

Message from the Tenth Assembly

Introduction: The World in Need of Healing

We have come to this Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, from many parts of the world God has created as good. It is also a crying, wounded world, in which devastation, suffering and violence are pervasive, along with denial, mistrust and blinding affluence. Our world is split asunder by forces we often do not understand, but that result in stark contrasts between those who benefit and those who are harmed, especially under forces of globalization. Today, there is also a desperate need for healing from “terrorism,” its causes and fearful reactions to it. Relationships in this world continue to be ruptured due to greed, injustices and various forms of violence. People continue to be abused and excluded by other persons, institutions and practices. Those viewed as being of an “other” religion, race, caste, ethnicity or life condition are often still kept at a distance and rejected.

This was poignantly demonstrated by the fact that over fifty participants—from poor countries in Asia and Africa—were denied entry into Canada and thus were unable to participate in this Assembly. We were painfully aware of their absence, which was a concrete example of how exclusion occurs through mechanisms at work in today’s fearful, globalized world.

The world’s multiple ills are evident around and within us; as Lutheran Christians we profess that in this world we cannot escape from these ever-present manifestations of sin and evil. We may yearn for definitive solutions to sin and evil, but are left with partial glimpses of what God, the ultimate healer, promises us. God promises “a new heaven and earth” (Isa 65:17ff.) in which suffering, sickness and dying are no more. Living in light of that promise we realize that amid the brokenness and suffering, God *is* effecting healing in our lives and our world, in mysterious and unexpected ways, using human beings as his healing agents. God’s abiding commitment to the world—to be with us—gives us the courage to name and seek healing for the wounds, scars and diseases, and to bear witness to the healing that is occurring. We have done so in this Assembly with a deepening sense of communion with one another, and in the confident hope that God’s promises as revealed through Scripture *will* be fulfilled!

Through daily celebrations of Holy Communion and in Bible studies, we have glimpsed these promises, and shared and celebrated our faith in the God who heals. Our sense of belonging to

the one body of Christ, with its many ecumenical dimensions, has been renewed. We have been touched by the healing power of God's Holy Spirit, and strengthened in our commitment to participate in God's transformative mission for the healing of the world.

And so we cry out, "Lord, heal our wounded world, heal our wounds and those ways we inflict wounds on others! O God, comfort, save and stir us to be about your healing work in our world today."

I. The Healing Gift of Justification

We are convinced that the message of God's healing gift of justification is rich in meaning for people in the third millennium. In our broken world, people experience so much evil in personal, social and global dimensions. We have to face our sinful thoughts, words, actions and omissions against God, human beings and the whole of creation. Sin is a power, manifested in acts, from which human beings cannot escape by their own means. In the midst of this, we yearn for liberation and healing.

Our hope in the midst of sin and suffering is that God heals us. The message of justification is the word of hope, which offers us the good news of God's love and acceptance. Jesus Christ came into this world and lived among us. He took the sufferings of the whole world onto himself. He humbled himself unto death, but in his death and resurrection we were given a new hope and future. Jesus Christ himself is the precious gift and promise for all humankind. The Holy Spirit makes this gift present in us by calling us to faith and renewal, and to life in the community of the justified. In this community we are included and strengthened by the healing power of the Triune God, who creates in us a new life through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the holy sacraments. Even though our healing here is incomplete we trust in the sufficiency of God's grace (2 Cor 12:9).

We, as Lutherans, assert that the doctrine of justification is the article by which the Church stands or falls. We rejoice that, with the signing in 1999 of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church, a chasm has been bridged; the mutual condemnations regarding justification do not apply. But, continuing challenges remain to address the theological questions still at stake, the reception and implications of this agreement in local settings, and probing what justification means for the world today.

We share the concern of many people who are not familiar with the language by which the common faith is traditionally expressed. There is a need for the theological content of the

doctrine of justification to be interpreted in different contexts. We challenge ourselves to talk about God's gift of justification in words which are understandable, relevant and meaningful for contemporary people. We encourage member churches to promote a deeper and wider understanding of justification.

We as human beings loved by God have a deep need for belonging together. We suffer from feelings of being excluded in ways that contradict community. It is therefore a big challenge to live truly as a community of justified, inviting and including everyone.

Justification is a personal encounter with God that challenges our communities and all humanity. We are called into the healing body of Jesus Christ. The deepest meaning of justification is experienced in our relationships with God and one another in our daily lives of worship, witness and mutual caring and sharing. In baptism, we are accepted, and included, into the communion of God's children. Through the Word of God and through the Eucharist our sins are forgiven, and we are strengthened by the presence of our Lord. We express our deep desire to come to the Lord's table together with our sisters and brothers in other Christian communities.

