

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

Introducing the Thirteenth Assembly
and its Theme



ONE BODY
ONE SPIRIT
ONE HOPE

THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
2023 - KRAKÓW, POLAND

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

Introducing the Thirteenth Assembly
and its Theme



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“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” – *Ephesians 4:4-6*

Preface

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) will hold its Thirteenth Assembly in Krakow, Poland. Assemblies are an embodiment of the communion with member churches from around the world gathering for worship and prayer life, and to share the stories of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ in their contexts. Assemblies also set the directions for the witness of the global communion of churches.

The Assembly theme is an integral part of the Assembly, providing the biblical background upon which the communion and its members engage with topics /issues as they discern their participation in God's mission and their life together.

The publication which you are holding in your hands is meant to start that engagement, offering a short explanation of the theme and questions for reflection in the LWF member churches. It is the first of a number of Assembly publications, which will also include the *Assembly Study Guide* and the Assembly report *From Windhoek to Krakow*.

Included also is a short description of the LWF, and the nature and functions of LWF assemblies to help those who have not attended previous Assemblies and/or are getting to know the LWF.

I commend this publication to the member churches as a resource for study at a local and national level. In doing so, we build up momentum as we start nurturing our global gathering at the Thirteenth Assembly in Krakow.

Rev. Dr Martin Junge
General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation
October 2021

LWF Assemblies

As the principal authority of the LWF and its highest decision-making body, the Assembly is the most representative expression of the LWF communion. It consists of delegates from all the member churches.

Core Functions of an Assembly

The Assembly:

- is responsible for LWF's Constitution;
- gives general direction to the work of the LWF;
- elects the President and members of the Council, which is the governing body of the LWF between Assemblies;
- acts on the reports of the President, the General Secretary and the Chairperson of the Finance Committee.

The Assembly also seeks to:

- empower the Lutheran communion for its witness and service in the coming years;
- support the Lutheran communion to learn and reflect upon the local context in the host country and the regional context.

How often does an Assembly meet?

As the highest decision-making body of the LWF, the Assembly meets normally every six years with the date, venue and program to be determined by the Council.

The Council, which governs the LWF between Assemblies consists of 48 members and the President, all representing the member churches. The Council usually meets once a year, to ensure that the LWF functions in an efficient manner according to its defined purpose and in accordance with resolutions made by the Assembly.

Composition and size of the Assembly

The LWF Council determines the number of delegates and their distribution among the member churches. Due regard is given to the size of member churches and distribution by continents and countries. Each member church has the right to have at least one representative in the Assembly. The LWF is committed to quotas' requirement that ensure each region is represented by at least 40% women, 40% men and 20% youth. The LWF also strives to uphold a balance between lay and ordained delegates.

Apart from delegates, the Council determines other categories of participants. Some of them have the right to speak in deliberations conducted in plenary but only delegates enjoy the twin rights of voice and vote.

Around 350 delegates are expected to gather for the Thirteenth Assembly in Poland. A Council meeting, regional pre-assemblies for the member churches, youth and women's pre-assemblies, and pre-assembly visits, will take place prior to the assembly itself.

Assembly outcomes

In addition to the responsibilities mentioned under 'Core Functions of an Assembly' the Assembly is also expected to produce the following:

- **Assembly Message**, which shall describe and represent the experience of the Assembly, and provide a collective memory of a historical event in the life of the Lutheran communion.
- **Assembly Resolutions**, which shall provide general direction for the life and work of the LWF within the context of the strategic plan and available resources.
- **Assembly Public Statements**, which shall describe a particular issue or concern and the position of the Assembly on that issue. Public statements are intended for widespread public release.

Journey toward the Assembly

Prior to an assembly, there are Pre-Assembly meetings for LWF member churches in their respective regions, and global gatherings in a Women's Pre-Assembly and Youth Pre-Assembly. These are important spaces for spiritual reflection, relating the Assembly themes to different church contexts, and for building community. Delegates also receive training on the rules and procedures for taking part in debates, decision-making and voting at the assembly.

