

Embargo against delivery

**Report to the LWF Assembly
Winnipeg, Canada, 21-31 July 2003**

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*For the Healing of the World
From Hong Kong to Winnipeg*

Introduction

- (1) I greet you delegates, representatives of member churches, official and ecumenical guests, visitors, colleagues and friends. Finally we are here. Canada was once described by a leading historian as a land of incredible possibilities, and the prairie provinces as the 'home' of Canadian hospitality. This is truly confirmed by the way we have been received by the host church. In this connection let me express gratitude to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada through its National Bishop Raymond Schultz, the Synod Bishops, retired Bishops and members of the Church Council. We are aware that countless hours of dedicated work have been invested beyond the call of duty by the Local Assembly Committee, the staff of the Canadian Lutheran World Relief, pastors, students, and numerous volunteers.
- (2) We are grateful to them and to the many others who assisted in relating to the political authorities in relation to the denial of visas to some Assembly participants. With gratitude I acknowledge the role played by the various Provincial and Federal parliamentarians who supported our request and by the media in drawing the attention of the Canadian churches, the public and the international community to this issue. We deeply regret that, despite these efforts, some of the representatives of our global communion have been prevented from joining us here in this Assembly.
- (3) I wish to recognize the presence of Bishop Dr. Margot Kässmann of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover, who will deliver the keynote address tomorrow morning, as well as the responders to her address, Bishop Dr. Wesley Kigasung of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea and Ms. Ivañez de Neyeloff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Venezuela. I also recognize and welcome, among our numerous distinguished guests, Dr. André Appel, former General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. I am asked to convey to the Assembly the greetings of former LWF presidents Dr. Gottfried Brakemaier and Dr. Mikko Juva, as well as former General Secretary, Bishop Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, who regret that they are unable to be with us.
- (4) Six years have passed since we gathered in Hong Kong, China, for the Ninth Assembly. We were inspired and moved by the mission-centered theme: "In Christ - Called to Witness". We

adopted commitments intended to give strength to our resolve to be witnesses to God's love for the world and to work together in the Lord's Vineyard.

- (5) This Assembly has the responsibility of reviewing the work of the Federation since 1997, described in the printed Six Year Report submitted to the Assembly by the General Secretary on behalf of the Council. Though the Six Year Report was made available on the LWF website some weeks ago already, the printed version could not be mailed out in advance due to circumstances beyond our control; hence the delegates received the Report only upon arrival. This Report will be highlighted tomorrow in the sessions devoted to "LWF presents itself".
- (6) In my remarks to you today I wish to draw your attention to some selected aspects of our work and purpose as a communion.

We live in a wounded world

- (7) The church is called to witness its faith in Christ as Savior and Healer. In this task it is continuously challenged by the ever-changing contexts of a world broken by sin. But this world is God's world. And as church we must in faith do our utmost to consider the world and live in it with what we believe is God's own love and concern.
- (8) Two years ago, when the theme of this Assembly was chosen, we were mindful of the fact that the world is a wounded world. Since that time developments around the globe have confirmed the significance and timeliness of this theme. In Trondheim, Norway, the Conference of European Churches recently held its Assembly around a similar theme, "Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles." And next year the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will hold its General Council in Accra, Ghana, under the theme, "That All may have Life in Fullness."
- (9) War and violence have continued to beset communities, people and nations throughout the world. The war against Iraq is only one illustration of how political leaders resort to violence to further their national interests. Other civil conflicts of different intensities have also taken place or are taking place in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, Israel/Palestine, Zimbabwe, and again Liberia, in which LWF member churches strive to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel in the midst of bloodshed. In a number of conflicts, particularly in Sudan, Nigeria, Indonesia and Israel/Palestine, and in the confrontation between India and Pakistan, religious intolerance and extremism has fueled the tensions.
- (10) As a result of the events of 11 September 2001, fear of terrorism has imprinted itself on the consciousness of the global community. The international environment we face today, as churches seeking to respond to Christ's call, has been fundamentally re-shaped by those events and especially by the political and military reactions to them. In addition, the war against Iraq presented the world community with a stark and unappealing choice between impunity for dictators on the one hand, and submission to a unipolar hegemony on the other hand. The implications of this choice, and the consequences of the actions ultimately taken, will confront the international community - and the churches - for years to come.

