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Message of the Eleventh Assembly

“Give, give us, give us today, give us today our daily bread”—a thousand voices joined in this theme song at the LWF Assembly in Stuttgart. Here is our message.

1. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (1) In a time of “grabbing and keeping,” we once again become aware that true humanity is found in receiving and sharing. “We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (1 Jn 4:19–21).

The whole of creation is a gift and not our achievement. We start off our life by receiving: breath, nourishment, life itself.

As Christians we confess and affirm our dependence on God’s grace. God sustains us, grants us talents, intelligence, ingenuity. Through Christ, God gives us salvation; sets us free. In as much as we depend on God, we also depend on others and others on us. Jesus himself set an example—not only did he give abundantly, he also received love and care in being anointed by the unnamed woman (Mk 14:3–9).

Commitments and actions

- (2) Knowing that in the act of sharing both givers and receivers can be deeply transformed, we commit ourselves to foster the awareness of receiving and the blessing of giving,
- by saying grace at meal time to testify that we are dependent on God’s grace and giving
 - by showing gratitude to our fellow human beings for what we receive from them
 - by sharing the gospel of grace with the people around us, freely passing on what we have received
 - by sharing not only our material goods, but also our knowledge and know-how with others
 - by caring for the environment, which we do not own, so future generations may enjoy the fruits of creation and lead wholesome lives.

2. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (3) We are a community with fellow Lutherans and all Christians and, beyond that, with people of all faiths and none. Through Christ each one of us can relate directly to God, but as

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children of God we are bound to one another. Because of our interdependence we need to make every effort to communicate across linguistic and other barriers.

- (4) We acknowledge that we face brokenness on all levels: in our Lutheran and Christian world, between different faith traditions, between humankind and the rest of creation. However, as Lutherans we testify that reconciliation is possible in Christ. This was witnessed to in the profound expression of repentance and forgiveness between Lutherans and Mennonites in this Assembly.
- (5) As members of LWF, we each stand firm in our faith and heritage. With all our differences, we encourage each other to listen prayerfully to the stories and perspectives of others, seeking wisdom, theological knowledge and factual evidence to illuminate our discussions and deepen our learning as communion.
- (6) Even though we long for agreement, we know that the basis of our communion is not shared opinion, but shared faith.
- (7) Jesus showed us that each one—woman, man and child—is equally valuable and important before God. As a communion that rejoices in its diversity and recognizes this equal humanity,
 - we acknowledge that our own policy of gender justice is only partially implemented. We need further reflection and implementation. We believe that in order to be a legitimate and credible voice for gender justice in society, the church must first achieve gender justice within its own structures and practices. Churches should be ahead of their time in granting women and men the opportunity to develop and use to the full their God-given gifts. Realizing gender justice changes and re-values the roles of both men and women; new roles in churches for both may shift traditional roles in society.
 - we emphasize the inclusion of persons with disabilities in church and society.
 - we oppose all types of human trafficking and commodification of the human body.
 - we emphasize that children's needs vary: some suffer physical starvation and abuse, others spiritual starvation and neglect. Still others become victims of human trafficking or are forced to become child soldiers. Many societies fail fully to recognize children's rights and needs. When we put the rights, needs and welfare of children at the centre (Mk 9:36), we have a future much brighter than we can imagine.
 - we reject the oppression of and discrimination against people for reasons of ethnicity, nationality or caste. We express our support for the Dalit communities in their hopes and aspirations for a new tomorrow.

Commitments and actions

- We ask for gender education to be included in all theological study.
- We ask all churches to recommit to gender and generational justice and inclusiveness. Box-ticking is never enough.

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- We ask the LWF and all member churches to facilitate exchanges for the sake of more widespread positive exposure to women in lay and ordained leadership.
- We refer to the resolution on human trafficking and relevant actions called for by this assembly.
- We endorse the message from the youth pre-assembly on the topic of sex education.
- We call for LWF and all member churches to make the rights and welfare of children a priority for future theology and action.
- We commit ourselves to continuing the dialogue with the Mennonites and the LWF and its member churches.

3. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (8) “The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:19). When people are transformed by the gospel, creation breathes a sigh of relief, and communities flourish. Where the gospel takes root, creation benefits.
- (9) We highlighted several issues that are of burning relevance today, as they have been for several yesterdays:
- **Food justice:** Recognizing adequate and nutritious food as essential to life, we are painfully aware that while large portions of the world population are impoverished and hungry, in other instances forty percent of food gets thrown away uneaten. This denies the fact that food is precious. The answer is not to fill empty bowls with cheap charity, but rather with the costly pursuit of justice for the sake of this and future generations. Direct support of the hungry and marginalized has to be combined with development and education. Our work has to empower people to fend for their own rights and live in dignity.
 - **Climate change:** We are aware that the window of opportunity for the reduction of greenhouse gas is shrinking. We realize that those who are most to blame often feel the least affected. As one consequence of this global crisis, some indigenous people are at risk of losing their ancestral land and culture.
 - **HIV and AIDS:** We recognize that the body of Christ is infected and affected; the church is both part of the problem and part of the solution. The churches’ silence or ill-advised recommendations have contributed to the ongoing spread of the pandemic. At the same time, churches are instrumental in providing information and education that result in effective prevention.
 - We recognize that in today’s world migration and issues connected with it are increasingly posing a challenge to social cohesion and political systems.
- (10) We acknowledge the large amount of work that has been done in some of these areas. We anticipate a time when we no longer need to speak about such issues each day.

