



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

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LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

Message to the Pastoral Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iceland

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I send you greetings from the LWF Secretariat in Geneva, and from the global communion of LWF member churches, as you commence your Pastoral Synod. We accompany you in thought and prayer as you worship, reflect, and seek God's guidance for your continuing Christian ministry and witness in Iceland. Some of your sisters and brothers from elsewhere in this communion might have been with you to accompany you in person, were it not for the effects of the volcanic eruption that has caused such widespread disruption of air travel throughout Europe but, mercifully, as yet no casualties in Iceland or elsewhere.

The wider effects of such an eruption serve to remind us of the fragility of our life on the surface of this dynamic and evolving planet within God's vaster creation. It gently demonstrates the very restricted limits of our power to control, manage, and ordain the natural world according to our plans and desires. It shows us how completely our lives rest in God's hands, despite all our much-vaunted technology and assumed mastery of the Earth. It is a salutary lesson.

Iceland has recently been the epicenter of another sort of eruption – the eruption of global financial markets since late 2008 – which brought suddenly to the surface many things that had been hidden. This eruption covered with ash all noble words and good intentions regarding economic accountability, regulation and solidarity. I refer of course to the collapse of the online banking scheme Icesave, and to its consequences in Iceland and in the wider European region.

With the recent release of the report of the Special Investigation Commission concerning the banking collapse, Icelanders have been confronted with a harrowing litany of corruption, deceit and negligence. However, it is clear that this situation arose not as a purely Icelandic anomaly, but as a consequence of a global failure of responsibility for the proper management and regulation of international finance – a failure in which almost all governments have been complicit. In this respect Iceland's experience offers another salutary lesson to the world.

The international marketplace – without appropriate regulation, and an over-arching ethical framework that subordinates profit to human dignity and to the protection of

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creation – is a dangerous and destructive beast beyond the power of any one government to control. The devastated economy of Iceland bears witness to that fact.

The church is not an economic policy institute. But the church knows injustice when we see it. And it is unjust that the people of Iceland should be made to bear the entire economic and social cost for a collective failure of responsibility that should be broadly shared, in particular with those governments that now press their claims against Iceland.

I think that Icelanders will now find that they have much in common with many other communities in the Global South – including in Liberia, Ecuador and elsewhere – who have struggled under the burden of unsustainable, unjust and illegitimate debt.

This is a teaching moment – a *kairos* moment – not just for Iceland but for the whole world. It is a moment for recognizing what these eruptions tell us about our global interconnectedness and vulnerability. It is a time for realizing our oneness in communion in the Body of Christ, proclaiming Christ's liberating words in the midst of crisis and suffering, and responding as the Body of Christ in action in the world.

I thank you for your apostolic hospitality, in providing an occasion and a context in which we can be challenged to live out our calling as a communion.

Having celebrated Easter at the beginning of this month, we continue to rejoice in the Easter experience, which is the basis of our faith and hope that we shall share in Christ's gift of overcoming the power of the grave. May the light of Christ guide our shared reflection and action. And may God hold you in God's hand, protect you, and strengthen you for your ministry to God's people in Iceland.

23 April 2010