- (11) The last few years have also been a time of continuing injustice, suffering and escalating violence in Israel/Palestine. Very recently, fragile signs of hope have begun to re-emerge. We pray for the realization of that hope - for the sake of the Palestinians, who have been subjected to occupation, domination and daily humiliations, and for the sake of the Israelis, who have lived in permanent fear of suicide bombers. Our prayers must also accompany the churches of the Holy Land, as they continue, in the midst of violence and hatred, to preach the healing word of the gospel and to contribute whatever they can to the promotion of peace.
- (12) Since our last Assembly we have witnessed a further intensification of the process of globalization and its effects on all spheres of human life, including the life of the churches. Globalization has contributed to the undermining of oppressive political systems. New mechanisms for globalized justice and against impunity, such as the International Criminal Court, have come into existence. Human rights have attained increasing prominence in international affairs. These aspects of globalization are cause for hope.
- (13) Yet on the other hand we are aware of the ambiguity of globalization. The unifying trends have also been accompanied by worsening fragmentation, marginalization and division. In a world of instantaneous electronic communication, an estimated 80% of people in the world have never heard a dial tone, let alone sent an email or surfed the Web. Economically, inequality of wealth and well-being and the tragic conditions of the poor, have never been more evident. Socially, though trends differ from place to place, deprivation and dislocation seem visibly to be on the rise in many societies. An estimated 2.8 billion people, close to half the population of the planet and almost all of them in developing countries, live on less than 2 dollars a day. According to a recent UN survey, the quality of life has actually declined in a significant number of countries over the last decade. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been wider. The devastation resulting from poverty is much more than the absence of material goods. It also inflicts spiritual wounds that undermine one's self-esteem, self-worth and confidence. It attacks the God-given dignity and equal value of every human being, and therefore undermines any notion of community and communion.
- (14) Some churches, particularly in the Latin American region, have called for an ethical examination of the legitimacy of the crushing debt burdens of many developing countries. They see the need to confront a situation in which the demands of international creditors continue to be given priority over the basic needs of citizens and their right to self-determination. It is our conviction that globalization can be reshaped by policies that are formulated through institutions with proper international accountability, rather than by the global presumptions of the G8 leaders.
- (15) Efforts of the strong to push their own way forward, disregarding the needs and pleas of others, can only be detrimental to the healing processes that the world is yearning for. The main instrument for the common life of the international community is and must be the United Nations. Strong and coordinated efforts must be made to further develop the abilities of the UN to fill all the functions attributed to it by its member states.

Churches for the healing of the world's wounds

- (16) Our Christian faith is grounded in a paradox: the image and reality of the crucified Messiah. The divine healing power of the almighty God is expressed in suffering, sacrifice, woundedness and vulnerability. Through baptism and the eucharist we are united with Christ, and as the body of Christ in the world, the church must bear the marks of Christ's healing sacrifice. Its life must show forth Christ's devotion to the other, even unto death. The church must be ready to confront the powers and principalities in our global village that deny human dignity.
- (17) Within the complexity of this world, the church is gathered to be a communion (koinonia); a dynamic reality; a fellowship of God's people from every tribe, tongue and nation; marked by a life of unity in diversity, sharing in the apostolic faith.
- (18) This Assembly is itself one visible representation of the church. We who are here, coming from seventy-three countries, have been called together in the unity we share in our faith, despite many differences of cultures, traditions and spiritualities. We have come together as we are, carrying the wounds of our people and our churches, as well as our own personal wounds. Our differences and our woundedness are not to be covered up. We are here to listen and be open to the cries of one another; to say "Your cry is my cry. Your joy is my joy."
- (19) In gathering the communion God rejects the forces of alienation, fragmentation and divisions based on race, color, gender, age, culture, descent, social or economic status. As part of its contribution to the struggle against the many forms of social exclusion, the LWF has continued to advocate against racism, notably at the World Conference Against Racism; it has helped to place on the international agenda the special category of dehumanizing discrimination faced by the Dalits of South Asia.
- (20) In this world we increasingly experience the politics of brute force and naked self-interest, yet the healing power of God is not the power of dominance. Communion with the Triune God, and with each other, determines a new relationship among the faithful. It is a divine gift, the meaning of which goes far beyond what we normally understand by the term 'partnership'. This term is often used in the commercial environment, where the quality of partnership depends on the contribution that one is able to bring into this relationship. You are either a senior or junior partner. If the relationship breaks down, one is free to walk away from the agreement. However, the notion of communion from a theological/biblical perspective describes an entirely different type of relationship, a mutual participation in the common faith and life among the members of a body. Life in communion is not based on a partial commitment of Christ but on the total emptying of himself for our sake.
- (21) Applied to the LWF, the concept of communion designates the common life of member churches as a confessional community placed organically within the universal church. Built on our declared altar and pulpit fellowship the communion of the LWF is an *ecclesial* fellowship and as such it is operative as an instrument for common witness and service.

