

*Being and Living as a Communion of Churches:
Taking the Next Steps*

Report of the Renewal Committee

I. Introduction

Initiatives for Renewal

- (1) The understanding of the ecclesial nature of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as a global organization has developed significantly since its start in 1947 as “a free association of churches.”¹ The delegates of the member churches at the Seventh Assembly in Budapest in 1984 adopted the language of “pulpit and altar fellowship” to describe relations among the churches and the standard for LWF membership. This expression was a clear theological and ecclesial articulation of the particular way that Lutherans speak about communion; however, the language of “free association” was retained as well.
- (2) The Eighth Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 took a major step to resolve this inconsistency by stating in the Constitution that the LWF is “a communion of churches” that is “united in pulpit and altar fellowship.” This reaffirmed that confessional communion has implications for ecclesial communion, and deepened the challenge for common life and mission among the member churches and also ecumenically.
- (3) The Eighth Assembly received a study on “Communion/Koinonia”, conducted by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg. That study raised a number of significant questions that have kept the work of the Renewal Committee focused on the future.
- (4) Those questions are:
 - *What is the basis of our fellowship and what holds it together?*
 - *How do we experience this fellowship and how do we express it?*
 - *How do we relate to each other, respecting our differences and sharing our needs and weaknesses, riches and joys?*
 - *Can we depend on the stability and permanence of our fellowship?*
 - *How do we maintain fellowship, that is, overcome conflicts, avoid discrimination and resist isolation and splintering?*

¹ The historical background on ecclesiological reflection in the LWF is provided by Michael Root, “Affirming the Communion,” in *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, ed. Norman A. Hjelm, Prasanna Kumari, Jens Holger Schjørring (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 216-245.

- *Can we act together, not only for each other within the churches, but more for others beyond the churches, and for the world?*
- (5) A partial response to those questions was expressed at the Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg in 2003 when the members added a sub-title to the organization's name: *A Communion of Churches*. That step constituted a public witness to and declaration of the quality of relationships within the LWF. This report explores how LWF structures might be renewed in response to these developments and in order to deepen relationships.
 - (6) As the LWF has matured in its understanding and experience as a communion of churches its current systems have been stretched by these strengthened relationships and this has sometimes limited their ability to empower and facilitate further development. Thus, it is timely and even urgent to focus again on LWF renewal in order to be responsive to the changed, and changing, context for service together in God's mission.
 - (7) In his report to the Council in 2005 the general secretary reflected on the LWF's role in a reconfigured ecumenical space and proposed that the Council consider a renewal of the LWF in the year 2010. He pointed to the fact that by the time of the next Assembly in 2010, 20 years will have passed since the LWF established the current LWF structure. In response to this proposal the Council asked the Executive Committee to appoint a Renewal Committee, comprised of a chairperson and 11 members representing the seven regions, including Council members and representatives from member churches, national committees, theological institutions, and related organizations for mission and diakonia.²
 - (8) This Renewal Committee came together in January 2007 and met six times until August 2009. A series of dialogues were conducted with:
 - a. The general secretaries of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC);
 - b. The LWF staff;
 - c. The LWF Cabinet;
 - d. The directors of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, ACT Development, and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance;
 - e. The LWF Executive Committee;
 - f. Leaders of church-related organizations for mission and diakonia.
 - (9) Responses to two previous reports were received from member churches, the Council and Council committees, departments of the secretariat, church-related organizations and individuals.
 - (10) In August 2009 the Renewal Committee completed its Final Report for presentation to the Council meeting in October 2009. The report contains two sets of recommendations; one set for action by the Council, another for action by the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart in July 2010.

² Cf. Annex 1: List of Committee members including those who left and those who replaced them.

From Federation to Communion

- (11) A renewal process should involve more than just a revamping of structures. Therefore this renewal must affirm the theology and self-understanding of the LWF that the structures are designed to serve. The Renewal Committee has recognized that the need for renewal arises out of developments in a dramatically changed global landscape in which the LWF lives as a communion of churches. This report reflects on these changes and their effect on the mission of the church in the world. Although, in some instances, titles have been renamed and some constitutional amendments have been suggested, the communion, through its own developmental process, has evolved at a rate with which its structures and work processes have been unable to keep pace.
- (12) With the imagery of new wine in old wineskins (Matthew 9:17) Jesus referred to the fact that new wine is volatile and requires the kind of accommodation that only new and flexible skins can provide. This report explores possibilities for engaging current conditions while anticipating further challenges in the future. The Renewal Committee has probed carefully into both the present and the future. It has examined the external and internal settings of the communion; it has assessed resources; and it has drawn on the experience of its members. What follows is intended to guide the communion in a process of deepening and broadening self-understanding, leading to substantial accommodation and revitalization.
- (13) The Renewal Committee has been guided throughout its work by its shared understanding of the development of the LWF since its inception, and in particular the significance of its growth over the years as a spiritual and ecclesial world communion for mutual support and partnership in proclamation and service. This ecclesial consciousness and acceptance of communion ecclesiology is demonstrated clearly in and through many official documents and actions of the LWF adopted at various stages of the Federation's history. In addition to the availability of these official documents and actions, there is a wealth of study background material.
- (14) At this point in history Lutheran churches recognize that they are part of an organization that is both a confessional body, and an ecclesial communion. It was natural, therefore, that the LWF history book, published for the 50th anniversary celebrated in Hong Kong in 1997, was named "From Federation to Communion."³ The Renewal Committee intended the process to continue the development of structures that serve the communion character of the Federation.
- (15) The "Functions" of the LWF (Constitution Article III) clearly indicate the priority of mission and diakonia, joint theological study and reflection, ecumenical efforts to further Christian unity, and attention to global concerns through advocacy and seeking peace and justice. The proposed renewal process aims to develop ways to better organize the life and work of the communion so that all member churches and related organizations for mission and diakonia take a shared responsibility for the different functions of the communion.

³ *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*. Edited By: Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari and Norman A. Hjelm. Augsburg Fortress 1997.

- (16) Clearly, this responsibility applies equally to the ways in which the communion takes shape in the different regions of the world. These instruments are appropriately deemed “regional expressions” and the Renewal Committee considers their increased and expanded role in the future to be critical. It is one of the guiding principles of the committee to “[take] into account the call by local churches to be co-participants in education, planning and implementation of programs for mission and diakonia.”
- (17) As long ago as 1990, the Eighth Assembly at Curitiba acknowledged that regional expressions are an important structural element in the life and work of the communion. Assembly participants understood the potential of regional church cooperation in the areas of mission, diakonia, theological reflection, ecumenical engagement and advocacy. The regions were, therefore, encouraged to express communion through an intensified use of current structures and programs, and to develop new structures *at their own pace*, in consultation with the churches within their specific regions. Such regional expressions are expected to carry a share of the responsibility for the promotion of communion life within their own context and the wider world.
- (18) There already are clear, strong, positive signals, particularly from the global South that churches in the regions wish to play a more clearly defined and responsible role in mission and diakonia. New structures and designs for coordination and unity need to be developed to better ensure coordination, capacity building and optimal use of resources. This will promote the unity and mission of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.⁴

Guiding Principles

- (19) While one cannot design structures directly from theological and ecclesial principles, the Renewal Committee has kept in focus the calls for structures that are interconnected with the quality and depth of the life of the churches themselves; and the urgency of functioning in a way that leads to a more strongly church-based witness and service in the world today.
- (20) The LWF has always been guided by an ecclesiological principle that maintains that authority within the Lutheran communion must be shared. Sharing authority presumes that responsibility designated to persons or units comes with the obligation to carry out certain mandates. In the communion, power, related to responsibility and authority, is properly limited so as not to become destructive. Both authority and power are used to serve and not to control.
- (21) In that spirit, the Renewal Committee was guided forward by the following principles:
1. *Mutual accountability and empowerment through participatory working methods and structures, taking into account the call by local churches to be co-participants in education, planning and implementation of programs for mission and diakonia and theological formation.*

⁴ *Report of LWF Restructuring*, Geneva, Switzerland, 1990

- a. Inclusiveness of gender and age groups continues to remain a priority, however, the limitations of official communication to four languages and the technical character of the language used creates a new kind of exclusion, therefore, the ecclesiology of communion needs to be accompanied by an improved strategy for communication.
 - b. *Safeguarding adequate procedures and dynamics of decision making.* The North-South power balance in the present governance and decision-making processes of the assemblies, Council and management structures of the communion will be maintained.
 - c. Authority and power equations will balance responsibility with the necessary means and authority to act effectively.
2. *Maintaining the sustainability of the member churches, the communion office and the economy of the communion governance structures by ensuring that the cost of structures does not exceed capability while, at the same time, members and regional expressions are challenged to grow in their capability to support new initiatives.*
- a. A mechanism is required to ensure that the work of the communion is supported by all members of the communion.
 - b. A shared sense of stewardship will support flexible structures that enable participation by members of the communion, allowing all parties to give as well as to receive.
- (22) The renewal of the LWF is indeed *a process*, requiring continuous communication and engagement by all its organic components. Thus the recommendations in this report are informed by developments that have occurred throughout the history of the communion, but are intended to move the LWF further. Although some recommendations deal with governance structures for today, new and varied forms of engagement of the member churches and organs of the communion are needed. As the context of God's mission keeps changing, the LWF must review continually its strategic priorities in order to pursue the vision toward which it is being drawn by the Holy Spirit. An enriched experience of communion will be the result of a renewed awareness of and deeper respect for each other as we continue to engage the world's challenges.

