



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

Office of the
General Secretary

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To
Delegates to the
Triennial General Convention
Lutheran Church in Australia

Geneva, October 2018

It is with memories filled with thanksgiving and joy that I write this letter to greet you on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of your Triennial General Convention taking place in Rosehill Gardens, Sidney NSW.

Only a bit over a year ago I had the privilege of visiting your church. During that visit I was able to grasp the way you express the good news of Christ in your particular context. I remember with fondness the encounters with those engaged in the impressive educational and diaconal work of the church, or those working among the aborigine's communities.

I remember the worship in Shepparton, where we received the word of God among a beautifully diverse community of local and immigrant worshippers, yet all of them united in Christ. "This is all about the new creation in Christ", I thought while rejoicing over the new citizenship of equals into which Christ calls the baptized, a citizenship acquired once and forever by his precious blood at the cross. In Christ, God wiped away those differences, which for us humans at times tend to become so defining.

During my stay among you I was also able to better understand the history of your church, which has its roots in two different church bodies that came together to form the Lutheran Church in Australia. Although a decades-old merger, I understood that the process of growing together is still unfolding.

You are not alone in that journey, as we all continue always becoming who we are already by God's word. It is in the nature of our Baptismal vocation: We can't escape that tension between history and future, between old and new orders, between holding fast to what was given to us by our forefathers and foremothers, and opening up to God's promises that always point us into the future.

This is what we grasped as a global communion of churches as we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation: we do have both, a past and a future. We challenged the notion that for Lutheran churches the glorious days are all behind us.

I want to offer a word of encouragement to you today, knowing about the challenges posed by secularism, with new laws squeezing the church into difficult places, with hardship to reach the young: God's story with the Lutheran Church in Australia is not over. Hence, rooted in your past journey, I encourage you to remain open to receive and to embrace what God may be doing anew among you. Because God is alive, you should indeed have lots of expectations for your church!

I have understood from the letter of invitation that one of the agenda items at your Triennial General Convention is to revisit the matter of calling women to the office of the public ministry. I want to express appreciation to the church for continuing to ponder this issue, for taking this discussion up once more, for the excellent materials

you have produced to support your internal discernment process and for being open to God's word and the movement of the Spirit.

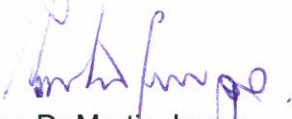
The position of the Lutheran World Federation on this matter is widely known. Our commitment towards the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry has been a journey, at whose crossroads your church stands today. As we continue living into the call of communion relationships, we believe no church can be forced to do something it believes the gospel prevents it from doing, and no church can be forced to wait and withhold, when it understands that the gospel is compelling it to move. In exposing ourselves to the tension of embracing each other despite our different stances on a matter, we take guidance from Paul's request to the Galatians: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

This is the mystery of ecclesial relationships: they compel us to embrace whom we recognize as deeply bound to us, albeit so different. They prevent us from seeking like-mindedness as a foundation of our unity, which is an approach that will always claim new victims by excluding others, thereby further fragmenting the body into which we were formed.

I hope and pray that the Convention may find a way to embrace the legacies and identities that shape your past, so that you find ways of jointly grow deeper into the mystery of becoming the church you are by God's word, and the future into which God is calling you.

I pray for your Triennial General Convention, for the discernment and decisions you will make, for the Triune God nurturing your relationships, your speech and your listening, your love for each other and your hope in Christ who calls us forward in faith. Be assured that the LWF, of which you are an associate member, stands with you in prayer and solidarity.

In Christ,



Rev. Dr Martin Junge
General Secretary