- (22) The member churches of the LWF are institutionally and legally autonomous, with their own structures of ministry and governing bodies. The nature of the LWF as a communion is characterized by the interaction of the autonomous member churches in view of the common good, both within the Lutheran communion and ecumenically.
- (23) Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God is recognized ecumenically, and it calls us to seek comprehensive eucharistic fellowship and mutual recognition of ministries. Ordination to the ministry, in the Lutheran understanding, is not carried out simply for the particular church in which it takes place. Ordination is in principle an ecumenical act, since it is an authorization to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments, which are gifts given to the universal church. From this perspective, no church is autonomous in the sense of being independent from other churches. As churches confessing the one apostolic church, we belong together. We are interdependent ecumenically, and the members of the Lutheran communion express and serve this interdependence in concrete and committed ways.

The instrument and the ligaments of the Lutheran communion

- (24) Our altar and pulpit fellowship expresses our spiritual interconnectedness, by which we are also united with the church universal. Without the binding power of the gospel, baptism and the eucharist, the LWF could be like a civil agency but would not be a communion of churches. The LWF in its organizational form is an instrument of the Lutheran communion. It is through this instrument that the member churches witness together to God's love for the world.
- (25) Like a living body made up of diverse organs, the Lutheran communion requires 'connective tissues', or 'ligaments', to make the life of the communion possible and meaningful. The LWF has various institutional ligaments serving the life of the communion:
- ⇒ *The Assembly* is the highest and most comprehensive expression of the Lutheran communion. It provides space for representatives from all the LWF member churches to confer together.
 - ⇒ *The Council (with its various committees)* is also a vital connective ligament for the communion. It exercises its governing authority according to the Constitution. The members of the Council represent the churches of the regions from which they come. This is the reason why the process of electing Council members by the Assembly involves a process of nomination by the member churches and consultation at the level of LWF regions.
 - ⇒ *The Secretariat* consists of the administration in Geneva, the Field Offices and the offices for the Regional Expressions. It prepares the work of the Assembly and the Council and facilitates the implementation of their decisions. Executive staff is appointed to the Secretariat, by formally established procedures, following endorsement by their churches.
 - ⇒ *The LWF National Committees* are responsible for the coordination and interpretation of the life and work of the LWF at the national level. In the nations where such committees have been established, their offices are the coordinating contact points between the Secretariat and the member churches.

- (26) In addition to the institutional ligaments of the communion, communication among the Lutheran churches is also maintained through consultations and gatherings and through conferences of bishops/presidents, women and youth, and other church representatives.
- (27) As another form of connection within the communion, there have been many visits and exchanges among member churches themselves, visits by the President, Vice-Presidents and other elected officials of the Federation as well as by representatives of the Secretariat. Associated with this Assembly itself, the programme of pre- and post-Assembly visitations provides further opportunities for mutual encounter. All of these “journeys” are much more than mere travel. I see them as being very much in the apostolic tradition. In the apostolic tradition of the New Testament, guests from Burma, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have visited sister churches in the Northern hemisphere. These visits are of great importance. They help us to learn from each other about the life of the churches, their spirituality and the missionary tasks that they face.
- (28) All these ligaments are not themselves the communion, but they are integral to its life. They enable it to function properly and meaningfully as an international body and as a spiritual fellowship. It is important, therefore, to strengthen these ligaments for the sake of our inner Lutheran unity and ecumenical cooperation.
- (29) In a real sense, theologically as well as practically, communion is *communication*. This is true with regard to sacramental theology and the understanding of salvation as well as to the way we interact as individuals and as an organization within the 'information society'.
- (30) Few things are changing as rapidly in our world as the means of communication. The LWF Secretariat is seeking to respond to the current challenges in this area by engaging member churches and partner organizations more actively in the development of communication strategies. Efforts are also being made to promote information exchange within the LWF constituency and between the LWF and ecumenical and secular media organs.
- (31) The LWF news service, *Lutheran World Information* serves to maintain broad coverage of developments related to the life of the Lutheran churches globally, paying attention also to ecumenical developments. The LWF is also a partner in *Ecumenical News International*, which provides media around the world with important news related to the activities of churches and church-related organizations.