We are convinced that God's healing gifts have to be shared with all people. We are called to participate in the sufferings of our sisters and brothers and so to carry out our common responsibility of working for justice at all levels in our world today. Although we are justified by faith alone, that faith can never be alone. It compels us to good works and love for all people. The justifying gift of God transforms us in faith, and gives hope and healing for the whole world.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *bear witness with our ecumenical partners to the message of justification in ways and languages that are understandable, meaningful and relevant for people living in specific contexts, especially where human beings are vulnerable and urgently need healing because of exploitation, oppression and alienation*
- *explore and pursue further—together with other churches—the relation between justification and ecclesiology, justification and the sacraments, justification and ethics, with special attention to the connection between justification and justice for the sake of a more credible public witness of the church in the world.*

II. The Healing Gift of Communion

As the justified people of God, we are a communion in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are called to share our resources and perspectives with each other, as well as to challenge and provoke one another to new horizons of faithfulness that go beyond what we can see or do as individual member churches. Because communion involves a commitment to the sharing of power, we must ask, as did the Curitiba Assembly, “How various groups within the church exercise power over others to exclude them from full participation in the Body of Christ.”¹ Misuse of institutional power is evident in our churches, as well as in societies, legal and economic systems, political and international organizations.

Many churches still do not ordain women and/or keep women from participating fully in decision-making processes. Often patriarchy plays a dominant role, legitimized by culture and religion.

Young people are a gift of God and bring many unique experiences and insights which they are willing to share. However, youth often are marginalized in and excluded from the life of our churches. They often are not included fully in their congregations and even more frequently are blocked from decision-making processes.

Our mutual participation in Christ leads us to challenge all those cultural, economic and political forces that define and tend to divide us. Communion can make us uncomfortable as assumptions and practices that we take for granted are challenged, and we are pushed to consider questions that we would not, as separate churches, on our own. These tensions, which can at times be threatening, are also a sign of vitality; they can deepen the realization of what it means to be a communion. We give thanks to God that our communion is blessed with diversity.

Communion means more than having nice feelings about one another; it involves calling one another into account for the effects that our actions have, or can have, on others.

Our understandings of communion are richly diverse and are grounded in the New Testament understandings of *koinonia*, with several dimensions: the believers’ communion and participation in Christ, communion with the Holy Spirit, the communion shared in the Eucharist, the communion in apostolic teaching, sharing in each others’ suffering and economic sharing.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *continue exploring what it means to live in the communion that God gives, to receive one another's differences as gifts and necessary complements for building up the body, and to learn from each other how communion as Eucharist creates and nurtures communion in the rest of our shared life*
- *continue studying the theological grounds for and implications of what it means to be a Lutheran communion, seeking to make it as inclusive as possible*
- *respond to situations of injustice in other parts of the communion from a communion perspective that moves beyond solidarity and accompaniment*
- *give attention to and develop policies for addressing situations of conflict within and between churches*
- *facilitate cross-cultural communication that enables us to listen sensitively and to respond authentically and gracefully, with an awareness of the prevailing unequal power dynamics; monitor and improve internal and public communication, according to the LWF Guiding Principles for Comprehensive Communication "A Communicative Communion"²*
- *invite the participation of Lutherans who currently are not a part of this communion*
- *facilitate dialogue within the communion on areas of disagreement, such as understandings and practices of the ministry, involving both men and women, both ordained and lay, in a spirit of mutual respect and in quest of common understandings*
- *challenge sexual stereotypes and raise gender issues early in life and seek to build a just community of women and men*
- *promote the full inclusion of women and youth in all aspects of our life and work as churches and in our societies*
- *make the church's institutional power more transparent and accountable, with a deepened commitment to sharing resources and developing inclusive styles of leadership.*

III. Healing Divisions within the One Church

Ecumenical dialogues are one of the important ways through which the healing and fulfilling gift of the Spirit is received. Through them, we are able to see with different eyes the many barriers of separation that exist between our churches and traditions. Yet we also realize how much we share on account of our faith in Christ and the communion in the Holy Spirit. The ecumenical dialogues are not only institutional endeavors, but real developments in our commitment to witness in the Spirit sent by the Father through the Son for the healing of the whole world. Reaching formal agreements on doctrinal matters and establishing official forms of intercommunion with other churches contribute to the healing of divisions within the one Church and therefore to the unity of humanity. The mission of the Church is strengthened through unity; through this unity we bear a deeper witness to God's love for humanity and creation.

