



Questions and Answers

Application for Full Membership in the Lutheran World Federation

Why is the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) applying for membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)? Because the constitution of the NALC states, “the NALC shall participate in Lutheran, ecumenical and inter-religious relationships as part of its ministry and mission...” the Executive Council of the NALC has recommended that we apply for full membership in LWF with voice and vote.

How did this process begin? The NALC affirmed application for membership in LWF at the August, 2011 Convocation when it unanimously approved “An Initial Statement on the Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Commitment of the North American Lutheran Church,” which affirms: “As an initial strategy the North American Lutheran Church will...apply for membership in the Lutheran World Federation...”

What is the Lutheran World Federation? The LWF is, by self-definition, “a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 145 member churches in 79 countries all over the world representing over 70 million Christians.”

What is the purpose of LWF? According to its constitution, the LWF

- † “furthers the united witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthens the member churches in carrying out the missionary command and in their efforts toward Christian unity worldwide;
- † furthers worldwide among the member churches diaconic action, alleviation of human need, promotion of peace and human rights, social and economic justice, care for God’s creation and sharing of resources;
- † furthers through cooperative study the self-understanding and the communion of member churches and helps them to act jointly in common tasks.”

The LWF Council has named **four priorities** for the work of the LWF:

- Strengthening Lutheran identity as a communion of churches in mission
- Deepening ecumenical commitments and fostering interfaith relations
- Bearing witness in church and society to God’s healing, reconciliation and justice
- Enhancing communication, mutual accountability and sharing

What does the LWF believe? LWF consists of member churches that accept the “Doctrinal Basis” as stated in the LWF Constitution: “The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. It sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church,

especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.”

Why would we want to belong to the LWF? We believe that being part of this global Lutheran communion will involve us in dialogue and conversation with Lutherans throughout the world, providing us with an important voice and vote in this international association of Lutherans. It is the only truly global fellowship of Lutherans with member churches in the global south as well as the north. Our fellow Lutherans in Ethiopia and Tanzania are full members of LWF and believe our full membership in LWF will provide an orthodox and confessional Lutheran partner in North America.

Does full membership in the LWF provide us with anything that can't be gained apart from it? The LWF is the primary Lutheran partner in global ecumenical relations between Lutherans and other Christian bodies, including the worldwide Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church. All global dialogues and activities happen between the LWF and these organizations. Apart from the LWF, we can have no involvement in official ecumenical interaction between Lutherans and others at the global level. Sitting at the table and maintaining a persistent orthodox and confessional voice in ecumenical discussions can have greater impact on their outcome than protesting from outside or simply ignoring the proceedings. Similarly, the LWF fosters regional relationships and activities between member churches. We want to have full involvement for the sake of this regional cooperation as well as at the global level.

Does full membership in the LWF imply or require full communion between member Lutheran churches? The LWF Constitution does not use the words “full communion,” but rather states, “The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.” While there are strains between many of the Lutheran bodies in the global south and liberal Lutheran bodies in the north, they remain as full members of LWF. In any case, NALC congregations retain the responsibility for determining who shall preach and preside within their local congregation and for establishing practices regarding the reception of the sacrament in their own congregations. For a presentation of “altar and pulpit fellowship,” please see the document from the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine included in this packet of materials.

We've heard that the LWF is an extremely “liberal” organization, politically. Is this the case? Many Lutherans have had concerns about the direction of the LWF within the last two or three decades. In recent years, the LWF has engaged in an intentional redirecting of focus, beginning with the proposals made by the Renewal Committee (2007-2009), incorporated into a new *LWF Strategy 2012-2017: The LWF Communion—With Passion for the Church and For the World*. The first part of this strategy addresses “Who We Are as a Communion,” lifting up first and foremost that “to be Lutheran is to be evangelical, proclaiming the good news of Christ’s life, his death on the cross and his resurrection...” At the same time, it is evident in the strategy that there remains a strong focus on social action and what many might consider a liberal political slant. Many do see evidence, however, that LWF now recognizes the absence of uniform support of members for “liberal” theology and practice and is now willing to accommodate orthodox confessional churches and their doctrinal position within the

organization. Moreover, it is those orthodox confessional churches in the global south which are the fastest-growing within the LWF. This makes it feasible for those who hope to change the direction of LWF, provided we are willing to engage in dialogue from within. Joining and sitting at the table can affect the direction of LWF, whereas boycotting the organization simply gives those with a more liberal agenda greater power and influence within LWF. While this LWF work of renewal is ongoing, we believe we have gifts and perspective to contribute to this continuing reform.

