Witnessing Hope Together: A Global Communion Perspective

A Contribution to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Strategy Conversation

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Opening

Greetings from the LWF Communion Office in Geneva. Thank you for the opportunity to share some reflections that I hope can feed into your conversations as you shape your new strategy for 2027–2032. The 2023 LWF Assembly in Kraków named our shared context clearly:

> We live in a divided world where bodies are hurting, rejected, excluded, and the earth suffers from environmental crisis. The war in Ukraine has left hundreds of thousands dead. We remember Ethiopia, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, Venezuela—places where violence claims lives and disrupts communities.

The Kraków message already carried signals of what was coming. Now, in 2026, we have moved beyond a divided world into a deeply wounded world — one that faces rupture rather than merely division, with wounds that are harder to heal the longer they are left unattended.

I will move through four reflections: from the world, to the communion, through some gaps I noticed, and toward mission. Together they form a single vision of what it means to witness hope in a world that is deeply wounded and in need of healing.

Reflection 1: Reading the World We Will Inhabit (2027–2032)

Strategic foresight practitioners use the framework of a TUNA world — Turbulent, Uncertain, Novel, Ambiguous. I find it useful to map onto the themes you have already named, and the connections are direct and clarifying.

Turbulence shows up in the insecurity felt by citizens. The wars in Ukraine, in the Middle East, and elsewhere are no longer distant realities — they are interconnected pressures on economies, on communities, and on the felt sense of safety (or the lack of safety) in the world. Uncertainty feeds what you rightly name as a culture of death. When despair has fully flooded our collective heart and mind, when there is nothing to look forward to, the question of the meaning of life becomes not theoretical but urgent. Novelty arrives through technological change so rapid that politics, law, economics, and ethics are constantly trying to catch up. The pace of AI development is such that even its own developers are pausing to ask whether their creations are safe to release — and that itself is a signal the church cannot ignore. And ambiguity floods both church and society when it comes to multiculturalism and declining parish membership. There are no quick-fix answers. But all of this above, honestly acknowledged, can become an invitation to share our questions rather than provide simplistic solutions.

The distinctive danger by 2032 is that despair — and even death — will become normalized, politically, socially, and spiritually. And here is where the theological concepts you have reached for — hope, grace, and inclusion — speak directly to the culture of death. Easter hope is about overcoming death, even when we find ourselves living in what feels like Holy Saturday — full of paradox, full of presence and absence at the same time, full of unanswered questions. Holy Saturday may in fact be where most people live, most of the time. But what drives us, what orients us, is the conviction that life and not death has the final word. Together we advocate for a resilient hope that refuses both naivety and despair — and that, I believe, is the distinctive contribution Lutheran theology makes to a wounded world right now. The public voice of the church is not only about naming what is wrong, but offering a vision and embodied example of what a world of hope looks like.

Reflection 2: What Global Communion Offers the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

The global Lutheran communion is not primarily a support network or a community of solidarity — it includes both. It is a theological sign of what human community can look like, both globally and locally. The concept that inspires me is *perichoresis* — the mutual indwelling at the heart of the Trinity, the eternal conversation, the dance between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that theologians have described as the very life of God. What I see in the seven regions of the LWF is this same movement reflected into human community: neither top-down nor bottom-up, but a genuinely mutual and responsible exchange of thought, spirituality, and witness. The *perichoretic* perspective is not about a one-directional shift of power from one center to another. It is a dance in which all partners are changed by the encounter. When African and Asian Lutheran churches shaped the LWF's theology of holistic mission in ways that changed the thinking of the whole communion, that was perichoresis at work. Although Finland is not the center, it is part of that dance — and that is good news.

This bears directly on the theme of multiculturalism your strategy names as a challenge. The global communion has been living with majority and minority dynamics, multifaith contexts, and deep cultural plurality for decades — in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Finland is arriving somewhere the global communion already living in. That means resources, treasured wisdom, and promising practices are available from within the communion itself. Diversity is not a burden to manage but a gift to receive differences that enrich both church and society.

You highlight three vision options — the Table of Boundless Grace, Shared Bread, and the Harvest of Hope — and I want to engage them with some questions. The table emphasizes connection and openness — but who is building it, not only sitting around it? Shared bread is diaconal and oriented toward others — but does it risk a posture where those with power offer charity rather than genuine mutuality? The harvest is outward and eschatological — but does it hold together both human agency and divine interruption?

