



The ninth station of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa, Jerusalem.
© epd-bild/T.Lohnes

Office for Ecumenical Affairs (OEA)

The LWF as a Global Ecumenical Partner

The development of the LWF as a worldwide communion of churches represents a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement. This conviction was firmly expressed by the Seventh Assembly, when altar and pulpit fellowship was declared

among all the member churches, and further affirmed by the Eighth Assembly, when the revised Constitution was adopted:

- “The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.”

- “The Lutheran World Federation confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world.”

The unity of Lutheran churches and the unity of the church universal are essentially parts of the same ecumenical continuum. A growing Lutheran self-understanding in the member churches is at the same time growth in ecumenical awareness and commitment. By developing as a communion, the LWF is an instrument by means of which the member churches can both develop mutual relations and act together ecumenically. Without the LWF many member churches would not have

ability at different levels. Significant developments such as the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) are only possible because of the existence of the LWF and its decision-making processes directly involving the member churches.

Since the mid-1960s, bilateral dialogues and the various agreements of communion relations that have been reached at national and regional levels have become increasingly important within the ecumenical movement. In the years ahead, the ecumenical role of the Christian world communions (CWCs) will remain significant. With its understanding of church and its ministry, the Lutheran communion is well placed within the network of global ecumenical relations as a bridge builder.

All communions that profess the Christian faith in the Triune God are called to grow in unity with each other. Unity *within* and *among* CWCs also serves a wider purpose: We seek the unity of humankind in this divinely created yet tormented world, of which all churches are an integral part. Christian unity is required for the church’s mission. Conversely, the purpose of mission is unity in Christ, among women and men, across the many different barriers that divide humanity.



Bishop David Tustin and Bishop *em.* Ambrose Moyo, co-chairs of the Anglican–Lutheran International Working Group (2000–2002). © LWF

been part of a global network, or directly involved in the ecumenical movement.

The LWF helps to overcome divisions stemming from differences in cultural, ethnic and missionary backgrounds. Through the governing bodies of the individual member churches, as well as those of the LWF as a communion, there are forms of account-

Anglican–Lutheran Relations

The Ninth Assembly noted with thanksgiving the Anglican–Lutheran agreements already in place, and encouraged further development of communion relations with churches of the Anglican Communion.

In August 2001, the LWF President paid a visit to the Archbishop of Canterbury. They discussed a wide range of global issues, in particular the mutual ecumenical commitment of the two communions, at the regional and global levels.

Communion agreements were reached in 1995 between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches through the *Porvoo Common Statement*. Through *Called to*

Common Mission (2001) and the *Waterloo Agreement* (2001), Anglican/Episcopalian – Lutheran relations of full communion were established in the USA and in Canada. An agreement providing substantial forms of church fellowship between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed churches was reached in 1999 through the *Reuilly Common Statement*.

When Anglican churches enter into full communion relations with other churches, the Anglican Communion regards itself as having, in a certain sense, expanded. At the Lambeth Conference in 1998, the Lutheran bishops of the Porvoo church fellowship were invited to participate as “bishops in communion.” Such an understanding represents a valuable contribution to ecumenical thinking, making it clear that the establishment of formal ecumenical relations has a significant impact on one’s own communion within the context of the universal church. Communion agreements are genuine contributions to the visible unity of the universal church.

Visible unity is a unity in proclamation, sacraments and ministry, and a unity in life and mission. The church’s apostolicity is the upholding of the fundamental tradition of the Christian church in faith, worship and service.

The Anglican–Lutheran International Commission (ALIC) completed its work in 1995 with a report on *The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity*. This report contributes to an ecumenical understand-

ing of the church’s ministry as a serving and healing ministry. Anglican–Lutheran efforts in the area of diaconal ministry have been followed up in the Nordic region by the Nordic Ecumenical Council, which published two important studies on *The Ministry of the Deacon* in 1999 and 2000.

The Anglican–Lutheran International Working Group (ALIWG) was established in 2000 and held three meetings in the USA, Iceland and Brazil. Its final report, “Growth in Communion,” analyzes current Anglican–Lutheran relations throughout the world, and makes recommendations to the governing bodies of the two communions about the continued development of bilateral relations.

