a little story. Those of you that were at that Council may still recall it. Today, I want to begin my address repeating that story. Not because I have ran out of ideas already. That would be indeed a very scary signal: not yet in office but already running short of ideas and repeating myself! Beware God! No. I want to repeat this story for all of you, because I continue believing that it describes in a very meaningful way our journey as a LWF communion. The story is about a rooster in a chicken farm.

Every morning when it was still dark the rooster went out to crow. He did so with amazing commitment, crowing from the depth of his heart and making use of all available resources and art. Actually, he was convinced that it was because of his crowing that the sun rose every morning. When he had finished his daily job and went back to the farm he used to look around with a sense of paternalistic pride at the hens. "There you go, darlings, I've made the sun rise for you", he even said once.

One morning the sunrise was really wonderful. The rooster got so enthusiastic that he couldn't stop crowing. The sun had long risen, but he continued crowing, just wanting to make the whole scenery even more perfect.

When he went back to the chicken farm he noticed that he had crowed too long. His throat was aching. He was only able to produce a weak croaking noise. The rooster panicked. What will happen tomorrow, if I can't crow anymore? What will happen to the chicken farm and to all these chickens and hens, which depend so much on my power to make the sun rise...? He went to sleep very early, just hoping that next morning he would be in good health again.

But he was not! The pain had worsened over night, and he could not even croak but make only a ridiculously weak squeak. Yet, he went out, like every morning, just pushed by the awareness of his plights and the panic that otherwise the sun wouldn't rise and they would all perish. He tried his best, he tried hard...yet there was nothing resembling real crowing coming out of his throat.

Great was his surprise when he suddenly realized that the sun seemed to be rising anyway! Slowly but surely it came up behind the hills, like every morning. Actually, it was again one of those wonderful mornings, but this time, it came without his doing! He turned slowly and looked back to the chicken farm. He couldn't believe what he saw there: the chickens and hens had come out like every morning as well!

Terribly depressed he went back to the chicken farm. What could be his place there? Didn't he lose his role and reason to be? And why should he go out the next morning, if the sun rose anyway, even without his help? Oh, and he felt so embarrassed and ashamed. He didn't even dare to look into the hens' eyes.

“Hey, don’t worry”, said one of the hens. “You can continue crowing”, she said. “Go out tomorrow as usual. But don’t crow **in order to** make the sun rise. Just crow **because** the sun rises!”

I have often told this story. I tell it when I want to explain how we Lutherans understand grace. Grace is like the rising sun. It is there, just because God wants grace to be there. As nobody can prevent the sun from rising, nobody can stop God from being gracious either. That was – in a nutshell – what Jesus revealed about God. That is in all its powerful simplicity the Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I often tell this story as a way of understanding good works as an expression of faith. Good works are a *response* to God’s grace. This is how we Lutherans understand the relationship between justification by grace and sanctification of our lives. Sanctification arises from hearts overflowing of joy and love because of God’s wonderful gifts. It is out of the gift of freedom, which God has acquired for us that we respond with good works.

The story has also served me many times as a discussion starter for a reflection on gender roles: the rooster – why does he have to think that he is the provider? And the hens – so silent for ages, although knowing - for ages as well - what was going on? All this untapped wisdom and potentials on one side, and these cruelly heavy role models! What is at the origin? Is it nature? Is it the culture of the chicken farm? What shapes that culture? Are there alternatives?

Today, I am sharing this story with you as I reflect on our common journey as the LWF communion of churches. I do understand the gift of communion like this rising sun. Communion is just there, right in our midst, by God’s grace! Not because of our doing, but because of God’s doing! LWF member churches have recognized this gift and have wanted to accept it as the key that shapes their understanding of being the church and of their mutual relationships. Our gathering here, the Eleventh Assembly, is not intended to be the gathering in **order to** make communion happen – we should not repeat the mistake of the rooster. We are gathered as an Assembly **because** of our vocation to give praiseful response to God’s gift of communion!

Of course, this is a difficult enough task. Who will set the tune for our praiseful response? Who is going to lead our singing? Does it have to be a unison tune – like Gregorian singing in ancient times, where everybody had to follow the same melody? Or are we ready for polyphony, where different sections join with their own voices into a richer, yet also more complex singing?

I believe it has to be a polyphonic tune! Because we read in the Bible that while there is one body, there are many members (1 Cor. 12) and that these many members give expression to a variety of gifts. We also know that the central gift, which explains all others, is love (1. Cor.13). Based on these fundamental texts, we recognize ourselves as a communion united in faith and committed to love.