II. Current Global Realities

Context

- (23) Communicating and interpreting God's blessing and inspiration for people in all circumstances requires churches to understand the context in which they proclaim the gospel. This will equip the churches to support those afflicted by forces of history or deliberate human action.

- (24) When considering LWF renewal, it is important to examine the context in which the LWF serves. The changes that were adopted in 1990 were developed in the context of the years leading up to the Assembly that year. The forces unleashed by the end of apartheid, the fall of communism and the creation of the World Wide Web were only imagined when the 1990 renewal proposals were adopted. Much has changed in the world and in the ecumenical context since then. Moreover, important new possibilities within the life of the LWF were opened up in 1990, and these also invite us to respond with further changes.
- (25) The LWF mission document, *Mission in Context* (which was adopted in 2004 as a response to the changing milieu) advises that understanding the context for mission is an interactive process that involves both naming and discovering contexts and situations. “In analyzing its context, the church may ask, among other things, questions relating to situations requiring transformation and/or healing, situations of conflict and reconciliation, and situations of control of power – its abuse, misuse, or lack of it.”⁵
- (26) This renewal document reflects on the current context, and developments that have taken place since 1990 for the LWF as a communion of churches, using three perspectives: the human landscape, the ecumenical landscape and the Lutheran landscape. This document cannot consider all perspectives, nor can it include extensive analysis or the full diversity of experiences. It aims to highlight for the LWF some examples of what has been experienced in the deepening of relationships and in joint action, and what limitations have been encountered.
- (27) In addition, diminishing financial resources available to the member churches, and hence to the LWF, have made it necessary to rethink the sustainability of ecumenical structures and programs.

The Human Landscape

- (28) The list of concerns and challenges facing the world’s peoples seems endless: growing poverty alongside increasing wealth; racism, exclusion and marginalization; sexual abuse and exploitation; illiteracy, unemployment and hunger; powerlessness and the abuse of power; war and conflict; insecurity, despair and apathy; and so much more.
- (29) The recent collapse of global economic institutions and their theoretical architecture is evidence that the dream of unlimited expansion is flawed. The public has lost its trust in financial institutions. Greed and corruption have subverted prudence and fiscal responsibility, impacting every economy on the planet. The consequences of the financial and economic crisis are being felt globally, pushing the poor deeper into poverty. Furthermore, it is more difficult for governments in developing countries to reduce poverty and for northern governments to willingly make development aid a priority.

⁵ *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission.* (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004), p. 11.

- (30) There are also signs of hope and human progress on the human landscape. The ability of communities to resist oppression and work toward change is growing. In many countries a significant number of people are able to move out of absolute poverty, school-enrolment is growing and child mortality has been significantly reduced. Opportunities for citizens to participate in governance and political processes have been expanded dramatically since 1990 and the number of wars and conflicts has been reduced. The rights of women are increasingly being recognized. The responsibility of the international community to protect people suffering from genocide, violent oppression and emergencies has been recognized and the capacity of the international community and local actors to respond has also improved significantly. The quest for reforms in global institutions is gaining support and the need for stronger regulation of the financial and capital and markets has also been intensified.
- (31) The last decades have seen the emergence of a wide range of organizations in civil society involved in humanitarian response, promotion of human rights and empowerment programs for and of marginalized peoples. This has brought a significant expansion of the opportunity for people's participation in forming their own future and makes it more difficult for governments and markets to oppress or exploit.
- (32) In the period since 1990, the dominant paradigm for understanding and describing the world's human landscape has been *globalization* (*Bloomquist: Globalization LWF Document 50, 200*, which involves the experience, processes and impact of increasing global connectivity, integration and interdependence. Globalization has had significant impacts, both positive and negative, on social and economic systems, and it presents both opportunities and threats for human community and sustainable life on earth.
- (33) In relation to the human community we can observe two opposing trends in globalization: on the one hand, there has been a growth in global interdependence and communication and a quest for global institutions and values; on the other hand, traditional networks and roots – like family, religion, ethnic group – are strengthened in a search for belonging and security in a context of rapid social change.
- (34) *Mission in Context* provided this overview of the impacts of globalization:

Different parts of the world have become increasingly interlinked as a result of improved means of transportation and communication technologies. In general, globalization has had a considerable impact on all aspects of societal life: economy, politics, culture, communication, and the individual's sense of value and morality. On the one hand, globalization has brought a number of benefits in different aspects of life. Improved transportation allows people to travel widely with greater flexibility and efficiency and to meet people of different cultures in their own contexts. The [various communication technologies offered by] the Internet [have] fostered the democratization of information, which can no longer be controlled or manipulated as easily by the state. Scientific and technical knowledge, best practices in different fields of human endeavor, and expectations and opportunities are shared across regional and national frontiers.... On the other hand,

with its promotion of individualism at the expense of community, globalization has widened the gap between people, nations, and the wealthy and the impoverished.⁶

- (35) The economic effects of globalization have not all been positive for the life of the earth and its people. There is increased environmental degradation and climate change, which have both immediate and long-term impacts. It is abundantly evident that decisions and actions in one part of the world's ecosystem can have dramatic impact on life elsewhere on the planet.
- (36) Economic globalization has been dominated by a neoliberal economic ideology. This has resulted in both a widened gap between rich and poor within nations and globally and unsound management of financial institutions. The scandal of illegitimate debt has continued to enslave nations and forced poor people to pay for the irresponsible acts of governments and lending institutions.
- (37) Despite technological progress, the world struggles with critical health issues, and illnesses are often hidden, denied or ignored. The HIV and AIDS pandemic continues to spread and raises many social, cultural and gender justice issues. Religious communities can be part of the problem, or can be agents for inclusion, care and advocacy for those affected by disease.
- (38) The growing understanding of the finite nature of natural resources is determining social and political developments on the global scene. Water is among the many resources turning into a strategic resource. Faith can play a positive role in the responsible stewardship of natural resources by discouraging wasteful behavior by humans and by encouraging the development of more effective and transparent ways of using natural resources.
- (39) An increasing global movement of refugees and people seeking a new life in other parts of the world intensifies immigration debates in many places, often driven by fears of being swamped by newcomers, and giving rise to opposition based on apprehension and dislike of "foreigners." Religious communities often find themselves called upon to provide immediate hospitality and also to participate in creative ways to re-imagine membership in local communities.
- (40) A sense of insecurity in daily life drives a growing number of people to look for and support radical and militant solutions. The overarching concern for state security and the threats of terrorist acts feeds a sense of instability in daily life, and responses to this can threaten social cohesion and human rights. Religious belief and history are often invoked to justify terrorism or responses to it, and religious leaders struggle against forces of radical fundamentalism and the fear of those who are "different from us." The role of religion in conflict, peace and reconciliation is challenging religious communities to strengthen efforts for inter-religious dialogue and common action for the good of society.
- (41) It is evident that no country is immune from the ripple effect of these forces and challenges. Globally, there is increased awareness and concern for human interrelatedness, justice and common action. People are looking for new forms of community that take seriously the

⁶*Mission in Context*, pp. 12-13.

threats to life and the environment. Meanwhile, globalization's push for connectivity leaves many cut off, thus increasing social fragmentation and limiting economic opportunity for those who lack status in the privileged network.