With previous assemblies, we reaffirm

- *the conviction that ecumenical commitment is integral to Lutheran confessional identity*
- *the importance of official dialogues with other churches*
- *the need to explore possibilities for new ecumenical involvements, methods and instruments, and better ecumenical coordination of programs and assemblies, and*
- *the importance of encouraging, equipping and assisting our member churches in their regional ecumenical dialogues, agreements and mission.*

We support the process initiated internationally to examine whether the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession apply to Mennonites today, and we encourage the development of Lutheran-Mennonite relations locally. We also encourage relations between Lutheran and Oriental Orthodox churches at various levels.

As we serve the world with words and deeds, our Lord's mandate and the healing gift of the Holy Spirit inspire our ongoing search for the visible unity of the Church centered in the proclamation of the Word, Holy Baptism, the sharing of the Eucharist and the apostolicity of the whole Church sent in mission.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *continue the international bilateral dialogues with the Anglican, Orthodox, Reformed and Roman Catholic churches, searching for new ways of improving the reception of dialogue results in member churches by means of accessible methods, study documents and catechetical materials, and to foster the initiation and/or the strengthening of regional dialogues and local ecumenical endeavors, in ways that are sensitive to local church realities, priorities, mission concerns, and pastoral issues (e.g., mixed marriages)*
- *welcome the agreements with churches of the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian and Reformed traditions that member churches have entered into since the last Assembly, and to study and appropriately implement the recommendations of the working groups with the Anglican Communion and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). We also commit ourselves to explore the possibilities for deepened relationships with these communions at the global level for the sake of our common mission in the world*
- *give priority to the regular meetings with the International Lutheran Council (ILC), and support member churches of the ILC and the LWF to develop and further their relationships locally*
- *support the study processes related to the coherence of the Lutheran ecumenical involvement, such as on the episcopal ministry within the apostolicity of the church and on the diaconal ministry, paying special attention to different and sometimes controversial aspects and interpretations*
- *incorporate new voices, disciplines, methodologies and partners in ecumenical dialogues and encounters, giving greater attention to ecumenical pursuits in and with Africa, Asia, Central Eastern Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean*
- *actively participate in discussions of a new configuration of the ecumenical movement, while also encouraging Lutheran member churches in the World Council of Churches (WCC) to uphold the WCC as key in the ecumenical movement, and working toward the realization of a truly universal Christian council taking practical steps toward coordinated assemblies*
- *find ways of engaging in dialogue with Pentecostal churches and to study and relate to charismatic movements within our own churches.*

IV. The Mission of the Church in Multifaith Contexts

God's mission is wider than the bounds of the church. The church participates in God's mission through witness in word and deed to the coming of God's reign in diverse, multifaith contexts. Our participation in the mission of the Triune God involves three interrelated dimensions, *diakonia*, proclamation and dialogue, which are integral parts of the mission of the church. We call attention to the great diversity of contexts in which mission is carried out and the variety of forms of Christian witness that are appropriate and possible in different contexts, and the need for churches to learn from one another.

Mission as transformation challenges churches to be themselves transformed in order to become God's instruments of transformation in multifaith contexts; the faith we confess is by nature dialogical. With the Curitiba Assembly, we: "...commend dialogue as a legitimate form of ministry and witness in a religiously diverse world... ."³ "...by listening to the faith and convictions of others, we have the opportunity to deepen our own commitments and to define our identity in relation to others and not over against them."⁴ With the world mission conferences in San Antonio (USA) and Salvador (Brazil), we affirm that "we cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."⁵ In light of this, we must continue to

- *affirm religious freedom*
- *explore with people of other faiths ways in which we may undertake common endeavors which promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation*
- *study our Christian faith in depth and others' faiths sympathetically, in order better to understand the relationships between them and the challenges that interfaith dialogue poses to Christian, specifically Lutheran, theology*
- *accelerate our efforts to equip people for witness and dialogue through education, encounters, one-on-one relationships and the contributions of persons who have crossed religious or cultural boundaries, and*
- *hold before our Christian brothers and sisters the interrelationship of witness and dialogue as integral to Christian mission and self-understanding.*

