

The Lutheran World Federation
A Communion of Churches
North America Pre-Assembly
January 29–31, 2009
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread”

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) 11th Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, will gather together the global Lutheran communion under a theme that is as timely as it is familiar: “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.” Spoken by millions of Christians every day and within the liturgy of Holy Communion, this petition expresses our need of both daily food and for a just, peaceful, and sustainable world. Recognizing our own trust in God’s gifts, we are called to share the food we have been given (Matthew 25:35–40). We are called to many vocations and to the service of our neighbor. Chief among our calls to serve the neighbor is to “loose the bonds of injustice” and “let the oppressed go free” (Isaiah 58:6). Our present global situation calls us to renew our efforts in holistic mission for the sake of the world.

As a delegate chosen by your church, you have been invited into this dynamic and important conversation. We will gather together in January 2010 for the North American Regional Pre-assembly, as a major part of this journey together, leading toward a deeper understanding of our context and our communion that will create a unified vision from the North American region and joining the discernment of the global Lutheran communion during the assembly in Stuttgart. These exchanges come at a critical time in our life together as a global communion and as the human family.

“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.” The theme of the Eleventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation calls us to provide a Christian response to the problems facing us today, and to work for a global order that that works for all, delivers on decent work for women and men, tackles social justice at home and fair globalization in the world. Our global communion has taken the lead to call for action; we know, however, that the political will for broad-based multilateral action does not yet exist in civil society or in governmental or economic systems. How do we work with one another to build awareness of these issues within our North American context while at the same building capacity to lead in our own context?

Every day, more than 1.2 billion people around the globe wake up and go to sleep hungry. Nearly half of the world’s workers cannot earn enough to lift their families above the poverty line of 2 USD per day. In the United States, unemployment rates are now the highest they have been in nearly thirty years. In Canada, about 400,000 jobs have been lost. For persons already living on the margins of economic viability, the current global food and financial crisis has become a tipping point between life and death, with millions forced into the cycle of poverty. Hunger is caused by many different systems, structures and behaviors. Hunger is not a matter of scarce resources, but a matter of justice. There is

enough food in God's abundant creation for all to be fed. Therefore, hunger cannot be tolerated by the body of Christ. We are called to consider how we—acting individually and collectively—can work toward the flourishing of the entire human community and the planet with which we have been blessed, as we raise the lament: “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

Poverty and hunger are not just problems for persons who are poor. If such large numbers of people continue to be trapped in cycles of poverty or systematically excluded in an unfair global system, global political and social stability is difficult to sustain. Fighting hunger is about more than increasing income; it is also about recognizing human rights and dignity and working toward social and political empowerment. Decent and adequate employment provides rights and recognition, family stability and personal development, along with fostering fairness, gender equality and meaningful youth participation. These dimensions of economic development make for justice and peace within societies.

The North American context has been formed as a consumer society in which the greatest profit margin is the goal of the market system and the lowest price is the highest good for consumers. Our context is filled with the greed and wastefulness that have led to our current global economic crisis. The systems that have been built up to protect these negative values threaten to perpetuate the realities of hunger, poverty, climate change, among others. Even as we live within these systems, how can we be formed to pursue opportunities for challenging these systems? In both the Small and Large Catechisms, Martin Luther offers insightful understandings of “daily bread” that highlight the connections between hunger, governance, war, family, community life, land, ecology, and labor. Luther gives us a model for seeing the human side of global economic systems and for forthrightly diagnosing and correcting the crises that face us today.

If our awareness of hunger is to result in a meaningful response from our communion for the benefit of the world, our analysis must be incisive and substantive. The North America Pre-Assembly will feature several opportunities to better comprehend the realities of our global systems and our communion's responses, including keynote addresses, panel and small-group discussions, and Bible studies. Throughout, we will address these subjects through the various lenses of theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, ethics, and sociology/anthropology—each undergirded by Scripture. Throughout, we will be mindful that the call to respond to hunger comes to us both individually and collectively, and that hunger must be addressed both in local contexts (our neighborhoods) and at systemic levels (including global economic systems).

During our Regional Pre-Assembly, we will reflect on what we, as the communion of the LWF, have done between the last assembly (in 2003) and today and will seek to discern the particular roles of the North American region in addressing the challenges we identify. How have we been changed by our churches' relationships with the global communion? What can we humbly contribute through these relationships? More importantly, what can we learn that will result in action? How are we being transformed individually and collectively from these engagements/encounters through the

communion? What kind of leadership must we cultivate in our region to form our communities through these commitments?

As we gather, we will discern and deliberate within consciously multicultural and cross-cultural frameworks. The rules and procedures of our gathering, along with styles of communication and learning will reflect the rich diversities of both our North American context and our global communion. During these gatherings, we will participate as individuals—bringing with us our unique perspectives and gifts—but always growing in relationship with one another so we can seek together our goals as a region and as a global communion.

Together, we will discover the ways our individual awareness and action can be amplified through the collective action of our regional and global communion, as well as how global systems affect local contexts. Together, we will seek to name these realities for what they are, working towards responding to God’s call in the midst of these challenges. Together, we will discover how the unique assets brought to bear by our global communion can equip us to respond to hunger in unique ways which other collective efforts (including those of our national churches or regional relationships) cannot achieve. Together, we will cry out, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.”

Our Lutheran heritage provides our churches with unique insights for navigating our current global situation, a context marked by lack of confidence in political leadership and sharp economic decline as well as widespread violations of human, social, and political rights. The Assembly in Stuttgart and the Pre-Assembly in Canada will also be shaped by matters internal to the Lutheran World Federation, such as transitions in leadership and the renewal process. Throughout our discernment processes, we will seek to be mindful that it is not focused on ourselves alone. We will learn from each other and determine how to communicate with our global communion important new steps being taken toward Lutheran-Mennonite rapprochement, as well as ongoing conversations regarding marriage, family, and human sexuality. As a region, we will also be discussing several important topics that will shape our engagement with the global communion, including diakonia and international development, the role of government, women’s ordination and gender equality, the possibilities of interfaith initiatives, and issues surrounding ecology and climate change. We will be mindful that our conversations take place within a world challenged by hunger, abject poverty, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and environmental degradation.

We will seek to respond by directly facing the wounds of the world, prayerfully seeking both deeper comprehension and the means to respond. We will be challenged by our participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, where Jesus’ presence is known among us in the sharing of bread and wine. As we pray “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” and are fed by the one who gave himself for us, we are called to be mindful of Paul’s admonition to not “eat and drink without discerning the body” (1 Corinthians 11:17–34). In the sacraments, the grace of God in Christ Jesus responds with abundance to our fears of scarcity, reconciling us to one another as we are reconciled with God. It is in this reconciliation that we experience God’s gift of abundant life (Luke 12:15) in

which all human communities flourish in safety, health, and wholeness. How might this sacramental identity spur us to action, not for ourselves alone, but for the benefit of the entire world? We will hear anew Jesus' words to the disciples when faced with a hungry crowd: "you give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16), and with those words the assurance that all will be fed (Isaiah 55:1).

Our communion of churches is challenged to assume bold leadership on a global scale, leadership that suggests new approaches while being forthright about the wrongs of the past, leadership that listens to and opens access for the poor, leadership grounded in faith and hope, leadership that offers the church as a transforming and reforming space, a place for engaging the problems faced by the world. As a church, we are called not to become more holy, but to become more human, not to set ourselves apart from the world, but to respond to the cries of humanity. We are pleased to join you in your response to this call, raising our voices with you: "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread"!

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