- (42) Globalization has also intensified inter-religious dynamics, locally and globally, and promoted the development of many coalitions and movements in civil society. While the church through its witness has managed to inspire many to raise their voices for compassion and justice, it is not the only player responding to crisis situations. In fact, in many places the church merely complements other efforts while it stands at the margins, and because of this its credibility is being questioned by various elements both within and outside the church.
- (43) At the same time, the church is increasingly recognized as an agent for transformation and reconciliation in the human landscape because of its potential to bridge the gap between global and local players and grassroots communities. This both raises expectations and calls for accountability. With changes in the human landscape there is a need for a renewed LWF, which can face this challenge more directly.

The Ecumenical Landscape

- (44) The ecumenical landscape has changed significantly over the last decades, especially since 1990. Although the fruits of ecumenical engagement have been given limited public attention, they have changed the face of Christianity on the globe and, hence, the frameworks for church cooperation. Judging from the number and depth of ongoing ecumenical endeavors there is little basis for characterizing the present time as an "ecumenical winter".
- (45) The 1990 restructuring of the LWF, which defined the organization as a communion of churches, has undoubtedly contributed to its present role as a strong partner with high credibility in the ecumenical movement. And within the communion, individual churches have found different entry points into the ecumenical landscape in the search for visible unity. The entry point can vary between bilateral theological dialogues, participation in ecumenical councils, cooperative church efforts in diakonia and advocacy, or joint church agreements with governments on common concerns. The most important achievements have been the formal declarations of mutual recognition.
- (46) The LWF has worked with distinctive intensity in the area of international ecumenical bilateral dialogues with Anglican, Orthodox, Reformed and Roman Catholic dialogue partners. With the 1990 affirmation of the LWF as a communion of churches, the strength of the LWF as an accountable, global instrument of Lutheran churches made it possible to reach an ecumenical agreement with the Roman Catholic Church in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* in 1999. The World Methodist Council signed the JDDJ in 2005, and an international biblical study on justification is being formed with Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Reformed participation.
- (47) The LWF and the ecumenical movement have from the beginning been marked by their response to violations of human rights, and the need for both human development and

protection of people whose security is threatened by humanitarian catastrophes. The LWF, through the Department for World Service, has been the leading international organization in the ecumenical movement to respond to human needs outside the reach of the local churches. The LWF has therefore a recognized position with the United Nations as the only, denominational humanitarian organization.

- (48) In addition to the many theological dialogues and agreements, increased high-level collaboration within the ecumenical movement has been seen in coordinated and joint efforts for diakonia and advocacy. These endeavors have focused attention and resources on such critical issues as the HIV and AIDS pandemic and humanitarian emergencies. The question has changed from “do we cooperate?” to “how do we cooperate?” and the response has gained momentum from ecumenical theological achievements, and continues to expand. In Latin America, churches have worked ecumenically to address illegitimate debt, with positive results.
- (49) The need for more effective and better coordinated work between the many churches, denominational and ecumenical organizations involved in relief and development service has led to the establishment of the ACT Alliance. The ACT Alliance is the result of the merger of ACT International and ACT Development. The alliance is global and ecumenical in membership, will be rooted in local communities in most of the countries in the world and be one of the largest global coalitions in the field of emergency response and human development.
- (50) A new climate also prevails in global Christian relations beyond the established ecumenical movement. An outstanding example of these new initiatives, and one whose lasting significance is yet to emerge, is the Global Christian Forum (GCF) , for which the LWF has been a significant and reliable supporter. This forum seeks to bring together churches long committed to ecumenism with the burgeoning Pentecostal and Evangelical communities – groups which have been apprehensive about the established ecumenical movement. The success of the first full meeting of the GCF in Kenya in November 2007 underlines the timeliness of new efforts to develop understanding and relationships with the new bodies which are changing the face of Christianity in the settings in which many of our members live.
- (51) In this wide and complex picture, a central element is the LWF’s continued support for the WCC) as a uniquely privileged ecumenical instrument. The LWF has encouraged the WCC in its recognition that it cannot stay the same, but must adapt to a changing environment. The LWF sees in the WCC focus on *Ecumenism in the 21st Century* ways in which the wide array of its ecumenical partners, and in particular churches and church organizations for mission and diakonia, are called to close cooperation as they work to alleviate the needs of the human family.⁷

⁷ The WCC articulated its ecumenical vision with the major policy statement, *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC*, in the 1990s, and released a study paper, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, in 2005. The WCC has initiated a process on *Ecumenism in the 21st Century*, with attention to

- (52) In keeping with the achievements of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues, and the development of the Lutheran communion as an effective ecumenical instrument, the Renewal Committee believes strongly that a new symbol of Christian unity is required. Recognizing some ambivalence in the responses of the member churches, the Renewal Committee still recommends a new form of assemblies that would share space with the WCC and in which the Christian World Communions (CWCs) and other bodies would be able to hold their own global gatherings. There are compelling reasons for defining the role of LWF assemblies in terms of space made available – by common agreement – on the occasion of the WCC assemblies.⁸ However, it is important that a distinct and Lutheran identity is visible at such assemblies.
- (53) For such a new model to succeed, a more systematic preparatory process is needed for LWF Assembly delegates to prepare them for discussion and action on behalf of their churches and regions. Regional Pre-Assembly processes are also needed in the member churches themselves to enable consultation and preparation on matters of common concern that will come – or in the mind of the churches ought to come – to the Assembly for deliberation and action.
- (54) Support for the special role of the WCC does not negate the serious recognition by Lutherans of other major global expressions of unity, which include the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches.

The Lutheran Landscape

- (55) The Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 was a significant landmark in the global Lutheran landscape. The amendment of the LWF Constitution there formalized an important shift from the understanding that the LWF is “an expression of the communion” to the understanding that the LWF *is* “a communion of churches.” (Article III) This decision clearly affirmed the growing ecclesial profile of the LWF.
- (56) The decision process itself reflected the dynamics of the Lutheran landscape. It was based on extensive consultation and deliberation among the member churches, and reflected a consensus that was clearly emerging. It was a theological and ecclesial process that sought consistency between theology and practice, and took seriously the particular dynamics of the context in which the LWF was serving at the time.
- (57) As a consequence of this decision, and based on this new understanding, the LWF governance and administrative structures were shaped with the aim of better integrating legislative and administrative procedures, and providing flexibility. Six legislative bodies were reduced to two (the Assembly and the Council). As an example of flexibility, structures for regional

ecumenical reconfiguration and the vision to include churches and families of churches that presently are not members of ecumenical organizations.

⁸ For more specifications of this option for future assemblies, cf. Annex2.

expression of communion were encouraged to develop in each region according to the needs and timeline deemed appropriate to the region.

- (58) These systems responded to the prevailing context in which the 1990 decisions were made, and have functioned very well to support the mission and work of the LWF and the member churches. At the same time, the following examples and reflections indicate the limitations and new needs that have emerged in the changing Lutheran landscape.

Lutheran Joint action and Mutual Accountability

- (59) The practical implications of the vision for communion turning from a “stand-alone consciousness” to a “consciousness of solidarity and mutuality” - included intentional efforts for joint action and mutual accountability, and recognition of the ability to act on behalf of one another, even as the member churches remain autonomous.
- (60) Furthermore, this understanding recognized that the aims of the LWF are carried out both by the member churches and by the common life of the member churches in the Lutheran communion. Therefore, to facilitate and support the achievement of its aims, the Constitution provided that the LWF “shall exercise its functions through the Assembly, the Council, the Secretariat and appropriate instrumentalities of the member churches” (Article VI).
- (61) The Assembly includes representatives of all the member churches and is the principal authority of the LWF. Although the 1990 changes did not affect the Assembly structurally, assemblies began making *commitments* as the primary expression of future directions, reflecting a tone of mutual accountability as a communion of churches. In actual experience, the reception of these commitments by the member churches, and follow-up action, has not been as positive as expected. The committee recognizes this gap reflects the diversity among the member churches. Despite existing instruments, the renewal process is necessary in order to further enhance the mutual responsibility and accountability of the churches.
- (62) The name chosen for the highest governing body between assemblies was the *Council*, expressing the growing ecclesial consciousness within the LWF. The Council has responsibility to act on behalf of the churches, including decisions about membership and relations between the member churches. Equal representation of churches from North and South has brought the increasing consciousness of solidarity and mutual accountability into the arena of governance and decision-making on behalf of the communion. Several examples will serve to reflect the growing practice of joint decisions on behalf of one another, and the increasing sense of mutual accountability.
- (63) The LWF is unique among the CWCs in authorizing entities through the Council or its committees to make decisions on behalf of the communion. For example, there is an International Personnel Committee; the LWF Project Committee, a forum where resources are shared; and the Standing Committee for World Service, which makes decisions on country programs and strategies.

