



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

***Greeting of the Rev. Martin Junge
LWF General Secretary,
to the***

***General Synod of the Church of Norway
12 April 2012, Tønsberg, Norway***

Your Majesty,
Honorable chairperson of the General Synod
Honorable presiding Bishop of the Church of Norway, honorable Bishops
Distinguished members of the General Synod
Dear sisters and brothers:

I greet you today on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a communion of 145 member churches to which you belong, and which describes its witness in this world as a journey with *passion for the church and with passion for the world*.

I come to your General Synod today with a word of thanks, and with an invitation.

My word of thanks relates to the many ways, through which you have supported the LWF communion of churches and have shaped its self-understanding. In 1947, a remembered leader of your church, Bishop Eivind Berggrav, was pivotal in bringing the LWF together. He also promoted the notion of the prophetic voice as a constitutive element for the life and witness of the LWF. Since then, many leaders of your church have followed. As a Latin American, let me take this opportunity to express our gratitude to for your support through the LWF to the peace agreements in Central America two decades ago. Let me thank you for the ways in which your church supports today the prophetic and healing presence of the LWF Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Let me also thank you on behalf of the communion for the response of your church to the violent events that hit your country last summer. We felt your pain as our own pain. We experienced your pastoral and diaconal response as our own ministry to the suffering. And we received your strong public voice during these times as an impressive gift to all of us.

These few examples are an affirmation of the conviction, that Christian faith, and religions in general, are not meant to be stumbling stones to people aiming at living in justice and peace. They are meant to be building bricks, creating bridges among people, communities and



countries to live in peace with justice. Violence is never to be accepted as a genuine expression of faith.

From my dialogues with your presiding Bishop, Rev. Helga Byfuglien, the LWF Vice President for the Nordic region, I have understood that the redefinition of the relationship between the Church and the State of Norway appears to be a very significant change in which you find yourself. It carries structural implications, but it raises also important questions about the *inherited* and the *intended* identity of this church.

And here comes my invitation: please consider having the LWF as a resource in your own discernment when adapting to these changing contexts. The LWF has today arrived to the point, in which it has realized that there is no longer a church so old, so strong, so well endowed that it can't still be at the receiver's end; and that there is no church so new, so vulnerable and in such scarcity of resources that it can't be still at the giver's end. This is the core of what it means to be in communion with each other.

What an opportunity for your church also to have your discernment in the horizon of the 500th anniversary of Lutheran Reformation in 2017! It just calls for an approach that is carried by joyful trust in the power of the Gospel. It invites to explore anew the particular Lutheran insight of the "*ecclesia semper reformanda*". For a church in faithful participation in God's mission, reform is always possible.

This General Synod of the Church of Norway falls exactly into the liturgical period, which some 2000 years ago found two disciples of Jesus Christ walking back to their home in Emmaus: coping with radically changed contexts, wondering about the match of Scriptures with their experienced realities.... Yet, also with that vivid memory of those powerful words and signs of the in-breaking reign of God in their hearts, and therefore so profoundly dialogical in their seeking of the truth, so amazingly hospitable to the stranger at their table...

I pray that this old biblical text may serve as a promise over this General Synod, so that this Synod becomes a journey where discernment is blessed by revelation. May God bless your deliberations and decisions.