



## July-August 2022 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God -

“Faith is the ability to listen to the melody of the future and hope is the courage to dance to its rhythm now” (adapted from Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves).

Participants at the May 9-13, 2022, Leadership Conference of the Americas at Santiago, Chile – of member churches of the Lutheran World Federation in Latin America, the Caribbean and North America – gathered, were encouraged and guided by the theme, “I breathe upon you the breath of life,” based on Ezekiel 37, the story of dry bones.

Ezekiel’s text is charged with this image of movement. The blowing, breath, spirit (*ruach*) of God has been present since the beginning. YHWH’s *ruach* moved over the waters. That same spirit falls on the dry bones causing the revitalization of that which had died.

“The bones have dried and are making noise,” shared keynote presenter, Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla, Executive Director of Global Mission, ELCA, “and our churches are in crisis.” Yes, in this time of pandemic, but even prior to this with our mission context marked by the great “isms” (patriarchism, racism and populism), and like the dry bones of Ezekiel they are making noise.

These three “isms” are present, unfortunately, in the life of our faith communities. “It is they who have dried the bones...and now the bones are making noise. It is these “isms”, said Padilla, “that cause the great abyss between the church and life project of Jesus.” These “isms” seek to hoard and maintain power while the life project of Jesus sought to empower, to serve, to embrace all in grace and love even to the point of death.

So, where do we go? The Brazilian, Vitor Westhelle, gives us a clue: “The theology of the cross is neither a discourse nor a doctrine. It is a way of life that we live out. It is a practice that involves a risk. It is a story that if truly told, courts danger but moves also into hopeful solidarity, the solidarity of those who are moved by the pain of God in the midst of the world, or by the pain of the world in the midst of God” (quoted by Padilla, “Martin Luther for the Life of the Church,” in *The Forgotten Luther III: Reclaiming a Vision of Global Community*, Conrad A. Braaten & Ryan P. Cumming, eds. [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021], 92.).

The Spirit, the *ruach* of God, pushes us to translate the good news of God into concrete actions for life in community. The Spirit pushes us towards God's mission; to restore community which occurs through reconciliation.

The Indian-Spanish theologian, Raimundo Panikkar, says it this way: "The great challenge today is to convert the sacred bread into real bread, the liturgical peace into political peace, the worship of the creator into reverence for the creation, the Christian praying community into an authentic human fellowship. It is risky to celebrate the Eucharist. We may have to leave it unfinished, going first to give back to the poor what belongs to them" (Raimundo Panikkar, "Many as a Ritual Being," *Chicago Studies*, 16[1977]: 27.).

The bones will continue to rattle if we stay where we have always been. For this journey we carry our backpack, and in it we carry the tools for the work: faith, hope, and love. "Faith, the ability to hear the melody of the future; hope, the courage to dance to its rhythm here and now; and love, a stubborn and unwavering commitment" (Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 260.).

In Christ Jesus –  
Shalom, +Larry

*"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* Romans 15:13