- (64) The 1990 decision on communion upheld an approach to common life among the churches, which expressed a commitment to shared ecclesial life rather than an expectation of comprehensive theological agreement. This recognized that the Lutheran communion exists on the basis of a common confession, and embraces all those churches that accept it. The fact that there are Lutheran churches that do not acknowledge pulpit and altar fellowship with all other Lutheran churches, and that are not members of the LWF, is a reminder that the ecclesiological task of creating full communion among Lutheran churches remains. Still, the effective way in which the member churches have worked together since 1990 has been unprecedented. Some joint efforts have experienced persistent difficulty because though governance and administrative systems are in place, agreed commitments and action plans are lacking. In addition, major differences still exist between and within member churches regarding ethical and theological issues. This calls for an intensified effort to identify those issues and develop ways and means to address them in a spirit of mutual respect and consultation for the sake of deepening the Lutheran communion.
- (65) Because of this, there is need for extensive communication, consultation and collaboration among our theological institutions to lead research, education and faith formation in ways that would assist the communion in addressing these challenges. The Renewal Committee identifies the need to strengthen the regional theological advisory groups and theological teaching institutions to better coordinate this role.

III. Nature and Development of the Lutheran Communion

The Ecclesial Identity of the LWF

- (66) The decision by the Seventh Assembly in Budapest in 1984 to declare pulpit and altar fellowship, including the recognition of ministry, was a decisive step in the development towards a communion of churches. This decision contains the necessary elements for the unity of the church, *satis est*, according to Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. During the last decades this understanding has been further developed, strengthening this communion, as it is shown in the annex related to the movement from Federation to communion. The constitutive elements of the church are the elements binding the Lutheran churches together. Because these churches are related to one another through the LWF, the ecclesial character of the communion of Lutheran churches also affects the Federation itself indirectly.
- (67) The ecclesial communion of the LWF is thus intimately connected to relations between the member churches. As an organization, the LWF is not a global church, neither is it an ecclesial communion residing in itself. It is a communion of Lutheran churches, united in the proclamation of the gospel and the sharing of the sacraments. The ecclesial identity of the communion belongs primarily to the member churches in their life together as worshipping and service communities.
- (68) However, the identity of the communion goes beyond altar and pulpit fellowship, heeding God's call to reach out to the world in need. Therefore, a process of theological reflection

must always be pursued by the member churches, and within the communion, in order to reflect on the tools needed for service in the world.

Local and Universal: Independence or Interdependence?

- (69) The 1990 Curitiba Assembly, in revising the Constitution, defined the Federation as “a communion of churches”, and at the same time declared the autonomy of the member churches in using the Federation as an instrument. This double decision leaves an open question concerning the nature of the communion.
- (70) Discussions within the LWF concerning the nature of the communion among Lutheran churches have to a large extent concentrated on the relationship between the global organization and the local churches. But, if the communion primarily belongs to the churches, a stronger emphasis ought to be put on relations between Lutheran churches in a specific country and a region. There is a deficiency in the communion if two churches in a country or a region primarily relate to one another only through the global body. It is important to continue the discussion on how the communion can be further developed at the local and regional levels. Being in communion calls churches to work together to avoid unequal power relationships and empower one another through the sharing of the resources and gifts that each offers.
- (71) While member churches are both independent and interdependent, there remains a critical role for the LWF itself in promoting the broadening and deepening of the communion among these member churches, and in the wider ecumenical context. The LWF has a multilateral as well as a bilateral dimension and therefore must face questions concerning the common mission of the churches and their mutual accountability within the communion.

Confessional - Confessing

- (72) From the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement there has been a discussion on the relationship between the confessional families, or CWCs, and the wider ecumenical movement. The confessional families have sometimes been regarded as obstacles to achieving the visible unity of the church universal. Why do we not take the direct road, it is asked, from individual churches to the wider ecumenical movement rather than the detour via the confessional families?
- (73) The importance of the role of the church as a *confessing* communion must be underscored in the life of the local churches, the LWF as a CWC and the wider ecumenical movement. The term “confessional” must not be understood as setting limits over against others, but as a commitment to what is understood as the confession of the universal church. Churches need to be faithful to the apostolic faith in proclaiming the gospel in the world of today. The communion of Lutheran churches thus can make a specific contribution as a *confessing communion*.

To Be Lutheran Is to Be Ecumenical

- (74) The intention of the Lutheran Reformation was to achieve a renewal of the church as a whole, in commitment to the apostolic faith, without establishing a new one. The confessional documents must be interpreted ecumenically also today. Therefore it has been said that to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical.
- (75) In practice, however – often due to historical, social and ecumenical circumstances – the Lutheran churches tend to interpret their primary identity as a confessional *Lutheran* identity. This is important, not least for minority churches. It is fundamental that we develop the ecumenical interpretation of what it is to be a Lutheran church and a communion of Lutheran churches so that the LWF, as a confessing communion, can serve the search for visible unity. The member churches have close relations with churches of other Christian traditions. On the basis of bilateral and multilateral dialogues they have also in many cases established altar and pulpit fellowship, often including the recognition of ordained ministries.
- (76) Given the ecumenical relations of member churches and the wider ecumenical context, it is quite logical that questions are asked about the legitimacy of the LWF as a communion of confessing Lutheran churches. The question which remains is how the LWF as a communion of Lutheran churches will be affected in the future, when the ecumenical landscape of the member churches changes. Already there has been a broadening of the membership in the LWF, when churches coming out of different traditions have merged as a united church and applied for membership in the communion. The question that can also be asked is whether the LWF itself could merge with other confessional families.
- (77) The LWF as a communion of churches can gain from the knowledge and experience of the ecumenical achievements made by its member churches. This also means that the LWF has the task of supporting the ecumenical dialogues at local and regional levels, as well as the unity and cooperation between Lutheran churches in a given country or region. In this way the ecumenical potential of the Lutheran tradition is employed concretely.
- (78) The self-understanding of the LWF as a communion of Lutheran churches has developed over many years. This ecclesial consciousness and acceptance of communion ecclesiology is demonstrated clearly in and through many official documents and actions of the LWF adopted in various stages of the Federation's history. In addition to the availability of these official documents and actions there is a wealth of background study material. For these reasons the Renewal Committee believes that there is no need to reproduce the same ecclesiological arguments. However the committee is of the strong conviction that the mission of being a communion remains the fundamental guiding principle for the renewal of the Lutheran communion.

Unity in Word and Sacraments and Mutual Recognition

- (79) One of the main characteristics of the Lutheran tradition is the way in which it outlines its ecclesiology in the Augsburg Confession. The point of departure is Article 4 on Justification. This is the article upon which theologically, according to the reformers, the church “stands or

falls”. The church is the community in which God’s grace is actually given through word and sacraments, again and again, for the forgiveness of sins, hope and salvation.

- (80) Article 5 focuses on how justifying faith is obtained by the means of grace, served by the ministry of word and sacrament.
- (81) Article 7 states that the church is the community of the saints, in which the gospel is proclaimed purely and the sacraments administered in accordance to it. It is important to take note of the full formulation of this statement: The church is not only said to be “where” the means of grace are administered. It is the community of the saints: the historical and spiritual reality of women and men congregating and being thus united by the gospel. For the reformers, the church and the unity of the church have one and the same basis: the sharing of word and sacrament as a community. Hence the recognition of the ordination of the servants of word and sacraments is a consequence of the recognition of one another as a true expression of the *One* church of Jesus Christ. The recognition of ordination does not imply that an ordained minister is automatically licensed to be employed and serve in another church body. The ordained minister must meet the standards and requirements of the receiving church. The responses by member churches to the report of the Renewal Committee certainly affirmed the recognition of ordination while insisting in the right of the member churches to develop standards for receiving ministers of another member church.

Worship, Proclamation and Diakonia as Integral to the Nature of the Church and its Service to the World

- (82) The primary nature of Christian unity is the spiritual relationship of the believers in and with the Triune God (John 17:20-24), but this spiritual unity is not isolated from human life in its individual and social dimensions. Unity is expressed in the well established ecclesiological terminology of koinonia, with its unique capturing of the comprehensive nature of communion. This understanding is also critical as far as the nature and structural character of the LWF is concerned.
- (83) The document *The Church as a Communion* (LWF Documentation 42/1997) presents a comprehensive understanding of koinonia expressing the interrelatedness of proclamation, witness, and service in God’s mission to the world.

9. Our koinonia with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit constitutes our “koinonia with one another” (1 Jn 1:3,7). Just as Jesus’ radically inclusive fellowship embraced even the outcast, the sick, and the poor, so too the church is called into koinonia with all those excluded from society.

10. Koinonia is furthermore a proclamation of unity among churches and believers which must be expressed in tangible spiritual and economic ways. This is most striking in Acts 2, and in Paul’s appeals to the Gentile churches to share their financial resources.[...] (Rom 15:26-27).

11. [...] Every local church gathered around the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments is a realization of the universal church of all God's people. Through Word and sacraments every local church is bound into the wider communion of churches.

12. In faith we are called to shape our life together as an expression of the communion we receive. We invite our churches to reflect on the foundations of their lives as communities in the life of the triune God. Since we share the gifts of communion in Word and sacraments we are challenged to find forms of communion which reflect the glory of these gifts.

- (84) The meaning of diakonia as an integral part of the church's identity and life is different than the activity of individual persons or specific institutions. Diakonia is most deeply related to what the church is corporately, to what is celebrated in its worship and announced in its preaching. There is an intrinsic interrelationship between proclamation, worship and diakonia in the life of the communion.
- (85) Nevertheless, one of the greatest challenges is how to establish a sound and responsible relationship between diaconal work and proclamation. The interrelatedness raises questions central to our unity in faith, common life, proclamation and diakonia. However, we must be careful in maintaining proper relations among these functions. The LWF document *Diakonia in Context* clearly addresses this concern:

It is therefore impossible to reduce diaconal action to an instrument for another purpose that what it basically is: service to the neighbor in need. It cannot be an instrument which serves the needs of the one helping, not can it become an instrument for evangelizing people. Diaconal action would then wrongly become a strategy, in a conscious effort to combine human-care activities and proclamation so that people can be converted. A result may even be that the diaconal activities would be chosen according to whether they would be effective in recruiting new church members.

[...]

Summing this up, some general principles can be formulated:

- Diaconal action is meaningful in itself. It does not need to be justified by other reasons; it should never be reduced to be an instrument for other purposes.
- Diaconal action must be unconditional. It cannot allow conditions to be a prerequisite for receiving help, as for instance participating in religious activities
- Diaconal action must respect the integrity of each person and their freedom to express their faith according to their own convictions and traditions
- Diaconal action must ensure that persons in vulnerable situations are not influenced or pressured toward religious practices and choices
- Diaconal action must acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human life, and especially of human suffering, and therefore be ready to assist people that ask for assistance, including counseling when this is asked for
- Diaconal action must be able to interpret reality and processes of social change in a holistic manner
- Diaconal action must be ready to account for its faith-based identity
- Diaconal action must take responsibility for the witness it is giving to the message of the church.

- (86) In this context the concept of development has a specific meaning, which has been further expanded in the booklet *Guiding Principles for Sustainable development* (LWF 2002):

A process of change by which the basic needs and human rights of individuals and communities in any given society are realized while at the same time protecting the basic

needs and human rights of other communities and future generations. [...] Thus development has been refocused to aim at the emancipation of the individual and the transformation and liberation of society, encompassing the social, cultural, and the spiritual well being of people. It is no longer focused only on economic and material wealth. In this understanding, development work, as part of the process of transformation and empowerment, is an integral part of the mission of the church. (LWF Mission in Context pp. 49-50)

- (87) This understanding of development as part of diaconal service assumes the advocacy role of churches, organizations, and individuals as integral to their witness to the world. While diakonia is grounded in the communion around word and sacraments, this action is not limited to an intra-church activity, but seeks to collaborate with other actors, including people of other faiths, or of no faith, for the healing of the world.

Networking with organizations and Institutions for Diakonia, Mission, and Theology

- (88) The life of the LWF as a communion of churches unfolds broadly in the form of networking among the member churches. Through this networking, the member churches mutually empower each other in vital areas. At the same time, member churches seek to ensure coherence and accountability in the LWF as committed partners. Such commitment is a prerequisite for the international and domestic work that the churches do by themselves or together through the different LWF departments.
- (89) From its beginning, the LWF has also been an active participant in major ecumenical programs of mission and diakonia. These forms of ecumenical joint action demonstrate a high degree of commitment by the Lutheran churches to multilateral cooperation, and show how, for Lutherans, “faith and order” and “life and work” belong inherently, together with “mission”, to the one ecumenical movement.
- (90) Related organizations for specialized ministries (diakonia, theological formation, witnessing) represent partners of high expertise in their respective areas, without which the churches today would be dramatically impoverished in their service. The main challenge, therefore, is how to organize work in these areas most effectively regionally and globally, with the related organizations as integral partners in the life of the communion.
- (91) There is much diversity in these relationships with varying degrees of autonomy and integration. For example, among organizations for diakonia, some exist as entities entirely within member churches; others serve on behalf of Lutheran churches only; and a third group serve ecumenically on behalf of many churches, while having strong or primary links with LWF member churches. Among mission organizations, some exist fully within churches; others are separate stand-alone entities; and a third group are semi-integrated units.
- (92) The organizations for mission and diakonia have different mandates. Some work only in a local context, others operate in different countries while still others work both locally and internationally. There is a clear trend that more and more organizations work both in the home

country and internationally, reducing the traditional distinct divisions between national and international mission and diakonia.

- (93) In the period since 1990, representatives of these organizations have participated actively in LWF processes for governance, consultation and joint action. They serve as advisors and consultants to the Council, and are regularly included in LWF consultations, such as the 1998 Global Consultation on Mission and the 2002 Global Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia. Mission organizations joined with member churches in an extensive consultation process that resulted in the new LWF mission document, “Mission in Context”, which seeks to deepen the common understanding and practices of holistic mission. Organizations for diakonia participated in shaping the Global Strategic Plan 2007-2012 for LWF World Service.
- (94) The ministry of theological formation is organized in varied ways within the member churches. Some are independent of but related to the churches, while others are owned by the churches. , A third group is dependent on theological faculties or programs at State universities. In the theological study process of the communion these institutions have provided valuable assistance.
- (95) These examples of consultation, joint action and mutual commitment demonstrate that these organizations are deeply rooted in the life of the member churches and the Lutheran communion, and also in the life of ecumenical partners. However, formal definitions of relationships with these organizations, e.g. within the LWF governing bodies, are lacking. A formalization of these relationships would significantly strengthen the effectiveness of the Lutheran communion. There is urgent need to consider amending relevant governing documents of the LWF in order to upgrade the relationship between the LWF and these organizations.

Regional Expressions

Historical Developments

- (96) The renewal process is intended specifically to revitalize and develop structures which enhance the communion character of the Federation, where the unity given is neither bottom-up nor top-down; and where the danger of fragmentation and isolation is overcome. Therefore with this in mind the Eighth Assembly adopted the view that the communion of churches in the regions would be expressed through intensified use of existing structures and programs in the Federation and among the member churches. The Assembly chose to use the language of “regional expressions of communion” rather than that of “regionalization of the communion.”
- (97) It is evident that practical forms of communion have developed significantly in a variety of ways in the different regions, for example in southern Africa and Latin America. It is also evident that further development is limited by the absence of formal recognition and supporting infrastructure.

- (98) The aims of communication and interpretation, as well as developing channels for advice and consultation, have been achieved in the regional expressions to a very high degree since 1990. Regional communication networks have emerged to enhance the identity, visibility and sustainability of communion in the regions, and to encourage mutual support in mission and diakonia, as well as theological reflection. In an environment dominated by large or majority churches and other faith communities, these networks prevent the feeling of isolation, especially for small and minority churches.
- (99) Regional conferences of bishops/presidents and other church leaders (including women, youth and laity) have strengthened forms of fellowship, communication, trust and understanding. They have also bolstered bonds of unity in common purpose and action, e.g., in peace building, advocacy, combating HIV and AIDS, and participation in the ecumenical movement. A sense of unity is evident among the churches when they share intimately their spiritual and ecclesial journeys despite diversities of culture, language and social contexts.
- (100) Council members from the regions regularly participate in LWF consultations, studies and regional gatherings. This has provided a strong link of communication and mutual learning between church representatives on the Council and church participants from the regions.
- (101) The participation of women and youth has been strengthened through regional relationships. The network of Women in Church and Society (WICAS) regional coordinators works jointly to further the communion's gender work with a regional sensitivity. Youth from the regions have participated in regional workshops and developed a global youth vision for the LWF, highlighting both the shortcomings of and the potential for the LWF as it seeks to become "a communicating communion."

The Current Shape of Regional Expressions

- (102) With the minimal structures encouraged in the 1990 renewal, the regions have each developed forms to express the kind of communion that suits their settings.
- (103) *In Africa*, three sub-regional expressions of communion are cooperating and collaborating more closely on matters of common concern. The Lutheran Council in Africa was established to strengthen communion, joint decisions and mutual accountability. There is also consideration of a commission to advise the region on doctrinal issues and differences.
- (104) *In Asia*, a regional office has existed since 2000. The Lutheran Council in Asia was established in 2007, with aims to strengthen communion formation and to coordinate regional efforts in holistic mission, diakonia and education. It will also focus on research in ecumenical theology and interfaith relations for the Asian context.
- (105) *In Europe*, church leadership conferences engage European and global church issues with increased mutual understanding and common concern. Partnership is based on equality and spiritual communion, and nurtures solidarity among larger churches and smaller minority

churches. A regional office (2003-2006) helped develop an integrated approach to international issues.

- (106) *In Latin America and the Caribbean*, the annual church leadership meetings express and celebrate communion in practical terms. Mutual knowledge and trust have grown significantly, strengthening efforts for pastoral accompaniment, conflict mediation, advocacy, church-to-church cooperation and sharing, and joint decision making.
- (107) *In North America*, a regional expression office has existed since 1998. It serves to enhance Lutheran communion and visible solidarity in the region, and to facilitate participation and cooperation with the LWF Geneva Secretariat. Regional consultations have addressed how local, regional and global issues intersect within the communion.

The Self-Understanding of Regional Expression

- (108) There are significant differences among the regions in terms of their context, church life and structure, needs, and number of member churches. These differences have informed the self-understanding of the regional expressions in the life of the communion. The responses received to the second report of the Renewal Committee are varied with no emerging consensus other than an affirmation of these regional expressions themselves. Their role in the life of the communion, beyond facilitating networking and exchanges among churches, has not been explored.
- (109) Responses from the churches indicate that a middle position is taken when the regional expression focuses on the sharing of experiences, mutual support and the development of common programs and mutual visits. This can enable the voice of the region to be echoed in the governing bodies of the LWF. In many regions the regional expression involves structures that allow member churches to influence the agenda of the communion. It is already the case that the responsibility for the implementation is given to the regional expression and the member churches. However, responses indicate a minority position that resists any organizational structure in the region and prefers informal consultation.
- (110) These assessments raise questions regarding a) the forms of cooperation within regions, b) the mandate given to the regions, and c) the synergies among regions and LWF programs. However, the Renewal Committee draws the conclusion that while there could be differences among the regions concerning the way the regional expressions take shape, a common frame has to be established.

Common efforts in Ecumenical Theology and Spirituality

- (111) As the LWF is committed to further witness to the gospel and to the strengthening of the churches in carrying out their mandate, the future of the communion will depend on its capacity to develop appropriate Lutheran, contextual and ecumenically engaged theological work.

- (112) In the years to come it will be an indispensable necessity for the communion to uphold the Lutheran commitment to proclaiming the gospel in today's world and to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with other Christian churches as well as with other faiths. The communion also should help the churches to move beyond their individual ethnic and cultural identities toward a communion companionship where human boundaries are transcended. Cooperation among member churches and theological institutions is stimulated in the areas of worship, spiritual life, other faiths, social ethics and issues of Lutheran and ecumenical self-understanding.
- (113) For this task, the LWF benefits from the work of Lutheran and other schools of theology in the different regions, but it profits especially from the engagement with ecumenical theology, and theology more generally, within the structures of the LWF itself, i.e. the Office for Ecumenical Affairs, the Department for Theology and Studies, and the Institute for Ecumenical Research (Strasbourg) as arms of the communion.
- (114) The life of the communion depends to a considerable degree on its capacity to empower believers for proclamation and diakonia. Theological education and formation should be further developed among the regions in order to overcome divisions, tensions and social injustice. Dialogues with Islam, Judaism and Asian religions especially should be strengthened, along with conversations on atheism and new paganism.
- (115) One of the strengths and priorities of the LWF is its ecumenical engagement and expertise; (cf. section: *The Ecumenical Landscape*). Such developments, which have taken place not only with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Anglican and Methodist churches, but also with Baptists, Adventists, Mennonites and Pentecostals, have also contributed to new perspectives in the self-understanding of Lutheran churches themselves.
- (116) Official ecumenical agreements, globally or regionally, have shown that the member churches, being in communion, can act together on doctrinal issues. Such developments are not optional in today's world, but show the commitment of the churches to keeping their ministries rooted in the ecumenical dimension of the churches' Lutheran identity. They also represent a significant resource for the churches in their local and regional contexts.
- (117) Lutheran dedication to ecumenical theology also includes critical analysis and independent research, evaluating and interpreting developments and achievements in the ecumenical movement as a whole. In this context, important contributions have been made over decades in terms of shaping new conceptualities and methodologies without which ecumenical theology would have achieved significantly less. It is urgently important that this momentum be regained, possibly in new patterns of cooperation, in the years ahead.
- (118) It will also be important to consider the best possible synergies among the different forms of theological work in the broad context of the LWF. The alternative shapes of theological engagement should be seen as complementary and -not considered to be in competition with each other.

Communication, Encounter and Consultation as Intrinsic to Communion

- (119) Communication belongs to the very being of communion because churches are mutually accountable to one another. Participation in the holy gifts and shared life is constitutive for the church as a *koinonia*. This is the foundation of the church and of the communion of churches as a communicative body.
- (120) The need to express that dimension of being a communicative communion is more than ever indispensable to our life together. In an age of increasing plurality, there is a need for a clear and comprehensive communication strategy in the LWF. Our historical moment provides an unprecedented opportunity for the LWF to re-imagine its approach to communications and relationships in light of current technological capacities.
- (121) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines communication as a social process with inherent learning and change. Such learning and change is necessary for a communion. It addresses a critical and fundamental aspect of our work, namely, the ideation, strategic, operational, and tactical planning necessary to communicate the message of this communion to the world. In addition, this kind of communication strengthens our governance structure, which requires a process of mutual consultation and dialogue for decision making.
- (122) A holistic approach to communication is needed in order to deepen and broadcast the implications of being a communion. Therefore communication is more than strategy and methods. Mutual consultation, coming together, and encounter of the member churches has to be manifested, for instance, in a shared reflection of Lutheran theological identity in the varied contexts of the communion and its programmatic emphases, particularly in the area of proclamation, evangelical witness, and diakonia.

IV. Issues for Consideration and Action

- (123) In its report to member churches and related church organizations of April 2009 the Renewal Committee presented issues for consideration pertaining to formal aspects of the life of the LWF, and issues relating to the way it is organized.
- (124) Responses and opinions were analyzed and discussed⁹ from:
- 24 member churches;
 - the German National Committee, representing 14 churches (2 separate responses);
 - the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), representing 11 churches (1 separate response);
 - the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) and the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS);

⁹ Cf Annex 3 –
Summary of Responses from member churches to Renewal Report

- Council Committees and departments of the LWF; and
- others.

(125) In the present report, submitted to the Council for its meeting in October 2009, proposals are made based on the majority opinions of the comments received to the April 2009 report. The proposals are made in relation to issues pertaining to the life of the communion as discussed and agreed – either as amendments of the LWF Bylaws by the Council or as possible legal amendments, or adjustments of wording, of the LWF Constitution by the Assembly.

ISSUE 1: THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS FOR MISSION AND DIAKONIA

- (126) Although the LWF is a communion of churches, organizations for mission and diakonia have had strong relationships, by mutual choice, with the LWF and with individual member churches. Such bodies are now developed by churches in all parts of the communion. They have shown leadership for effective mission and diakonia on behalf of, and jointly with, the member churches. There is a growing prevalence of churches in the South sending missionaries to other parts of the globe. They are all acknowledged as effective instruments of the member churches and of the Lutheran communion. In the future this will require increasing accountability and transparency by the actors within the communion.
- (127) In the period since 1990, representatives of these organizations have participated actively in LWF processes for governance, consultation and joint action. They serve as advisers and consultants to the Council, and are regularly included in LWF consultations, such as the 1998 Global Consultation on Mission and the 2002 and 2008 Global Consultations on Diakonia. Organizations for diakonia participated in shaping the Global Strategic Plan 2007-2012 for World Service.
- (128) These examples of consultation, joint action and mutual commitment demonstrate that the organizations are deeply rooted in the life of the member churches and the Lutheran communion, and also in the lives of ecumenical partners. They have become essential participants in the common life of the communion. However, the pattern of consultation and cooperation has so far not been explicitly stated in the LWF Bylaws. The following recommendation shall clarify this situation.

(129) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that in the LWF Bylaws a fourth category of membership, namely Consultative Membership in the LWF, be established for representatives of church organizations for mission and diakonia. Such consultative membership could be attributed by the Council, either upon application from the organizations in question or by initiative of the Council itself. It shall give the right to speak, but not the right to vote in the Council.

ISSUE 2: THEOLOGICAL FORMATION, IDENTITY AND PRACTICE

- (130) Theological understandings and identity of Lutheran churches are contextually understood, determined and lived out in very different ways within a global communion and can be potentially divisive. Much more concerted effort needs to be made to create the space and provide the expertise for deepening theological understandings and exchanges that reinforce our commitments and our identity as a distinct faith-based communion. A transparent and open sharing of views and perspectives, where there is opportunity to listen and be challenged by one another, is truly an expression of communion.
- (131) There is an immediate need for nurturing the theological formation (formal and informal), Lutheran identity, perspectives and practices (worship, pastoral care, advocacy for justice, the care for creation) of the members in the communion, especially at the congregational level. Lutheran identity is an urgent concern in many parts of the communion and therefore the renewed LWF needs to focus more on theological formation, education and capacity building.
- (132) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that strategic priority be given to:

- a) strengthening the capacity and synergies of theological institutions used by member churches;*
- b) increasing networking between the theological institutions and exploring the possibility of new instruments for the purposes of enhancing and strengthening Lutheran identity, training, formation and capacity building; and*
- c) establishing a consultative body in the LWF for theological institutions and making the required amendment in the LWF Bylaws.*

ISSUE 3: THE ROLE OF REGIONAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE LUTHERAN COMMUNION

- (133) The Eighth Assembly concluded that the communion of churches in the regions would be expressed through intensified use of existing structures and programs in the Federation and among the member churches. The Assembly authorized the configuration of the worldwide constituency into seven regions. This was not meant to “regionalize” the communion. The Assembly chose to use the language of “regional expressions of communion” rather than that of “regionalization of the communion.” The seven regions were encouraged to develop at their own pace, with a minimal emphasis on anything structural. Nevertheless, even with the minimal structures encouraged in the 1990 renewal, the churches in the regions have developed forms of organization and expression that suit their contexts and settings (for example, the Lutheran Council in Africa (soon to be established), the Lutheran Council in Asia, the Communication Committee for Lutheran Minority Churches in Europe (KALME) etc).

- (134) These regional expressions are established by the member churches in the region and are accountable to them. Recommendations and concerns that emerge from regional gatherings sometimes find their way to decision-making bodies. Yet, there are no clear mechanisms for follow-up and accountability to the LWF Council. What is lacking is a constitutional mandate of regional decisions and formal participation within the communion. This makes the role of regional gatherings tenuous and limits their further development. The churches in the regions where the implementation of programs of mission and diakonia are concentrated must therefore be given the task to propose an effective way of arranging such organizations, including possible partnerships with ecumenical bodies in the region.
- (135) The various activities and initiatives in the regions give expression to living out the dynamic reality of being communion within the regions. There is a need to formalize the status of regional expressions as *organs* rather than instruments of the global communion.

- (136) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the required amendments be made in the LWF Constitution and Bylaws so that the consultative role of regional expressions, such as proposing items for Council agendas, preparing the slates for Council election by the Assembly, and other areas, be adequately defined. The contributions from the regional expressions are made through the vice presidents of the relevant regions.

ISSUE 4: MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF ORDAINED MINISTRY

- (137) The ministry of the ordained provides a concrete example of the challenges arising out of life in communion. Pulpit and altar fellowship has, since the Budapest Assembly in 1984, been declared among the members of the communion, and this includes a mutual recognition in principle of the ordained ministries of the member churches. However, there is a need for a specific formal statement of mutual recognition of ordained ministries within the LWF, both at the global, constitutional level, and the member churches.
- (138) Several member churches have entered into bilateral or multilateral, confessional or ecumenical, agreements with other churches for the mutual recognition of ordained ministries. However, no universal agreement or mechanism exists at present for such mutual recognition among the member churches of the LWF, which are de facto in communion with each other. It should be mentioned in this connection that for Lutherans, ordination is in principle not only for service in a particular congregation or church, but in the church universal.
- (139) The focus here is on the recognition of the ordained ministry itself, i.e. the validity of the ordination to the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* (CA 5). Member churches all have their standards and procedures by which suitability for ministry is determined. Levels of education vary widely from one member church to the next. Facility in language is necessary if ministers are to communicate effectively. Cultural factors can render an otherwise qualified candidate ineffective in a given situation. Therefore, even though an individual's ordination should be

recognized as universally valid, the local standards to exercise that ministry in a given context must be respected.

(140) Recommendation:

On the basis of the decision by the Seventh Assembly that being in communion in the LWF implies mutual recognition of the ordained ministry among the member churches, the Renewal Committee recommends that the member churches consider their own regulations so that the ordained ministers from sister churches within the communion may be formally recognized and installed for service without re-ordination whenever the receiving churches find such service desirable and appropriate.

ISSUE 5: FUTURE ASSEMBLIES

(141) The Assembly shall remain the principal authority of the communion, and is given the primary legislative and policy-making function. It is therefore a truly constituted body of representatives from every member church in the communion. According to the present Constitution, assemblies are held every six years. This implies that they are not *conventions* or one-time, disconnected, *stand-alone-events*. They are rather regular meetings that provide opportunities for the membership and others to worship, consult, celebrate the commonwealth of gifts, inspire one another and discuss issues confronting the communion. Actions by the LWF Assembly are not binding for the member churches, unless a commonly agreed request for such an action is made by them.

(142) As a confessional communion that is an integral part of the ecumenical movement, the LWF is committed to work with the WCC and other CWCs for broader ecumenically-shaped assemblies.

(143) For several years, the LWF has engaged in the ongoing discussions concerning wider ecumenical assemblies. A Discernment Committee established by the WCC presented its recommendations to the WCC Central Committee in August 2009.

(144) The main model explored allows CWCs to hold gatherings with their own defined character within expanded spaces provided within the framework of WCC assemblies.

(145) The WCC Assembly Planning Committee has been instructed by the Central Committee to develop a design for the utilization of expanded space. (See annex 2)

A separate LWF agenda could be established for the expanded spaces in order to honor the required legal obligations of the LWF (i.e. election of the President and Council members, admission of new members, receiving the General Secretary's report on behalf of the Council etc.).

(146) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that:

- 1) *the LWF Assembly be affirmed, in keeping with the LWF Constitution, as the principal authority of the communion, and the primary legislative and policy-making body in the LWF, with representatives from every member church in the communion; and that*
- 2) *the LWF consider concretely the recommendations of the WCC Central Committee concerning future assemblies, with possible expanded spaces for CWCs, preparing – if relevant and required – amendments in the Constitution and Bylaws so that LWF assemblies (with their own defined character) may in the future be held within expanded spaces provided within the framework of WCC assemblies.*

ISSUE 6: THE ROLES OF THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENTS AND CHAIRPERSON OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

- (147) In keeping with the ecclesial character and global structure of the communion and its regional expressions, the LWF needs to consider reshaping the functions and roles of the President and the Vice Presidents. The President should be an ordained church leader and the chief spokesperson of the LWF as a communion of churches. The Vice Presidents will be associated with the regional expressions.
- (148) In the past (prior to the establishment of the secretariat) the Treasurer managed, on a voluntary basis, the financial affairs and many other tasks for the LWF. With the establishment of the secretariat, a financial executive staff person (director) was appointed to be responsible for the financial affairs. The title “Treasurer” was however retained despite the change in the functions of the Treasurer. The present recommended name change from “Treasurer” to “Chairperson of the Finance Committee” is a friendly amendment that recognizes the changed conditions within which the LWF operates and which parallels the way most similar organizations conduct their affairs.

ISSUE 6.1: THE ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

- (149) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the following description of the role of the President be considered and acted upon:

The President is elected by the Assembly from the general membership of the member churches. The mode of election is described in the Bylaws. The President, an ordained leader in her or his own church, represents the LWF. The LWF President does not represent a particular region. Presidents should be elected successively from the different regions of the communion taking into account a need for rotation. The primary role of the President is to chair the Assembly, the meetings of the Council and of the Officers. The President, as the elected representative of the Assembly, provides the leadership under which the Council carries out its mandate. The President is the chief spokesperson of the Assembly and the Council and together with the General Secretary, a public representative for the LWF. The form and functions of the office are described in the Terms of Reference.

ISSUE 6.2: THE ROLE OF VICE PRESIDENTS

(150) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the following description of the role of the Vice Presidents be considered and acted upon, including making an amendment in the constitution:

The Vice Presidents, members of the Council, are elected by the Council upon recommendation of the relevant Pre-Assemblies. The Council will ensure that the team of Vice Presidents will be a combination of women and men. The Vice Presidents, lay or ordained leaders in their own churches, represent the LWF in the region to which their churches belong. The Vice Presidents may preside over regional meetings. They shall report on the life of their regions, on behalf of their regional expressions, to meetings of the Council.

ISSUE 6.3: THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

(151) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the following description of the role of the Chairperson of the Finance Committee (the Treasurer) be considered and acted upon, including making an amendment made in the Constitution (X: II).

The Chairperson of the Finance Committee shall be a member of the Council and elected by the Council. She or he shall chair the Finance Committee, interpret reports to the Council on financial matters, maintain such policies and limitations as pertain to financial operations, and assist the Council in setting policies for financial support from the member churches. It is the task of the Finance Committee to monitor the competence and accuracy of financial transactions and to recommend financial policies to the Council. The Chairperson of the Finance Committee shall be a member of the Meeting of Officers.

ISSUE 7: THE COUNCIL AND MEETING OF OFFICERS

- (152) The Council is a gathering of representatives of official bodies which are themselves legal entities on their own. The Council is a decision making body with a balanced representation of ordained/lay, men/women, young adults, agencies and theological institutions. It is characterized by mutuality, and its purpose is to ensure that the vision for the communion's mission is maintained.
- (153) The Meeting of Officers (Executive Committee) is a committee of the Council and is responsible for shaping the agenda of each Council meeting in consultation with the General Secretary.

ISSUE 7.1: THE COUNCIL

(154) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that that the following description of the Council be considered and acted upon, including making the required amendments in the Constitution (VIII):

The purpose of the Council is to ensure that the continuous interpretation of the communion's mission is maintained from one Assembly to the end of the next, and that it is communicated and implemented throughout the membership.

The role of the Council involves articulating, and taking action on strategy and policy, and monitoring the overall work of the communion office through the General Secretary. The Council must survey and assess the global environment in which it is called to mission, to set priorities, and to ensure that all aspects of its work receive appropriate attention.

The Council is to ensure clear communication of its priorities and a regular schedule of review and consultation with the General Secretary through the Meeting of Officers. It is the task of the Council to make its vision and expectations clear for the General Secretary, so that the accountability of the Council and the General Secretary is unambiguous and mutual.

The Council is further responsible for the approval of governance documents such as Bylaws, Rules of Procedure and other policy enactments. These documents establish the authority and limitations within which the General Secretary functions, and ensure legal compliance on behalf of the LWF.

The Council shall consist of 48 members nominated by the regions and elected by the Assembly. The Council may appoint up to 21 advisors.

The Council shall elect from within itself, with gender balance, seven Vice Presidents on a regional basis, and the Chairperson of the Finance Committee (Treasurer.) It shall elect the General Secretary and make Cabinet appointments upon the General Secretary's nomination. It shall also approve the annual statement of needs (SON) and budgets, appoint Council committees, and make all the necessary decisions regarding the LWF between assemblies as outlined in the Constitution, Bylaws and other governing documents of the LWF. These documents establish the authority and limitations within which the General Secretary functions, and ensure legal compliance on behalf of the LWF. (Cf. the LWF policies and regulations that govern appointments)

ISSUE 7.2: THE MEETING OF OFFICERS (THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE)

(155) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the following description of the Meeting of Officers be considered and acted upon, including making the required amendment in the Constitution (VIII):

The Meeting of Officers shall consist of the President, the Vice Presidents, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee and the Chairperson(s) of the Program and Project Committee(s). It serves as the Board of Trustees for the LWF and as a Personnel Committee in approving executive level staff appointments. The Meeting of Officers shall review the recommendations from the Program/Project committees for the Council's action, and otherwise receive and act upon reports as may be assigned by the Council. The role and function of the Meeting of Officers is described in the Terms of Reference.

ISSUE 8: THE GENERAL SECRETARY

- (156) It is important that the General Secretary be authorized as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to be a spokesperson of the LWF in order that he/she may be able to quickly respond to issues as they arise.
- (157) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that the following description of the role of the General Secretary be considered and acted upon, including making required amendments in the Constitution (XII):

The General Secretary is elected by the Council. The General Secretary is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and together with the President, a public representative and chief spokesperson for the LWF.

It is the General Secretary's responsibility to prepare, in cooperation with the Meeting of Officers, the meetings of the Council and to implement the visions and execute the decisions of the Assembly and the Council. The General Secretary shall maintain close connections with the member churches and church organizations for mission and diakonia, and implement strategic choices based on the Strategic Plan.

As the Chief Executive Officer, the General Secretary is responsible for reporting to the Council and Assembly on all activities of the communion office. The General Secretary is accountable to the strategic priorities established by the Council and accountable for strategic plans and management structures that will lead the communion toward its vision.

The office and functions of the General Secretary are described in the Terms of Reference.

ISSUE 9: THE COMMUNION OFFICE

- (158) The financing of the communion office will be a major challenge in the future. The global financial crisis will increase this challenge. The LWF currently has a projected deficit, which will increase in the coming years with churches, particularly those in industrialized countries, unable to increase their contributions due to changes in demography and other reasons. While the work of the communion should not be detracted or conditioned only by financial concerns, it is essential that the membership of the communion is aware of the difficult financial prospects of the LWF. For example, 80 percent of the A-budget income comes from only six countries.
- (159) The secretariat staff has been reduced from 124 in 1990 to 71 in 2009, which is a decrease of 42.7 percent, with little efforts by the assemblies and councils to lessen the tasks assigned to the staff. This is not a concern to be addressed by the LWF management alone, but also by the Council and the Assembly. Meeting the needs with the activity-based costing (ABC) can only be a partial solution to the problem. Within the renewed LWF, there must be a broadening of the funding basis and essential cost reduction activities to secure the work of the LWF over the next decade. The communion office and the core programs need to be financially sustained by all member churches as an expression of communion.
- (160) Recommendation:

The Renewal Committee recommends that a comprehensive process be put in place with the aim of ensuring that LWF programs and organizational structures are financially sustainable by the member churches. Such a process should be supported by an external consultant with proven expertise in this area. The process should consider:

- a) structure of the communion office;*
- b) staffing needs to support the programs of the communion;*
- c) the cost of governance structures;*
- d) the location of the communion office; and*
- e) communication mechanisms and structures.*