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Commitments and actions

- Food justice: We refer to the resolutions and actions of this Assembly.
 - As we are only beginning to understand the extent of the issue, our first priority should be to educate ourselves about the dynamics of food production and distribution in a globalized world.
 - We ask the member churches to be actively involved in diaconal work with those suffering from food injustice and support the work of the LWF Department for World Service.

- Climate change: We refer to the resolutions and actions of this Assembly.
- HIV and AIDS: The rate of infection continues to exceed the rate of increased access to treatment. Hence the following actions are all of paramount importance.
 - Churches are asked to maintain the awareness of the disease, counteracting stigma and marginalization and ensuring the inclusion in church and society of those infected.
 - Prevention, treatment and care must be given equal priority. We call on all churches to consider how best to act on prevention of HIV transmission in their specific contexts.
 - Political commitment to achieve universal access to treatment is waning. We call on all governments to fulfill the promises they have made in this regard. This will enable people with HIV to live full and productive lives for the benefit of society.
 - The churches are invited to pursue their commitment to welcoming migrants who have emigrated for political, economic or climatic reasons.

4. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (11) The world we live in is God's ongoing creation of which we as creatures are a part. For our living, we rely on basic gifts that we cannot produce such as the atmosphere, fertile soil and clear water. We are creative creatures, capable of developing skills and inventing technology to improve our lives as well as to jeopardize them.

- (12) Jesus says, "I have come that you might have life in abundance" (Jn 10:10). As Christians we are called to be good stewards of God's creation and to share its gifts equitably. However, we have been polluting, exploiting and destroying God's creation, therefore decreasing biodiversity and causing the basic necessities of life to deteriorate.

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- (13) We are acutely aware of the environmental, social and economic unsustainability of many current patterns of behavior and practices in our global village. Our context today fails to provide a balance between these three pillars of sustainability. The ongoing global financial and economic crisis has shown us serious concerns regarding the unconstrained accumulation of wealth of the few at the expense of the many.
- (14) Illegitimate debts, incurred by unscrupulous lenders and borrowers, have plunged countries into deep financial crises, which are a major cause of hardship in affected societies.
- (15) Greed is a sin that contributes to current unsustainable practices and systems, and therefore must be confronted. It also fuels the injustice between rich and poor; between developed and developing countries and communities. We as Christians and churches repent of our complicity in this greed-driven culture.

Commitments and actions

- (16) Through our repentance and the forgiveness promised to us by God, as well as our daily rebirth in our baptism, we are strengthened to work for the renewal and rebirth of creation. Therefore we commit to promoting alternatives to prevailing economic systems so that God's gifts may be distributed in a more sustainable and just manner. In accordance with the resolutions of the LWF assembly we call on LWF and all member churches to give attention to concrete actions such as:
- consistent ethical investment policy and practice
 - purchasing policy that is responsible ecologically and socially
 - carbon dioxide neutral event management
 - ecologically sound means of transportation
 - sustainable practice in the ownership and use of land and buildings
 - good and transparent governance
 - sustainable management practices.
- (17) Furthermore we call upon the LWF and its member churches to
- advocate for the cancellation of illegitimate debts
 - promote sustainable development
 - raise awareness on environmental issues.
- (18) We look to a future where all share in the daily bread.

5. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (19) Give us today our daily bread. *"What does this mean?...* Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-

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control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like” (Luther’s *Small Catechism*).

- (20) The sacramental sharing of bread and wine obliges us to care for the daily bread of our societies (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). As a communion of small and large churches, we recognize that we fulfill the obligation of feeding the world physically and spiritually in various ways, for instance through preaching the gospel, education and capacity building, social and political diakonia, advocacy, and effective communication
- (21) In an increasingly multicultural world, the need for dialogue and working together (diapraxis) grows more urgent daily. The fruits that are harvested from ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and diapraxis depend on the depth of knowledge and immersion in our own tradition. Being well grounded in our faith tradition enables us to be open, receptive, and hospitable to others.
- (22) We acknowledge that the climate crisis and issues of sustainability make dialogue and diapraxis between people of different faith traditions essential and may provide an impulse towards greater mutual understanding. This comes to expression in common advocacy and action.
- (23) We expect the LWF and its member churches to speak up loudly and prophetically.
- (24) Going out with this message, trusting the Triune God, we proclaim:

*As we face rising waters, hunger, and displacement,
God suffers with us.*

*As we mourn the distress and wounds of God’s creation,
God weeps with us.*

*As we struggle for justice,
God struggles with us.*

*As we expose and challenge climate injustice,
God empowers us. **

*As we are troubled by divisions in and between our churches,
God challenges us to become what we already are in our baptism.*

*As we, in the light of the gospel, discover the reforming power of diversity and tension,
God inspires us to repentance, reconciliation, and renewal.*

*As we dare to face the challenges of giving and receiving, of sharing,
God creates God’s people into newness.*

**(God, Creation and Climate Change, p. 129)*