A major role of the regional pre-assemblies is to designate a slate of member church representatives from the region to be nominated to serve on the new LWF Council.

The Thirteenth Assembly

The Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF will be held from 13 to 19 September 2023 in Krakow, Poland. It will be hosted by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The theme of the Assembly is "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." The theme refers to Ephesians 4:4: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling."

The assembly will be structured around three dimensions:

1. Celebration of the Lutheran communion's common faith across contexts and cultures;
2. Mutual enrichment through joint reflection and discernment;
3. Joint decision making as mandated by the LWF constitution.

Furthermore, the assembly will have the special purpose of helping the member churches to understand and learn from the life and context of churches witnessing in minority situations. This will be the second LWF Assembly in Central Eastern Europe, the first was in 1984 in Budapest, Hungary.

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

The Thirteenth Assembly theme—
“One Body, One Spirit, One Hope”—will
guide the assembly’s deliberations.

Our identity as faith communities is formed by
the proclamation of the Word, the confessional
writings and catechisms, and by worship
and acts of loving service in the world.

How will member churches, individually
and as a global communion of churches,
be signs of hope in the midst of God’s
creation, participating in God’s holistic
mission of reconciling and renewing?

The assembly sub-themes—the Spirit creates, the Spirit reconciles, the Spirit renews—will help interpret the main theme in light of the creative, reconciling, and transformative love of God.

LWF member churches are called to bear witness to God’s compassion and mercy for the world. But how is this accomplished in a fragmented world? Since its formation, the LWF has embodied a vision of communion—unity in the body of Christ. In a broken world, amidst suffering, injustice, and the abuse of creation, God does not abandon humanity and the world God created. God is “through” all, that is, God works through people to accomplish God’s will. God is “in” all, that is, God “inhabits” all people and creation by means of the indwelling Spirit (Eph 2:22).

In the Large Catechism, Luther writes, “In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life.”¹ Baptized into the one Body of Christ, as new creation, we are called to live as witnesses to that profound and all-encompassing reconciliation that God accomplishes in the world. This baptismal call shapes the life of our church as we respond to the challenges to live as new creation, as people of God, each in our context.

The theme is biblically rooted with ecumenical potential as well as speaking concretely to the needs of the world. In the following pages, we will take a close look at the assembly theme, considering its biblical foundation, its theological development, and contextual, experiential, and practical applications. Though “unity” itself is not mentioned, it is clearly present in the word “one”: One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.

And so, this booklet will ask us about unity. What is the face of unity and reconciliation in your context, in your proclamation of the gospel, in your service to the neighbor? The trajectory of these questions is guided by Scripture, in particular, Ephesians 4: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Let us begin by considering unity and the inherent connectivity in the theme.

¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., “Baptism” in *Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 441:41.

Unity

Unity underlies all three parts of the assembly theme. Most causes of suffering and injustice in the world result from dualism—dividing humans from creatures, mind from body, men from women, and people from homelands. While exclusionary forces (ecological, political, economic, or social) and endless classifications of people into categories result in division, God’s nature is to include. The mystery of the Trinity is diversity in unity. God is a life-giving communion of three in one.

The three components of the theme are interconnected. Hope is the experience of God’s Spirit that compels us to bridge the gap between the all-encompassing peace and justice that God has promised and the reality of the world in which we live. It is the body, filled by God’s Spirit, that lives into the hope grounded on God’s promised reconciliation.

Unity, however, is not uniformity. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, Paul demonstrates how the gospel addresses all peoples in their diversity. The apostle Paul reminds believers of their call to embody love and peace, rooted in the source of unity revealed in Jesus Christ and in which believers



Photo: LWF Archives



participate through baptism. In the letter to the Ephesians, the writer focuses on God’s plan of salvation that reconciles and unites all people in the body of Christ. God’s plan of salvation reconciles all creation in life-giving unity.