In our world today, where too often religions are used by political forces to divide people and fuel conflict, it is crucial that we pursue justice and reconciliation with those of other faiths. Reconciliation is central in the gospel we proclaim: In Christ, God has reconciled the whole creation. In this sense, dialogue that furthers such reconciliation is one of the important ways

of carrying out God's mission. Christians are called to live in peace with all and to promote reconciliation with people of different faiths, without surrendering their call to be witnesses for Christ. The relation between interfaith dialogue and proclamation requires ongoing study and discussion in our churches.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

• **Listen**

- o ensure that Christians from minority contexts are heard so that Christians in majority contexts might learn from them*
- o create forums where churches can openly present their predicaments and needs, and thus inspire and invigorate us to advocate for each other*
- o listen to people of other faiths with a willingness to learn and recognize signs of God's presence among them.*

• **Repent**

- o of the church's failure to see the good gifts of God in cultures*
- o of how the church has supported oppression and exploitation of people and seek to rectify these injustices*
- o of how churches and individuals have exploited creation.*

• **Pray**

- o for God's mission in the world, the mission of our own church, and for openness to the gospel*
- o call upon the Holy Spirit to renew individuals and congregations for the sake of mission.*

• **Learn**

- o promote catechesis and biblical learning in our churches; we need to know our own Christian tradition well in order to enter into responsible dialogue with others*
- o read the Bible in ways that enable us to discover how God meets people in different cultural contexts*

o explore in new and creative ways what it means to be church in multifaith/multicultural contexts with regard to the nature of the church, structures, theology and theological education, spirituality, ministry and the priesthood of all believers

o encourage ongoing renewal of our worship practices in ways that are culturally and contextually appropriate

o prepare pastoral guidelines for multifaith gatherings and the effects of interfaith marriages.

• **Witness**

o empower God's people for witness to the gospel in word and deed in daily life and society

o develop and disseminate practical ways of holding together interfaith dialogue and witness

o invite others to faith in Jesus Christ.

• **Dialogue**

o actively pursue the dialogue of living and growing together in mutual respect and understanding, striving with people of other faiths for the healing of the world ("diapraxis") through reconciliation, peace, justice and better living conditions for all God's children.

V. Removing Barriers That Exclude

At this Assembly, we were reminded that we live in a world where fear and suspicion of other people are rampant, due to differences in gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, caste, sexual orientation, age, or physical/mental condition. We all are created in God's image. Even though diversity is part of God's creation, differences often become the basis on which barriers are built that exclude persons and communities from participating fully in the life that God envisions for all.

We recall and affirm those many ways the LWF has spoken out repeatedly in opposition to discrimination and exclusion of many kinds. Rights of refugees, displaced persons and migrants, have long been at the forefront of LWF work. Working to end gender-based

discrimination and to empower women in both society and the church has been a programmatic aspect of LWF work since the early 1970s, and later with regard to youth. In both cases, many resolutions and commitments have been made in the past. Discrimination based on “caste” (especially of Dalits) and against Indigenous peoples in many lands has received attention in more recent years.

For the first time in the history of the LWF, meetings of representatives of Indigenous peoples were held during this Assembly. In many countries, Indigenous people are discriminated against, in terms of land rights, ethnic background, language and/or culture. Ethnicity is seen both as an asset and a danger. Frequently, Indigenous people feel powerless and voiceless regarding self-determination and access to education, health care and job opportunities.

We also were challenged by those among us at this Assembly who are differently-abled [people with disabilities] for whom life in its fullness is hindered due to inaccessibility to institutions, education, employment and social life. In some countries disabilities and diseases are still considered the result of sin, or a cause of shame in families.

The current pandemic of HIV/AIDS has moved us as churches to confess how we have sinned against those infected and affected by this disease, by stigmatizing and discriminating against them, particularly based on assumptions regarding their sexual practices. We are reminded of God’s healing power of inclusion into the community, as well as the many ways that we, as Lutheran Christians, could promote healing through social justice advocacy.

We acknowledge the diversity within the communion on matters of human sexuality. At the same time, we believe it is important to enter into dialogue to clarify our understandings and learn from the Scriptures, contemporary knowledge and our different experiences. In approaching such dialogue we seek to preserve the human rights and dignity of all people.

