



'One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.'

Greeting at the 13th LWF Assembly, Krakow, Poland.

By Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches.

Dear friends in Christ

It is my joy and privilege as General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, also known as CEC, to greet you on the occasion of this 13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the LWF leadership and the Assembly delegates for granting me and the Conference of European Churches this opportunity.

You, as a world communion, gathering in Europe is significant for European Churches, and I feel a particular responsibility to welcome and thank those of you who have travelled from beyond the borders of this continent to share your thoughts, your concerns, your prayers, and your presence with fellow Lutherans from near and afar.

Europe and European Churches, the Conference of European Churches, welcome you as friends in Christ sharing in our common global mission.

The Conference of European Churches, CEC, was established in 1959 as Europe's prime regional ecumenical organisation. Today, it comprises 113 Member Churches: Anglican, Old Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Also, we work together with National Councils of Churches and faith-based organisations throughout Europe. Our relationship with denominational world communions like the LWF and global ecumenical partners like the WCC is pivotal and fruitful.

It happens so, that the Conference of European Churches gathered for its Assembly as lately as June this year in Tallinn, Estonia. Some 350 participants from all corners of Europe were delighted to meet in the home country of LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt. Dr Anne Burghardt, as a former member of the CEC Governing Board, had been instrumental in paving the way for the realisation of a dream to host a CEC Assembly in a Baltic country.

Thank you, General Secretary, thank you Anne, for taking the first steps and making this possible. Also, thank you, Archbishop Urmas Viilma of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church for your unwavering and dedicated support throughout the preparations and execution of the event in Tallin. And finally, a big thank you to the Lutheran churches of the Nordic region for generously backing the Assembly financially.

We who work in Ecumenical organisations know that we can always count on the Lutherans.

Lifting our eyes beyond our organisations, however, to the wider world in which we live, in a similar way the wider world should know that it can always count on the churches. The theme for our recent CEC Assembly in Tallin reflected this, as we gathered around the words “Under God’s blessing – shaping the future”.

Not just our own future as churches. The future of our societies and our communities. The future of our wider social fellowships. The future of this generation and the next. The Conference of European Churches stay together as a fellowship of churches and faith based agencies to enhance the voices of churches in a European political context, one which is increasingly secular and ever more plural.

Yes, Europe is in many ways a secular continent. And yes, churches and Christian communities are in many parts of Europe struggling to navigate a societal reality where they are losing some of the influence and status they used to have. However, this should never halt us from knowing that we have a everlasting message to everyone, a message which needs to be shared no matter the context: We are here witnessing to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

For that reason, CEC decided to gather for its Assembly on a bold note: That we feel God’s blessing every day, and that we as churches wish to share that blessing with others, shaping our common future, locally, nationally, continentally and – with your help - globally.

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We in CEC with our member churches and partners work hard to establish a constructive dialogue based on sound public theology with decision makers and influencers in European countries and in the European Union. Currently - how could it be any different - with a particular concern for the war in Ukraine and all its wider consequences.

With the theme of your Assembly here in Krakow I see a similar bold expression: 'One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.' How can we as Churches, you as Lutherans, in the best possible way, in a dividing world promote 'One Body, One Spirit, One Hope' as the only way forward towards peace.

We feel blessed by God as one body, with one Spirit, giving us one hope – the hope that express both our uncertainty of what the immediate future will bring and our trust that we can – under God’s blessing - shape the future together, if we want: As One Body, in One Spirit, with One Hope.'

It was a good friend and colleague from ELCA who – some 30 years ago – gifted me with what became the headline of my ecumenical journey. He reminded me that “The Church is a worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement”. This ecclesial definition

has followed me since as a guiding ecumenical principle, and it is today as strong and fundamental as ever.

Over the coming week, be that worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement as you sing, pray, and talk together. Let Krakow know, let Europe know, let the entire world know that it can count on the Lutherans, on your will and capability to encourage people, sparking the hope that is needed to mend a broken world.

Thank you for your attention.