The General Secretary of the LWF and the Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) have agreed to hold annual joint staff meetings, the first of which took place in Geneva, in 2002. In addition, the ACC is represented at the LWF Council, and in September 2002, the General Secretary gave the keynote address at the ACC’s meeting in Hong Kong.

Lutheran–Orthodox Relations

The Ninth Assembly also noted with gratitude the dialogues of the Lutheran churches with the Orthodox churches. The international Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission met for the first time in Finland in 1981. Since then it has met approximately every



Participants in the 2000 meeting of the Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission, Damascus, Syria.
© LWF

two years and statements have been adopted on divine revelation, Scripture and tradition, the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, authority in and of the church and the understanding of salvation. Since 2000, discussions have focused on Word and Sacraments/Mysteria in the life of the church.

While the International Commission produces very concise statements, some regional dialogues are more prolific. Input from such regional dialogues is recognized in the International Commission since several of its members are also active in the regional dialogues.

While Orthodox and Lutherans are not yet approaching institutional forms of church fellowship, common ground has been found in central matters of the faith. The statements adopted provide important material for the theological understanding of unity and contribute as such to the healing of divisions in the one church.

Lutheran–Reformed Relations

In 1989, a Joint Commission of the LWF and WARC called on Lutheran and Re-

formed churches have established binding forms of communion. Although progress varies according to the different regions, bonds between the two families have become stronger and cooperation between the LWF and WARC has increased.

In 1999 a Joint Working Group was established whose mandate it was to:

- Review the present state of Lutheran–Reformed relations
- Assess the implications of regional developments for the global relationship
- Examine ways in which the governing bodies of the two communions might fruitfully cooperate
- Identify other possible forms of practical cooperation
- Consider whether it would be helpful to begin a new round of international Lutheran–Reformed dialogue

The Joint Working Group met three times. Prior to its meeting in Brazil, in 2000, a consultation was held with Brazilian Lutheran and Reformed church leaders. Leading up to the meeting in Geneva, in 2001, a consultation was held with representatives of united (Lutheran and Reformed) churches, together with representatives of the LWF and WARC, on the relationship of the united churches to the two world families.

The final report of the Lutheran–Reformed Joint Working Group, “Called to Communion and Common Witness” indicates how Lutherans and Reformed view their ecumenical growth and the development of visible forms of unity.

The Joint Working Group proposed a bilateral study project on “Structures of Unity.” This proposal was agreed upon by the 2002 meetings of the WARC Executive Committee and the LWF Council. A



Lutheran–Reformed Joint Working Group members visit the Reformation Monument in Geneva, Switzerland, 2000.
© LWF

formed churches throughout the world to “declare communion with one another” and to “make their unity more real and visible for their members as well as for the world.” It also urged the LWF and WARC to collaborate wherever possible. Today, in many parts of the world, Lutheran and

new Joint Lutheran – Reformed Commission will take responsibility for this study project, as well as other important aspects of the developing Lutheran – Reformed relations at the global level.

The participation of WARC at a quadrilateral Catholic-Lutheran-Methodist-Reformed consultation in 2001 on the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in a wider ecumenical framework” drew special attention to the relationship between justification and social justice. This relationship must be clarified and developed before it is possible for the Reformed to consider any formal affirmation of the JDDJ for their part. It has been agreed that a quadrilateral commission will be established to work on this issue.

Lutheran–Roman Catholic Relations

Regular joint staff meetings between the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), headed by the LWF General Secretary and the President of the PCPCU, remain an important instrument for ecumenical contact and cooperation between the two world bodies.

Since the Ninth Assembly relations between the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church have been dominated by the JDDJ and by issues relating to the Jubilee Year 2000.

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

By the Ninth Assembly the final text of the JDDJ had been sent to the member churches for their consideration. An assessment process was also underway within the Roman Catholic Church.

Since the responses of the Lutheran churches varied in character and content, careful consideration of these responses was required to determine the basis for action by the LWF Council. An analysis conducted by the Institute for Ecumenical

Research, Strasbourg, concluded that the JDDJ had the support of the vast majority of the member churches. On this basis the 1998 meeting of the Council voted unanimously to endorse the JDDJ. The reservations of some member churches were not simply ignored, but were recognized by the Council and will remain as parts of the responses of the member churches. The member churches represented on the Council, which had not responded favorably to the JDDJ, nevertheless joined in the unanimously affirming vote on the basis of the majority of positive responses.

