

**Meeting between Representatives of
The International Lutheran Council (ILC) and
The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
Geneva, Switzerland 27 – 29 March 2012**

Communiqué

Representatives of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) met in Geneva, Switzerland, on 27 – 29 March 2012, as proposed by the “Memorandum of Understanding” they approved in March 2005. The memorandum was described as a legacy from our forebears to be built upon. There was consensus that this meeting would be based on it.

The memorandum states the expectation that ILC – LWF meetings be held on an annual basis, with a view to increased mutual understanding between the two Lutheran world bodies and their member churches. When relevant, the meetings receive and discuss reports on issues of tension perceived to result from activities, statements or policies of member churches of either of the two organizations or agencies related to them.

However, this was the first meeting since 2008. The 2009 meeting was to meet in the Philippines – but local circumstances required the meeting to be postponed. An informal, non-minuted meeting took place at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Assembly in Minneapolis in August 2009 with LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, ILC Chairman Rev. Dr Gerald Kieschnick, ILC Executive Secretary Rev. Dr Sam Nafzger and LWF Assistant to the General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, Dr Kathryn Johnson. Then with changes of leadership in both the LWF and ILC, meetings were again postponed in 2010 and 2011.

The 2012 meeting, based on the “Memorandum of Understanding” intends to resume the pattern and expectation of annual meetings between the ILC and LWF.

Following introductions in which each participant shared a brief summary of their faith journey, reports were presented by the ILC and LWF on their activities and involvements since the last meeting.

Rev. Dr Ralph Mayan reported for the ILC. He shared a history of the ILC, that in 1958, following an LWF Assembly, some Lutheran churches decided to meet and ask, “How do we relate to the LWF?” Their meetings led to the formation of the ILC, not as opposition to the LWF, but as an association of churches gathered in a forum, or arena, to encourage, support and share with one another and to study theological issues together.

The 23rd ILC Conference met in Korea in 2009 on *In Christ: Living Life to the Full*. Its purpose was to strengthen and care for one another, to help pastors in their health and their ministry. At that conference, a statement on homosexuality and the church was adopted, *Same-Gender Relationships and the Church*.

The 24th ILC Conference will meet in Canada in September 2012, on the theme *What Does this Mean? How do the Scriptures Speak to Crises Facing Confessional Lutherans Today?* The keynote speaker, Dr Kettner, will address confessional interpretations of four themes: ordination of women, homosexuality and the church, preaching and living the Word. Consideration of the LWF Mennonite Action will take place at this conference as well as the administrative future of the ILC.

The Fourth World ILC Seminaries Conference on *Confessional Lutheran Identity in the Light of Changing Christian Demographics* was held in Ft Wayne, Indiana USA in 2010.

The major change of ILC leadership has been a challenge. With the election of Rev. Dr Matthew Harrison as Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) President in 2010, Dr Gerald Kieschnick had to resign as ILC Chairman, for the ILC chairman needs to be the elected leader of one of the member churches. As Vice Chairman, Bishop Voigt became chairman. After 18 years of service, Dr Sam Nafzger retired as Executive Secretary at the same time and Dr Ralph Mayan was asked to serve as interim. Both Dr Mayan and Bishop Voigt are serving as interim leaders until new elections are held in 2012. An exploratory committee is considering administrative needs of the ILC and where the administration would be based.

Encouraged by the ILC, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church has engaged in conversations with the Roman Catholic Church in Germany on worship, church and Eucharistic fellowship, baptism and justification. Results of these conversations will be shared with the 2012 ILC Conference.

The “Wittenberg Project” was introduced by Rev. Dr Albert Collver as a cooperative project between the LCMS and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, administered by the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg. A building has been purchased in Wittenberg and plans are being developed for its use.

Rev. Martin Junge reported on the LWF and gave a brief account of its history since 1947 and the four principles upon which the LWF was founded: Diakonia, Mission, Theology and Ecumenism. He described the LWF as being on a journey from Federation to Communion.

There was a change of leadership in 2009 when the LWF Council elected Rev. Junge as the new LWF General Secretary. The Council issued an invitation to the ILC to join the LWF in the “Mennonite Action” that was coming to fruition after years of dialogue.

At the Eleventh LWF Assembly in 2010, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land was elected LWF President. The Mennonite Action of repentance and reconciliation proved to be a profoundly moving experience and resulted in unexpected fruits including a new trilateral dialogue on Baptism involving LWF, Roman Catholics and Mennonites. The study process on Family, Marriage and Sexuality adopted in 2007 was given time to continue conversations in member churches and regions. At the Assembly, various centrifugal forces of potentially divisive issues were met by the centripetal unity around worship, Word and sacrament.

In 2010, the LWF Executive Committee appointed a special committee for *Luther 2017: 500 Years of Reformation* to begin plans for a global commemoration of the anniversary.

The 2011 Council meeting adopted a five-year LWF Strategy with three priority areas of engagement and a strong commitment to church and to the world.

The 2012 Council meeting in Colombia has as its theme *Together for a Just, Peaceful and Reconciled World*. The Biblical hermeneutic of Luke’s Emmaus story will shape conversation on family, marriage and sexuality. Preparations for the Twelfth Assembly in 2017 will get underway.

A wide range of potential plans for observing the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation were shared. Three features for LWF were identified: a global dimension, ecumenical engagement and affirmation that the LWF communion is made up not only of churches *of* the Reformation, but churches *in* reformation.

There was considerable discussion on a number of theological topics: the different expressions of faithfulness to Scriptures, the meaning of “confessional Lutherans”, human sexuality, ministry and biblical hermeneutics.

A number of local situations were discussed in which tensions have occurred, including in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and the United States of America. The meeting encouraged ongoing communication in all these situations. In addition, it was agreed to send a letter of encouragement to the Lutheran Church in the Philippines from the LWF and ILC. Acknowledging the value of the global conversation, member churches were encouraged to look for opportunities for interaction at the local and regional levels.

A number of positive developments among member churches were highlighted for continuing action, including conversations about possible common commemorations of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation through seminars, educational emphases and publications. It was agreed to share continuing plans and update one another.

Both ILC and LWF thanked one another and affirmed the positive spirit of the meeting in which frank and candid conversation could be shared about mutual concerns, while building upon a common Lutheran heritage in Christ's Church. The value of these meeting for direct mutual conversation as well as of contact with local leaders and their churches was agreed.

Bishop Voigt suggested Wittenberg as a possible site for the 2013 meeting, for which 12 – 14 November may be possible dates, depending on ILC leadership elected in September.

The meeting was co-chaired by Rev. Martin Junge (LWF General Secretary) and Dr Ralph Mayan (Interim ILC Executive Secretary).

Participants from the ILC included Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt (Interim ILC Chairman) and Dr Albert Collver III (LCMS – Director of Church Relations, in representation of LCMS President, Dr Matthew Harrison).

Participants from the LWF were National Bishop Susan C. Johnson (LWF Vice-President for North America,) and Rev. Norbert Denecke (General Secretary of the German National Committee of the LWF). LWF staff based in Geneva who joined the meeting included Rev. Dr Musa Filibus (Director, LWF Department for Mission and Development), Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata (LWF Study Secretary for Theology in the Department for Theology and Public Witness), Rev. Dr Patricia Cuyatti (LWF Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean in the Department for Mission and Development) and Rev. Dr Stephen Larson (Interim Coordinator of the LWF Department for Theology and Public Witness).

Of all the participants, only Dr Ralph Mayan and National Bishop Susan C. Johnson had attended previous ILC – LWF meetings.

This communiqué shall serve as the official record of the meeting.

Geneva, Switzerland
29 March 2012