LWF ERM 2026 Augsburg – Summary Report

Summary Report – European Regions' Meeting – Augsburg, Germany

'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3)

Coming together from LWF's three European regions, we met in Augsburg, Germany, from 6 to 9 October to begin reflecting on the journey towards the LWF Fourteenth Assembly and the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. Meeting in this historic city, known for its commitment to peace, we visited sites connected to the Reformation and engaged with the theme 'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3), as we wrestled with the contemporary legacy of the Augsburg Confession.

During an ecumenical opening worship service in St Anne's Church, where the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in 1999, Bishop Christian Kopp of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria described the search for unity of the Spirit as "the central calling for us Christians," urging us to "hold fast to the bond of peace, strengthening and renewing it every single day."

During fellowship, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Augsburg Dr Bertram Meier in his letter spoke about the urgent need for peace and unity in a continent where "the foundations of European co-existence - democracy, respect for human dignity and solidarity - are once again being called into question." Underlining the "spirit of hope and ecumenical fraternity" that inspires the journey towards the Augsburg Confession anniversary, he said he hoped the jubilee could become "an opportunity to deepen our bonds and accelerate our efforts to restore unity."

After learning more about the local, regional and national German context, we listened to Bible studies by Indigenous Bishop Paneeraq Siegstad Munk from Greenland and parish pastor Rev. Szabolcs Nagy from Hungary. They offered perspectives on the interconnectedness of all humans with God's creation, as well as the temptation to create political or religious uniformity, thus suffocating diversity and silencing the voices of minority groups.

Church leaders from our three regions shared insights into the particular challenges facing their congregations, including polarizing debates over human sexuality, rising discrimination and violence against women, a backlash against women's ordination, or the need for stronger public witness of the church in a climate of rising right-wing populism and divisive political rhetoric. Small group discussions echoed these themes, enabling every participant to share examples of the struggles their churches are facing, as well as the signs of hope in their midst.

We heard from three experts on the Augsburg Confession – a document intended to set out the faith of the Reformers while preserving the unity of the church – and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification – which overcame a key theological division between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. We also heard about the LWF's initial planning for the engagement of member churches in the journey towards 2030. In the lively discussions that followed, we explored a central question of what confessing means in a contemporary, ecumenical context and how a 16th century document can be made more accessible and interesting for today's audiences. Our renewed encounter with the Augsburg Confession has left us energised and greatly inspired.

Five participants from different regions and backgrounds took part in an intergenerational storytelling session, allowing them to ask questions and share deeply personal stories of how the

Augsburg Confession and its legacy continue to affect their lives and their churches today. Reflections ranged from ways of sharing what it means to be church through the breaking of bread with the wider ecumenical family, to reconciliation with our Mennonite siblings and discovering our Lutheran identity through exploring the Augsburg Confession. This session initiated further discussions about how we handle our unity in diversity.

During the meeting, groups visited various locations around the city which illustrate the ways in which Augsburg continues to nurture ecumenical and interfaith relations, as well as pioneering models of reconciliation and care for neighbors in need. These included a visit to the 'Fuggerei', the world's first social housing project which still provides accommodation for those in need today, and a walking tour organized by the Peace Office of the City of Augsburg. We were warmly welcomed to the Town Hall by the new Lord Mayor Dr Florian Freund, and shared evening prayer in the tradition of Franciscan spirituality inside the Barfüßerkirche. Throughout this day, we were blessed by the presence of a visiting delegation from the Christian Federation of Malaysia.

On the final day, we heard about the LWF Mutual Responsibility Framework, which aims to define guidance and direction for member churches to deepen communion relations and to promote mutually respectful relationships. The framework seeks to highlight the importance of jointly recognizing the Augsburg Confession as one of the principal doctrinal documents binding us together as a Communion.

We concluded our meeting with discussions in regional groups and presentations from LWF European vice-presidents in the plenary to sum up their discussions. Participants expressed gratitude to the Steering Committee for their work in preparing the meeting. We deeply appreciated the longtime commitment of our Regional Secretary Rev. Dr Ireneusz Lukas, who will conclude his service at the end of January 2027.