At the same time, we have to face the reality that our experiences, they vary so much! Our contexts are substantially different. Our way of being the church in these differing contexts, as well as the way in which we describe how Christ speaks to us through Scriptures – all that varies and gets differing forms, flavors and expressions. The voices in the choir, they are diverse. Sometimes very diverse.

There should not be space for worry or concern among us because of our diversity. It is deep gratitude to God that should prevail. Because in this diversity I see God nurturing LWF member

churches in an ongoing way. Our diversity is a sign that the Triune God is indeed alive and powerful. LWF member churches are today rooted in all regions of this globe. God has allowed them to become established there and to contextualize. Diversity is not a problem. As an expression of God's powerful action through the Holy Spirit, diversity is a precious gift.

Yet, it is also true that this diversity also becomes a task and a challenge. As a communion of churches, it calls us to identify and to name our basic agreements and our common understanding. Thus, although we are singing different parts of a same doxology, our diverse singing is still recognizable as praise and witness to the same God. Its shape is configured by the way in which we as Lutheran churches understand our Christian faith. The spiral of relating our context to Scripture and to our confessional identity is one of the important theological tasks ahead of us. I regard this task as an extraordinary opportunity to mature our understanding of being a communion of churches and become stronger witnesses of God in a world longing for bread, justice, and peace.

Within this theological conversation, we will indeed have to face this other question as well: what about the dissonances that again and again become audible?

Let me go back to musical theory. According to it, there is no harmony without dissonance. Actually, one can only build harmony on the basis of dissonance. Otherwise, no tune, no choir, no polyphony is possible.

I think that this basic insight from musical theory also applies to our life as communion, to our praising response and grateful witness to the gift of communion. Dissonances are needed, as they are needed in music, so that our tune evolves and becomes increasingly refined and remains both **relevant** and **powerful** in today's world? Dissonances, though sometimes difficult to accept, carry the promise of transformative power. They help will help us to find these "new songs" which the Psalm invites us to sing to our Lord. (Ps. 149).

It is with this basic conviction that the LWF can approach its task of finding and rehearsing the tunes that will give witness to the gift of communion in today's world! While journeying into unknown land, let us develop our doxology joyfully and confidently. Let's do so with a profoundly spiritual attitude, in coherence with the fact that the LWF is fundamentally a *spiritual journey*. I'm convinced that we will find those new songs. Not **in order** to make communion happening, but **because** communion happens as the sun rises every day.

During my time in the LWF Secretariat in Geneva, I have learnt a sentence from our General Secretary, the Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, which fully reflects my own experience and practice as a Lutheran Christ: "to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical". I fully subscribe to this sentence. To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical. There should be no doubt that our vocation is to continue contributing and participating ecumenically. Not as an option, but as an expression of who we are as Lutheran churches. We are part of this one Body of Christ. It is because of this that we will continue working together with the WCC, with other Christian World Communions, as well as with other organizations such as the ACT-Alliance and the Global Christian Forum. These are all relevant spaces to translate our ecumenical vocation into practice. And we will also continue our commitment to dialogue with our many ecumenical partners in bilateral conversations, promoting mutual understanding and relationships of trust. As we continue discerning what it means to be churches in communion, we are committed to do so with a sense of ecumenical responsibility. Never turning the back to others. On the contrary, we will seek to strengthen our contribution to unity in reconciled diversity.

Let me move on now and leave my initial story behind. Instead, I thought it is good if I share with you some few details about my own personal story.

I was born and grew up in Chile. As many people in the country of my own generation, I was profoundly shaped by the period of great political difficulties in my country. We suffered the loss of democracy and freedoms and lived seventeen years under the rule of military dictatorship. During that period of time, I learnt how little it takes to lose democracy, and how much it takes to regain it. And I learnt to appreciate the tremendous value of participatory democracy.

During that period of time, which was not easy for my family either, the Lord came into my life. And I discovered the church for me. It became so important! My home church became a space of protection, of mutual consolation and support. I learnt to hold on to values – justice, human dignity, non-violence, tolerance – which the political and social context were belying almost daily. I heard words from the pulpit that affirmed us in these values. They inspired us to have hope, but also to develop that evangelical stubbornness that leads to creative resistance. I experienced how the words from the pulpit liberated an amazing amount of energy among us in order to turn to the neighbor and serve those suffering the loss of their rights, persecution, hunger and illness. I learnt to appreciate the power of the table of the Holy Communion, which nurtured our faith, hope and love during these difficult days.

