

European Pre-Assembly, 31 January – 3 February 2017, Höör, Sweden

In preparation for the 12th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Namibia in May this year, delegates and advisers of the three European regions met in Höör, hosted by the Church of Sweden.

The sermon ‘Recognised by his wounds’, in the opening worship guided participants through the meeting. Archbishop Antje Jackelén preached on John 20:19-31, the story of the disciples encountering Christ appearing in the meeting after resurrection.

Her message was: standing before God (Coram Deo) we turn to the human needs. Liberated by God’s grace, a communion in Christ living and working together for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

“There is more to being sent than being excellent and doing great. ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you,’ means that there are going to be wounds. We are always going to be hurt and wounded, and we will make others feel wounded. Maybe in the time ahead more than before, since four dangerous P’s are affecting our countries these days, and hence also our churches: *polarization*, *populism*, *protectionism* and, with the word of the year 2016 (according to Oxford Dictionary), *post-truth*. We will have to resist, and thus we will feel the pain of our own wounds as well as the pain of others’ wounds.”

We as churches will respond to the four P’s as follows: we will proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ bringing people together, being on eye-to-eye level with a person, meeting others beyond borders and listening to the contextual stories, speaking out to each other, even when the content is uncomfortable. Churches should not contribute to fear but be a positive force to meet the fear that we know that people are struggling with.

Overall churches should continue their longstanding effort to communicate and educate. We as churches have a long experience in living together and act in solidarity (conviviality). Yet we recognise that Europe is not a homogeneous unity both in the secular as well as in ecclesiastical world. When looking self-critical at the current state of Europe, national boundaries could enhance a risk. It is a chance for the churches to overcome nationalism and those borders: Europe is much more than the European Union.

Together with the women in our churches (Women in Church and Society) we state that churches should condemn all types of violence against women, men and children and affirm the dignity of all human beings created in the image of God. Churches can play a positive role in promoting justice and building bridges of reconciliation between different religious and ethnic groups. Ordained ministry and leadership are a call from God, both women and men are called.

We are reminded that Christ has redeemed the whole world not just humans, the earth is the Lord’s. Salvation cannot be earned by work or deeds, we receive it by grace. Through gratitude for that gift we are freed to take action for the caring of creation.

Our overall strong recommendation is to develop robust ethical guidelines in order to unpack the not-for-sale themes: salvation, creation, human beings.

Some remarks to the subthemes:

Salvation - not for sale: We will proclaim the liberating gospel of Jesus. The doctrine of justification is fundamental to our Lutheran heritage. We are saved and receive our dignity not by our own acts, but by the grace of God. The gift of salvation needs to be rediscovered. Thus it can call people to believe in God. There is an increasing pressure especially on young people in society of 'not being good enough'. We as churches have to show and to practice what salvation can look like also as a daily experience in life. So that we are freed and loved.

Creation – not for sale: In the light of ongoing Reformation of the church (semper reformanda) we respond to fundamental questions of human life and develop spiritual and practical guidelines in order to overcome consumerism and materialism. We as LWF want to work on ourselves and rethink our consumption patterns in order for LWF churches to become role models for sustainability and for the accountable treatment of God's creation. Initiatives on local and congregational levels that aim a change in attitude should be encouraged and supported. Special focus should continuously being set on issues in regard to climate justice.

Human beings – not for sale: In the light of the crucified Lord we are freed. Even though it seems as if every human being has a price-tag in today's economic system. The pressure for rising profits due to the financialisation of the economy is leading to the growing mistreatment of people. Human beings are being exploited for economic reasons. And this leads to trafficking and the growing marginalisation of people with disabilities, older people, and many more. We see the rising inequality in the world as a challenge to the churches and the LWF.

We ask the LWF to provide a framework and facilitate a process, to analyse what it means to live in significantly changing societies like Europe, in order to share our prayers, vulnerability and strengths, listen, learn, seek council with each other, discuss theology and envision reformation as on-going as faithful disciples of Jesus in our time.

We experience the LWF as a growing communion of churches and therefore we would wish to begin to explore whether the time is right to rename ourselves as a communion.

With so many people displaced and uprooted as either refugees, asylum seekers or migrants we as European churches are called to recognise, welcome and support them. We call upon ourselves to partner with newcomers and migrant churches, as well as with people who are homeless or unemployed.

We continue to pray for those persecuted because of religion in all parts of the world, especially for Christians in Syria and other countries in the Middle-East. Freedom of religion and belief should apply for all.

We are looking forward to meet the worldwide Lutheran communion in Namibia and to joyfully mark 500 years Reformation together; harvesting the fruits of the liberation by God's grace.