

(Embargo against delivery)

Report to the LWF Eleventh Assembly
Stuttgart, Germany, 20-27 July 2010

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From Winnipeg to Stuttgart

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

- (1) Your presence here—as delegates, ecumenical participants, honored guests, visitors, official representatives of the state and local municipal authorities—is a sign that the LWF Eleventh Assembly has begun in earnest. We are grateful to Bishop Frank O. July and, through him, to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg and the local committee under the leadership of Kirchenrat Klaus Rieth; to the Leading Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich, to the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD); to the state and municipal authorities; to the Assembly Planning Committee; to the International Worship Committee and its corresponding local counterpart; to the Assembly Content Coordinator, Professor Erwin Buck and Gertrud Buck; to the Assembly Office in Geneva under the leadership of the Deputy General Secretary Rev Chandran Paul Martin, the LWF Cabinet, and members of the staff in Geneva; to the IT coordinator Ms Jeannette Sylla; to the stewards; volunteers, and the translators and interpreters. Without your dedicated work, this Assembly would not be possible. I want also to offer a special word of appreciation to the mayor and the authorities of the city of Stuttgart for the generous hospitality extended to us.
- (2) I also extend greetings to my predecessor Bishop Gunnar Stalsett who will be joining us later this week, and to former LWF Presidents Bishop Christian Krause and Professor Dr Gottfried Brakkemeier. Dr Brakkemeier was unfortunately unable to attend the Assembly in person, but sends his best wishes for this occasion.

2. FROM WINNIPEG

- (3) Seven years ago, we gathered in the city of Winnipeg, Canada, for the Tenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. We met under the theme “For the Healing of the World.” We departed from Winnipeg with the shared conviction that as churches and individuals we are called to be a healing and reconciling community, to be a sign of hope in the midst of brokenness. We harvested the fruits of our discernment into a basketful of 101 commitments and resolutions. On the basis of these commitments and resolutions, the Secretariat and the Council identified four main priority areas around which programs and projects were organized and implemented for the period between Winnipeg and Stuttgart. These priority areas are: i) to strengthen Lutheran identity as a communion of churches in mission; ii) to deepen ecumenical commitment and foster interfaith relations; iii) to bear witness in church

and society to God's healing, reconciliation and justice; and iv) to enhance communication, mutual accountability and sharing.

3. THE SIX-YEAR REPORT

In the "Six-Year Report" the General Secretary, on behalf of the Council, gives account to the Assembly of the programmatic activities and other initiatives undertaken within these four priority areas. My remarks today are based on the assumption that delegates have had sufficient time to read this document and that detailed reporting is superfluous. In addition, member churches were kept informed about the work of the LWF through Annual Reports, *Lutheran World Information*, a steady flow of press releases, publications, and the distribution of Council decisions. It is assumed that these information resources are shared within the churches through their own internal information distribution systems. For purposes of this report today, I will limit myself to just a few observations, based on the life and experience of the LWF over these years.

4. TO STUTTGART: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASSEMBLING IN GERMANY

- (4) It is now 58 years since the LWF assembled for the first time here in the land of the Reformation (Hanover, 1952). Today it is difficult to imagine what efforts it took for the German churches to host such an international event, at a time when the German people were extremely vulnerable, politically and in other ways. And yet, they chose to host it despite all difficulties. It was an act of spiritual courage rooted in the desire to promote national and international reconciliation. By God's grace, Lutherans learnt to accept and to live with each other, when there was every reason for them to go their separate ways. The churches in Germany showed a willingness to do the most difficult thing, namely, openly to speak about their painful national history and to let others have a say. From across the face of the earth they came in numbers and committed themselves to stay together for the sake of the *unity* which Christ willed and prayed for. In this regard I want to believe that the Assembly at Hanover was as transformative an experience for Lutherans then as the World Cup has been for the people of the Republic of South Africa today.
- (5) The world has changed since 1952. Developments such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the liberation of Nelson Mandela released forces that have reshaped our global village. The forces of globalization both connected and disconnected people. The gap between those who do not have enough to eat and those who have far more than they need has grown tremendously. Despite stronger controls, the movement of people crossing borders to seek a better tomorrow has increased. Here in Europe, the situation of minority peoples and communities has become an increasingly heated political issue. At the same time, theological dialogues and ecclesial agreements have changed the European ecumenical landscape. And interreligious dialogues and consultations have a greater priority than ever before.
- (6) Political scientists and economists describe Germany as the major player in the process of European integration. Therefore holding an Assembly on German soil brings us face-to-face with European realities such as immigration, secularization, and the ecclesial and missiological question of what it means to be church in Europe today. Could this be an occasion for the churches in Europe to share with others the challenges they face within a