The name of the LWF: possible change

- (32) The reports of successive Assemblies show how the LWF has matured theologically in its self-understanding. The Seventh Assembly in Budapest (1984) represents the most far-reaching change so far in the ecclesial character of the Federation, establishing altar-and-pulpit fellowship between all the LWF member churches. This development was affirmed by the Constitution adopted by the Eighth Assembly in Curitiba (1990).
- (33) At the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, I raised the question of a possible name change given the fact that the federal concept no longer expresses adequately the ecclesial nature of the fellowship

that exists between the member churches. Last year I presented to the Council a detailed report on "The Nature and Future of the LWF." Here I presented four different alternatives for a new name:

The Communion of Lutheran Churches (CLC)

The Lutheran World Communion (LWC)

The Lutheran Communion (LC)

The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches (LWF)

- (34) The Council voted to endorse the fourth proposal - "The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches" - with the understanding that when for practical reasons the full name is too long the present name would also remain valid, and that LWF would remain the normal acronym. The Council asked the General Secretary to check whether there are any legal implications that would require constitutional changes. This has been done, and the LWF's legal advisors have confirmed that such a name change would be consistent with the existing constitutional description of the Federation. It is therefore up to this Assembly to consider such a step.

Toward a more inclusive communion

- (35) Inclusion and acceptance, rather than exclusion and discrimination, is the hallmark of communion in Christ. The vision of an inclusive communion of women and men still lies before us unfulfilled. While acknowledging that policies have been put in place at the level of the LWF governing bodies and the LWF Secretariat, these policies are for various reasons far from being actualized in some of the member churches.
- (36) More than two thirds of the LWF member churches have by now adopted procedures that allow for the ordination of men and women. Churches that have taken this decision have found their witness enhanced by new gifts brought into the ordained ministry. This is an experience that the LWF continues to commend to its members. Through scholarship programs and other means women have increasingly qualified themselves for leadership and positions of responsibility in church and society. However, there is a pressing need for many member churches to take further measures allowing and encouraging women to assume roles of leadership. Synods and other decision-making bodies should take bold steps, where still required, to move out of inherited patterns of male dominance. We should actively seek, through our theology, to overcome traditional and cultural mechanisms by which women are denied such positions on the grounds that they are women.
- (37) Violence against women is a radical form of exclusion, that denigrates the image of God in the victim as well as in the perpetrator. It represents a fundamental challenge, impacting both on the inner life of the church and on the life of the wider community in which it witnesses. The LWF has taken a strong stand against this social evil through the widespread distribution of its publication "Churches say NO to Violence against Women", produced by the Women in Church and Society Desk of the Department for Mission and Development. We must commit together as a communion to apply the document to our local contexts, as we observe the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence.

- (38) We have committed ourselves to an inclusive communion, in which the *younger generations* shall be more and more included in the life of the churches. Young persons, who represent both the future of the church and an important part of its present life, provide significant contributions to the understanding of the gospel and its proclamation. Increased participation of young people is happening in some churches, but not in others. The bible is full of stories of young people who influence the life of the church. Let us not be afraid of the creativity of the young people in our midst.
- (39) The LWF has established policies to ensure youth participation and contribution. In particular, we have committed ourselves to achieving 20% youth participation in our major decision-making bodies. As we prepared for this Assembly we were informed by several churches that they were not able to include youth representatives as asked for by our guidelines. I appeal to LWF member churches to reflect on the importance of this commitment, and to honour it.