Through baptism, we are called to actively participate in this plan. Baptism makes us a new people, a new creation through the gift of justification. In baptism, we are not all made to fit some perfect model, but we are all reconciled. Our differences are no longer divisive. Believers are not called to create unity but to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in one body, one Spirit, and one hope (Eph 4:4). Living into that call, we find ourselves going ever deeper into God’s act of reconciliation that shapes not only mission but also service through humanitarian action.

The theme of the Thirteenth Assembly challenges us to ask what is “oneness”? As noted above, this oneness is not about uniformity. The well-known ecumenical goal speaks about “unity in reconciled diversity.” We are all invited into a communion, with our great diversity, that is not a stumbling block but a building block for a beautiful and beloved community, in which each person can see the other as a unique child of God.

Uniformity, on the other hand, is something constructed or imposed by human beings. When uniformity is derived from human agendas it risks being

exclusionary, destructive, and oppressive. The former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, is about 100 kilometers from Krakow. This place stands as a stark and constant reminder of the negation of the assembly theme. It represents the “powers and principalities” that work against God’s act of reconciling the world to God’s self. Auschwitz-Birkenau represents the oppressive forces that are unleashed when human beings define unity in terms of a uniform nationalistic, ethnic, gender, class or religious identity.

We are all too aware of the global backdrop of growing social, political, economic, and ecological exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic has further unmasked the injustices of ethno-nationalism, patriarchy, religious extremism, gender-based violence, and economic inequity around the globe. Disruptive forces divide and separate human beings within, and against, themselves. Sin is the source and cause of separation among the church, human society, and creation.

Today, there are many examples of people creating exclusionary and unjust political, social, economic, religious, and spiritual systems that dehumanize the dignity of human beings and kill the life of all God’s creation. In the midst of this situation, the church is called and sent to witness to hope in the unity of the Spirit, which is God’s continual liberating and creative activity of reconciling and renewing the world.

Questions

1. In your context, how do you witness to God’s continual liberating and creative activity?
2. What opportunities exist in your context to create partnerships that build unity and solidarity?
3. As you engage in mission in your local context, how can LWF member churches support each other in order to witness to the reconciling work of God?

One Body

The concept of one body may convey many levels of meaning for this assembly. It points to our baptism into the Church as the body of Christ, our participation in political bodies, and our belonging to the Earth as one community of life.

The apostle Paul uses the concept of body to describe the “Church” (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12, etc.) as one body of Christ into which people of different races, nationalities, and conditions (Jn 3:5) are baptized. In this body, there are no distinctions according to culture, gender, or citizenship. The diversity of languages, cultures, skills, and talents is understood in terms of grace—gifts of the Spirit at work through the diverse members of the Church. Rather than being merely tolerated, diversity is necessary for the health of the body, just as diverse organs are necessary for the physical body. Belonging meant that each person contributed to the body. Equity calls for priority to be given to “weaker” members in order to build up the health of the whole.

The assembly theme affirms the body as a metaphor of inclusion and participation. It asks us to consider how the life and ministry of LWF member churches communicate the good news of radical inclusion through the proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments. While our Lutheran identity is formed and informed by these means of grace, and shared commitments, we appreciate the ways that the Word creates a diversity of faithful identities by which the Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens us to live our faith in diverse contexts in the church, in humanitarian action, and in the public sphere.

We must acknowledge that in the context of some social and political systems, unity is used as a means to deny the dignity or body right of individuals in the name of uniformity. The presence of the Church as a body of people assembled in the world, united across ethnic, national, economic, race, and gender-based differences is a radical critique of political, social, and economic systems that seek to enforce cohesion through uniformity. A communion of churches is a body in the world that can hold up the mirror of the gospel to unjust power structures and bear witness to the hope that is found in diverse bodies united in the life-giving liberty of true communion.



Being set free from all powers and principalities of this world, the body of Christ is at the same time called to be the servant of all creation. Forces of exclusion and unjust uniformity are the cause of ecological destruction, which leads to the injustices of climate change that many member churches face today. Lifestyles and economies of production and consumption are destroying habitats and destabilizing ecosystems. This results in losing life species at an alarming rate and in diminishing the biodiversity that sustains the web of life. When ecosystems fail, so do human cultures and economies. In many parts of the communion, we see how members of the human family are forced to flee their homes due to climate induced insecurity and conflict. Our communion is called to participate in God's mission to care for creation in a way that ensures all creatures have a home to flourish and renew the face of Earth.

Biodiversity is also a theological concept. Diversity is the wisdom of God woven into the fabric of creation, and bears witness to the life-giving nature of the Trinity as a community of diversity. In the context of ecological exclusion caused by extraction; the desecration and destruction of forests and seas; the loss of indigenous lands and cultures; and the commodification of life for economic ends, our witness to the importance of biological and ecological diversity has never been more critical. Faced with the threat of ecological exclusion, the LWF fosters interdisciplinary dialogue that can

lead to economic, technological, behavioral, and structural solutions that secure justice for every creature.

Many economic and social forces that strive for uniformity negate bodies that are different. Ultimately, the loss or exclusion of individuals or groups disintegrates the reconciled diversity that sustains ecological bodies (ecosystems), ecclesial bodies (churches) and political bodies (people, cultures and societies). Against this context of exclusion, LWF member churches have a hopeful message to share. Our communion is an instrument of grace through which churches can participate in God's mission to create, reconcile, and renew healthy and life-giving communities. Rooted in Luther's concept of Christian liberty, can the presence of a diverse communion, united in one body, be a sign that calls communities around the globe to discover the liberating, reconciling and transformational power for healing that is found in authentic community?

Questions

1. What are some threats to the diversity, beauty, health, and well-being of social, political, religious, and natural systems in your context?
2. What bodies need protection and dignity in your nation or local communities, and how are churches called to create safe spaces for these bodies?
3. In what ways can the LWF, as a global communion of churches, support your faithful work of being a life-giving community in your context?

One Spirit

Through the Holy Spirit, God created all things, and this creative activity continues through all time (Gen 1:2). The same Spirit is present in Jesus Christ's act of redemption and the Spirit is the foundation of community—the church. Through the assembly of believers, the Spirit of God continually renews and sanctifies, making all things holy, as Luther explains in his commentary on the third article of the Creed.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit directs all things to their fulfillment, to the unity—communion—that God intends. This is part of our ecumenical vocation. We, as baptized in Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, are called to participate in God's renewal of creation and be responsible for the well-being of our neighbor and all creation. The Holy Spirit continually sustains and nourishes new creation, drawing us ever more fully into the body of Christ, empowering our participation in the plan, the mission of God.

We know the work of the Spirit through a diversity of gifts (1 Cor 12). The diversity of gifts does not cause fragmentation but serves to build up community, to strengthen its witness and sustain its unity. Through this diversity of gifts that serve one another and all neighbors, the Holy Spirit calls us to build bridges and invites us to embark on a journey of transformation.

Building up the one body, the church, where the Holy Spirit dwells, means that there is no place for distinctions of wealth, status, gender or nationality; no room for pride in education or religious privilege among us (Col 3:11, Is 2:11). God, who creates all human beings in God's image and likeness, is the one whispering to us by, and through, the Holy Spirit: You are one body and called into one hope. The one Spirit calls us to such a dynamic and organic unity.

Unity happens not simply as theological idealism, but concretely, as we learn from the conversion of Cornelius. His reception of "one Spirit" convinces Peter that Cornelius, the Gentile soldier, has been accepted by God into God's family on the same basis as the first disciples. The Spirit brings down intractable barriers. The Spirit reconciles all who were at variance. This is a standing characteristic of the Spirit's work in the church as it con-



Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

tinues the work accomplished by God the Son who reconciled all human beings to God (1 Jn 2:1-2).

The work of the Holy Spirit begins in each individual's life in baptism where they receive "God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with [its] gifts."² We are claimed by God in baptism, embraced by the Holy Spirit. The reconciling work of the Spirit engages us in building up community—the one body. In this way, the Holy Spirit enables us to witness to the creating, reconciling, and renewing work of the Father and of the Son.