context of such rapid change? What do these changes mean for the churches in Europe that have traditionally been seen as “majority” churches? What can the “minority” churches in Europe say about being church in transition?

- (7) Germany was also at the epicenter of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Here, nearly 500 years ago, a dynamic movement took hold which built on previous movements in the Western church. This movement re-focused on the gospel of God’s justifying grace as proclaimed in the Scriptures. It was in this region that initiatives began to make the Bible accessible again to the ordinary believer. Translating the Bible into German—long before the advent of the Bible Societies—was a fundamental step towards equipping the faithful to be fluent in the first language of their faith: *knowledge of the Scriptures*.
- (8) Towards this goal, Luther and some of his colleagues in Wittenberg initiated the production of Christian educational materials for the instruction of children, youth, laity and clergy. It was in Wittenberg that Luther’s Small Catechism was produced, now translated into more languages than any other of the Lutheran confessional writings. It was a fulfillment in its day of one of the expectations expressed in the Official Statement to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ 1999) to “interpret the message of justification in a language relevant for human beings today.”
- (9) Many people coming to this country for the first time see the places where Luther lived and worked as literally “inspirational.” While these Reformation sites belong to the German people, the *spiritual* wealth they represent is in my view an ecumenical gift to the One Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, meeting here offers an opportunity for Christians from other lands to reconnect spiritually with the historical place where the Reformation movement crystallized.

5. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD

- (10) Sisters and brothers, we are gathered here today from different contexts, nations and tribes of many tongues, and from different time zones. We bring with us the experiences, perspectives, concerns and emotions of the people we represent. We shall spend an entire week discerning what God wants us to be and do, under the theme: *Give us today our daily bread*. When Martin Luther spoke of “daily bread” he referred not only to physical and spiritual sustenance, but to all that is necessary for a human life in dignity—including good government. In so doing, Luther leads us to address the structural causes of physical and spiritual poverty, as well as the symptoms.
- (11) Millions of people on our planet still do not have their daily bread, rice, ugali, or potato—food that is healthy, nutritious and appropriate to their needs and cultures. They do not have daily shelter and daily clean water. They suffer from unjust national and international economics and politics.
- (12) The petition for our daily bread is a communal petition—not for “my” bread but for “our” bread—that entails communal responsibility rather than individual privilege, not only within the human community but also within the community of creation. According to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, human beings have dominion over creation. They are charged

with “presidential responsibility and duties” for the whole of creation. Therefore the “us” and the “our” in the prayer includes the needs of our fellow human beings, as well as those of the rest of creation including the buffalo, the elephant, the birds and the fish, and the *wellness* of the environment. What we receive from God is only edible, digestible, enjoyable and spiritually nutritious when we are conscious of the needs of others.

- (13) In the current context of global economic and environmental crisis, provoked in part by greed and a lack of mutual accountability, the theme of this Assembly is especially poignant. How can and how should we live together in this global village? How can and how should we recognize and reflect the interconnectedness of the whole human family? How can and how should we demonstrate responsibility and love to our neighbor? How can and how should we together sustain, nurture and strengthen our communion? How can and how should we as churches hold our political and economic leaders to account? How can and how should we exercise our “presiding” responsibility and obligation towards a suffering creation? How can we find the “Christ” in “crisis”? These are some of the essential questions for our deliberation.
- (14) Bread also represents the spiritual significance of simple fellowship. It was in the act of breaking bread that the risen Lord Jesus was revealed to the travelers on the road to Emmaus. It is in fellowship and care for one another that we recognize the face of God. And so may we find the face of Christ around the Lord’s Table, in conversations and daily meals during these days together.

6. BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES

- (15) One of the significant steps taken by the Assembly in Winnipeg was to add to the LWF’s name the descriptive phrase, “A communion of churches.” This implies a change of perspective regarding the relationship between the LWF as an organization and its member churches. The member churches are the LWF, and through the structures of governance they live out their *koinonia*. Yet, we should recognize that the LWF has what one might call two “qualities.” Structures such as the Assembly, the Council (with its various committees) and the Communion Office are the organs of the Lutheran communion; they share in the DNA of the communion. The second quality is expressed when the LWF acts as an instrument of the communion, as it relates to other organizations or communities outside the communion of member churches.
- (16) Communion in Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is also a task and a responsibility; a calling for all of us to engage in the work of communion-building, and a privilege to do so. The Six-Year Report highlights numerous examples of consultations, workshops, visitation programs by staff, and from church to church, and other activities and initiatives whereby the LWF has sought to pursue this task. The meetings of the Council and of the committees of the Council, held in different places, have been instrumental in strengthening member churches to work together and to see beyond their immediate contexts. You have seen the different kinds of publications initiated through the various departments/units of the LWF. There are also exhibitions on display at this Assembly that illustrate the work carried out by the LWF, the member churches, and related agencies, as well as ACT Alliance and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. The Public Hearings during this Assembly are intended to animate

discussions on some of the issues that have preoccupied the LWF over the past seven years: food security and climate change, illegitimate external debt, and HIV/AIDS. All these activities and interests have brought together representatives from member churches from across the world to work together and thus to promote intra-Lutheran unity in God's mission.

- (17) Communication is the lifeblood of the communion. As members of the communion it is our duty to ensure that we keep communication going in and between regions. Without good communication, relationships break down, leading to frustration and suspicion.
- (18) The Communion Office, mentioned earlier as one of the organs of the LWF communion, is indispensable for the building of communion. Therefore it is important that such an office be sustainable for the sake of the whole communion, and that it represent our global diversity.
- (19) We are called to be an *inclusive* communion. Without living out that calling, we cannot be effective witnesses for justice and inclusiveness in our societies. Within the limitations of its evolving self-understanding, there have been many expressions of this commitment by the LWF: many resolutions; the appointment of specialized desks; the establishment of quotas; and the articulation of an inclusive ecclesiology. Nonetheless, more than 60 years after its foundation, the LWF still struggles to live up to its own vision of inclusiveness. We continue to be challenged to work towards becoming a communion that truly reflects the body of Christ—complete in all its parts and representative of its full diversity.
- (20) Equitable participation in God's mission is the hallmark of an inclusive communion. Member churches were therefore urged to take appropriate steps towards the ordination of women, and where it was not the case, to put in place policies of equality. During the last Assembly the call was directed to member churches to undertake theological study on overcoming the remaining barriers that prevent gender mainstreaming and women's ordination. But in most cases, even Assembly or Council decisions that received strong support at the time do not enjoy much subsequent follow-up by churches. It challenges us to examine whether and to what extent Assembly resolutions are considered by the churches as morally binding. We confess that we are a communion, but in many cases it seems we are still live and act like a federation. However, even belated and partial progress must be acknowledged. You may recall that the LWF Seventh Assembly in 1984 called for a balance to be achieved between men and women Assembly delegates as of the LWF Ninth Assembly. That vision has finally been realized at this Assembly.
- (21) The LWF has put in place a Youth Desk since the early 80s in order to coordinate and support youth programs in member churches. Over the years both the Assembly and Council and other governing bodies of the Federation have made resolution after resolution calling for a church inclusive of its youth. Some progress has been made in this regard. Nevertheless the absence of young people in many churches today, and the fact that many are finding more meaning in charismatic worship services, is a sign that mainline churches need to renew their liturgies and practices. At this Assembly we shall hear more from the LWF Youth about how they envision more inclusiveness in the life of the communion.
- (22) The body's strength depends on the participation of all its members. Around 10 percent of the world's population—or 650 million people—live with a disability, and 80 percent of them

live in developing countries. For the church to be an inclusive community for people with disabilities is not an option but is a characteristic by which it must be defined.

