

Press release, February 2, 2019

**Farewell service for Director Dr Klaus Schäfer who is going to retire**

**Presiding Bishop Gerhard Ulrich: He stands for mission as encounter**

Hamburg (ce) – The Director of the Centre of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, Dr Klaus Schäfer, is starting his retirement. On February 2, in a festive farewell service in the Christuskirche in Hamburg, the Presiding Bishop Dr Gerhard Ulrich emphasized: „I have come to know and to appreciate Klaus Schäfer as a very religious and highly competent ecumenical theologian. He is living the spirit of ecumenism which belongs to the essence of the church“. Revd Dr Schäfer, 65, has been director of the Centre of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations, the former Northelbian Mission Centre, since 2005. More than 150 guests gathered to celebrate Dr Schäfer’s retirement, among them international ecumenical visitors, academics as well as many people from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany who are active in supporting ecumenical relations, interreligious dialogue and church world service.

The Presiding Bishop Gerhard Ulrich continued: „Klaus Schäfer stands for mission as encounter which starts with listening to others, to strangers, to people far away. For him all who are baptised are missionaries. The struggle for peace, justice and the integrity of creation “creeps out” from their baptism and is developing. This openness and encounter, coming alive in ecumenical relations, is of invaluable significance in a time when respect for others, even strangers is endangered to come under the wheels of populism and when fear of different cultures threatens to lead to separation movements.“

Dr Schäfer represented the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany in several international ecumenical organisations, was a member in expert groups for mission theology, synods and chairman in a committee of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church Germany. He also taught the subject of Religion, Mission and Ecumenism at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Hamburg. He studied protestant theology at the Mission Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony (ELM) in Hermannsburg and at the University of Hamburg. He then was lecturer for biblical theology at the Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad in India.

„I got to know Klaus Schäfer as an experienced and skilled ecumenist and theologian. He led the Centre of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations actively together with the staff and all those who were involved voluntarily with the work of the Centre. He also represented it in public in an excellent way“, said Dean Stefan Block, Chairman of the Board of the Centre.

Before the farewell service, Revd Dr Klaus Schäfer discussed „Intercultural Perspectives in Church and Theology“ with Dr Alex Malasusa (Bishop of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese of the ELCT, Tanzania), Dr Johnny Oommen (Christian Hospital, Bissamcuttack, India), Dieter Becker, professor emeritus for intercultural theology of the theological seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, and Dr Uta Andree, designated head of the department for mission and ecumenical relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany.

Among the guests were also Revd Silvia Genz (President of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil), Revd Jakhin Huika (Dean of Lakshmipur in the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church in India), Mrs She Hongyu (Deputy General Secretary of the Amity Foundation in China), Revd Ashraf Tannous (Parish of Beit Sahour in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land), Revd Adam Tlaisego Khunou (Diocesan Executive Secretary in the Cape Orange Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa) and Rev. Prof. Dr Dace Balode (Dean of the Theological Faculty of the University of Latvia, Riga).

Dr Klaus Schäfer's successor will be Revd Dr Christian Wollmann. He was elected by the general assembly of the Centre of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations in September 2018. He is 42 years old and is up to now working in a parish in Norderstedt near Hamburg. He will start his new office on March 1, 2019.