Naming and speaking out against discrimination of all kinds and defending human rights have and continue to be key. Yet even more crucial is to take the next steps of empowering and working with others to effectively *remove* the systemic barriers. It is not enough if some individuals are themselves able to overcome such barriers, while the patterns of discrimination and exclusion remain in place.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *continue to recognize and support the basic human rights of Indigenous peoples according to international laws and standards; land rights are fundamental to the survival of Indigenous peoples and their cultures*

- *acknowledge and seek the presence of Indigenous peoples within our churches; take steps to challenge paternalistic patterns and affirm Indigenous peoples as equal partners*
- *continue standing in solidarity with those in India, especially the Lutheran churches which are helping to empower the Dalits as they struggle for human dignity and rights*
- *make our churches accessible so as to include differently-abled people in the full life of, and decision making, in our churches; in word and deed, unconditionally support differently-abled people in their struggles to overcome all forms of discrimination; seek compliance with the United Nations' standards that secure equal opportunities for differently-abled people.*

VI. The Church's Ministry of Healing

We are embodied beings. As the Incarnation of Christ makes clear, our bodies are important. God became embodied in a human being and addresses us as embodied persons—as we are—rather than according to human standards of what are “perfect” or “normal” bodies. Sometimes our bodies are broken and in need of healing.

As a Christian communion we are called to participate in God's healing work, which promotes the wholeness of life. Physical, mental and spiritual healing of persons is not a new activity. This has been important in the life and ministry of the church from its beginning, and continues to be in the church's ministry today. Jesus healed and called his followers to do likewise: “...to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Lk 9:1-2). The ministry of healing, which has an eschatological dimension, belongs to the whole church. It continues Jesus' ministry of healing, building and edifying a new community. It includes the ministry of service—*diakonia*—through medical, educational and social services for those in need. All are called to promote healing, nurture and preservation of life.

We testify to a rich variety of applications and understandings of healing in our churches, affected by local situations and cultures. As a Lutheran communion, we see the importance of sharing experiences and developing our understanding of the Church's healing ministry. We need the gifts of the Holy Spirit to discern the spirits and to provide our communities with sound criteria in the exercise of the healing ministry.

In our globalized world we cannot limit the task of healing to the individual or intimate sphere. A wider perspective is necessary, including social, political and ecological

dimensions. The prophetic dimension must not be ignored in the healing ministry of the church. Where healing takes place, justice is restored.

It is of fundamental importance to relate the healing ministry to the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments. Healing is grounded in the Word of the cross, which basically is a word of powerlessness. This clarifies that the source of healing is God. This is expressed in the Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, as celebrated in Baptism and Eucharist. Both are sacraments of healing. From this basis the church is given its ministry of healing as a transformative action, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As Lutheran Christians, many of us have kept our distance or been suspicious of healing movements in the church. Yet, all of us yearn for healing of body, mind and spirit. With regard to faith-healing movements, we affirm that human beings cannot guarantee, promise or control the outcome. Healing is not synonymous with salvation, nor is faith necessarily a precondition for healing.

Healing is not limited to curing in the scientific sense. The essence of healing is to alleviate suffering, give hope and enable people to live and die with dignity. Disabling conditions may persist in healing, but persons are restored to life in community, for the sake of abundant life. Pastoral care and liturgical acts of anointing and healing are further expressions of this reality.

These affirmations help us to see that the ministry of healing belongs to the whole church. Both ordained and lay members are called to heal as partners in God's healing work for the wholeness of life.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *continue to develop our understanding of the church's ministry of healing, in relation to*
 - o the richness of cultural expressions, with a special focus on marginalized and Indigenous cultures*
 - o our socio-political and environmental contexts, permeated by concerns such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, violence and destructive lifestyles*
 - o everyday life, giving value to daily work as vocation and the opportunity to be partners in God's healing ministry in the public arena*
 - o charismatic movements*

o the spiritual life of the church, and especially how this can be expressed in liturgies for healing, drawn from the wealth of cultures within the Lutheran communion.

- *broaden the understanding of diakonia, as a fundamental dimension of the church's nature and life, and especially diaconal ministry as a part of the holistic ministry of the church.*

VII. Justice and Healing in Families

God has created us and redeemed us in Christ for fullness of life in community, marked by love and sharing. Families are a primary expression of that divinely ordained community. Here, human beings are nurtured, raised and supported to participate in society. Within our global communion, there are widely divergent understandings and compositions of families, with different cultural practices and taboos. The challenge is to pursue justice and healing in many different kinds of families.

In a changing world, the integrity of family as a place of love, nurture and safety is continually challenged and often broken by violence, disease, the impact of poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, and changing patterns for our life in community. Families in all parts of the world experience massive changes and tensions, especially in times of war, economic upheaval and devastating pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.