- (23) The church has a special responsibility to create a space for those communities that have been weakened and excluded in both church and society to speak for themselves. Toward this goal the Assembly in Winnipeg emphatically recognized the place of indigenous peoples in society and in our communion. Yet, much more needs to be done in order to recognize and affirm the indigenous perspective and voice in the Lutheran communion, in the wider church and in society at large.
- (24) Likewise, more needs to be done in pursuit of the dignity and rights of Dalits, and against the entrenched discrimination of the “untouchables,” which represents radical denial of the most basic notions of human dignity and the most fundamental principles of human rights. The issue has increasingly emerged as a focus of international ecumenical concern and action, notably at a joint WCC/LWF global ecumenical conference in 2009 at Bangkok. This called for a global ecumenical solidarity movement to end this dehumanizing system of exclusion. This is a call I personally wish to affirm and extend this call to the Assembly.
- (25) I also have in my heart the Lutheran communities of Kazakhstan and the region of Central Asia , whose history, struggle and perseverance greatly moved me when I visited them in the years 2003, 2006 and 2009. These communities, having suffered forced removal, suppression of their identity, massive emigration, poverty and lack of opportunity, have nevertheless survived and maintained their faith in God’s goodness and justice. They are true witnesses and examples to the whole church. It is the mission and responsibility of a global communion of churches to lift up the voices of its smallest and most excluded members, whose voices would never be heard by the international media, but who have much to tell about human dignity and faithful witness to the gospel.

7. **DIACONAL RESPONSE AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**

- (26) Diakonia is an integral part of being a communion of churches. It is the proclamation of God’s mercy and justice through deeds of love and compassion, the expression of the love of neighbor, and a further means of witnessing to Christ. In diaconal action, the church points beyond itself to the Kingdom of God in our midst. For the LWF, diaconal responsibility to refugees and other victims of conflict provided the first invitation to join the path that led us to communion among Lutheran churches globally. And we continue to live out the diaconal calling through our faithful service to the poor and the oppressed in LWF country programs throughout the world.
- (27) Diakonia cannot be divorced from the Eucharist or from prayer. It is prayer and action; prayer *in* action. These days, prayer is too often regarded as an expression of the church’s powerlessness, of its surrender to the powers and principalities of this world. The tendency is to treat prayer as plan “B” on which to fall back when every other human effort has failed. And yet, prayer is the energy without which diakonia loses its essential character and vitality.
- (28) Jesus Christ was the first “deacon,” who cared for the poor, the sick and the oppressed. This was one of the defining features of his ministry on earth. His question to the paralytic man at

the pool of Bethesda, “Do you want to be healed?” is as relevant today as it was then. Development has long been focused on the delivery of goods and services, which has inevitably resulted in a culture of dependency. Diakonia must be about the whole person, and a process in which the whole person is engaged as an active participant in their own healing and well-being.

