

Opening of the Consultation and Welcome to the Participants

Oberkirchenrat Michael Martin

Dear sisters and brothers,

it is a great pleasure to welcome all of you here in Neuendettelsau. Our church is deeply honoured for you to be our guests. And I am very happy that you have accepted our invitation to attend this first Partners' Consultation involving all our partner churches in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific region. As head of our church's Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Partnership, Mission and Development Service, I have huge expectations for this consultation: We want our Christian communion to become visible – in our prayer together, in our sharing and discussions, in joint action and in achieving stronger partnership and mutual cooperation.

This is the first time that the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Bavaria has organized a multilateral consultation involving all of you. That fact is partly due to the diverse histories of our partnerships. It is also due to us in the Bavarian Lutheran church having changed: By founding the "Centre Mission EineWelt", we have integrated the fields of mission, partnership and development service. We want to discuss *your* expectations concerning our centre *Mission EineWelt*. And lastly, it is due to multilateral conversations having only recently become an important platform and type of networking in the partnership efforts of the churches, thus complementing traditional bilateral relations. In many cases, you have more experiences with "Round Tables" in your context – more than we currently have in Europe.

This example illustrates an important goal of our consultation: We need to share experiences – *your* experiences that you can share with us and amongst each other, and *our* experiences, which we hope to share with you:

- Firstly, we will look at the experiences of our churches in mission work: How does each of our churches accomplish proclaiming the Gospel in the context of a globalised world undergoing rapid change? What can we learn from each

other in terms of spreading the Good News, building our parishes and witnessing to Jesus Christ?

- Secondly, we will discuss our churches' experiences in dealing with the social challenges in our countries. Each of these countries faces different social and economic challenges. This is why it is so instructive to listen to what the responses are that you give on the basis of your faith, to learn about your initiatives and also to reflect together on the problems you may be struggling with.
- Thirdly, we hope to hear from you about what your expectations are towards this cooperation with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Bavaria and maybe even about your expectations in view of cooperating with other churches that you get to know at this consultation.

With these goals in mind, we have planned for the consultation to comprise a number of different working methods and items of content that I would now like to introduce to you:

- We will have times of common prayer in the mornings and evenings of each day, according to the traditions of different churches. Tomorrow, Wednesday, in our church is the Day of Penitence and Prayer, and we will have a solemn service of worship together with Bishop Johannes Friedrich, which is going to be broadcast on German national television.
- Like a string of pearls, there will be moments for each church to present itself at some point during the consultation. For ten short, but important minutes each, we will hear about the challenges the church is facing in its changing social context.
- This afternoon, Dr Kjell Nordstokke of the Lutheran World Federation will give a presentation on the LWF's understanding of mission. I hope that we will have a lively discussion based on your experiences.
- On Thursday I will introduce you to our Bavarian church's concept of partnership, including its understanding of content and methods of partnership work. I will be requesting your comments and reflections. As the Church Council member in charge of this field, I am depend on hearing your expectations and

advice to be able to develop our work in a meaningful way. In particular, we will need to discuss your expectations of future consultations and of our Centre Mission *EineWelt*.

- There will be a number of sessions of small group work. Thomas Prieto Peral, my colleague, will share theses and questions for discussion, which we then can work on together.
- On Friday, we would like to summarize the results of the consultation in a statement, which is to be read to our Synod and published. A *Draft Committee* will be set up to prepare this statement. Traugott Farnbacher will give you more details about that in a moment.

To be successful, a consultation on this scale needs careful preparation. Therefore, I would like to thank my colleagues from the Department for Ecumenical Affairs, in particular Ms Droste, as well as the secretaries of *Mission EineWelt* for their intensive preparatory work and for their very good cooperation.

Permit me now to open our Partners' Consultation and to ask the Triune God to bless our deliberations. May God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit bless us and guide us through these days of common work and common life.