From the brief explanation of my faith journey you will probably recognize that I understand the mission of the church holistically. I believe that proclamation, diakonia and prophetic presence in society (advocacy) belong intrinsically together. They all influence each other in a process of mutual transformation. Friends, what sense would it make to engage actively in advocacy, defending the rights of people, if at the same time the main message from our pulpits hammers the bad news on the people in the pews that they are dirty sinners, worth nothing but harsh punishment? We ourselves would be undermining the dignity of people, which we want others to uphold! What sense would it make, if we feed people in need through diakonia, but build fences around the table of the Lord, making it the exclusive event for some few? We would be deepening a divide between spiritual and material needs, which holistic mission precisely wants to overcome! And what a sense would it make to proclaim the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, who became one of us in order to show God's solidarity and compassion, if this Gospel doesn't move us to solidarity and compassion with others? We would be reversing God's powerful tide towards humanity and creation, and thus fail to be witnesses of who the Triune God actually is.

There needs to be coherence between the three dimensions of holistic mission. And there needs to be sound balance between them as well. To get at this coherence, and to find this balance, I believe, is going to be a task for the LWF in the years to come.

From my experience in my own church I still want to share another important detail: I grew up in a church where there have always been women pastors. I belong to a church which will soon have more female than male pastors. I'm neither nervous nor concerned about it. I'm simply grateful for these developments. I actually was mentored during my internship by a female pastor, Rev. Gloria Rojas, who is sitting at this Assembly representing my church as its first female President. If you want so, I learnt from a woman pastor how to serve as a Congregational pastor.

I move on now with my address, knowing that I'm just touching on issues that deserve a much deeper conversation. Let me share with you some of the key concepts, which I would like to retain as important orientation points for my service as a General Secretary of the LWF.

One of these key concepts is for me the notion of the **polycentric** nature of the LWF. The LWF does not have one center, but many. The LWF is globally present. There are LWF member churches in all regions of the world and specific identities begin to evolve in those different centers. What it is to be the church is defined in a polycentric way, giving space to different ways of being the church. Each of them will bring something valuable to the table. Dear brothers and sisters, as I prepare to take on my service as General Secretary, I'm determined to approach the entire LWF in its polycentricity, and with the basic conviction that each of these centers is a contribution, an enrichment to our communion. Regardless of the age, the size, the wealth and the theological and spiritual profiles of our member churches: there is no church in this communion, which doesn't have something to give; there is no church within this communion, which isn't in need to receive. Resources and capacities, experiences, instruments and knowledge – let us leave behind the old idea that all this needs to be brought from one corner of the world to the other. Let us move beyond the idea that within this communion of churches there will be some on the giving end, and some others on the receiving end. Let us instead acknowledge that each church has resources, each church has own capacities, each church has experience and knowledge that we need to *circulate* and *share*. I see the LWF moving much more strongly into this direction in the future, thus becoming a space and a process, where mutual learning and mutual transformation happens.

A second concept, which has become extremely important to me during these last years is the notion of **transcontextual dialogue**. My computer underlines in red the word transcontextual, signaling that this word does not exist. Actually it does. This explains many of the problems, which we face today as a global village. The human race has learnt to connect people around the globe through travel and communication. The human race has learnt to transfer resources with a mouse click. The human race has learnt to become deeply interconnected through various forms of media. Yet, the human race has not yet learnt to live as neighbors. Issues of neighborhood are becoming extremely complex and sometimes even highly explosive. At all levels: in villages and cities, among tribes and ethnic groups, among nations, and in the global village. We often don't know how to be neighbors. I have the perception that this difficulty also applies to some extent to us, as the LWF. Let me put this in a theological language. As LWF we have been insisting –rightly so – on the notion of the contextual church. This is indeed the direction to go and is coherent with the notion of incarnation, which is so central for Lutheran theology. Churches need to be contextual, responding to conversations, challenges, needs and questions, which are identified locally. Yet, within this contextual approach, which I want to strongly affirm, there is also a risk. Because we may also withdrawing into own contexts. We may use our context as a refuge and even as an excuse for communication breakdown, for self-exclusion, or the exclusion of others. Let me use in a provocative way some more Lutheran terminology here: if we are not careful we may end up with a fourth “solus”, next to sola scriptura, solus Christus and sola fide: the solus contextus! I see it as one of our most challenging tasks for the future, that while affirming the contextuality of churches, we affirm also their universality, and engage therefore in a dialogue, cooperation and collaborative work across contexts. Here I see us not only maturing as a communion of churches, but also contributing to the wider question of our neighborhood in this one world, in which we are living together. Here I see also an excellent entry point for our interreligious engagement, with our particular focus on diapraxis, which Asian LWF member churches have brought to our common table of the LWF as their gift.