- (29) LWF member churches have acted together in reflecting theologically on their public role and in developing common strategies to respond to poverty and economic injustice, for diakonia is not just about responding to the symptoms of human suffering, but about seeking prophetically to change what is causing or contributing to poverty and injustice.
- (30) The LWF has joined the growing ecumenical movement for climate justice by actively addressing environmental degradation, desertification and the humanitarian impacts of increasingly severe weather events and recognizing the particularly harsh impact of climate change on the poor—including food security, livelihoods and the environment. At this Assembly, we will have a special opportunity to reflect on the impact of climate change on the availability of daily bread for all God’s people, and to deliver a clear theological message about our global interconnectedness and common responsibility.
- (31) During these days we will also reflect together on other global challenges that have marked the LWF’s prophetic diakonia since Winnipeg, including our work in addressing the moral and ethical dimensions of illegitimate debt on the basis of a an LWF program hosted in Buenos Aires by the Latin American churches on behalf of the entire Lutheran Communion; and our ongoing role in responding to the HIV-AIDS pandemic. We shall give attention to our responsibility of uphold the rights and dignity of all people – especially the most marginalized and excluded.

8. ECUMENICAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

- (32) The formation of the ACT Alliance from a reconfiguration of ACT International and ACT Development demonstrates the dynamic involvement of the LWF in practical ecumenism. Out of more than 100 members of ACT Alliance, about one third belongs to the Lutheran family. This is a visible sign of the shared commitment of Lutheran churches to ecumenical cooperation in diakonia.
- (33) The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 was a powerful sign of the value of the LWF as an instrument for ecumenical progress. On 31 October 2009, in Augsburg, Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodists commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration. A planting of commemorative trees in Wittenberg took place during these 10th anniversary celebrations with the participation of representatives of various Christian World Communions, underscoring the wide ecumenical significance of this document. The dialogue related to the JDDJ is continuing. A group of biblical scholars from the LWF, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council is engaged in further study of the biblical understanding of justification. Local and regional dialogues are also reaching important new understandings, such as the recently-concluded dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics in the Nordic countries.

- (34) Another initiative carrying very wide ecumenical potential was the adoption of the LWF statement on the Episkopé in Lund in 2007. Indeed, Lutherans do not see themselves as “the Church,” but as a movement within the one Church. We are *aware* that we need other Christians. The results of that awareness, and of the relationships that we have consistently pursued, are visible in this Assembly. The unprecedented number of ecumenical participants makes this Assembly itself a landmark in the history of ecumenism.
- (35) Here in Stuttgart we will be asked to take an action redefining our relations with Mennonites from whom we have been estranged for 500 years, and about whom our Lutheran confessions have very harsh things to say. Leading theologians of our movement—including Martin Luther himself—were willing to use theological arguments to support the violent persecution of members of the Anabaptist tradition. But now we can build on the careful historical and theological work of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, whose report has been made available to all delegates. We will consider an action that asks for forgiveness—from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the persecution and violence of which our Lutheran forebears were guilty, and of which we are the inheritors. I appreciate the fact that the International Lutheran Council is present when we take this action because all Lutherans share in this historical heritage.
- (36) This reflection and action will likely be one of the significant landmarks for which this Assembly is remembered, and by which the future of the LWF and of the wider ecumenical movement will itself be marked. Only by rooting out the violence, exclusion and discrimination in our own tradition and practice as Lutheran churches, and by seeking to heal memories among us and between us and other church families, can we become credible and effective witnesses for peace and reconciliation in our wider societies.
- (37) On behalf of all of us, I say a special word of welcome to His Eminence Walter Cardinal Kasper, now the President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and also the former bishop of this very place. Wherever he has been, he has worked with us Lutherans in warm and fruitful cooperation, and we take this opportunity to thank him for all that he has accomplished. We also want to extend our congratulations for the 50th anniversary this year of the formation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the forerunner of what is now the Pontifical Council.
- (38) We are honored also that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is represented at this Assembly. Our dialogue with *Orthodox churches* is our longest continuing dialogue, preparing now to celebrate its 30th year. The Commission has found and articulated important areas of agreement in recent years on topics surrounding the Church, notably on the Eucharist, and has helped deepen mutual knowledge and respect with these venerable communities of our shared faith.
- (39) In many parts of the world, Lutherans and *Anglicans* live very closely together, and in a number of places have expressed these mutual recognitions in terms of agreements of communion. Through such lenses as the diaconal character of the Church, our dialogue seeks to deepen these relationships.

