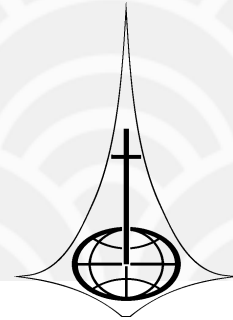


To the LWF Member Churches  
and National Committees

# LWF Sunday Celebration of LWF Sunday 2002



*July 2002*

Dear Friends,

Following the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1995, it has been a tradition in the Lutheran communion to celebrate an "LWF Sunday" annually. On this Sunday, preferably around the date of Reformation Sunday, all churches of the Lutheran communion are invited to celebrate together, to pray to God, to be guided by God's Word, and to intercede for the churches, society and the whole world. Such celebration makes LWF Sunday a magnificent opportunity for a spiritual experience in the full sense of being churches in communion.

This year's celebration material was prepared by the LWF member churches in Latin America. The general theme for the material is:

### **"Churches as Communities of Life in the Midst of Diverse Cultural Contexts"**

The theme is based on one of the Village Group issues of the 1997 LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, China, "Churches as Living Communities in Diverse Cultural Settings." The proposal from the Latin American churches, however, is original in its own right. By providing a more sociological interpretation of the term "culture" and defining it as the combination of attitudes and ways of understanding one's own reality, the Latin American churches invite us to reflect on

– a culture of discrimination (e.g. HIV/AIDS)

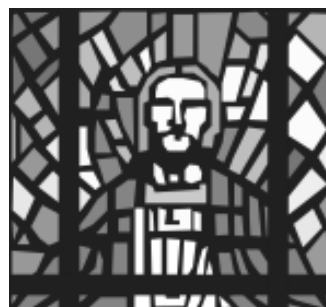
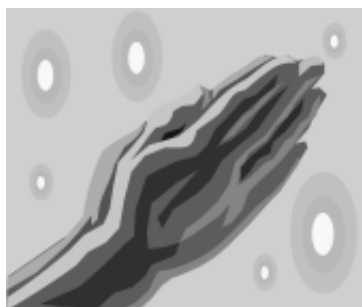
- a culture of violence (e.g. urban violence, displacement of people)
- a culture of exclusion (e.g. economic globalization).

Seen from this perspective, the issue acquires a quite different dimension. It is no longer limited to local situations that are sometimes very difficult to understand from a distance. Presented in this way the issue relates concretely to each of our realities. Indeed, discrimination, violence and exclusion are not phenomena peculiar to Latin America but, unfortunately, are present everywhere in the world. What is the role of our churches in the midst of these diverse cultural contexts? How can an "evangelical" ministry—in the true sense of the word—be carried out in these contexts? How can a culture of solidarity, peace and inclusiveness be articulated amid contexts that are often so hostile?

I hope that the worship material provided by the Latin American churches, together with the witness of people living in the region and endeavoring to serve God there, will serve as an inspiration to celebrate LWF Sunday in each of the churches belonging to our communion.

Yours sincerely,

Ishmael Noko  
General Secretary  
The Lutheran World Federation



The member churches of the LWF in Latin America are happy to offer the Lutheran communion some reflections on the subject of "Churches as Communities of Life in the Midst of Diverse Cultural Contexts".

The subject has been presented in a way which could be used for special services but also for group meetings. We would like to encourage people to find participatory forms both for celebrating worship and for working in groups. Moreover, the two approaches can be combined by inviting groups to engage in discussion on one or all of the subjects of reflection during a service. It would also be possible to give individual sections to different groups in the congregation for reflection, leading up to a service on

the Sunday at which each group could present its ideas and conclusions. Indeed, there are an infinite number of possibilities for celebrating this LWF Sunday!

Each section contains a testimony from life, a series of questions for personal reflection by the preacher or as community reflection, and a proposal of Bible texts to read or on which to preach. All of this is intended to serve as helpful suggestions rather than rules to be strictly followed.

At the end, we offer a brief outline for a service of worship.

The member churches of the LWF in Latin America wish you a blessed LWF Sunday.

## THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF LIFE IN THE MIDST OF A CULTURE OF DISCRIMINATION

In Latin America, as in other parts of the world, stigmatization and discrimination are a reality. This is particularly obvious to people who are carriers of HIV/AIDS. A Christian who lives with the virus wrote the following prayer.