Intra-Lutheran relations

- (40) Since the inception of LWF in 1947, its member churches have prayed for a fellowship that is inclusive of all Lutherans in the world. However, over three million Lutherans remain outside the fellowship of the LWF, even while sharing in the Lutheran confession and our spiritual fellowship in Christ. In several areas in the world, the LWF and its member churches collaborate with the Lutheran communities outside the LWF in diaconal activities. But the yearning for a fully inclusive Lutheran communion remains unfulfilled.
- (41) The lack of a united Lutheran witness undermines the integrity of our mission and reduces the vitality of our ecumenical engagement. Should not the common affirmation of the Lutheran confessional writings be sufficient for church fellowship among the Lutheran churches? What are the real reasons that keep Lutherans apart?
- (42) I am pleased to inform the Assembly that a process of consultation is in place between representatives of the International Lutheran Council (ILC), representing most of the Lutherans still outside our fellowship, and the LWF. Common ground as well as differences are being identified in the area of theology, with particular reference to confessional and ecumenical issues. The importance of enhanced coordination, communication, and theological discussion has been emphasized.
- (43) It is my hope that the conversation that the LWF and the ILC are currently engaged in will bring us forward substantially in this area.
- (44) I am also happy to report that since the Ninth Assembly we have maintained close relations with the three associate member churches (the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Japan Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway), all of them being represented at this Assembly. In Norway, the Church of Norway and the Free Church constitute together the LWF National Committee. The associate member churches in Australia and Japan are both active participants in the regional programs of the Asian Lutheran churches. This is of great

value to the life of the LWF, and will hopefully lead one day to the full membership of these churches.

Commitment to global ecumenism

- (45) From the beginning the LWF has seen itself as related to the ecumenical movement. All steps it takes in the direction of its own unity and coherence are also seen as contributions to the unity of the one, universal church of Christ. And the ecumenical movement remains, at the present time of history, a deeply significant healing process.
- (46) Bilateral relations between the Christian world communions are a vital part of the ecumenical movement. They require appropriate instruments of accountability, providing a basis for trusted global relations. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, signed and celebrated in 1999, represents a major bilateral achievement at the international level. It could not have been achieved without the instrumentality of the LWF.
- (47) The international dialogue commissions with the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church continue their solid work. Conversations between the LWF and the Seventh-day Adventists have been carried out and the report and recommendations from this process are being studied by the member churches. Two international working groups, with the Anglican Communion and with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, have both submitted their reports. The LWF Council has received these reports, and upon its request they have been sent to the member churches for study and response. I strongly urge that providing such responses be given high priority.
- (48) In the ecumenical area there continues to be substantial reciprocal interaction between national and regional developments on the one hand and the international dialogues on the other hand. I commend the agreements of church fellowship negotiated and entered into at national and regional level by LWF member churches since the Ninth Assembly, with churches of the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian and Reformed traditions. The vast majority of all bilateral communion agreements that have been established around the world involve Lutheran churches. Such developments contribute in a real way to the visible unity of the church. In the period before us we must make strong new efforts, however, to ensure that these developments also take place in the southern hemisphere to a greater degree.
- (49) Bilateral dialogues and relations are not, however, the only instruments of ecumenism. The ecumenical commitment of the LWF is also, by its nature, multilateral. The World Council of Churches (WCC) was deliberately formed as a fellowship of individual churches, without a specific role for the Christian world communions (CWCs) such as the LWF. However, in light of the increasing ecumenical importance of the CWCs, it was significant that the WCC Eighth Assembly in Harare (1998) adopted a resolution calling for closer cooperation between the WCC and the Christian world communions. This resolution has been followed up both by the LWF Council and the WCC Central Committee.

- (50) We must explore how our practical cooperation with WCC might grow and develop further. Our common emergency agency Action of Churches Together (ACT) is one example of good cooperation. The news agency ENI, mentioned above, is another.
- (51) The WCC provides a unique framework for deliberation of fundamental ecumenical issues. The LWF and its member churches should play an active and supportive part in the current discussions of the nature and purpose of the WCC and the need for new configurations in the ecumenical movement in the future. Some form of representation in the WCC of the CWCs as communions will be important for the continued development of the ecumenical movement. The Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CS/CWCs) is an important forum also contributing to this discussion.

The episcopal ministry in the church

- (52) The role of the episcopal ministry (the ministry of oversight) is an issue under discussion ecumenically and among the Lutheran churches, with regard to the apostolicity of the church. Different views and practices have been maintained by the LWF member churches within the space of the communion.
- (53) The communion agreements that some of our member churches have entered into with Anglican churches, or with Reformed churches, or with both simultaneously, have raised questions about the coherence of the Lutheran understanding of the episcopal ministry. I am pleased that a study process has taken place leading to a statement by the Lutheran dialogue members on the issue of "The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church." This study process included five regional meetings with representatives of member churches, and the statement builds on the texts of ecumenical agreements to which Lutheran churches have been a party. I believe this statement provides a differentiated, yet coherent and healing approach to this issue. The LWF Executive Committee has received the statement, and upon its request it has been sent to the member churches for their study and response.

