

Lutherans to apologize for Anabaptist persecution: Decision of Lutheran World Federation Council

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The Lutheran World Federation is preparing to formally ask forgiveness from Anabaptists—Mennonites, Amish and similar believers—for 16th-century persecution, including torture and killings.

The decision to prepare the statement was made by the LWF Council, the world body's main governing agency, which met in Arusha, Tanzania, June 24-30.

Anabaptists, whose name means "rebaptizers," were the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation and were persecuted by both Lutherans and Catholics. They emphasized believer's, or adult, baptism, even for those who had been baptized as infants.

Much of the Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists was based on writings by key figures in the Lutheran movement such as Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, as well as condemnations in Lutheran confessional documents such as the Formula of Concord and the Augsburg Confession, which are still considered authoritative for Lutherans today.

Last year, a statement by participants in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission noted that the 16th-century condemnations do not figure prominently in the reading of the Reformation among Lutherans today. Added the communiqué: "The history of persecution has, however, been deeply imbedded in the memory of Anabaptist descendants and requires careful joint processing in order that obstacles may be removed for the sake of better understanding and closer relations between Mennonite and Lutheran churches today."

The statement seeking forgiveness is expected to be ready for the LWF's 11th assembly, to be held in July 2010. The LWF represents 68 million Lutherans in 141

member churches in 17 countries, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In 2006, the ELCA formally apologized for Lutheran persecution and repudiated the use of government authority “to punish individuals or groups with whom it disagrees theologically.” *David E. Anderson, RNS*