The tendency may be to emphasize one over the others. But what's key is how to hold all three together — as relational, diaconal, and missional dimensions of a single calling. Here I want to offer a gift from Malaysia. There's the story of the mouse deer who survives and outwits the elephants who are powerful and often fighting each other. The smaller animal wins not through strength but through wisdom, agility, and a refusal to be defined by powerlessness. Faithfulness in the midst of the forces that challenge the church requires all three at once. This same wisdom speaks to parish membership — where what looks like decline might actually be an invitation to reimagine what the church's presence can look like in a Church 24/7 world.

Reflection 3: What Is Missing

I want to name four gaps honestly and briefly.

The first is technology and artificial intelligence. Technophobia is not the answer, and neither is uncritical adoption. What is needed is discernment rooted in the image of God and a theology of vocation. Being created in God's image means we bring human discernment and agency to the world -- the irreducibly human capacity for wisdom that no AI replaces. In an increasingly automated world, the Lutheran theology of vocation needs fresh articulation. And the deeper theological question underneath all of this is: what does it mean to be human when the temptation is to surrender human judgment to machines that speak, reason, and generate?

The second gap is climate and creation. I was genuinely surprised not to find it more prominently in the brief. The Church of Finland has made real contributions to our Climate Justice Task Force at the LWF, and Nordic churches have often led here. If those conversations are happening, I would encourage making them more visible — this is an area where Finland has genuine gifts to offer the whole communion, and its absence feels like a missed opportunity.

The third gap is intergenerational dynamics. The Finnish church is navigating an aging membership while the global communion's demographic center has shifted decisively toward younger populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There is much to learn from churches where personal faith is vibrant and young adults are actively engaged.

But this is not simply a youth question — it is an intergenerational one. Too often the conversation about young people is conducted without the aging population present (or the other way round). What is needed is not a youth strategy alongside a seniors strategy, but a genuinely intergenerational imagination for the church.

The fourth gap I name briefly. The legal and structural realities — EU frameworks, UN shifts, church law and governance — form the context in which this strategy lives even if they are not named explicitly. Naming the frameworks and limitations within which we work is the kind of realism that keeps faithful action grounded. I find myself wondering what that might look like as the strategy moves toward 2032 and beyond.

Reflection 4: Mission, Interfaith Dialogue, Evangelism – and the Eschatological Horizon

Holistic mission, as the LWF has learned over decades, holds proclamation, diakonia, and advocacy together — not as competing priorities but as inseparable dimensions of a single witness. Mission is grounded in what God has already done through Jesus Christ, so that change can happen in us as well as around us. God's grace comes first — and from that grace flows a mission toward a common world, a common home, that we engage in together.

On interfaith dialogue, we are moving beyond simply understanding one another or standing in solidarity with one another's pain, both of which remain important. The next horizon is imagining futures together within this shared home. That requires Lutheran confidence — not triumphalism, but the honest acknowledgment that comes from a theology of the cross. We enter interfaith encounter knowing our own brokenness, and that honesty becomes a genuine bridge. God shows no partiality, and preaching the gospel of peace means we can sit at the table with people of other faiths not despite our differences but through our convictions. As Finland becomes more multicultural and multifaith, there is much to learn from Lutherans who have navigated being the Christian minority within religiously diverse contexts for generations where interfaith engagement is not a new challenge but an everyday reality.

And on evangelism: we cannot surrender the proclamation of the gospel to a narrow stream of Christianity. There are many voices offering false security and deepening fear. Our proclamation is the invitation to the table, the sharing of the bread, the harvest of hope — a gospel of healing and hope that is willing to confront evil, to name death for what it is, and to insist on life.

Closing remarks

The book of Revelation is a letter to seven churches — each one named, each one known in both its faithfulness and its failure, each one entrusted with a charge to witness in the particular place and time it inhabits. In a sense, Finland receives this message too. And the global communion receives it together — the full address, the complete witness, none of us sufficient alone.

I think of the Artemis II astronauts who looked back at the earth from the moon — this small, luminous home, wounded and beautiful all at once. We need that capacity to zoom out, to see with new eyes. Because we are not only a people of the table, the bread, and the harvest — grounded, embodied, local as those images are. We are also a people of the horizon, holding the new heaven and the new earth as our destination, where God will dwell among us. That is the witness the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is being called to. And the global communion is ready to walk that journey of witnessing hope together.