Unity, mission and diaconia

- (54) From the beginning of the life of the church, its unity, its mission and its diaconia have been basic to its self-understanding and purpose. As instruments to help serve these life functions of the church, organizations with special focuses have been instituted: missionary societies, ecumenical organizations, and diaconal/humanitarian agencies. These instruments provide competence and capacity for the fulfillment of these functions. It is clear however, that the service of unity, mission and diaconia are inseparable in the witness of the church. Most organizations for inner and foreign mission have had significant diaconal service integrated in their work. These functions are rooted in the nature of the worshipping community. Every church, at every level, must be "marked" by these essential features if it is to be recognizable as church at all. And the LWF as a communion of churches must bear the same traits as the member churches themselves. It cannot be a true communion without the "marks" of commitment to unity and engagement in mission and diaconia (cf. Article III of the LWF Constitution).

- (55) In the area of diaconia there has been a tendency over some decades for large diaconal institutions to become institutionally independent of the churches, with the main point of contact with the governing bodies of the churches being limited to information-sharing. In some cases efforts have been made to make newly-established Lutheran development services, operated by churches in the South, independent of these churches. However, at the stage of history where we find ourselves today, we have also seen a reversal of this development in some countries, such as in Sweden, Finland and Germany, where the responsibility and accountability of the churches have become decisive for the structures of the agencies. This new trend is very important for the life of the churches and for the nature of the service they provide.
- (56) To help clarify basic aspects of diaconia, a major consultation was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in November 2002, with the Department for World Service taking the lead in an inter-departmental preparatory process. Its report "Prophetic Diaconia: 'For the Healing of the World'" raises fundamental questions about the centrality of mission and diaconia in the life of the church, and deserves careful study in our member churches and the related agencies.
- (57) As an LWF contribution to the ongoing discussion on missiology and as a resource for the member churches, a working paper has been developed by the Department for Mission and Development called "Mission: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment." I warmly recommend this document also for further study and comments.
- (58) These issues should be considered further in a broad international consultation, which can hopefully take place in the near future. The LWF, serving as a bridge between many partners committed to serving the needs - spiritual and material - of humanity, stands in an excellent position to promote this discussion.

Approaching complex social and ethical issues

- (59) The churches have sometimes had considerable difficulty in addressing certain complex social and ethical issues. One such issue is the question of globalization. Churches are themselves deeply involved in this process, for good and for ill. The LWF, through materials prepared by its Department for Theology and Studies, has challenged member churches to approach this question from the perspective of communion, and has invited member churches to participate in transforming economic globalization.
- (60) Another issue that has generated a lot of controversy in some societies and in some churches is the issue of homosexuality and attitudes to homosexual persons. This is an issue that has been with humankind since time immemorial, and will continue to be with us in the future. It will not go away. It is a complex matter with ethical dimensions related to culture, anthropology and spirituality.
- (61) There are some churches in which this issue has not been raised for discussion, some others in which it has become a discussion of great controversy, and still some others in which it has been addressed with little or no difficulty. Since we are a communion of interdependent churches, no member church can ignore the issue, or consider it closed one way or the other, while sister churches are struggling with it.

- (62) An issue of this kind requires patient discussion and prayerful reflection. This Assembly should take steps to ensure careful preparation for such discussion and reflection. I propose therefore a process of consultation, exchange, discussion and prayer as a communion, in order to seek the guiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The new Council could be asked to take the carriage of such a process mandated by the Assembly, in order to examine this issue in a proper consultative way utilizing the space that we have for differences of views and open deliberation within our communion.

