

## ***To the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches (LWF)***

President Bishop Dr Munib Younan,  
General Secretary, Rev. Dr Martin Junge,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am so happy to be invited and welcomed “home” to the Lutheran communion and to be part of your fellowship in this assembly. I am here to bring you greetings from the World Council of Churches, a fellowship of 348 churches to which many of you also belong, but where Lutherans are a minority. I bring you greetings from the moderator of the WCC central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom, a sister of Africa from the Anglican church in Kenya, the first woman and the first African to be elected for that position. I also convey greetings from the two vice-moderators, HE Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox churches, and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, representing the United Methodist Church.

I greet you with the words of the Holy Scripture:

“And now faith, hope and love abide, and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13)

This conclusion of the Apostle Paul comes after addressing a conflict, one of the first dividing conflicts in the Church. He addressed those who needed liberation from their own ideas of being more significant than others, those who needed the liberation to become a servant to one another in love. This was later brilliantly formulated in Luther’s definition of the Christian freedom, being not suppressed by anyone, being a servant of everyone. The act of liberation is an act of justice that should lead to a life together in peace, whether it is liberation from oppression or from being an oppressor, from discrimination, violence, or hopelessness. The act of liberation is an act of love.

Therefore, the ecumenical movement is a movement of love. The many gifts, the many competences and particularities can go well together in the communion called church, if the way is clear:

“But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (1 Cor 12:31).

There is, dear sisters and brothers, a way from conflict to communion. It is a way in which we search the truth and share the gifts together, but from the beginning to the end it is the way of love. Indeed, it is so because love drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

This should be true for all processes in the Church, and particularly for everything that happens in the ecumenical movement as we focus on the relations between us. One of the great contributions to the one ecumenical movement recently is that the LWF prepared an

ecumenical commemoration, together with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, of 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation, paving the way from conflict to communion. After the prayer of confession and reconciliation in Lund on Reformation Day 2016, those relations will never be the same. They have to remain a relationship of love, so clearly said in your words about moving together as pilgrims, in diakanoia for the world together. This was even signed by President Bishop Munib Younan and His Holiness Pope Francis, as you were accompanied by the General Secretary Martin Junge, and Cardinal Kurt Koch, the President of the Pontifical Council of Promoting Christian Unity.

Another great contribution to the one ecumenical movement is how this assembly highlights for all of us important insights of the one ecumenical movement. Some of them have come through new understanding, or at least through a better understanding of the harsh and brutal realities in which we live in different parts of the world. Some of them have come through new sharing, at least a better and more open sharing of the gifts of our different theological traditions. Some of them have come through a combination of the two, through a mutual search for the truth that we owe one another: The truth about the world and the truth about God.

The themes of this assembly of the Lutheran World Federation is indeed an eminent example of how the ecumenical movement deals with both and combines truth about the world and the truth about God. You do it in a time when we have a new momentum in the ecumenical movement as movement of love, an ecumenical spring time for new life together.

The *oikoumene*, our common home in this world, is a household, an economy, where we have to work for the best outcome for our life together. The work we do should be contributing to the economy of fairness and the welfare of all, to the social justice that can weave and support the social fabric we all need for our lives. In this we recognize that our common home is not only my world or our world, it is God's world. Every day the God of life is creating our lives, "me and all creatures," and gives us our daily bread (which was the focus of the last assembly, in Stuttgart). The resources for our lives are gifts of God's creation. We do not live by being in opposition to or promoting this or that principle or theory, but by being together in the reality of the God of life.

The *oikoumene* of God's salvation, in which we are included in our common home, the Church, is a household of faith, where we share the truth about God and about ourselves. The insights into both theology and anthropology that characterized Martin Luther's thinking, writing, and not at least preaching, led to what we call the Reformation. It became a reformation of the Church, but with many implications for life together in the whole society, the wider *oikoumene*. This tradition has brought forward a focus on the Church as a fellowship created and liberated by the grace of God, through the justification by faith in the

crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. The Church is called to be a sign of the unity of humankind, the communion of love to which we all are created.

The LWF is a strong, and in some senses, the strongest Christian world communion, when it comes to resources available for its work. The work that is done, is done for the benefit of the Lutheran churches and their ability to be church in their contexts. However, it is also done for the benefit of the wider church fellowship and the one humanity. Particularly through the work of your Lutheran World Service you share your gifts with the most vulnerable and those who need them the most—I think today particularly of the many refugees who are finding a way toward life in fullness through the work of LWF. In this continent of Africa you are really in the lead of showing what our call to justice and peace as expressions of love means in practice. I am so glad when I see your outreach in so many parts of the world.

The most important and the most valuable things in life are not for sale. Lutheran theology and Lutheran churches have contributed to the common understanding of our faith in God. We are always before God, as God's creation – as sinners and as justified – not because we have brought our capital forward, not even our ecumenical funds or merits - but because of the grace of God.

Luther is famous for his words of standing up for conscience, and he showed us that sometimes we have to stand up, knowing where we need to take a stand. This is part of our ecumenically call to be prophetic. We live in God's ongoing creation, where we are accountable to God, through our mutual accountability to one another.

But allow me to parse the metaphors in another way. We are not called only to stand, we are called to move, to move together. Our relationship to one another is the arena in which we are called to be on a pilgrimage, with open eyes, with open minds, to see how the reign of God is present and coming with the values of justice and peace. The LWF is with the World Council of Churches, with its churches and partners today in shaping the ecumenical movement as a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. This is our way towards more unity today.

Your choice of venue for this assembly exemplifies the ongoing commitment to justice and peace that is a defining characteristic of the LWF. The stories of oppression and colonization, but also of liberation and restored dignity, are interwoven also in the life of the Lutheran churches here in Namibia. The signs of hope we see here will seed even stronger signs of love, and we hope and pray that this assembly will further inspire the whole region of Southern Africa to remain steadfast in the legacy of justice and peace so forcefully demonstrated here.

In everything we are as human beings; whatever the colour of our skin, whatever gender we are or whatever relationship in which we build a life in togetherness, with our gifts, with our capacities and in our orientation, we are called to search for the better way—the way of

love. The way of love that drives out fear. Then we can truly see that the best is freely given, and not for sale, and we can develop both our economies and our ecumenical movement accordingly.

May the almighty God of life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, continue to guide the LWF as a communion in love and a communion of love, generously sharing among yourselves and with the whole ecumenical family. We are so proud and privileged to have LWF as our close partner in the ecumenical movement and in the ecumenical centre in Geneva, as you give power and weight to our common witness in the international organizations serving the wellbeing of the one humanity, as well as in so many other contexts.

We believe in the free gift of liberation from sin, in this world that is our common home. This becomes truly our shared hope of transformation when we open ourselves, when we come out into the world of God and to the fellowship in the churches and of the churches. We are not going toward the twilight but toward the dawn of God's reign when we continue in the ecumenical movement of love, the pilgrimage of justice and peace. For the greatest among them is love and love never fails.

*Windhoek 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2017*

*Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
General Secretary  
World Council of Churches*