

ELCT-EKM-Partnership Conference, Lutherstadt Wittenberg 2016 "Come for everything is now ready"

Final Letter

Bishops and representatives of different partnership groups of seven dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (Iringa Diocese, Konde Diocese, North Central Diocese, Southern Diocese, South Central Diocese, South Western Diocese, Ulanga Kilombero Diocese) and the Evangelical Church in Central Germany met in Wittenberg from May 5th through May 9th 2016.

The theme of the conference was "Come for everything is now ready" (Luke 14:17), from the scripture passage that we read and studied throughout our conference (Luke 14:15-24) – the parable of the wedding banquet. It was in this spirit of God's invitation for all, that we shared fellowship, rejoiced and feasted together, looking for ways to invite others to share the blessings we have received from God.

We have a renewed sense of thanks and praise to God for the partnership links between our churches which started more than 40 years ago, and have grown and developed in many different ways.

We rejoice that our partnership is based on our common faith in God as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is bringing us together as brothers and sisters in Christ, a foretaste of God's heavenly kingdom.

During our conference we shared our faith in prayer and praise as we listened to the Word of God, and reflected on it in contextual Bible studies.

We thank God for the communion we have found during this conference, the respectful and trustful dialogue we have shared, the friendship we continue to enjoy.

During the presentations and plenary discussions we realized that the ties between our churches have grown through the sharing of our faith and supporting each other through prayer, personal encounters and exchange of visits, long-term exchanges and through practical support. We are aware that the work benefited a lot from the cooperation between church leaders and grass-root level as well as from the support by Leipzig Mission.

Beginning with the "seeds" of the 2006 Njombe Declaration, the partnership groups presented the "fruits" of their respective relationships. These included support for hospitals, school partnerships, scholarships, skill-sharing, volunteers, and staff exchanges. Recognizing and celebrating these fruits have encouraged us to continue our journey together.

We shared as partners our different experiences of the spiritual life in ways which were mutually appreciative and enriching. In this way we have helped one another to see each other through our partner's eyes. We discovered that diversity is a gift for our communion and does not have to be a threat.

It is important that we continue sharing our insights and contextual resources when reading the Bible and continue praying for each other. We want to encourage the parishes to celebrate Rogate Sunday as Partnership Sunday in both churches, offering intercessions and prayers for each other. The Tanzanian partner dioceses should be included in the EKM prayer calendar on a regular basis. Likewise, the Tanzanian partner dioceses should have a regular prayer plan for EKM.

We need to reflect in greater depth, and with genuine respect about the different ways in which we think about and practice the Christian faith in our different contexts. We need to listen before we speak, and when we speak, do so in love.

Partnership is an opportunity to learn from each other. We need continuing mutual consultation about the spiritual, social and economic needs we face in our various contexts. This might include questions of migration and refugees, mission and interreligious dialogue, leadership, development and climate change. We believe our relationship is a firm and strong one that allows us to develop open and robust conversations in deeper ways.

We want to explore the use of modern media to improve the communication related infrastructure between the partners, hence establishing a network especially amongst the youth.

We encourage personal encounters between partnership groups, congregations, in conferences and at the level of church leaders. We should also consider ways in which we include other partners in the development of our partnership, and ways in which we might share our faith-based partnership with non-Christians. We value the importance of long-term personal exchanges (for example: volunteers, senior experts, those engaged in theological studies and training) from both North to South and South to North, and we should strongly continue to support this in the future.

Short- and long-term visits need to be carefully prepared in order to foster mutual understanding and respect, and avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings.

While we see the importance of projects to help meet the social, economic and educational needs of our communities, we agree that money should never determine our partnership: instead practical support should be an outcome of our relationships.

We are committed to accountability and sustainability of our projects, which must grow out of local discernment of needs.

We began our conference thanking God for the fruits that have already grown from our partnership. We leave, believing we have new seeds to sow. Through these seeds and fruits may we join more fully in God's mission to the world, and with the help of God proclaim to our neighbor, to each other and to the world: **"Come, for everything is now ready!"**.