Inter-faith aspects of current tensions in the world

- (63) Around the world today, there is an obvious and urgent need for processes of reconciliation between nations, cultures and religions. One of the strongest negative forces in this situation is prejudice. The enemy images that have built up over generations and the habit of discrimination ingrained for centuries are not easy to erase at a stroke. Indeed, ancient prejudices continue to be manipulated for political purposes and to be given fresh vitality in many modern contexts. It is my strong belief that for the sake of peace, and for the sake of the future of humanity - which is God's family - the Christian churches are called urgently to do what they can in their own contexts to build understanding instead of confrontation.
- (64) One of the very greatest challenges before us, particularly in the light of recent world events, is the healing of relations between the three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The LWF and its member churches have a strong focus on relations with the other 'Abrahamic' religions, as indicated by the range of initiatives that have been undertaken engaging Muslims and Jews in dialogue and cooperation in a number of contexts. The LWF, through its Department for Theology and Studies, has produced a series of publications in this area intended as a contribution and as resource material for member churches in their inter-faith relations.
- (65) The LWF seeks to promote inter-faith dialogue not as an academic exercise, but in order to address the pressing issues of the contexts in which our communities live. The LWF has facilitated a process engaging religious leaders from across the geographical and faith spectrums of Africa in inter-faith dialogue and practical cooperation to address conflicts and to promote peace in Africa. Meeting in October 2002 under the theme "Embracing the Gift of Peace", approximately 120 religious leaders committed themselves to an ongoing process of cooperation to help reduce tensions and conflicts in that continent. This was the first time that such a gathering has taken place on a pan-African level. The LWF and its partners continue to support this vital process.

HIV/AIDS

- (66) During this period under review the LWF, in collaboration with the member churches, agencies, ecumenical partners, and the UN Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, has sought to give a stronger focus to its efforts concerning the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The focus has been both on the disease itself, and on the stigmatization and exclusion of people living with HIV/AIDS in our communities and churches. In May 2002, the LWF launched a communion-wide HIV/AIDS campaign in Nairobi, Kenya. It has organized several consultations in the

various regions, and financially supports many programmes and projects on different aspects of the HIV/AIDS crisis through its Departments for Mission and Development and for World Service. In all these programs, the LWF seeks to involve people living with HIV/AIDS in its work.

Conditions of work in the churches

- (67) Church work is a vocation, not mere employment, but it should not be less than human dignity requires. 'Decent' work within the church is a matter not only of stewardship, but also of witness. Churches proclaim human dignity and human rights, but the conditions in which many workers in the church must fulfil their calling fall short of those standards. This problem is not limited to developing countries or countries in which public finances and legislation regarding labour standards are inadequate. In my travels I am often confronted with very unfortunate working conditions in the churches. Perceptions of the nature of work in the church and a lack of financial resources have sometimes led to conditions of work in the church that in practice are undignified, and even exploitative.
- (68) I am well aware of the dilemmas involved, often having to face them myself in the management of the staff of the LWF. Nevertheless, as a communion we must together face up to the challenges that exist in this area. We must encourage each other to live up to relevant national standards and International Labour Organization conventions.
- (69) In this context let me also draw attention to the important issue of dignified working conditions for persons with disabilities. This is an area where the ethical standards of a society are put to a test and where churches have a responsibility to speak out clearly. This is, however, also an area where the churches themselves must be keenly aware of their own practices and priorities.

Indigenous issues

- (70) Meeting here in Winnipeg sets us in a context in which the voices of indigenous people - the First Nations of this land - can and should be heard. The period between Hong Kong and Winnipeg has coincided with the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004). However, the concrete outcome of this observance in terms of the improvement of the lives of indigenous peoples around the world is hard to discern. Several international instruments have been adopted in this area, but ratification and implementation by individual countries has not followed sufficiently. We must put pressure on governments to ensure such ratification and implementation. Several member churches have taken significant initiatives in this area, leading to strong associations with indigenous communities in their countries. The LWF as a whole could take a stronger lead in this area. I hope that in the next period this can be achieved.

Continuing our walk together

- (71) As I have said before, the strength and unity of our communion is for the sake of the unity of the one church of Christ. For that reason, we must continue to strengthen our communion and to deepen the experience of that communion in all member churches.