### Testimony from life

*Omnipotent God, creator of life, sustainer of all that is good, my companion in the midst of the suffering of this earth, hear my prayer in my isolation and estrangement from all help and all truth...*

*HIV/AIDS has made me feel separated from You. I ask, Why me? What have I done to deserve this? ... Help me to remember that You do not punish creation with illnesses but that You are Emmanuel, God with us. You are as close to me as my breathing.*

*AIDS has caused a separation between the body I knew and the body I have now. Help me to remember that I am more than my body and that, although it is very painful for me to see what has happened, I am more than my body... I am a part of You and You of me.*

*AIDS has cut me off from friends, family and colleagues at work... Oh God, help me and help them to understand that I have not changed. I continue to be a friend, son and colleague because our love for one another is Your love for us... Help them to overcome their fear, shame and guilt... Help them all to understand and accept my situation.*

*AIDS has cut me off from society, my working life and my community... It is painful that they no longer see me as they used to... Forgive them for their blindness in judging me because they do so out of ignorance and fear... Help me not to be furious with them.*

*AIDS has cut me off from my church... Help the church to renew its ministry with the "least among*

*them" to reach out to me and others like me... Help them to stop judging me and to continue loving me as You have always done.*

*Help me and all of them to understand that the Church as the Body of Christ is hurt by division, separation and estrangement.*

*God of my life and God of my death, help me to know You as you were, are and will be.*

*Amen*

*(from: Pastoral Ecu mica y Solidaria de Personas viviendo con el VIH/SIDA, Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

*Recursos lit rgicos. Liturgia de compromiso y esperanza)*

### Questions for personal or community reflection

What feelings do you have when you read this prayer?

Do you think that the church should cut off people who are carriers of HIV/AIDS? Explain your answer.

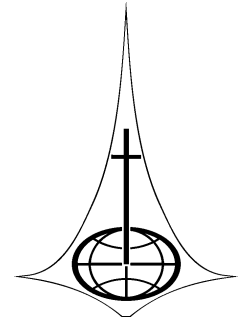
How can we get beyond the culture of discrimination in church and in society?

### "But I say to you..."

(Texts from the Bible for reflection and/or preaching)

Luke 19:1-10

Matthew 7:1-5



## THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF LIFE IN THE MIDST OF A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

Latin America is caught in a real spiral of violence. In homes there is a very high rate of domestic violence, the victims of which are especially women and children. There is criminal violence without any respect for life. There is political violence, and structural violence.

In Colombia, 2,000,000 persons have been displaced from their homes as a result of violence. This figure, horrifying in itself, reveals its depth in the following example of the suffering of a displaced person.

### Testimony from life

*"My name is María Teresa. I came from a town called Vigía del Fuerte (Antioquía). I left in 1998 because of the violence. They were threatening to kill us. First, I came alone and then I went back because of my three children and my husband. Now we live in the south of Bogotá in an area called El Oasis.*

*I live in a small house that is unfinished. We get our water from a hose; a neighbor sells it to me. We have no drains. This means that our children get sick, although we do not know the cause of their illness.*

*My husband left me to roam around. Now I do not know where he is: I am living alone with my three children.*

*When they lend me money I make pastries and cook fish to sell in our area. In that way I get money to buy something to eat. Today I was not able to have lunch because I have no money."*

*(Interview conducted by: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia, Office of Justice and Life)*

From Ecuador, this moving testimony concerning the phenomenon of urban violence:

*One Saturday last May we went shopping in the supermarket. The scene lasted only a few seconds but we are still shocked by it. As we approached the cashier to pay, a woman ran in front of us, and two shots rang out in the shop. In front of the door there was an elegant man, not hiding his face. With a heavy weapon he covered the two other thieves as they emptied the till of Western Union. The guards had already been overpowered and wounded. Our first reaction, wanting to do something to stop them, was illogical because the thieves had decided to attack anyone who opposed them. We had no other option but to throw ourselves down on the ground in fear of being shot. While crawling to the back of the shop with the other people, we were thinking that, if the police arrived at this moment, we would be left inside with the thieves. So we got up, held each other's*