- (40) We extend our warmest greetings to the new *World Communion of Reformed Churches*, formed last month and bringing together two separate Reformed church families. Your presence at this Assembly immediately following your own Uniting General Council is a strong ecumenical sign of encouragement for Lutherans who are praying for the same goal.
- (41) We are pleased also to have our *Methodist* partners with us. Last year in Augsburg, as we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, one of the most prominent new developments was the presence with us of Methodists, who also have added their affirmation to the Declaration in the years since the last Assembly.
- (42) We look forward to 2017 when we will mark the *500th anniversary of the Evangelical Reformation*. It is my hope that we might find an appropriate ecumenical way to mark this anniversary in which we can celebrate what we have achieved in overcoming the condemnations of the past and in making visible the unity of the church, and in which we seek to discover together the message of the Evangelical Reformation for the whole of the church today.
- (43) The *World Council of Churches* has a unique and irreplaceable role in bringing Christians together, and many of our member churches are its members also. This “double belonging” is represented here by the new General Secretary of the WCC, the Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from our own Church of Norway. As the WCC prepares for the culmination of its Decade to Overcome Violence, we recognize how deeply its concerns and commitments are also ours. The WCC Assembly in 2013 is being organized as an inclusive and participatory event, and the LWF will play its full role both in the planning process and in the Assembly itself. I would encourage us to consider what additional steps we as a communion might take in this regard, such as holding an LWF Council meeting in conjunction with the WCC Central Committee or within the “expanded space” of the WCC Assembly.

9. INTERFAITH DIAPRAXIS

- (44) As much as we seek the Church’s visible unity for the sake of Christ’s mission on earth, we recognize that there are other religious communities that constitute part of the world that God so loved. Therefore, the ecumenical community’s goal is not only the unity of the church, but the transformation of the human *race* into a human *family*.
- (45) The LWF is committed to enabling our member churches to relate to other religious communities in their contexts, to plant the seeds of transformation and to find what God is doing in other traditions and other cultures.
- (46) Interfaith diapraxis—practical cooperation across religious borders—has been a special focus of the life of the LWF in the period since Winnipeg. This engagement is based in part on the LWF’s longstanding practical experience in international diakonia. In countries such as Mauritania, Cambodia and elsewhere, people of other faiths are working for and with the LWF in the pursuit of a shared humanitarian objective. Through this practical cooperation in humanitarian service—even if we still have much to learn and to understand—interfaith diapraxis has become part of the LWF’s being.

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- (47) In the year 2002, an LWF-supported initiative on the African continent brought together seven major religious traditions, namely Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i and African Traditional Religion. Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) is the network and process that resulted. An IFAPA Commission was appointed to help guide the work of this network, and IFAPA Women's and Youth desks were established. With private sector support, a pilot project of interfaith collaboration for water resource access and management was undertaken in the Kirehe district of Rwanda. Numerous interfaith initiatives were taken in conflict-affected or post-conflict situations in Africa. Many LWF member churches in Africa have participated in these initiatives, gaining important insights and developing valuable relationships.
- (48) In Asia, the understanding of interfaith diapraxis has been informed by local communities' response to the devastating impact of the 2004 tsunami. Formerly separated by religion, Muslims and Christians found themselves working side-by-side, discovering compassionate human beings behind religious stereotypes. The friendships and mutual cooperation that resulted inspired subsequent LWF seminars on a "dialogue for life." Diapraxis provides a platform from which people of all faiths can jointly address many common concerns and, in the process, build deeper and stronger relationships.