Because of the need to “break the silence” regarding domestic violence, we affirm how the LWF resource, *Churches Say “No” to Violence Against Women*, has been used in many of our churches, and among our ecumenical partners, and encourage that effective follow-up continue in churches throughout the communion. In addition, attention needs to be given to violence against men, children, the elderly and the differently-abled.

An essential part of our pastoral and prophetic ministry in solidarity with those who suffer is continually to lift up God's gracious intentions for life in community, through care, for justice, peace and healing in families.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *encourage and support one another in*
 - a) *study and respectful dialogue on issues of marriage, family and human sexuality, in a manner appropriate to the needs of each member church, and*

b) advocacy for the human rights and the dignity of all persons regardless of gender or sexual orientation

- *increase awareness regarding prevention of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through education and information, including speaking-out against harmful, abusive and exploitative sexual practices, treating sexually transmitted diseases, promoting faithfulness in marriage and advocating effective means of prevention (e.g., abstinence, use of condoms, sterilized needles, clean blood supplies)*
- *encourage and support one another in overcoming violence in families, particularly violent practices against women and children (including harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage) and to create processes of healing and reconciliation within families*
- *encourage and support one another in counteracting alcohol and drug abuse*
- *be mindful of how families experience spiritual poverty and encourage the development of liturgies and worship resources that reflect their needs and realities.*

VIII. Overcoming Violence

Violence in our world today takes many forms—some of them overt and personal but many of them covert, embedded in dehumanizing structural and institutional forms. In situations where one group holds the power and others are left dependent, injustices fester and often are reinforced and perpetuated through violence. The church must also be aware of the possibility that it may misuse its power, especially through traditions and practices that exclude and oppress.

We deplore, as did the Curitiba Assembly, the huge expenditures that go into military budgets, often at the cost of meeting the basic needs of people, and that lead instead to further oppression, denial of human rights and an escalation of violence. Following the Hong Kong Assembly, we affirm the role of the LWF “...to facilitate dialogue, peace and reconciliation at all stages of the evolution of conflict.” And “...to support and accompany local initiatives in pursuit of sustainable peace, justice, genuine reconciliation and the reconstruction of civil society, and the establishment of trust among peoples and nations.”⁶ We affirm the continuing exploration of the ethical dilemmas this poses, such as those discussed in the LWF paper, “Armed Intervention to Defend Human rights.”⁷

We note the alarming evidence of religious and other forms of fundamentalism that contribute to suspicion, hatred and conflict. We challenge all those ways religion is misused to legitimize or rationalize the use of violence—in families, communities, nations and internationally. We join with the Hong Kong Assembly in declaring that “‘Fundamentalism,’ whether political or religious, is contrary to the basic values of human dignity and freedom....”⁸

Our faith is in a God who through justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, rather than through vengeance, breaks cycles of violence. Nonviolent resistance to conditions that lead to and are themselves violent is a form of discipleship.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *participate fully in the WCC ecumenical “Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2010) Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace.”*
- *become agents for overcoming violence and for promoting reconciliation. Our theologies should help break the barriers that prevent us from expressing repentance and receiving absolution, and support advocacy for the oppressed and liberation of both oppressors and the oppressed. The gospel of liberation must be applied in practical contexts of oppression and marginalization within the church as well as in society*
- *encourage and support one another and act to overcome sexual violence against children and youth including within our churches*
- *affirm and use the power of non-violence, educating and training for non-violent actions to transform situations of violence and injustice*
- *pursue dialogue, encounter and practical cooperation as a means of reducing prejudice and enemy images and overcoming violence, stigmatization and victimization*
- *actively confront expressions of religious and political fundamentalism, including Christian fundamentalism; search for common values of justice, peace and reconciliation in all religious traditions, and undertake joint interfaith actions*
- *recognize and support the essential role and initiatives of women in negotiations and peace-building processes, and encourage men to be more active in opposing violence*

- *confront increasing militarism, the manufacture and proliferation of weapons, arms spending at the expense of social spending (including health and education) and military, political and all other forms of imperialism*
- *support efforts to strengthen the United Nations, international institutions and international law as instruments of peace, especially in the current context of isolationism, unilateralism and xenophobia*
- *advocate against violence in the media and in popular forms of entertainment, especially those affecting children and youth; encourage journalists to provide authentic communication and objective non-sensationalist reporting on world events*
- *confront those who profit from the trafficking of women and children.*

IX. Transforming Economic Globalization

Economic globalization is reshaping our world. We have heard of the impact on our communities around the world, and have focused on key economic policies that abdicate all decisions to the market without considering the human, social, ecological, and spiritual consequences.

