LWF President Urges Commitment to a Sustainable and Strong LWF in the Future: "What Shall Be Our Witness?"

GENEVA, 23 October 2009 (LWI) - In a report highlighting the rapidly changing contexts of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its respective member churches, LWF President Bishop Mark S. Hanson today urged the organization's Council to make decisions that reflect commitment to "a sustainable and strong LWF going into the future."

Presenting his oral report to the Council meeting 22-27 October at Chavannes-de-Bogis near Geneva, Switzerland, Hanson asked the LWF member church representatives to focus on the legacy of the governing body's leadership.

The current Council was elected at the 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, and is due to complete its work at the July 2010 Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany.

Hanson is presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

"What shall be our witness? What story shall we tell?" were Hanson's opening questions in his report, which noted the important issues on this year's agenda such as the election of the next LWF General Secretary, and response to the Renewal Committee report.

The LWF president affirmed his commitment "that when we leave this meeting, we will have clarity and transparency about the recommendations we are making, including a timetable and process for developing the language of proposed changes to governing documents." He stressed the need to be clear about what decisions would be left to future elected Council members and the Geneva Secretariat.

Decreasing Financial Resources

On issues that have impact on the organization's finances, the president noted that while the LWF had exercised responsible fiduciary leadership despite the global economy and serious changes in the financial resources of member churches, the organization faces greater challenges currently and in the future.

Citing the ELCA's situation, Hanson pointed out that the church would be facing a significant decrease in its budget from which support for the LWF comes. "We are experiencing a 30-year trend
in decreased membership and giving to support the work of the ELCA beyond its local congregations. ... Furthermore, we do not know the budgetary implications of our recent decision on human sexuality," he told the Council meeting.

Hanson challenged the Council to give high priority to the generation of new resources as part of its responsibility. "Too often we have left this [task] to the Secretariat or some member churches rather than exercising leadership ourselves," he said. He called for a more specific strategy in raising funds for the LWF Endowment Fund.

The president urged member churches to address how discussions and decisions on marriage, family and human sexuality would impact the life, work and unity of the LWF. He explained that the ELCA had already taken significant actions on human sexuality in recent months.

He said "rather than making (issues on) marriage, family and human sexuality the cause for distancing ourselves from one another in the LWF, let us resolve to engage in deeper dialogue on the theological and ethical issues raised in our current discussions and decisions by member churches." He pointed out that the LWF task force report on Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality and the Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue offered helpful insights and suggestions.

Leadership and Accompaniment

The president called for a renewed commitment to women in leadership and applauded four member churches that recently voted to ordain women. "We need to give strong leadership as Council members affirming and admonishing one another so that gender justice becomes a growing reality throughout the LWF," he said.

He urged sustained engagement as peacemakers and called for renewed resolve for accompaniment especially in urgent contexts such as the Middle East, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land seeks an end to occupation, cessation of violence and lasting and just peace.

The president’s report underscored continued commitment to diaconal work; eco-justice and environmental work; and interfaith engagement.

Hanson expressed the hope that the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification this month would be an opportunity for the communion to renew its
"commitment to dialogue so that one day the unity we have with Christians throughout baptism might be experienced together at Christ's table of the Eucharist."

He said he thanked God for the leadership provided by the General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, and other staff in Geneva and across the world. "It is truly a joy and honor to serve with you," he added. (747 words)

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Around 75 representatives from LWF member churches and partner organizations are attending this year's Council meeting at Chavannes de Bogis near Geneva, Switzerland. An additional 90 registered participants include invited guests, stewards, interpreters and translators, media persons and LWF staff.

The 49-member Council is the LWF's governing body, meeting every 12-18 months between Assemblies held every six years. The current Council was appointed at the July 2003 Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada. It comprises the President, Treasurer as well as lay and ordained persons, representing the different LWF regions.

The Council host church, the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein has 6,818 members, and has been an LWF member church since 1979. It is headed by Ms Dagmar Magold.

(From LWI)