10. THE LWF RENEWAL PROCESS

- (49) At its meeting in Jerusalem/Bethlehem in 2005, the Council endorsed the General Secretary's proposal to initiate a process to envision a renewed LWF. The Executive Committee, acting on behalf the Council, appointed a Renewal Committee chaired by Bishop emeritus Raymond Schultz.
- (50) The decision to embark on the renewal of the LWF was based on an assessment of the changes that have created a different context for the LWF today than that of the past. The general human, social and political landscape has changed, and much of this change has been related to the processes of globalization. Ecumenical achievements have created a new environment for the ongoing search for visible unity. The decision in Winnipeg to add a descriptive phrase to the name of the LWF—"a communion of churches"—reflects a deepening of inner-Lutheran relations and of the LWF's self-understanding. These changes cannot any longer be accommodated in the current structure.
- (51) After a long process of consultation with various stakeholders, the Renewal Committee submitted its Report to the Council in October 2009. The Report included nine recommendations for action by the Council. The main outcome of the Council's decision was the proposal to amend the current constitution and to reorganize the Communion Office. Tomorrow, Bishop Schultz will introduce this item, and the Assembly will be asked to make decisions on amending the Constitution. The new Council will deal with the Bylaws and the Communion Office. The Secretariat Self Assessment process, in which the Executive Committee and staff participated, has been completed and the learning from this exercise will be invaluable for the next steps in this process.
- (52) One of the underlying reasons for seeking to renew the LWF is the realization that the LWF needs to be a place and a forum in which member churches can dialogue with each other; a

place where a culture of listening permeates every conversation. There is a need to reduce the tendency to dominate decision-making processes. I believe that it was a timely step for the LWF to embark on this process at this moment. Changes in the contexts in which we are called to act together require an LWF that is truly owned by all member churches, not just by a few.

11. MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND SEXUALITY

- (53) The Lutheran communion, like some other church families, is engaged in a process of discernment with regard to the pastoral challenges associated with issues of marriage, family and sexuality. These issues are hardly new, but have been emerging over a long period of time, in different ways and in different contexts. I have even found some of my own reports dating back to 1995 proposing a process of reflection on these issues.
- (54) As many of you will be well aware, the LWF Council appointed a Task Force mandated to develop guidelines for the promotion of sustained and respectful conversations among and within the member churches on these pastoral and ethical concerns. In March 2007, the Council received the proposed guidelines and sent them to LWF member churches for use during a period of five years, i.e. from 2007 to 2012. The member churches were asked to consult each other in the process of decision-making regarding these matters. Like most other decisions of the LWF Council, these guidelines are not strictly binding on member churches, but should be morally persuasive.
- (55) From the reports received so far it is clear that the member churches are at various stages of reflection and action and that different positions are emerging on these issues.
- (56) During the Pre-Assembly gatherings I have had consultative discussions with church leaders and delegates as to how we might proceed toward 2012, taking into account that the Assembly was imminent. The general consensus was that these issues not be dealt with by the Assembly but that the process be allowed to continue until 2012 as originally recommended by the task force.
- (57) I therefore advise the Assembly to allow the process to continue as planned for the sake of those member churches that have only recently begun to reflect on these matters. Beyond that, the newly elected Council will assume responsibility.

12. CONCLUSION

- (58) On 31 October I conclude my service with the Lutheran World Federation. I thank you all, the member churches, President Bishop Mark Hanson and Ione Hanson, the Treasurer, Mr Peter Stoll, the Council members, Honorary Council members, LWF staff in Geneva and in the Field, Ecumenical collaborators and co-workers, my wife Gladys and family for the support you have given me throughout my ministry in the LWF. Your invaluable support was indispensable for the mandate I was called to undertake. Where I failed it was because I did it alone, and where I succeeded it was because you stood by my side. The President has informed me that on Friday this week I will have an opportunity to say special words of

Good-bye to the Assembly. I shall therefore wait until that moment to convey my appreciation to all of you.

- (59) To my successor Rev. Martin Junge, I congratulate you once again in the presence of the member churches and before the respectable ecumenical partners of the Lutheran World Federation. I commend you to God's care and ask the member churches and ecumenical friends to extend to you the friendship they have accorded to me over these years. Since the beginning of this year, the handing over has gone on well. I wish you and your family strength and God's blessings as you will soon take leadership responsibilities in the Lutheran World Federation.

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