The Council’s resolution expresses the official position on the JDDJ of the LWF as a communion. It affirms that between Catholics and Lutherans a differentiated consensus (i.e., a consensus containing differences representing complementary aspects) has been reached on basic truths regarding the doctrine of justification. Furthermore, it affirms that the mutual condemnations regarding justification expressed at the time of the Reformation do not apply to the teachings of the two parties presented in the JDDJ.

While the Roman Catholic Church’s official response essentially affirmed the consensus reached on justification, it contained certain reservations regarding particular issues raised in the JDDJ. The response concluded that in spite of the consensus reached, it was impossible for the Roman Catholic Church to declare in a general manner that the condemnations dating from the Reformation no longer apply. This meant that the goal of the JDDJ process had not been fully reached. This led to further consultations between the LWF and the PCPCU to consider the implications of the situation and the requirements for its resolution. The result was an agreement to develop an “Official Common Statement.” This statement would have an “Annex” clarifying particular remaining questions. The “Official Common Statement” formally stated that the two parties affirmed the JDDJ in its entirety.

The texts of the “Official Common Statement,” with its Annex was approved

Crowds watch the ecumenical procession toward the historic signing of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Augsburg, Germany, 1999.
© LWF/L. Wieckhorst



by the Council, which also authorized the signing ceremony and the celebration of the JDDJ in Augsburg, Germany, on October 31, 1999. The achievement of the JDDJ and its festive signing celebration attracted more media attention than any other ecumenical event in recent years. Around the world it was widely celebrated in a number of special ecumenical ceremonies. Much joy and hope was liberated through these events, marking that a new depth of common understanding has been reached between Catholics and Lutherans in a core theological area. It is frequently reported that Lutherans and Catholics at parish level now see each other in a new light, as sisters and brothers in the Christian faith. In many mixed Lutheran-Roman Catholic families the agreement is said to have had an important healing effect.

The Commitment of the LWF to the JDDJ

The official positions of the individual member churches are expressed in the responses they submitted to the LWF. In these responses the churches state their views in the detail they find necessary. The official position of the LWF is reflected both in the action taken by the Council in 1998 and in the “Official Common Statement”

approved in 1999. Both of these documents unequivocally affirm the JDDJ. This affirmation is formally binding for the LWF as a world communion. The churches that expressed reservations remain full members of the Federation. This indicates an internally differentiated understanding of the matter, but does not detract from the commitment of the LWF to the agreement reached.

Follow-up of the JDDJ

The way in which the JDDJ should be followed up ecumenically is a complex ecumenical matter, outlined in 2000 in a special report by the General Secretary to the Council, which subsequently adopted a Plan of Action.

The Plan of Action calls for further study of the Christian being simultaneously justified and sinner to be carried out especially by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg.

As part of the follow-up process a quadrilateral consultation was organized by the LWF and the PCPCU in 2001 on “Unity in Faith.” WARC and the World Methodist Council (WMC) were invited to send representatives to this consultation, which also paid attention to the role of doctrinal agreements with a view to establishing

official church relations. Already in 1991 the WMC formally expressed its support for the JDDJ as an ecumenical achievement. For the Methodists, a theologically substantiated affirmation of the JDDJ does not seem impossible, in light of the way justification and sanctification are considered in the JDDJ. This matter is being followed up trilaterally with the LWF and the PCPCU. For the WARC, more attention needs to be paid to the issue of social justice (cf., the section on Lutheran – Reformed relations.)

Furthermore, follow-up is specifically called for in the area of ecumenical efforts in common witness “to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, and with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times.” The LWF study project on the contemporary meaning of justification is a significant contribution to the follow-up process of the JDDJ. (On this topic, see the section in this report from DTS.)

In order for the broader biblical basis for the faith in the justifying God to be more expounded than is already the case in the biblical section of the JDDJ, a symposium of biblical scholars will be called together by the LWF and the PCPCU.

There is the strong expectation among many that the major achievement of the JDDJ will, in the not too distant future, also have an impact on the formal church relations between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. At the present time the possibilities for such a development are not clear, since the issue of the recognition of ministries is not close to being resolved. But the ecumenical efforts continue with undiminished strength, in the international dialogue commission, in regional dialogues and through theological research in many countries.