Economic globalization has brought a profound sense of hopelessness to so many. Instead of the promised prosperity, many aspects of economic globalization continue to bring suffering, misery and death to millions. In spite of the increase in food production, the unequal distribution of wealth and goods leaves more than one billion people under the spell of endemic hunger. Many nations of the South find themselves under the unbearable burden of economic debt. The historical reasons for the debt are deeply connected to colonialism and the unfair development of the modern system of trade and finance. The harsh burden of globalization falls in greater measure upon women; they not only suffer its direct effects but also are called upon to care for others abandoned due to the consequences of globalization.

Through our diverse experiences, we are facing the same negative consequences of neoliberal economic policies (i.e., the Washington Consensus) that are leading to increased hardship, suffering and injustice in our communities. As a communion, we must engage the false ideology of neoliberal economic globalization by confronting, converting and changing this reality and its effects. This false ideology is grounded in the assumption that the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to

the systematic exclusion of those who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies and the destruction of the earth.

We find negative global effects of economic globalization within all parts of our communion, but particularly in the South and in Central Eastern Europe. Economic globalization has resulted in the following:

- *a growing gap between the very rich and the poor that particularly adversely affects women, youth and children*
- *increased marginalization of Indigenous peoples, excluding them from their right to their land, self-governance, resources, Indigenous knowledge and their culture*
- *the international debt has become an instrument of domination; the rates of interest charged amount to usury; many of the debts are illegitimate (including “odious debts”); the efforts undertaken by governments and international financial institutions so far have failed*
- *the globalization of information that connects people in many parts of the world is denied to the majority who lack access to it*
- *churches have shrinking resources as support decreases because more people are struggling to survive*
- *unemployment and underemployment are reducing the ability of people to earn a living and are forcing many into dehumanizing activities (e.g., trafficking in women and children, prostitution, criminal activity)*
- *while capital and goods are freely traded across borders, people left desperate by weakened local economies are often prevented from migrating*
- *governments are becoming powerless and less willing to safeguard the well-being of their people.*

As a Lutheran communion we call for the development of an economy that serves life. We affirm the LWF document, “A Call to Participate in Transforming Economic globalization,” upon which we commit ourselves to work, based theologically on what it means to be a communion. We also emphasize, with Martin Luther, that economic practices that undermine the well-being of the neighbor (especially the most vulnerable) must be rejected and replaced with alternatives. Luther also reminds pastors that they are obliged to unmask hidden injustices of economic practices that exploit the vulnerable.

We recognize that this vision of an economy that serves life will need to be pursued ecumenically. We join with the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and other church families in a continuing ecumenical process focused on how economic and ecological injustice challenges us as churches.

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *participate in transforming economic globalization and to engage in partnerships with civil society, particularly in efforts that recognize the churches' prophetic role in promoting justice and human rights*
- *help empower members by raising awareness of the issues of economic globalization and equipping them to take concrete actions*
- *address issues of economic globalization that include trade, debt, militarization, corruption, corporate social responsibility, gender equality and migration*
- *build and strengthen ecumenical partnerships, multifaith cooperation, and participate in civil society alliances (i.e., the World Social Forum)*
- *create opportunities and arenas for dialogue, discussion and moral deliberation between various economic actors, policy makers, citizens, stakeholders and communities.*

X. Healing Creation

The wounded creation also is in desperate need of healing. The earth continues to be polluted due to human greed, ignorance, overpopulation and wars, as well as a consequence of consumerism. This has fatal consequences such as drought, desertification, extinction of species, poverty and starvation. We confess that we play a part in the exploitation and destruction of nature. Too often, we treat the creation as an object for our use and inflict wounds upon it, rather than seeing ourselves as part of God's precious gift of creation. Contributing to this reality have been misleading theological attitudes: that it is heaven not earth that matters; that humans are to exploit and subjugate all creation, including human and ecological relationships; and, that the scope of God's redemption is limited to human beings alone.