*hands, and ran to the shelves, looking for an emergency exit. On the way, one of the shop women who had frozen, did not hear us shouting that she should run, so Laura threw herself at her and pushed to make her react. We continued running to reach the back entrance and escape from the shop. The police, who admittedly arrived quickly this time, were already surrounding the shop, but the thieves were quicker and had got away. Thinking about it outside we realized that we had witnessed a scene which seems only a reality in films. But we live in a country which is becoming increasingly "modernized," a country which is paying the price of development and of the ambitions of a few who are impoverishing many others. It seems that even the quietest corners we know in the world cannot escape this advance: the ecological deprivation and violent exploitation of human beings who become less and less human – some dehumanized by ambition, corruption and crime and others, forgotten and marginalized.*

*(Byron Morales, Director of MAP International—Ecuador, May 2002)*

### Questions for personal or community reflection

Is there an increase in violence in your context? Give examples to support your answer.

How do you make sense of there being so much violence in the world?

What role could the church play in connection with violence? Explain how.

### "But I say to you..."

(Texts from the Bible for reflection and/or preaching)

John 8:1-11

Matthew 5:43-48

Micah 4:3-4

**THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF LIFE  
IN THE MIDST OF A CULTURE OF EXCLUSION**

One of the most harmful consequences of neo-liberal economic globalization is its tendency to exclude large segments of the population from all social benefits and progress, including social and community processes. "Welcome to the ball of the superfluous people" is the sarcastic title of a very popular song in our region which refers to the exclusion of young people (education, health, work, housing, etc.).

The director of a diaconic project working with excluded people in Argentina has written the following:

**Testimony from life**

*"Their context seems to tell them that they are not important, that they are nobodies in the circuit of production and consumption and that in the governmental institutions they are not even a number. Every day the context seems to say, "We do not need you." They are not considered a factor to take into account; they are systematically excluded; they are not visible in society; they have no identity of their own. In addition, they are frequently deprived of a notion of their own existence by which they are the object of decisions but never actors in their own lives. The constant experience of being humiliated and despised destroys their capacity to interact with other people and to see themselves as independent and autonomous persons with rights and obligations who form part of a social network. This exclusion implies a total loss of the collective dimension of human existence."*

*(Claudia Lohff, Director of the Promotion Project at Quilmes—2002)*

**Questions for personal or community reflection**

How do you in your context experience or see this tendency to exclude persons and groups?

What do you see as the causes of exclusion?

In what way is this exclusion a challenge to the ministry of the Church?

**"But I say to you..."**

**(Texts from the Bible for reflection and/or preaching)**

John 10:10

John 5:1-13

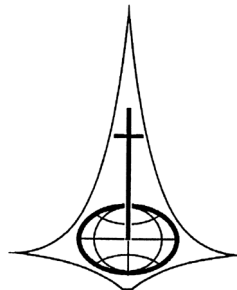
**OUTLINE FOR A SERVICE OF WORSHIP**

Welcome and explain the purpose of the service	Option 2: Different groups present each section with reflections	<i>Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile)</i>	Eucharistic liturgy
Hymn			Hymn
Kyrie	Option 3: Sermon		Blessing and dismissal
Confession of sins	Hymn		
Gloria	Apostles' Creed		
Readings	Short presentation—What is the Lutheran World Federation?		
Hymn			
Option 1: Reflect on the different sections in groups, and summarize the reflections at the end	Prayers of intercession ( <i>We ask your prayers for our churches in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua,</i>		

Proposal for hymns  
(all from the ecumenical hymn book *Thuma Mina*)  
Cantai ao Senhor – *Oh, Sing to the Lord* (TM 3)  
Miren que bueno – *Behold, How Pleasant* (TM 6)  
Deus chama a gente – *God Calls His People* (TM 221)  
Palavra nao foi feita – *The Word Is Not Created* (TM 83)  
A ti Señor te pedimos – *O Lord, Have Mercy upon Us* (TM 29)  
Santo, Santo – *Holy, Holy Is Our God* (TM 117)

**THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**

P.O. Box 2100  
Route de Ferney 150  
CH-1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland



Tel.: +41 22 791 61 11  
Fax: +41 22 791 66 30  
info@lutheranworld.org  
www.lutheranworld.org