Is it realistic to believe our full membership can make a difference in the direction and focus of LWF? Because of the great numbers of biblically conservative Lutherans in the global south, as well as in Asia, our African brothers and sisters believe there is a growing majority of LWF member churches who oppose changes in church teaching with regard to marriage and sexuality and that there is a very real possibility that together we can make a positive impact within LWF.

What is the process of application for membership into the LWF? An application, as approved by the Executive Council of the NALC, has been submitted with required supporting documentation. An initial consultation has taken place. A recommendation came to the NALC 2012 Convocation from the Executive Council for approval. This recommendation was approved by two-thirds of those present and voting at the NALC Convocation in August. This action of the Convocation now is referred to NALC congregations for a vote on ratification. To be ratified, this action must be approved by two-thirds of our NALC congregations voting, as provided by NALC constitution 13.03: "All inter-Lutheran and ecumenical church-to-church relationships of an official character shall require the approval of two-thirds of the votes cast at a convocation, and shall require ratification by congregations..." This process of congregational ratification of convocation actions is an important "check and balance" within the NALC. We are now in that process of ratification and these materials are provided so that pastors and congregations can be informed prior to voting. If ratified, the LWF will act on our application, either by reception into membership by the Federation in the Assembly, or in the interim, by the LWF Council. While constitutionally congregations have six months from the end of the 2012 Convocation to complete ratification voting, congregations are asked to hold special congregational meetings to vote on ratification no later than December 31, 2012, if at all possible.

What happens if the recommendation for full LWF membership fails to be ratified by the required two-thirds NALC congregations voting? We will not move forward in the application process. As stated above, this application process is in response to the actions of the NALC Convocation in 2011. Congregations are now being asked to make the final decision with regard to our application.

If we become full members of LWF, how do we terminate our membership in the future, should we choose to do so? According to LWF bylaws, "A church's membership in the LWF terminates: a. if the General Secretary receives written notice of the church's withdrawal from the Federation..." Should we decide to withdraw from LWF, it would require a resolution from the NALC Executive Council, a two-thirds positive vote by the NALC Convocation, and ratification by two-thirds of our congregations. At that time, a letter would be sent to the LWF General Secretary. If circumstances required more urgent action, the NALC Executive Council could

temporarily suspend our membership in the LWF, or suspend our participation therein, pending action at the next Convocation.

Are other Lutheran bodies in North America full members in the LWF? The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church-Canada are not members of the Lutheran World Federation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are full members. Other North American members are: Lutheran Costa Rican Church; Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope; Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras; Salvadoran Lutheran Church.

Is there another pan-Lutheran body that we could join? Doesn't the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod belong to another group? There is no other international Lutheran body that serves as an ecumenical partner to other Christian bodies. The International Lutheran Council is a small organization with the Missouri Synod as its primary member.

What financial commitments will we have to LWF if we become full members? This is the response we received from LWF: *Membership fees are calculated every two years based on two parameters, namely, the number of members in the church and on the Gross National Income Purchasing Power Parity of the member church country.* Our understanding is that the actual amount of funding is determined through a consultation process with the particular member body. For example, while an amount is recommended by LWF, the actual fee/contribution is agreed upon through a consultation to reach a specific amount. Although the NALC leadership would consult with LWF regarding an amount of financial support, such an amount would need to be approved as part of the annual budget by delegates at the NALC Convocation.

Can we decide which LWF programs we wish to support? LWF member churches participate in programs and projects in different ways, both financially and through member involvement. We can choose which specific programs and missions we wish to support through additional financial support, grants and involvement.

How can we get more information, or have our other questions answered? You can find answers at www.lutheranworld.org, or by e-mailing NALC Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, dwendel@thenalc.org, or NALC General Secretary, mchavez@thenalc.org.

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