The third concept, which will shape the way in which I will be serving the communion as its General Secretary is *inclusiveness*. I have been reading the history of the LWF during these last months. I have found out that the word inclusiveness or inclusion is rather new in the vocabulary of the LWF. The longing for an inclusive church and LWF, and the effort to translate that into practice, however, has been there right from the beginning. Bishop Hanson quoted the brilliant speech of Dr. Noko at the ELCA convention 2009, reminding the Assembly about the prophetic action to include churches in the emerging LWF, which belonged to countries that only a few years earlier were at war! All were included.

Some of you were witnesses of the painful struggle in the life of the LWF because of the practices of racial segregation in church life in South Africa. It was a struggle in various Assemblies but the outcome is very clear: exclusion on the basis of racial issues does not have space in the life of the LWF. And it was precisely because of this vocation for inclusion that member churches that could not distance themselves from apartheid, were not harshly *dismissed*. Their membership was *suspended*, and later on they were again fully included in the life of the LWF.

I have observed during this Eleventh Assembly how we are struggling still with the inclusion of women and youth. Budapest 1984 reaffirmed our commitment towards inclusion with a resolution regarding women's participation; Curitiba 1990 reaffirmed this commitment and focused on youth participation. Winnipeg 2003 brought into the visual field of the communion the reality of indigenous people and the need to include them as well.

It is becoming clear that there is homework left for us. We are recognizing deficiencies in the life of the LWF regarding our vocation to be inclusive. We have quotas, but often, we have difficulties to reach them. There seem to be disconnects between what we decide globally in an Assembly, and what happens locally. But even when we fulfill quotas that is not sufficient. They may ensure presence, but not necessarily participation. In order to be faithful to our previous Assembly commitments and achieve our goals. We need to allow ourselves to be transformed as churches and as global communion by the power that women and youth bring to us. It is time for us men to get involved in making our churches and the communion more inclusive. Youth during this Assembly has shown us that they are ready for this step!

I thought it was important to share some of these key concepts with you, which will most surely shape my way of serving the LWF as its General Secretary. But I need to move on now, because I know that you want to hear something about my priorities as well. Actually, many people have been asking me during these days about that. My response has been consistent: it is not about *my* priorities! Because the LWF doesn't belong to me. The LWF belongs to you, the member churches. And it is with you, through the Council, that we will have to reach the point of identifying those priorities which provide a direction for the time ahead. Indeed, I have my own ideas. You may have even heard some of these ideas in what I've been saying today. I understand that I will have to bring these ideas to the Council, which you have elected here as the body that governs the LWF and represents all member churches represented here. I intend to exert leadership, but I want to do so in a participatory manner.

Out of this principle, my immediate task in the months of September and October, when I will be acting as General Secretary, is to establish the contacts and the working relationships with the President, and with the Council. Bishop Younan: it will be a privilege to work together with you. All your experiences in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, your exposure to such different religious, political and social hermeneutics that encounter each other in some few square kilometers and your ability to

understand each of them and remain strong and prophetic in your determination to mediate, dialogue and work for peace – all this is a witness, which we have been admiring around the world. Through your election as LWF President, these experiences, abilities and witness are now called upon for the entire communion. I look forward to excellent cooperation and mutual support, as we take on our respective roles of servant leadership in the LWF.

Dear brothers and sisters, let me now come to some concluding remarks. I will do so by going back to the little story that I put at the beginning of my presentation. The story of the proud rooster. During my theological studies, I remember that while we were learning about the parables in the New Testament, our teacher said something very important to us students. He cautioned us against a too extensive use of parables. “They will always fall short to what they actually want to explain. There will be misleading aspects in a parable, or even missing ones”.

This is also true for the story, which I used at the beginning. Because it dwelt too much in the vertical perspective. There is nothing wrong in it. We receive grace from God, and it comes to us like a gift, similar to the rising sun. That is all true. But we know as well that grace has a horizontal dimension as well. Grace doesn't tolerate to live enshrined in individual lives. Grace will always want to find its way to the neighbor. A self-confined grace, a grace that is egoistically stocked and jealously fenced from others, will vanish like the manna in the desert.

In our identity, we have this strong theological perspective on grace, as it is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. And as Lutherans, we follow this strong theological emphasis on incarnation. I always understand us as the church that is caught by this incarnational tide. Jesus Christ came right in the midst of this world. He touched its joys and beauties, but also its pains and sufferings. Jesus Christ came into its midst to redeem it from its deep complexities and contradictions, from its sinfulness. And we are caught by God's movement towards the world. Because God through Jesus Christ gives such a strong witness to God's love for the entire world and the neighbor, we too understand that we are called to not only live in this world, but to love it and to love our neighbor.