The Lutheran confessional witness, which places a strong accent on the connectedness between the Spirit and the body, implies that faith is always active in love, in service of the neighbor—all neighbors. Confessing the gospel—justification by faith alone—means rejecting all other criteria we might impose on the gospel. The work of faith is precisely the dismantling of all the barriers and divisions of dominance created by human systems. The Spirit's activity continually reaches out to the world, bringing all people together.

Contextually, member churches face political, social, economic, and even spiritual systems that fragment and divide the body of Christ. There

² Large Catechism, *ibid.*

are many competing “spirits” in this world that seek power over nations, communities, and individuals—ethnic superiority, exclusive patriotisms, addictions, accumulation of wealth, and many more—resulting in political, social, religious, and economic instability and imbalance, which in turn victimize many people.

As a global communion empowered by the Holy Spirit, the LWF speaks up against all forms of oppression; social, physical, and spiritual. It engages in the struggle for a just society in particular through advocacy and humanitarian action. It participates through the Holy Spirit in God’s act of reclaiming the world and reconciling all things.

The one Spirit leads us to profound unity in communion. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we, as member churches, begin to better understand the communion to which we are called in our ecclesial life at local and global levels. We learn the practice of living in communion by listening to and discerning the many Lutheran identities present in the communion.

The Holy Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8) always looking east, west, north, and south, and saying “yes” to life abundant for all, and “no” to injustices! It calls us to prophetic action. Reconciled into one body, united by one Spirit, who inspires one hope, our communion takes shape, a communion that is open to the beautiful diversity of humanity and all creation.

Questions

1. Where do you experience fragmentation and the pull of many “spirits” that compete for your attention and time?
2. The one Spirit is known through a diversity of gifts. How can all these gifts be used to build up community—valuing every member and every gift—and lead to transformation?
3. What does it mean to be attentive to the Holy Spirit’s work in each and every member church, and in the global church? How does this impact your own witness?

One Hope

Hope is one of the gifts of the Spirit that human beings cannot generate from within themselves. Hope originates when a promise made to us is spoken from the outside. Hope, in the Christian tradition, is built on nothing else but Jesus Christ who speaks words of promise for salvation and liberation to all God's creation.

In Scripture, the life of hope was born and generated when Israelites were given news of liberation from tyranny. God said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings." (Ex 3:7) God saves and God promises the people a future with hope (Jer 29:11). These prophetic messages give hope of liberation from all oppressive powers. Such hope encourages people to forge ahead despite many different difficulties.

The word of God framed the hope, which not only resides in human creation but also stretches to all created beings.

The letter to the Ephesians insists on hope. Why? Hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Hope knows what God has done in Christ, sees it continually surfac-



Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



ing in everyday life, and waits for the fulfilment of God’s promises. Hope liberates from the powers and principalities of this world and encourages believers to forge ahead, despite the many obstacles surrounding them. Hope unites, creating solidarity in both expectation (prayer) and action.

In the context of Christian faith, hope is more than positive optimism. Hope is a gift of the Spirit that comes from the promise of cosmic reconciliation. This hope is “eschatological,” that is, it is not fulfilled, yet at the same time, this hope is already active where faith in Christ moves us to participate in the Spirit’s work to renew the face of the earth and reform unjust systems. Luther’s catechism teaches us that this hope is expressed when we pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

In Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul lists hope as one of the three theological virtues that are given by God’s Spirit. Hope has two dimensions. Hope implies faith in the promise of what God wills for creation, and in the capacity to strive for what must be altered, amended, and rectified to realize that promise “on earth as it is in heaven.”

LWF member churches bear witness to economic, political, and social injustices. People have been excluded, marginalized, and oppressed

because of their color, gender, social or geographical location. Some have been trafficked, many have died as victims of war, while others have been tortured. Victims of unjust structures await the realization of God's goodness, righteousness, and justice with great hope.

