

Geneva, June 20, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research,

Dear Bishop Kristina Kühnbaum-Schmidt, Chair of the Board,

Dear Staff of the Institute and dear Professor Theo Dieter,

Dear Friends and Guests and Supporters of the Institute for Ecumenical Research!

Sixty years ago, the Institute for Ecumenical Research officially began its mission here in Strasbourg. What a joyous occasion it was, according to the LWF archives. Many leading theologians were present. The opening address was given by Rev. Prof. Dr Fredrik A. Schiotz, LWF President and President of the American Lutheran Church based in Minneapolis.

Sixty years of stellar scholarship and writing produced such important documents for the ecumenical world as the Leuenberg Agreement, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and From Conflict to Communion. Ecumenical hermeneutics and methodology were to a large extent formulated and advanced here, in this place, defining and guiding ecumenical dialogue post Vatican II.

And today, we have another special occasion – the signing of the Statutes that establish the Institute for Ecumenical Research as a registered association with its own independence allowing it many more possibilities for fund-raising and hiring. We recognize though that the funding landscape for church institutions and activities is under enormous pressure. But I am grateful that the Institute launches into its next sixty years, all the stronger because of these challenges. It will seek new ways of work and collaboration in order to respond to the ecumenical and interfaith challenges ahead.

The LWF renews its commitment to the Institute that has come alongside the LWF's theological and ecumenical work. It is more important than ever today to have an independent theological research think-tank. We might be in a difficult situation right now but we need to ensure that the knowledge, capacity, and potential that have been built up along all the years does not get lost.

I regret that I cannot be with you in these days but you know of my unwavering support and appreciation for the Institute for Ecumenical Research and for the dedication and commitment of the Board of Trustees of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research. My thanks go personally to each and every member.

United in thanksgiving and in prayer,

Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt,

LWF General Secretary