- (72) As we walk together into the future, we must explore how we can develop our representative structures in order that the official leadership of all our member churches can work together in ways that commit us and engage us as a global communion within the ecumenical movement. We must enhance our common efforts and our mutual accountability, without undermining the autonomy of each member church. One specific measure that I wish to propose is the institution of a regular cycle of consultations in which the LWF Council meets with leading representatives of all the member churches in the communion, following the model of one such meeting that took place in 1994.
- (73) Some member churches have, through ecumenical agreements, achieved close forms of church fellowship with churches of other Christian world communions. We welcome this unconditionally. At the same time the question arises whether the LWF member churches can generally achieve similar closeness among themselves. Can the LWF move beyond altar and pulpit fellowship to even more substantial forms of mutual recognition and cooperation, for instance in the area of exchangeability of pastors and bishops? Some member churches, such as the ELCA, have declared explicitly their openness to exchangeability of ordained ministers from all the other LWF member churches. Such declarations are of great significance for the further development of the communion.
- (74) As we are confronted with a growing range of difficult doctrinal/ethical issues, the LWF needs an expert advisory commission, drawn from all parts of the communion, to discuss fundamental presuppositions and to outline possible main lines of consideration. Such a commission would seek to clarify what the LWF member churches can say together on important matters of teaching. It would not be a program or standing committee. It would have no authority to make decisions binding on the LWF or the member churches, but would play an advisory role. In interaction with the teaching ministry of the member churches and with various theological instruments of the LWF, such a commission could play an important role in the development of the LWF as a communion in faith.
- (75) Pastoral leadership formation must become a greater priority in our churches and in the life of our Lutheran communion, so that well-prepared leaders can equip our members and churches to become more active agents of God's work of reconciliation in the world. We need socially-engaged teaching and preaching in our churches that will form and empower members confronting the forces of division and domination in our societies. In this area the LWF can contribute guidance and resources through the programs and projects of the departments of Theology and Studies, Mission and Development and World Service, as well as in cooperation with the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg.
- (76) There is a stated wish among LWF member churches to move toward a simpler, more integrated pattern for the various global church assemblies. We must seriously explore how we might move in this direction. I therefore welcome the decision of our Council to take up this task together with our ecumenical partners. In this process, we must also give due attention to the question of what it means to be a delegate at an Assembly. What authority is given by churches to the delegates that represent them, by what processes are the results of the Assembly received by the churches, and how seriously is the outcome taken?

- (77) Our experiences with visa difficulties leading up to this Assembly highlight a growing challenge, especially in the current period of heightened security. Every country has a sovereign right to regulate entry to its territory. But the nature of our communion, and the apostolic tradition, calls us to share in each others' lives - both the joys and the pains. Undertaking travel and providing hospitality affords an important personal experience of communion. However, the current international environment of increased security and tighter immigration controls in some countries has a chilling effect on this form of communion experience. The increasing role of prejudice and stereotypes in this process is obvious to all. These developments confront us afresh with the dilemma of the church - which is not of the world but is in the world - and its relations to the state (or rather to individual states).
- (78) For the same financial reasons that are now impacting on churches and many other communities around the world, the LWF secretariat is a much leaner organization now than we were some years ago. This means that we will depend even more in the years ahead on member churches sharing the burden, and on closer coordination of our efforts within the communion. The commitments of the communion must be implemented in a broad partnership, involving the member churches even more directly in carrying responsibility for the common programs and activities. Thanks must be expressed to the member churches for all that they have contributed, in the period since our last Assembly, to support the many programs and projects of the LWF. So far as the financial stability of the LWF itself is concerned, the establishment of the Endowment Fund, which currently stands at 6.2 million CHF, is an important instrument that requires the further support of the communion. Likewise the commitment to pay a fair rate of membership fees calls for response from all member churches. The Treasurer will deal further with these matters in her report. I thank the member churches for standing with the LWF at a challenging time, demonstrating their commitment to this instrument of the communion and of the ecumenical movement.

Conclusion

- (79) We gather in the midst of a broken world in need of healing. The brokenness of the world, the division between rich and poor, between North and South, is painfully obvious as we gather without our sisters and brothers who have not been granted visas to enter this country. We gather for the sake of the healing of the world, but we know that such healing is not in our power. At the very core of the Christian faith as Lutherans understand it is the insistence that in our deepest need we do not look to ourselves or to our own resources, but to Christ and to the healing power of his Spirit. We cannot heal the world, but we know that Christ and the Spirit can, and have, and will. That is the basis upon which we gather for this Assembly.
- (80) I take this opportunity to express my thanks to the member churches of the LWF, that are the life and soul of this communion; and to the President and members of the Council who have guided our common work over these last six years so faithfully and well. I thank my colleagues in the LWF Secretariat in Geneva and the field programmes around the world, who have worked with commitment and professionalism for the realization of the communion's common objectives. And once again, on behalf of the whole LWF, I give special thanks to the host church of this Assembly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and to the many dedicated volunteers who have made this vision their own. Your planning and work is now bearing its long-awaited

fruit, for you have made for us in this place a space in which we can meet each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, to share our joys, our pains and our concerns without reservation, and to re-discover what it is to be a communion.