St. Augustine once wrote that hope has two daughters: anger and courage. In light of the faith that we have in God's promise, the presence of injustice creates in us a righteous anger on behalf of all victims of trauma, exclusion, and violence. The Spirit pushes us to participate in God's work of establishing justice and making peace so that all may have abundant life.

Where we feel righteous anger at the injustice and abuse of power which we experience in our societies and churches, the theme of the Thirteenth Assembly aims to ground our hope in God's promise of peace and justice. Nurtured by the Spirit, Christian hope is a vital component of the church's mission through its worship, proclamation, diakonia, humanitarian work and advocacy in the public space, and through its ecumenical and interfaith commitment.

Questions

1. When and where does your community feel the greatest anxiety or trauma related to exclusion or division?
2. How do you discern God's call to hope in the face of conflict and anxiety? How is hope transformative?
3. In what ways can the mission of the communion of LWF member churches be a sign of hope in this world?

An invitation

This brief introduction has explored the assembly theme—One Body, One Spirit, One Hope—through biblical, theological, and contextual perspectives. Each member church has a unique context, and together we seek what it means to be one body in one Spirit with one hope for our witness and mission. As we journey together toward the Thirteenth Assembly in Krakow, we will gather our reflections, locally and regionally. A full Study Guide is also in preparation and will be available to the member churches in time for the regional pre-Assemblies.

The Thirteenth Assembly theme also points to the connection between the church's call to strive for unity in its engagement in service and mission (through prophetic diakonia and humanitarian actions) and the public witness of advocacy to end injustice and dehumanizing practices. The one hope of the church's calling is that all may know the liberation God offers in Jesus Christ and the abundant life and peace intended by God (Jn 10:10). The theme highlights some of the pastoral practices and humanitarian actions connected to local realities in which the church is engaged in different parts of the world.

The questions we ask ourselves are inspired by the Lutheran confessional writings, by the Small and Large Catechism, and by our worship life in Word and sacrament. And today, just as 500 years ago in that decade of the 1520s with its creative and generative impulses of reform, we are in a time of confessing. How does confessing the gospel guide our journey into deeper communion, not only among ourselves, but with all our neighbors and with creation?

Learn more about the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF:

2023.lwfassembly.org/en

Send your questions to: lwf.assembly@lutheranworld.org

The world urgently needs to hear the gospel of justification: God's act of liberating grace. We are called into this adventure of living the gospel in our many contexts and together as a communion of churches that is called forth into the world.

The visual identity

The visual identity of the Thirteenth Assembly is a bold expression of our connectedness as one body in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit and called to share the transformative hope and love of God with the world. The Assembly logo draws inspiration from the local context and cultural heritage of Poland, the host country of the 2023 Assembly.

Three visual elements, representing the assembly theme—One Body, One Spirit, One Hope—come together to uplift, inspire and challenge.

- **People** symbolize our relationship as one body of Christ, rooted in the love of Christ
- **Dove** conveys our connection in and through the work of the Holy Spirit
- **Leaves** represent the hope we have by faith, rooted in Christ

Together, the people, dove and leaves, form a modern representation of Wycinanki, a popular form of traditional artwork in the region.

The color palette is derived from the LWF visual identity alongside colors unique to the Assembly that celebrate the natural beauty and artistic heritage of Poland and its people.



ONE BODY
ONE SPIRIT
ONE HOPE

THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY
THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
2023 • KRAKÓW, POLAND

About The Lutheran World Federation

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of 148 churches in the Lutheran tradition, representing more than 77 million Christians in 99 countries.

The LWF was established in 1947, in Lund, Sweden upon four pillars, which guide its work until today: rescue for the needy, common initiatives in mission; joint efforts in theology, and common engagement in the quest of the unity of the church.

The communion's member churches share a common Lutheran heritage, shaped by the diverse contexts in which they experience and witness to God's liberating grace. As churches in communion, they support each other, offering accompaniment in a spirit of mutuality and solidarity as they carry out God's mission.

While the LWF Communion Office is located at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Switzerland, some of the staff members are based in their home countries and in regional offices.

