

A Communion-wide Process of Discernment on Economic and Climate Justice En Route to the Development of a Public Call or Declaration at the 2010 Assembly

The LWF Council voted unanimously to support the development of such a call or declaration through the various events leading up to the Assembly, and encourages participatory input into it as it journeys through the various Pre-assemblies leading up to Stuttgart.

Background

“Give us today our daily bread,” the theme of the 2010 LWF Assembly in Stuttgart, is a central petition in the prayer that Christians around the world regularly pray. It is prayed with the faith conviction that “God will provide,” no matter what crises we encounter. This petition can also be heard as a cry or lament from those of us, whatever our faith, who are unable to acquire the “bread” we need to live, and who cry out or plead, “Give us today our daily bread!” Billions are excluded or exploited because of social, economic, environmental and political forces that destroy possibilities for life. Due to the current global economic and climate change crises, this is increasing dramatically.

When discussing the meaning of this petition of the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism (and in many other instances), Martin Luther was not hesitant to speak out against systems and practices that oppressed and impoverished people. He did so from out of the center of his theology, which led to a reformation in faith, practices and institutions. As a Lutheran Communion, we are called to speak out against similar injustices in our day, because related crises of faith were at stake then and now. In the 16th century, the crisis was over the gospel that frees people from the fear and bondage of sin, which becomes embedded in systems that need to be challenged. Now, people are in fear and bondage over what the future will be like, unless dramatic changes are made for the sake of global economic and climate justice.

The financial crisis and global economic recession have added to the strong sense that we are going through *kairotic* times in which the ways of life that some have taken for granted, and many others long have aspired to, are ending or changing dramatically. These have been grounded in premises of boundless economic growth, fueled by carbon consumption, that are jeopardizing the future of the planet and of life as we have known it, and particularly the lives, lands and livelihoods of those who are the most vulnerable. In the face of these interlocking crises, as people of faith we cannot remain silent.

For many years, the LWF has been addressing significant social, political, economic injustices and crises – such as flagrant human rights violations, systemic sexism, racism and caste-ism, stigma and discrimination against those affected by HIV and AIDS, the forced migration and exploitation of large populations; political conflicts fueled by old ethnic and interfaith rivalries, increasing competition for natural resources, and self-serving leaders; how mandates and deregulation of neoliberal globalization promote unlimited growth and greed, resulting in enormous profit for a very few while billions fall deeper into poverty, and cry out, “give us today our daily bread!”

The 2003 LWF Assembly adopted a “Call to Participate in Transforming Economic Globalization,” and a statement on illegitimate debt, which has become a key strategy through which this work has deepened. “Communion, Responsibility, Accountability”¹ has been the theological-ethical framework for this LWF work.

The 2003 Assembly also declared that

As a communion, we must engage the false ideology of neoliberal economic globalization ... (which is) grounded in the assumption that the market, build on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to the systematic exclusion of those who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies *and the destruction of the earth.*

Since then, the logic, practices and outcomes of neoliberal economic globalization have continued ravaging vulnerable communities and countries. The recent global economic crisis has exposed the scandalous greed to which this unlimited, unregulated neoliberal globalization can lead. Many have lost their means of livelihoods, their life savings, and their sense of a future. Especially critical are the still unfolding effects on those most vulnerable who depend on economic assistance that is decreasing due to this crisis. A half century of development gains may be jeopardized, with many more falling into chronic poverty. Meanwhile, some individuals in the banking and financial sectors who caused the crisis are reaping millions of dollars in bonuses made possible by the huge stimulus expenditures that were intended to relieve this crisis.

Climate change is becoming a serious threat to at least half of the global population; of these, many are likely to be severely affected. Climate change underlies many other challenges, such as severe food shortages, the increasing spread of diseases, conflicts over land and water, and the forced migration of people. Severe storms, rising seas, droughts and other calamities are wake-up calls to repent (to change course) before it is too late. As in biblical times, so also today we must cry out against systems, powers and practices that enslave and exploit both people and nature.² There must be drastic reductions in carbon-based consumption for the sake of reducing global warming trends,³ through measures that share the responsibility globally. Those who have contributed most to the problem should bear more of the cost for adaptation and mitigation, especially for the sake of those in the world who are most vulnerable to the affects of climate change.

We as the Lutheran Communion face these crises, not with a sense that God is punishing or abandoning us, but with a sense of God’s indwelling, abiding presence, empowering us to speak and act, rather than succumbing to fear and despair.

As we prepare for the 2010 Assembly in Stuttgart, we need to consider what God may be saying to us through what these global crises are exposing today. How do we proclaim and embody hope in the midst of the despair and suffering that is so pervasive – and as captured in the plea, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread!”?

¹ See the articles in *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization*, Karen L. Bloomquist, ed. (LWF Documentation, 2004).

² For further elaborations, see *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives*, Karen L. Bloomquist, ed. (LWF Studies, 2/2009), particularly the article by Barbara Rossing and the communiqué from the LWF Climate Change Encounter in India.

³ In 2008, the LWF Council called for a 40% reduction in fossil fuel emissions by 2020.

You are encouraged to contribute to a Communion-wide discernment process, by responding to the following questions:

1. How are you, as well as the people and creation around you, affected by economic and climate changes today?

2. As you reflect on the theme, “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread,” in your context, what do you see as factors contributing to these challenges?

3. As people of faith, how should we respond?

4. What biblical, theological and ethical insights – from Lutheran, ecumenical and interfaith perspectives – are especially important?

5. What practical efforts are being made to correct or adapt to what is occurring?

6. What should the LWF and member churches be doing in this regard?

Delegates, church leaders and members are asked to discuss these matters in local settings, and come to pre-assemblies and other gatherings prior to the 2010 Assembly prepared to provide input to this the major document. The intended outcome of such a process would be a declaration that has been developed in more participatory ways over some months, and has greater possibilities for more a public profile and prioritized commitments coming out of the Assembly, where it would hopefully be adopted, in a publically symbolic way.

Please send your responses to Dr. Karen Bloomquist (kbl@lutheranworld.org). We especially are interested in names of delegates to Stuttgart from different regions who have expertise related to the above, and who might be contacted to be a part of a core group to work on this declaration.

Your name _____ Email _____

Suggested names of persons to work on this: