

July 16, 2010

LWF Youth Message to the General Assembly

We are 120 participants – including delegates, stewards and LWF staff from 6 continents and 45 countries, representing the youth of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches – who are attending the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC), 10-17 July 2010 in Dresden, Germany, organized by the LWF and hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony, Germany.

We come as youth representatives from all over the world from different cultures, traditions and spiritual vocations. Though we may be citizens coming from countries with different socio-economic and political situations we all live in a globally connected world and are united by faith in our Savior Jesus Christ who taught us to pray « Give us Today our Daily Bread ». We understand that sharing is the core of this petition, calling us to open our eyes, repent of our selfishness, and break down the walls of ignorance that are built between us.

As full members of the Lutheran Communion in the present, we are also conscious of our responsibility in connecting this generation with the future, which is why we seek the full inclusion of youth and their concerns in the life of the whole church and society. We are committed to taking part in facing our shared challenges within and through the Lutheran Communion. We are committed to respecting each other despite different theological positions on the same issue, and not only to respect the position of majority, but also to respect minority positions.

During our conference we discussed many issues, but among the most important and urgent from our point of view are (i) **sustainability** (especially focusing on climate change and food security), (ii) **gender justice**, and (iii) the role of youth in enhancing the **visibility of the LWF**.

Sustainability

As young Christians, we are acutely aware of the environmental, social and economic unsustainability of current patterns of behavior and practices in our global village. The context in which we live today fails to provide a balance between these three pillars of sustainability. The still ongoing global financial and economic crisis has shown us that there are serious concerns regarding the unconstrained accumulation of wealth of the few at the expense of the many. Greed is a challenge which lies behind the unsustainability of current practices and systems, and therefore must be confronted. Injustice between rich and poor, between developed and developing countries, has its origins in this source. We look for a future in which we all finally share our daily bread.

Because of unsustainable methods of production, not only humans are suffering from economic injustice but also God's precious creation. We have to find a new paradigm in which all three pillars of sustainability – society, economy and the environment – are

fully integrated, and in which the needs of today can be met without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore as young Christians, with a personal as well as ethical concern for the future, we are challenged to promote sustainable development in its economic, environmental and social aspects.

We address ourselves to the following different expressions of the global Lutheran communion:

- The Lutheran World Federation: Through the LWF the different Lutheran churches all over the world are connected, and are able to experience and learn from each others' reality. This expression of communion is a powerful tool for advocating globally. We ask the LWF to hold an experimental, virtual meeting of executives during the next four years in order to explore the feasibility of using virtual meetings, thereby saving economical and environmental resources.

- LWF Member Churches: Churches are responsible for raising awareness and for the education of their congregations in their own specific contexts. This includes materials with practical advice on how to change lifestyles as well as theological reinterpretations in support of more sustainable and eco-friendly patterns. Churches also have a responsibility to advocate with governments, corporations and other relevant actors for social, economic and environmental sustainability in policy and practice. We ask members of the Communion to purchase and promote fair-trade and sustainable products. We strongly recommend that member churches only invest in ethical and environmentally-friendly funds and investments. We encourage active share holding advocacy. In addition, we desire the LWF and its member churches to investigate new banking options-specifically focusing on ethical practices (like low corporate bonuses and not rewarding greed) and sustainability practices (like not contributing to the financial crisis).

- 11th LWF Assembly: We recommend that the Assembly adopt a public statement addressing greed and social, economic and environmental sustainability, food security in the context of climate change, and agro-ecological approaches to food production, distribution and consumption.

With regard to climate change and environmental sustainability, the proportional responsibility of nations must be taken into account, assuring that national investments in environmental protection and preservation should be according to the amount of pollution produced, recognizing also that the people of the developing nations are suffering the most from the impacts of global climate change.

Gender Justice

“Give us today our daily bread”. To us this means seeing all human beings as equals and

not tolerating the denigration of anyone's human dignity. We call upon the Communion to challenge systems and practices that limit the choices for men and women on the basis of gender. We young Lutheran people from many different geographical and cultural contexts believe that cultures and practices within both society and church that diminish the God-given dignity of women must be transformed. This includes traditional patriarchal systems and practices that prevent the emancipation of women. We recognize that in many such cases these systems and practices are sustained not only by the men who practice them, but also by women. We ask that the LWF calls on member churches to act on regional and individual, personal level to break this chain of habits.