That is the origin of our diaconal commitment. During the Seventh Assembly of the LWF in Curitiba, it was even stated that our communion is a deeply diaconal communion. Because of grace, and because of God's love incarnated in Jesus Christ. The LWF has captured this diaconal dimension right from the beginning and has developed a strong profile among struggling, suffering and persecuted communities. Bishop Younan talked about the milk that he received as a child. I could tell you more stories. For instance, from the Arauca province in Colombia, with tremendous levels of violence and poverty. “Lutherans have given us the opportunity to get organized and to protect ourselves”. This is how people in Arauca got to know Lutherans. Or I could tell you about a Minister of the government of Mozambique, who approached the World Service Director after a meeting and said to him: “I know you guys. I was a refugee in one of your camps”. This is the memory, which thousands of people have about Lutherans. We are known as people with a profound passion for the neighbor. And this is good so, and this should remain so.

Let me again come with a theological concept. Bishop Hanson referred in his address to Luther's definition of sin. Using the Augustine definition in Latin “*cor incurvatus in se ipsum*” Luther spoke about the person curved in on him or herself.

Yes, it is true. We have to discuss some internal issues which are influencing our understanding, but also the quality of our relationships as churches in communion. As we move on in our journey as a

communion of churches, we will continue strengthening our regional expressions and engage in transcontextual dialogue. But: this should not result in a “communion incorvata in se ipsa”, this is, in a communion that is curved in itself, busy in internal dialogues, concerned about internal relationships, self-centered and horribly indifferent to the joys and pains of the world, in which the communion is placed, and which the communion is called to serve. Such a communion incorvata in se ipsa would indeed become a communion that has been touched by the deadly sting of sin.

There continues to be hunger outside. There are child soldiers today. There is HIV.

There is the huge challenge of climate change, with a clear indication that without strong reaction from the human race, it is going to erode the basis of survival for billions of people. And there is the painful incapacity of governments to adopt a global perspective in order to tackle the challenge. Can we be a voice that contributes in this discussion. Will we have the strength to adopt a communion perspective and contribute to tackle the challenge?

Some months ago I read a very wise word of a North American poet:

*Man has survived hitherto (this was written back in the 50ies)
Because he was too ignorant to know
How to realize his wishes.
Now that he can realize them,
He must either change them
Or perish.
W.C. Williamson*

The sort of metanoias, of change of mind, that are needed, are of deeply spiritual nature.

There is a economic order that is absolutely unfair, unjust and a deep expression of sin, depriving millions of human beings from their rights and even their lives. Did you know that the G 20 spent 816 billion USD to bail out its banks? All of a sudden the money was there, over night, to save banks. Why has this money never available to save people needing ARV, or to cancel debts of clearly illegal or illegitimate origin? Are human beings of less value? Isn't this a moral question, which a communion like the LWF, with its global structure should be raising, hopefully together with other denominations, religions, and organizations?

Did you know that in the year 2006 the global South transferred altogether 657 billion USD to the North? This means, that after bringing summing up all financial flows of all nature: commercial, loans, gifts, the global North had a surplus 657 billion USD. And that in the year 2009, the “best” year regarding development aid, only 123 billion USD were offered as development aid to countries needing support? Where is the morality in that picture? Shouldn't the LWF take an active role in this discussion as well, raising its prophetic voice on behalf of those people, which are not abstract numbers, but are an important part of its 70 million members? We would even know the names of those, on whose behalf we would be speaking! What a tremendous advantage: to be so firmly rooted locally, and so well positioned globally. Are we making use of it?

Let me conclude here, mentioning that I will come to our next Council, proposing that we should hold our next Assembly in the year 2017, thus making our Assembly one of those events marking the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. But it will be also a benchmark that will shape quite

importantly the work of the LWF in the years to come. The LWF needs to mark this anniversary. It will do so with ecumenical openness – the Lutheran Reformation is not an exclusive property of Lutheran churches. It belongs to many other churches meanwhile. It was actually never meant to be an exclusive property of Lutheran Churches. Instead, it was meant to be a contribution to the entire Body of Christ, and as such we should be commemorating it.

Words to Ishmael:

- time spent, dialogues, drawn me back to history. Evian!
- “Emotional side of it”. What I’ll take along is your passion
- Rising sun of the communion