

# LUTHERAN CORE CONVOCATION

FISHER, INDIANA

## REFLECTIONS FROM COMMUNION OF AFRICAN LUTHERAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

SEPTEMBER 25-26, 2009

The communion of African Lutheran Churches across North America is in full participation on this convocation with deep gratitude to God. In such a very distressing, shocking and confusing time for all of our churches we are deeply grateful to God who has never abandoned his beloved church and who offers us this resurrection experience of renewed life in Christ through this convocation. We are also grateful for the leaders of movements such as Word Alone, Lutheran Core and Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ for their persistent and enduring leadership in season and out of season to stand for our common witness.

This is a very historic convocation; it is closely watched by people of all motivations. It is also being watched globally and ecumenically as the decision taken in Minneapolis has fundamentally shattered and deeply impacted our global and ecumenical ties. The big question we are wrestling with is, “*Now what?*”

Is it possible for us as immigrant African churches to continue focusing on mission? Can we ignore the elephant standing in our denomination in the form Homosexual life style and ordination? Can we silence, or explain away the deep biblical, confessional and evangelical issues being raised by our members? Can we effectively respond to issues being raised with dismay and total disgust by the very people we are trying to reach? *Can we do that?*

As far we are concerned our choice is very clear we have to either give up our evangelical and prophetic ministry in our society and silently die as a denomination or rise to the task of realigning ourselves with churches, leaders, and communities of similar conviction and work shoulder to shoulder with them on the alternative evangelical, confessional and missional fellowship for the sake of advancing God’s kingdom and reconfiguring Lutheranism to get back to its outstanding dogma and kerygma (doctrine and teaching) on matters of life, faith and mission.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I stand before you as a very proud Evangelical Lutheran Church leader. I have been proud of my Lutheran identity along with my fellow African Lutheran leaders across this denomination and beyond. We have served Lutheran churches on both sides of the Atlantic. Currently we the leaders of this vibrant community and the flock of Christ we are called to care for are in the state of confusion, bewilderment and brokenness.

During the assembly in Minneapolis our voice was totally shunned. Through persistence we were able to get only two opportunities for two minutes each. During those times we tried to voice our plea and humble request to the assembly. Our request was simple and clear, it was asking the assembly to reconsider its drastic action and exercise righteous restraint from leading the largest Lutheran body in North America into utter Chaos and departure from faithfulness to the Holy Bible and its' own confessions of faith.

Our pleas were seen as unworthy voice of a backward culture from a dark African continent where some assembly partners would never choose to visit. Our voice was diminished to the voice of unfit person from uncivilized culture who is not worthy of sharing his/her opinion. Those words were clearly heard across the continent, as far as we are concerned they were not necessary, unchristian and uncalled for. The assembly leaders should have openly admonished speakers who are utterly disrespectful, biased and full of wrong assumptions about a continent where there are more than 17 million vibrant Lutherans. These 17 million Lutherans are not condoning, approving or blessing polygamy as they were blatantly accused at the assembly, however to the contrary they have relinquished old ways of life to openly live for Christ and witness God's love to the world through their words and actions. Therefore those accusations made from the assembly floor by ordinary delegates all the way to Bishops were blatantly wrong and baseless. Nonetheless we offer our forgiveness for holding grudges or disappointments against brothers and sisters is not what we choose to do.

Right after the assembly our national advisory board, was gathered to work on a position statement. That statement was intended to clearly denounce the decision the church wide assembly took and to help our more than 120 African congregations across the United States of America and Canada to overcome the shock and disillusionment. As soon as the draft document

was complete it was shared with the ELCA leadership. That document was very helpful to overcome the looming demise of our ministries. Currently it is being openly shared across the nation.

On that statement we have clearly stated that we will be in direct and constant consultation and collaboration with people of the same conscience and biblical position. That is why we are here today. We have come to Fisher, Indiana to have a direct participation in our future life together, to have consultation on how to enhance our common mission and to establish a clear mechanism of collaboration as we go forth.

