



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Department for Mission and Development – Africa Desk

Message from the LWF Africa Pre-Assembly and Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation, 24 – 28 March 2010, Abuja, Nigeria

Theme: “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread: The Church in Africa Today”

Preamble

We, church leaders of member churches of The Lutheran World Federation – a communion of churches (LWF) in Africa and delegates to the LWF Eleventh Assembly gathered for the Africa Pre-Assembly Consultation at the Vines Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria from 24 – 28 March 2010 under the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread: The Church in Africa Today,” deliberated on a number of critical and relevant issues facing our African continent. We reflected on poverty and the mission of the church in Africa.

We recognize that our gathering took place in a country that is enormously blessed but also under the shadows of fears and suspicion because of internal conflicts. Nonetheless, we were encouraged as we celebrated the grace of God through daily devotions, presentations, Bible studies and sharing of experiences. We prayed for the victims of recent conflicts and for peace in the country and other parts of the world.

We express our gratitude to the Lutheran Church of Nigeria and the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria for hosting the Pre-Assembly and to the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the hospitality afforded us during our stay.

We were inspired by the presence, sharing and contribution of the LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, a son of Africa, as we reflected on and celebrated his long, selfless service to the communion. Our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family as he completes his service with the LWF.

The Assembly Theme

For us in Africa, the Assembly theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” is both most relevant and urgent within our context and other parts of the world because it is a matter of survival. Yes indeed, a matter of life and death which calls for re-awakening and opening of the eyes of the communion toward concrete action in our world **Today**. Because of its urgency, it cannot be postponed till tomorrow.

Our prayer for daily bread today includes: land, water, education and gender equity.

Give us today our daily bread. Yes, God gives for all sufficiently and willingly. Yet this is not the reality in the world, and even less so in Africa:

Poverty

Africa is rich in both natural and human resources and diverse in culture. Given these enormous resources, it is scandalous that many people on the continent still go hungry. Children still go to bed on empty stomachs, die of preventable diseases and head households due to the scourge of HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases. Women and children are trafficked across our borders. Men and women are dehumanized by abject poverty.

Unjust global economic systems heightened by commercialization and privatization of basic goods and services continue to have negative impacts on the continent and aggravate the processes of deprivation.

Climate Change and the Environment

We re-affirm that as African nations we are the most vulnerable, most affected and yet least capacitated to cope with the effects of climate change, resulting in food insecurity and hunger, internal displacement and conflicts over land and water.

Reflecting on the theme of the Assembly reminds and calls our attention to how we have damaged the earth. It helps us to recognize the cruelty to one another, how as Christians we can love and work with persons of other faiths for peace and justice rather than become instruments of hate and destruction. We therefore pray for God to enlighten us so that we can discover what we need to do as human beings to restore the earth so that it can feed all of God's people. We are reminded that we are caretakers of God's creation. What does this mean? We cannot ignore environmental issues; we cannot continue to stand by when the earth is being destroyed and polluted as all this affects food production and livelihoods. The trend of a new wave of colonialism in the form of land grabbing on the continent is a matter of concern that the church can no longer be silent on. We call for urgent attention to the activities of wealthy nations and multinational corporations buying off lands in many parts of Africa to produce food and other agricultural products for use in their countries while local communities are rendered landless and further pushed into perpetual poverty.

Distribution and Management of God-Given Resources and Wealth

We find it appalling that God's children suffer hunger and thirst due to poor governance, poor leadership, corruption, injustice, lack of political will, abuse of basic human rights and gender inequity.

Good governance, economic justice, politics, etc. involve human beings and where human beings are involved God is also involved. Such matters are important because they concern God's people and cannot therefore be left to politicians alone. We therefore need to revisit our doctrine of the two kingdoms of God to understand its implications for our search for food for all.

Diaconal Praxis

We re-affirm the critical role of diakonia in the life of the communion in bringing transformation in church and society. As we move to the LWF Eleventh Assembly, we call on our sisters and brothers within the global LWF communion of churches to intensify joint efforts to address systems and structures that perpetuate injustice, poverty and deprivation.

As a region we note with concern that the diaconal work of the LWF is fragmented. There is urgent need to optimize the intended complementarity between diaconal organs of the communion. Therefore we call on the LWF to ensure the involvement of the churches in the decision-making processes concerning diaconal activities in the region.

Gender Justice

Equal and active participation of women in leadership has long been on the agenda of the LWF. We note with concern that some member churches of the communion in Africa still do not heed the voices of women in the region crying for inclusivity within the church structures, leadership and in the ordained ministry. Women who have been divinely called by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are not afforded the opportunity to fully practice their calling. We call on member churches to fulfill their commitment to gender justice by putting in place concrete steps to address these issues.

Youth

We note with concern that some member churches have not fulfilled the commitment to the 20 percent requirement for youth representation and participation in leadership and decision making as decided by the LWF Assembly in Curitiba. The risk of not implementing this resolution is that member churches may lose the gifts that young people bring to the life of the churches and may lose them to other emerging churches as a result of frustration. Equally, we express concern and call the attention of member churches in the communion, ecumenical bodies and our governments to increasing level of unemployment and underemployment among the youth and the phenomena of child poverty.

Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality

We strongly affirm our decision taken in Lund in 2007 that “marriage is holy, ordained by God and is a relationship between a man and woman.” Therefore, the majority of African member churches say “**NO**” to homosexual acts and regard it to be sinful.”

Further to this affirmation of our position on this matter, we are extremely disturbed and deeply regret the recent developments taking place in some member churches of the communion who have taken unilateral decision on same sex marriages, disregarding the strong sentiments expressed by other members of the communion. This unilateral action has negatively impacted our life together as a communion, something which could have been avoided.

We pray for the Spirit of discernment and for the grace of God to abound as we seek to resolve these issues.

Theological Education and Leadership Development

In view of the challenges facing the church in Africa today, we perceive the need to further strengthen theological education and leadership development and reorientation designed to equip all God’s people for service to God and to one another through proclamation, worship, and diakonia. We reiterate our concern for contextually relevant materials and call to mind the need to share the resources that are available to us or bring our resources together to provide sound theological education. Furthering the connectivity and network between our theological seminaries especially in the region is crucial.

The issue of self reliance for the church in Africa should be a top priority. We note with joy that the churches in Africa have moved in the direction of meeting their financial obligations to the Assembly. At the same time we urge all member churches to honor their commitments to the communion as well as budget for future assemblies for sustaining the work of the LWF.

Global Christian Unity

We re-affirm the crucial importance of holding our Lutheran identity together with our commitment to the ecumenical movement and search for global Christian unity. As we engage in ecumenical bilateral agreements, we also need to further the understanding of the Christian faith in our Lutheran identity and to ensure that agreements reached are shared to members at grassroots level.

Looking Ahead

In view of our deliberations, we reaffirm our commitment to tackle poverty and economic injustice in collaboration with ecumenical, governmental, non-governmental and development agencies by pursuing concrete actions on the poverty program adopted at the Pre-Assembly consultation. We ask LWF to continue to its implementation in collaboration with sub regional expressions.

As we bring the Pre-Assembly to a close, we look forward to the opportunity to celebrate with sisters and brothers at the Assembly through sharing of the Word and Sacrament and to renew our common vision for witnessing Christ in a suffering world. Lord we pray that resources are justly distributed and that there is daily bread for all. Amen.

28 March 2010