The LWF has been led by Rev. Dr Martin Junge since the Eleventh Assembly (2010-2021). The Rev. Anne Burghardt, a pastor of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, assumed the office of General Secretary on 1 November 2021.

LWF President since 2017 is Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa, who is head of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.

At the core of LWF's work is the vocation to live and work together as a communion of churches in ongoing reformation. This is not a static reality, nor is it an end in itself: LWF member churches live and work together, continue to respond to God's call and partake in God's mission in the world. In doing so, they support each other to witness vibrantly in their diverse contexts and promote human dignity, justice and peace.

The overall work of the Communion Office is guided by the LWF Strategy 2019-2024, which articulates LWF's vision: "Liberated by God's grace, a communion in

Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.” LWF’s work focuses on two strategic priorities

- Supporting churches’ presence and vibrant witness in the world
- Promoting human dignity, justice, and peace

that expound LWF’s passion for the holistic witness of churches and the commitment to address together and respond to the root causes of suffering in the world especially for the most vulnerable people.

Two programmatic departments, focused on theology, mission and justice; and on humanitarian and development work, implement these priorities.

The work of the LWF takes a variety of forms: from deepening relationships among the member churches to joint theological reflection and dialogue with other churches and faiths. Sharing about the faith, serving people in need and advocating for a more just, peaceful and reconciled world are also critical components.

At the heart of relations among LWF’s churches is the calling to participate in God’s ongoing

mission in this world. The LWF supports churches to increase their capacity to take part in the holistic mission of sharing the gospel, meeting the varied needs of people through diaconal service, and advocating for justice, peace and reconciliation at all levels of society. This includes leadership development and capacity building and strengthening the capacity of churches to respond to emergencies.

In recent years, the LWF has invited member churches to a communion-wide discussion on Lutheran identity, exploring what it means to be Lutheran across a communion of churches that witness in diverse contexts.

In response to the Twelfth Assembly resolution on theological education, the LWF has established a network of theological educators to support churches and their institutions to exchange information, innovative ideas, and access resources to strengthen their work and build capacity.

The outcomes of previous theological processes can be found in study documents on topics such as the church in the public space, the self-understanding of the Lutheran communion and the Bible in the life of the communion.

The communion's ecumenical work has led to significant milestones, most recently the 2016 Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Deepened dialogue has broadened signatories to the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification from the initial Lutheran and Catholic partners in 1999, to now include the Methodists, Anglicans and the Reformed. Guidelines on LWF's *Commitments on the Ecumenical Way to Ecclesial Communio* offer a basis for dialogues and conversations with other church bodies in the common goal toward Christian unity.

LWF has an international diaconal arm, LWF World Service, which is the expression of the vocation of LWF member churches to jointly serve people in need as a response to the gospel calling to care for the neighbor.

Through its humanitarian and development work, the LWF in 2020 directly supported nearly 2.5 million refugees, internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups in 27 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle

East. More than half of the beneficiaries are refugees or internally displaced people, and the rest are mostly members of host communities and other communities that are at risk.

Through its advocacy hub, LWF Action for Justice, the communion engages locally and globally, with a focus on advocating for human rights, gender justice, climate justice, and peace. LWF advocacy is based on the witness, voice, and decades of experience and work of member churches, country programs and communities at local and national level, to inform and influence policies, legislation and decisions to ensure the dignity of all.

As an internationally recognized faith-based organization, LWF partners with the United Nations (UN) through its specialized agencies in advocacy, humanitarian response and development related work. This includes the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). LWF's work around the world involves partnerships

with the member churches and related organizations, theological institutions and networks; ecumenical and other faith-based

partners. The LWF also engages local communities, civil society, development and humanitarian organizations, and state actors.

Liberated by God's
grace, a communion in
Christ living and working
together for a just,
peaceful, and reconciled
world.

— *LWF Vision*



Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert



ONE BODY
ONE SPIRIT
ONE HOPE

THIRTEENTH ASSEMBLY

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