Our mission and ministries are very young and tender. Therefore they are in need of much care, attention and guidance. If we differ to offer these much needed moral and biblical leadership our churches can easily slip into a state of emergency and loss of membership. Right now most of our churches are already distracted from focus on mission; our pastors are facing a difficult task of interpreting and explaining things that are biblically, morally, ethically and culturally despicable and very farfetched from what they know. The common counsel they get from church hierarchies is that it doesn't apply to them. How can a teaching social statement and ministry policy adopted by a given denomination apply to one and exempt the other. Where is the unity in teaching, in faith and in life?

In the last few weeks we have lost hundreds of our Lutheran members to our neighboring Baptist, Pentecostal and evangelical churches. Our leadership team is doing its best to stop this crisis, which is why we are saying that our presence here is not just for a show of face but in search of a real solution for this dangerous Missiological challenge of our day.

Our calls to this convocation are clear and simple;

1. **Call to unceasing prayer!** As far as we are concerned the 2009 church wide assembly resolution is a clear indication of the spiritual state of the ELCA and its churches. There is a major spiritual crisis in the church therefore what took place in Minneapolis is a spiritual blow to the church. Spiritual crisis should get a spiritual response. Therefore a national and international prayer network should be launched as we are in a battle not with flesh and blood but with spiritual forces who are trying to defeat our mission.

2. **Call for strong unity!** As people of God who are facing the same challenge, it time for us to be united locally, nationally and internationally for the sake of the Gospel. Today we are facing a new challenge of extreme liberalism, unrestrained secularism, moral relativism, religious universalism and limitless humanism. Peter and Paul had their share of challenges; these are our challenges for today. These challenges are facing all of us squarely in the face. Therefore let us stand united on the Holy Word of God and on our confessions. Through unity and collaboration we can be able to contain this crisis and effectively respond to the persistent and forceful attack launched on the one holy, universal and Christian church of Jesus Christ. As we deal with this challenge in a strongly united fashion we can be able to effectively respond to the missiological challenges and evangelical opportunities facing us in this complex yet exciting missional landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  
3. **Call for a functional organization!** On this convocation and beyond we have to take concrete steps and not nominal actions. In this journey we want to see a very tangible effort and evidence of getting organized and standing together as a body of Christ. This organized body must be ready, prepared, envisioned and provisioned for the sake of evangelical mission in the world. Time is of the essence therefore getting tightly organized and starting to function as a body can be a very stabilizing and mobilizing factor in our common mission and ministries.
  
4. **Call for domestic and global mission!** Actions and decisions taken at the church wide assembly were internationally impactful; the impact was far reaching beyond the shores of the United States of America. African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Caribbean churches are all negatively impacted as their names were collectively stained by the resolution. This is adding another layer of difficulty for those churches who are already serving under communist and Islamic persecutions. Therefore an international or global mission entity should be organized in response to this crisis and proactively assist and steward the longstanding global relationships we have as Evangelical, confessional and missional Lutherans worldwide. In that work

we are prepared to have a leading role as we have more than 17 million Lutherans directly impacted by this action in Africa.

5. **Call for optimism and faith in God!** Today we want to register gratitude to God and to leaders and participants of this convocation for giving us this chance to share our position and clearly state our missional determination. We also want to clearly assert that everything we do is out of love for all children of God and not out of bias or hatred directed at anyone. We have enjoyed hospitality, partnership and support in the ELCA for many years. Our ties are very strong and our relationships are very deep however our confidence in this church is very much shaken by its bold and unrestrained action against the Bible and 2000 year old Christian tradition on its 2009 assembly. Therefore we commit to work hard on healing and reconciliation by openly preaching the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness, for they are inseparable. As we do that we will fully focus on our Lutheran, evangelical, confessional and missional movement for renewal. In all of these activities and actions our priority is one and only one, that is proclaiming Christ crucified, without any apology and compromise in season and out of season. We are not ready to conform to the world for we are determined to be transformed by the renewing power of the word of God. Advancing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was, is and forever will be our sole priority. To that evangelical cause we are committed. We are also committed to stand strong in unwavering solidarity with all of you as we believe, hope and pray that you will also walk with us in this journey!!

May God bless this convocation!

Challa Baro  
Evangelist, Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church in Minnesota