As a Lutheran communion, we affirm instead that

- *God is present not only in and with human beings but in and with all creation; Christ suffers with creation when it is abused, wounded, violated; the Holy Spirit cries with the wounded creation*
- *through Christ, God reconciles, transforms and heals **all** of creation*
- *human beings are to be God's creating, restoring, sustaining hands on this earth*
- *reconciled to our Creator through Christ, we have the opportunity to repent; justified by faith we can act accordingly. In so doing we acknowledge our place in creation and accept our responsibility toward creation.*

The 1990 LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, made the commitment to form "one global lifeline of churches supporting each other in confronting threats to God's creation." Here we raise up the importance of

- *challenging, on personal, corporate and international levels, specific practices that violate and wound the creation*
- *working for policies and practices that respect all of life, and opposing the patenting of life forms or processes that produce them, especially at the expense of everyone who depends on them*
- *promoting sustainable agriculture, based on a holistic ecological approach, that is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate and humane and learning from the insights and experiences of minority cultures and Indigenous peoples*
- *opposing consumer and profit-driven models of economic development and industry which ignore equity and justice for all creation*
- *reflecting on ethical and justice issues related to modern biotechnology, whose social and medical consequences are yet to be seen*
- *lifting up and promoting alternative ways that guarantee equitable trade and fair wages.*

Therefore, we commit ourselves and call on member churches to

- *challenge practices where the gifts of God for all are made into commodities in unjust and unnecessary ways, which especially impact the poor. This includes the*

privatization of water and all other natural resources that are basic for human life and the patenting of seeds for crops and of other living organisms

- *become more eco-centric in order to live more in harmony with nature. We have much to learn from Indigenous peoples and other traditions and what they have to teach us about our participation in and preservation of nature*
- *work for a more just sharing of the goods of creation, mindful that for many people, how they relate to nature is a matter of daily survival, and that some of us consume far more than others. Together we must work against climate change and the greenhouse effect, by acting to decrease the consumption of fossil fuel and use renewable energy resources*
- *evaluate new biotechnological developments and advocate against those that violate the dignity and integrity of human beings as created in the image of God*
- *support international agreements (e.g., the Kyoto Protocol) that seek to preserve the environment and the integrity of creation*
- *include study of the theology of creation as an established part of the curriculum of institutions of higher learning of the LWF member churches, and educate our communities on the theology of creation*
- *respect Sunday as a day of rest in order that all creation can be restored and renewed.*

Conclusion

In light of the many challenges we face in today's world, we have reaffirmed past commitments of the LWF, and assumed new ones. We pledge to devote ourselves and our best efforts to them. And yet, we know all too well the limitations of our capacities and recognize the tragic effects of our sinfulness, which also pervades our churches and our communion.

More than ever, our deeply wounded world needs a testimony of hope, a hope that arises out of God's promise alone. In Christ, we have come to recognize that God heals the world and us. Jesus Christ came into this world and lived among us, like one of us. He took the sufferings of the whole world on himself. In his death and resurrection we were given a new hope and new future. Jesus Christ himself is the precious gift and promise for all humankind, for all creation.

And therefore, we confess the God as God of Life, and see healing as promoting the wholeness of life. In the midst of all suffering and injustice, God is continuously at work, healing our world. In Christ, God makes us whole, receives us anew as God's children, restores all broken relations, and calls us into the pathways of discipleship.

Thus, as justified sinners, we are all called to participate in God's work of healing our world. We are not yet in the fulfilled reign of God. Our discipleship calls us to follow Jesus on the way of the cross. God's Word and sacraments lead us on our way from the cross to resurrection. The Holy Spirit guides the church on this journey of faith and hope, and reminds us to carry each others' burdens in prayer and solidarity. And thus, "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:1b-2a). O God, guide us to do so, "for the healing of the world."

Notes

¹ *LWF Report No. 28/29 "I Have Heard the Cry of My People."* Curitiba 1990. Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly. Geneva: LWF 1990, p. 82.

² LWF Council Agenda, Wittenberg, Germany, 2002. Exhibit 16.1

³ *LWF Report No. 28/29 "I Have Heard the Cry of My People."* Curitiba 1990. Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly. Geneva: LWF 1990, p. 84.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *The San Antonio Report "Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way."* Ed. Frederick R. Wilson. Geneva: WCC Publications 1990, p. 32, par. 26. *Called to One Hope.* Ed. Christopher Duraisingh. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998, p. 33.

⁶ *Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.* Hong Kong 1997. Geneva: LWF, pp. 59-60.

⁷ LWF Council Agenda, Turku, Finland, 2000. Exhibit 17.3.

⁸ *Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.* Hong Kong 1997. Geneva: LWF, p. 72.

° *LWF Report No. 28/29* "I Have Heard the Cry of My People." Curitiba 1990. Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly. Geneva: LWF 1990, p. 89.