The Jubilee Year 2000

Lutheran–Roman Catholic relations were affirmed by the visit of the LWF President to the Pope in early December 1999 after

the signing of the JDDJ, and prior to the opening of the Jubilee Year. The two church leaders both pointed to the ecumenical significance of the JDDJ in their addresses and the need for reconciliation at the present stage in history.

In November 1998, the Pope published the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Incarnationis Mysterium*. It presents fundamental aspects of Roman Catholic ecclesiology and contains spiritual guidelines concerning the celebration of the Jubilee Year. One element in this celebration is the granting of indulgence, by means of which one can share in the “treasure of the church” provided by Christ and the saints. Controversies that arose throughout 1999 on the issue of indulgence resulted in a somewhat incomplete ecumenical participation in the opening of the Jubilee Year in Rome.

In light of the objections made to the role of indulgence in the Roman Catholic celebration of the Jubilee Year, the PCPCU invited the LWF and the WARC to discuss the historical and theological aspects of



indulgence. The symposium took place in Rome, in February 2001. It was co-chaired by Edward Cardinal Cassidy, then President of the PCPCU, and the general secretaries of the LWF and the WARC. The papers presented at this symposium will be published in English and German.

In 2000, another controversy arose over the publication of the *Dominus Iesus*.

Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari (center), LWF Vice-President for Asia, is among signatories to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 31 October 1999, Augsburg, Germany.
© LWF/L.Wieckhorst

This document, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as well as guidelines given by this Congregation regarding the use of the notions of “churches” and “ecclesial communities” were interpreted by many as an ecumenical step backwards.

Other Jubilee Year events considered important by the LWF were the “Day of Prayer for Pardon” regarding sins committed by sons and daughters of the church and the “Commemoration of Witnesses of the Faith in the Twentieth Century,” in which the General Secretary participated.

The General Secretary has since also taken part in two major events pertaining to peace and interfaith issues organized by the Society of St. Egidio.

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity

After completing a series of reports on central issues since its inception in the mid-1960s, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity focuses in its present phase on the “Apostolicity of the Church.” This work represents an effort both to take stock of where the partners in dialogue stand on topics within that broad, funda-

tradition that goes back to the Early Church. Healing divisions in the one church can be seen in the perspective of becoming more strongly united in the church’s apostolicity.

Eucharistic Hospitality

In August 2000, the President sent a letter to the PCPCU asking whether eucharistic hospitality might be considered between Roman Catholics and Lutherans, especially in light of the agreements reached in the JDDJ. The PCPCU responded that at present the Roman Catholic Church does not envisage changes in current regulations on eucharistic sharing. According to Roman Catholic understanding, eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to the question of institutional church communion. For Lutherans it remains important to emphasize that the living Christ, who cannot be divided, imparts himself to us in the Eucharist and his real, divine presence transcends human barriers, also the barriers of Christian confessions. Recognizing the validity of each other’s concerns, Catholics and Lutherans need to pursue their dialogue on this issue so vital in ecumenical relations.

Lutheran–Seventh-day Adventist Relations

Lutheran–Seventh-day Adventist conversations commenced in 1994 and concluded in 1998 after four sessions. The final report contains several recommendations for different types of contact and cooperation, and calls on Lutherans not to consider the Seventh-day Adventists as a sect but as a free church. The recommendations encourage several specific forms of mutual recognition and cooperation. Both sides are presently studying this material and future relations between Adventists and Lutherans will be shaped by how the report and its recommendations are received by the two constituencies.



Members of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity in Opole, Poland, 1998.
© LWF

mental issue and to make progress toward a common understanding.

For Lutherans it is ecumenically important to gain an understanding from others that the Lutheran churches did not “originate” in the Reformation, but maintain in their own framework the apostolic

Relations with Former Dialogue Partners

The LWF has formerly been in dialogue with the Methodists through the WMC, and conversations have been conducted with the Baptist World Alliance.

