

**THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN RHEINLAND
SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2018**

**Honourable Chairperson of this Synod Assembly
Fellow Bishops,
Members of the Synod Assembly
Invited Ecumenical Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I humbly take this rare opportunity to wish you a happy and blessed New Year 2018. On behalf of all the invited guests, I extend our thanks and gratitude for inviting us to this Synod. In addition, I also bring you warm greetings from our respective churches.

Your Synod takes place in a year which anticipates that our churches and the whole world in particular has to come together than before. We are living in a world where each one of us is affected in one way or another by the existence of hatred, conflicts and terrorism. No where today is the world secure. In 2017 we have witnessed increasing number of immigrants, terrorist acts, and persistent hunger in some regions, especially in Africa, wars, instability of states and poverty. I'm sure these events that are causing havoc and threatening peace have also been part of the talk in Germany.

A high percentage of the problems listed above are motivated by religious beliefs. They are provoked by world religions' ideologies. However, it is amazing that all world religions, being Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hindu, or African Tradition Religion(s) are supposed to promote and respect human dignity and the environment they live in. The support and respect of human dignity and in the world we live is the basic principle of ecumenical dialogue with people of other denominations, faiths and ideologies.

As Christians we have the mandate to reach the whole world with the message of liberation and salvation (Mt 28:19-20). This does not mean to conquer others, but to encounter culture, to teach others the good news of Jesus Christ! Dialogue with others makes the achievement of this goal imperative and possible. The heart of dialogue is when one respects the other as a creation of God in the first place.

When I take my case as an African, the church in Africa has been growing because we have first taken the first step of respecting others the way they are. Many Africans and I hope people from Asia, live with people of other faiths. In our extended families, some are Christians, Muslims and others believe in local religion(s). In principle, people respect each other and any hatred of each other could sometimes be ignited by other factors such politics and poverty and not because of different faiths.

If I take the case of Tanzania, there has been a gradual development of tolerance built between people of different faiths. All social institutions have worked on it to confront segregation based on race, colour, religion, gender and political ideology.

Our first President Julius Kambarage Nyerere worked hard to build a country that is struggled to free itself from hatred and nepotism based on race, colour, religion and political ideology. I say this because before his death, Nyerere was the one who educated Tanzanians to have multiparty democracy - a democracy that would not destroy the basic virtues of human unity, dignity and rights.

Furthermore, Christians, despite their missionary strategies to convert others, had to live these social virtues created by politicians and religious leaders. The inculcation of tolerance began with the basic human rights of believing in any religion without violating the law. The law allows one to believe in anything, without disturbing another. Mission is possible because you witness to someone, and if he or she is convinced by his or her own will to convert to another religion or denomination, one is allowed to do so.

This case story allows me to urge you in Germany and Europe with still high percentage of Christianity to work hard on the principles of dialogue. When you receive many people from other countries with other faiths, are you cultured enough to live with them? This question needs a quick answer since you have many immigrants with different faiths and culture with you. There is no doubt that you need to respond to these issues with a very robust theology that promotes ecumenical encounter as a long term project. Ecumenism needs pragmatic actions in order to have a fruitful encounter against ethno-centrism and anti-Semitism. But dialogue should also allow you to witness your faith as Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to lead to salvation.

Moreover, you need also to have short term training and study visits to ecumenical partners where you can learn and see how people live together with people of different faiths. If you can invest in tourism, how best would it be also to invest in such study tours? I welcome you to our ecumenical centre in Zanzibar, Tanzania for example, which you have together with other churches dearly supported.

With this few remarks, I once again on behalf of all the ecumenical guests wish you a very fruitful assembly. I pray the Holy Spirit will be moving to accompany you as you go through your agenda.

I humbly thank you, and God bless you in the Year 2018 and always.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Alex Gehaz Malasusa
Bishop of ELCT, East and Coastal Diocese.