

**Mennonite World Conference Response  
to the  
Lutheran World Federation Action  
on the  
Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists  
Given by President Danisa Ndlovu (Zimbabwe)**

Martin Luther and the Anabaptists called this practice of the early Christians the “rule of Christ.” We find it in Matthew 18, one of only two places in the New Testament where Jesus uses the word *ecclesia*—“church.” Both times his subject is “binding and loosing.” More specifically, in this instance, Jesus teaches about granting forgiveness while reestablishing communion in the community of disciples.

*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:18-22 NRSV).*

Today in this place, we together—Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites—are fulfilling the “rule of Christ.”

Today in this place, we together—Lutherans, Anabaptist-Mennonites, and other Christians—are living out a basic and essential meaning of church: binding and loosing; seeking and granting forgiveness; restoring and healing relationships in the body of Christ.

To God be the glory!

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Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, you have taken this action on the legacy of the persecution of Anabaptists in which you ask for forgiveness from God and from Anabaptist-Mennonite sisters and brothers. You seek forgiveness:

- for the harm that your forbears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists;
- for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries; and
- for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors to the present day.

Are we worthy to receive your request? We are painfully aware of our own inadequacy. We cannot bring ourselves to this table with heads held high. We can only come bowed down in great humility and in the fear of the Lord. We cannot come to this point and fail to see our own sinfulness. We cannot come to this point without recognizing our own need for God’s grace and forgiveness.

At the same time, we are profoundly moved by your spirit of repentance and by your act of seeking forgiveness. And we remember the prayer of George Blaurock, the first Anabaptist—baptized on January 21, 1525, in Zurich (Switzerland); burned at the stake on September 6, 1529, in Klausen (Austria).

While in prison Blaurock wrote these words:

*I sincerely pray for all my enemies, O Lord, however many there may be. Do not lay their sins to their charge. Lord, I entreat this according to your will.*

We believe that God has already heard and granted this Anabaptist prayer. We believe that today God has heard your confession and is granting your appeal for forgiveness. We joyfully and humbly join with God in giving forgiveness. In the spirit of the “rule of Christ,” we believe that what we are doing together here today on earth, God is doing also in heaven.

To God be the glory!

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Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not only have you sought forgiveness for past acts, you have demonstrated the integrity of your initiative by making specific commitments to new action. We gratefully acknowledge these commitments. In response:

- We commit ourselves to promote interpretations of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story which take seriously the jointly described history found in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission Report;
- We commit ourselves to take care that your initiative for reconciliation is known and honoured in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching about Lutherans;
- We commit ourselves to continue with you deliberation on the unresolved issues between our two traditions, in a spirit of mutual vulnerability and openness to the movement of the Spirit;
- We commit ourselves to encourage our member churches, their local congregations, and their institutions to seek fuller relations and greater cooperation with Lutherans in service to the world.

To God be the glory!

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During the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).*

He also gave them a physical, embodied demonstration of this new commandment:

*Jesus (...) got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

Some Anabaptist and Mennonite churches have maintained the practice of foot washing. This wooden foot washing tub comes from one of them. We offer it to you as a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is boundless love and unfailing service. We will learn to seek one another's good from a posture of voluntary and mutual submission. For it is in our vulnerability to one another that God's miraculous, transforming, reconciling presence is made visible in the world.

To God be the glory!

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