



# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES  
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

*Office of the General Secretary*

Geneva, June 2008

## **A Pastoral Letter to our Member Churches and Institutions in Celebration of the “Pauline Year”: 28 June 2008 - 29 June 2009**

Dear friends,

This year marks the celebration of the 2000<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Apostle Paul!

Of course, we do not have a record of exactly when Paul was born: his parents did not know that he would grow up to be one of the most important leaders of a new movement not yet begun, which worshipped and followed a figure who himself was still a youth. But it was about 2000 years ago, and that event deserves to be honored. We don't know either when Paul died, but the Church has honored him as a martyr and commemorated him, along with his fellow-apostle Peter, on 28 June. And so this year, beginning on this festival day, there will be a celebration of St. Paul - of his writings, of the accomplishments of his life, and of his faithful death.

In calling your attention to this year of celebration, I invite you to join in an ecumenical observance which has been first a vision of our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church. The Pauline Year was announced by Pope Benedict XVI as a time for “liturgical, cultural and ecumenical events as well as pastoral and social initiatives inspired by St Paul's spirituality.” The many events planned, especially around Rome, can be found in multiple languages at the website <http://www.annopaolino.org>.

In particular, the Pope has sought to lift up the ecumenical significance of celebrating the Apostle to the Nations, seeking to encourage a “humble and sincere search for the complete unity of all the parts of the mystical Body of Christ.” We too live in that hope, and so are happy to join in his prayers for unity. To celebrate with one another, as we also mourn together and yearn for the overcoming of our separations, is one form of recognition of the unity we already share.

As Lutherans, of course, we have our own history of special devotion to this complex, wise, provocative and elusive figure who is the Apostle Paul. Without attention to the Pauline writings, it is difficult to imagine the Lutheran movement in the Church. It is no accident that so many of our congregations are named for St. Paul, or that so many of our children have been baptized with his name. We are excited to see the commencement of the work of the Symposium of Biblical Scholars, an expanded collaboration which includes Methodists and Reformed scholars as well as Lutherans and Roman Catholics in examining the biblical basis for the doctrine of justification. This was a promise of Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of



Justification which is only now coming to fruition. Attention to contemporary ecumenical understandings of Paul's message will be an important part of their work, and because of this Pauline Year their first meeting will be in Rome, with a visit to the church of St. Paul's Outside the Walls.

In this spirit of common inquiry and shared indebtedness to the Apostle, I urge all member churches and institutions in our Communion to make this year a time of special attention to Paul. There are many ways in which this can be observed, both in our own communities and in ecumenical settings. When groups of clergy meet for ecumenical Bible studies, for example, they could concentrate on Pauline texts or preach on these letters in ecumenical worship services. When seminary faculty teach the Pauline letters, the Acts of the Apostles, homiletics, or the history of the Bible in the church, they could call attention to the Pauline year. Doubtless you will be able to think of many creative ideas for this observance, and we would be happy to learn in Geneva about what you are doing.

In every generation, the Apostle has made a challenging conversation partner: again and again his writings have stood at the beginnings of renewal in Christian life. He struggled with many of the most intractable questions of faith, and no one comes away from his writings without being instructed, exasperated, puzzled and inspired. For our time, when communities of Christians in many parts of the world are discovering anew the costliness of discipleship, the faithful witness of Paul the prisoner and Paul the martyr also speak to us with fresh strength. From the Catholic Church we have received this invitation: let us make this a year of encountering both Paul and one another. In the spirit of cooperation and thankfulness for their ecumenical invitation, I pass along to you this challenge to spend this year together with Saint Paul.

With sincere good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed in a hand-drawn oval. The signature appears to be 'Ishmael Noko'.

Ishmael Noko  
General Secretary