We believe that the body is given by God and is sacred, and no one should be able to break that sanctity. We therefore think that it is important to help both women and men know their legal rights, to empower them in daily life, and to challenge especially domestic violence and the objectification of women's, children's and men's bodies. We ask the LWF to continue and strengthen its work to empower young women, and to expressly denounce the commercialization of the human body, particularly the bodies of women and children, in the media.

Many women and men around the world lack the opportunity to obtain an education. One example of that are women and girls who have to stay home to take care of their families. Women and girls have an equal right to education. When women and girls are denied access to education, the whole society is deprived of the potentials with which God has blessed them. We believe that women, men and young people should also be entitled to comprehensive sex education, in order to empower them for responsibility for their own bodies and sexuality.

We believe that in order to be a legitimate and credible voice for gender justice in society, the church must first and foremost achieve gender justice within its own structures and practices. This is also a matter of a faith commitment to respecting the God-given dignity of all people regardless of gender. We wish also to encourage further theological study on gender equality.

Therefore we strongly agree with the outcomes of the women's Pre-Assembly, especially on the subjects of vocational leadership, vocational gifts and ordination. As was stated in the women's Pre-Assembly, men and women are both made in God's image, and the wholeness of the Church requires both men and women to be included and to be enabled to fully live out their respective callings.

We affirm the LWF's longstanding policy for a minimum participation of 40% women in all LWF events and structures. But we are aware of an implementation gap, and consider that this quota should not be responded to in a merely tokenistic way, but out of a genuine commitment on the part of all member churches to gender justice within the church. We ask the Council to have the issue of gender justice as a standing item on the agenda. We call on the Assembly to urge member churches to re-commit to genuine, practical and effective implementation of LWF policies and decisions regarding

the full participation of women in the life of the church – and of the LWF communion – as well as in society.

LWF visibility and the role of youth

We recognize and appreciate the opportunities afforded by the LWF through the Pre-Assembly Youth Conferences, through the policy for 20% participation of youth in all LWF events and structures, and through other affirmative action and empowerment measures. We are excited by the possibilities and potential of being active participants in the global LWF communion of churches. But we are dismayed by the lack of knowledge and awareness of the LWF, its role and its work in our own churches and communities.

Among the strategic communication objectives, visibility has been identified as an important issue. Communication structures and practices for the broader and more effective sharing of information concerning the LWF and its work have been highlighted by youth as essential. In order to be active and constructive participants in the life of this communion, young Lutherans must be given the opportunities, resources and information to better understand the LWF structures and processes.

Lack of language diversity in the documents produced by the LWF is one of the major obstacles to greater visibility. We understand the budgetary constraints regarding translation. We ask that the Federation implement regional committees for translation of all documents into the official languages. Therefore the LWF shall implement official and volunteer translators chosen by the regions.

We young people offer our enthusiasm, energy and networking skills, to assist in raising the profile and visibility of the LWF. We want to be part of a better two-way communication between the LWF and the churches, the congregations and the wider society. We ask only for the opportunity and the forums to do this.

In order to ensure the legitimacy and accountability of youth representatives in the life of the LWF, more democratic and transparent processes for choosing youth delegates to LWF assemblies and conferences should be established within the churches. We do not wish to be mere numbers in a quota, but to be valuable and valued contributors to the life and work of this church family. Member churches should provide their designated representatives with the information and perspectives necessary to enable them to truly represent their churches in LWF contexts, and afford them the opportunity to provide feedback to the church governance structures and congregations.

The LWF renewal process envisages the establishment of regional conferences within the seven geographic areas. In order to help solve current and future challenges within our globalized and fast moving world, it becomes necessary to provide an effective and efficient platform of interaction. We ask LWF to consider creating permanent regional or sub-regional youth committees within each of the LWF regions. These committees should organize regular youth conferences on a regional level to help build a stronger

youth constituency for the LWF, and to enhance the engagement of youth with the LWF. We ask the LWF to encourage its member churches to use their former youth delegates and stewards in future preparations of their youth representatives.

Conclusion

Youth represent the most important potential for change in society. Young people are generally the first ones to challenge injustice and oppression and to envisage a different future- we should not forget that Jesus was about 30 years old. Young people have the skills that church structures and institutions may lack for communication and networking for change. Let us take the leadership that we are capable of taking, not only in the future, but here and now. Let us be the gifts to this communion that we know we can be.

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Psalm 24:1