The dialogue between the LWF and WMC, which resulted in the report *The Church, Community of Grace* (1984), has since led to binding forms of church fellowship between Methodists and the EKD–Evangelical Church in Germany, the Church of Norway, the Church of Sweden, and the Leuenberg Fellowship. Relations between the LWF and WMC are maintained in the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CS/CWCs) and in the follow-up to the JDDJ (see above).

Conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the LWF led to the report *Baptists and Lutherans in Conversation: A Message to our Churches* (1989). Relations between the LWF and the Baptist World Alliance are presently maintained primarily in the CS/CWCs.

Study on Lutheran Identity in Ecumenical Relationships

An interdepartmental project, involving OEA, DTS and the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, seeks to clarify some of the ways in which the confessional identity of the Lutheran communion can be described with reference to certain issues of global ecumenical significance. The study is prompted by the fact that the consistency of Lutheran teaching and practices (e.g., on the subject of the ordained ministry) is sometimes questioned in international ecumenical dialogues. Moreover, new ecumenical relations entered into by Lutheran churches (e.g., with Anglican churches) have raised questions about consistency also within the Lutheran family.

The aim of this study is not to produce “timeless” pictures of Lutheran confes-



sional identity, but to describe Lutheran perspectives on certain issues, particularly as achieved in ecumenical dialogues, in a coherent manner. Lodged in the OEA, the study has in its first phase focused on “The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church.” After five regional meetings around the world, a consultation was held in Malta in late 2002 with the Lutheran participants in the different dialogue commissions. The consultation developed a Statement that will be made available to the member churches and to the Tenth Assembly.

The next phase of the study, lodged in DTS, will focus on the church’s diaconal ministry.

Participants in the Lutheran–Seventh-day Adventist Commission meeting, Cartigny, Switzerland, 1998.
© LWF

Relations with the World Council of Churches

The 1998 Assembly of the WCC in Harare recognized that advances in the discussions of ecumenical models are the direct result of common engagement between the WCC and the CWCs. The Assembly furthermore recognized that in this process there is a focus on the “ecclesial self-understanding” manifested by some of the CWCs. This fact is an important characteristic of the relationships between the WCC and the CWCs, indicating the need for the WCC to recognize the historical and ecclesiological uniqueness present in the CWCs and to strengthen the relationship

with the various CWCs. The Harare Assembly also called on the CS/CWCs to play an active part in this process.

At the 1999 meeting of the Council it was emphasized that strengthening the relationship between the CWCs and the WCC in general would contribute to the coher-



Participants in the 2002 Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions meeting in Hendersonville, North Carolina, USA.
© LWF

ence of the ecumenical movement and to good stewardship of resources. The Council asked the General Secretary to seek to initiate a direct “dialogue” between the LWF and the WCC on future relations and patterns of cooperation. A joint Geneva staff group submitted its report in 2000. The group continues its work and has since been joined by a representative of WARC.

In 2002, the Council strongly affirmed the ecumenical role of the WCC at the present time, and asked that the General Secretary and the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, carefully follow and contribute to the developments regarding the participation of CWCs in the WCC.

The Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions

The main purpose of the annual meetings of CS/CWCs has been to provide a space for mutual reporting and sharing of current experiences in the daily work of the

various communions. In 2000, the CS/CWCs adopted a statement encouraging each communion to establish relations with the WCC in accordance with their particular needs and possibilities. In 2002, a procedure was put in place for a broad discussion within the CS/CWCs regarding its nature and future, as well as ecclesiological aspects of the CWCs and their role in the ecumenical movement.

Cooperation between the OEA, DTS and Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg

In 2001, a staff group representing the OEA, DTS and the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, delivered a substantial report on “Theology and Ecumenism in the LWF.” The report describes in clear detail the different roles of OEA, DTS and the Institute for Ecumenical Research within the LWF family. It emphasizes, however that cooperation between the three must always be intimate, involving mutual consultation on substantive and procedural aspects of the ecumenical life of the LWF. All three are presently struggling with serious shortages of resources. Important issues of priority setting as well as fundraising are therefore on their common agenda.

The opportunities and challenges facing the LWF ecumenically will undoubtedly affect its future, and the contributions of Lutheran churches will impact the future of the ecumenical movement. In the years ahead it will be essential for the LWF as a communion of churches to maintain a strong and professional ecumenical involvement, in keeping with its confessional nature and purpose.