



# BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada  
80 East 10th Avenue  
New Westminster, B.C. V3L 4R5

## Bishop's Report to 2014 Congregational Annual General Meetings BC Synod – ELCIC

Friends,

As I travel throughout our synod, I am inspired by the various ministries in which you are engaged and the dedication and faithfulness that you demonstrate in seeking to serve our Lord. These are challenging times for the church, with an aging population and diminishing numbers. I have had many conversations with individuals and congregations with respect to these issues and I try to provide what support, encouragement and analysis that I can. Quite a number of our congregations are wondering what shall become of them in the next 5 to 10 years. These are common questions; deep and heartfelt questions.

Yet in the midst of these challenges, we hearken once again to the statements of faith we have learned so well over the years: that God calls us not to be successful but faithful; that our vocation (our calling) remains regardless of our age; and that we are a resurrection people fully aware that death also is part of life.

We are on this journey together. Our synod is not so much a separate entity as it is a gathering of the people of God, a gathering of congregations. We never exist in isolation. God calls us into relationship with one another. So let us move forward together. Let us build up one another, rejoicing when one rejoices and mourning when one mourns. The future is uncertain; the way forward is unclear. Yet we venture forth confident in the grace and guidance of our God.

May God's peace, hope and call renew you in spirit and in service.

+Bishop Greg Mohr

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In this year's report to congregational AGMs, I will share a few things with you with respect to the ministry in our synod and my own ministry as your Bishop. A much longer Bishop's report will be included in the synod convention packet made available later this spring. As you might suppose, a significant portion of my time and ministry involves working with congregations and pastors in crisis, transition (including Call Process), struggles, counseling, discernment, parish ministry, and governance – sometimes all in the same phone call! I thank you for the support and encouragement you give me, and for the prayers that you offer for me and for my family.

### **2014 BC SYNOD CONVENTION** (May 29 to June 1, Prince George)

At the end of May 2014, our synod gathers for its biennial convention in Prince George. This year's theme, "Where the Waters Meet" (a variation on the original indigenous name for the area), invites us not only to remember our baptismal identity and calling but also to reflect on our relationships with one another and with our earth. Our guest speaker will be Rev. Dr. Dittmar Mundel, associate director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life.

This year's convention is once again an election year for the positions of Bishop and Treasurer (4 year terms). A document that was prepared a few years ago will once again be sent to congregations to assist in your reflections regarding the election of the Bishop. It also outlines the process for election as stipulated in the synod bylaws. In addition to the election of Bishop and Treasurer, there will be elections for several Synod Council positions.

Another topic of conversation at the Synod Convention will be a review of proposed constitution and bylaw changes. With a move nationally to a 3-year cycle, we also need to consider this possibility for our synod, along with the proposed changes as to how delegates are selected for the national convention. In addition, the proposed bylaw changes include a shift from the regional Conference structure to that of Ministry Areas; this involves a shift from a governance function to that of developing greater networks of support and mutual ministry within an area.

## **RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

This major initiative of our synod enters its second phase this year with a new group of five pastors and three congregations participating. This is in addition to the first group of 11 pastors and 5 congregations, who continue their explorations, discovery, and "experiments." The Task Force overseeing this process in our synod will be working this year on facilitating the transition process for congregations and pastors who complete the first 2-year phase. It is vital that we keep looking ahead to the "next two years" and then "the next two years" after that. This concept is key: we need to continue practicing, honing, discerning, and living the habits and practices of a missional people. Opportunities for new pastors and congregations will continue to be made available, but we also need to make sure that those currently engaged in this process have the resources and leadership needed to continue working within their congregations year after year.

There are many introductory resources available for viewing on our synod webpage <[www.bcsynod.org](http://www.bcsynod.org)>. Click on "Events" and then on "Renewal and Redevelopment." These videos will provide significant background information as to why we are engaging this process and what the process entails. And do not hesitate to call me or any member of the Task Force if you have any questions about this process. I am highly committed to doing whatever I can to support this process in our synod and I encourage every single congregation and pastor to become involved.

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH SYNOD OF ALBERTA AND THE TERRITORIES**

In 2013 I was invited to attend the ABT Synod Study Conference. In particular, I was asked to speak about the renewal process underway in our own synod with our facilitator Rev. Dr. Alan Roxburgh. This past fall, the ABT Synod officially engaged the services of Alan Roxburgh to facilitate their renewal process.

BC Synod Convention action in 2012 instructed us to seek ways by which our two synods might work more closely together. My attendance at their Study Conference afforded me the opportunity to engage in informal and formal conversations about ways by which we might attend to this. Further, Bishop Kochendorfer and I converse regularly to discuss ministry within our synods and to ponder opportunities to facilitate greater engagement among our congregations and pastors. As you can well imagine, the geographical and financial limitations are of concern. Nonetheless, we need to continue to explore ways by which we might mutually benefit from a closer working relationship. (To that end, some of you might want to register for the National Worship Conference to be held in Edmonton this summer! Also, the ABT Synod has 4 church camps that you might want to check out. I know a number of BC folks, including members of my own family, who have attended church camps in Alberta over the years.)

## **URBAN MINISTRIES**

**SUMS:** Surrey Urban Mission Society celebrated a new chapter in its life in 2013, as it held a grand opening for its “new” facility in north Surrey. The SUMS’ board is actively engaged in a review of ministry, which will lay the foundation for its direction in the coming years.

**LUMS:** At the end of 2013, the board of the Lutheran Urban Mission Society (downtown eastside, Vancouver) made a very difficult decision to cease its current ministry by the end of January. Please pray for Pastors Brian Heinrich and Matthew Senf as they discern God’s calling and their future ministry. Pray also for the board as it discerns what next steps might be possible.

## **LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

The BC Synod is co-owner of the Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, SK, along with the other three western synods. As reported earlier, the Board of Governors needed to declare a financial exigency and the seminary continues to operate under that mandate. Regardless of the stressfulness such financial difficulties cause, the seminary continues with its switch to 3-week intensive classes rather than a semester-based curriculum. We currently have 5 BC Synod students engaged in either diaconal or ordination-track studies. Please continue to pray for our seminary, its professors, staff and students. Also pray that others will hear the call to ministry and explore a seminary education.

It is imperative that all of us encourage and call forth prospective candidates for ordained or diaconal ministry. Pastors and Deacons regularly talk about the many people over the years who encouraged them to pursue rostered ministry; they know how important that personal contact was for their own discernment.

## **CARING FOR ALL CREATION: LAND, WATER, AND OUR COMMUNITIES**

This initiative is facilitated by the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life, and co-sponsored by several groups including the BC Synod and the Faith and Society Committee. Announcements recently were sent to congregations and pastors so please take note of this ecumenical, inter-faith, and community-focused initiative. As noted in the brochure, this initiative is premised on “having to create a caring community that knows and supports each other as we take on the vital task of seeing, thinking and acting in new ways.” Large group gatherings will be held every other week in Victoria and Vancouver beginning March 3 and 4. On alternate weeks, participants gather in smaller groups, where readings, activities and field trips are suggested.

The Ronning Centre also will be making these gatherings available by on-line audio broadcast for those living outside of these two locations. They also will help people organize and facilitate small group gatherings.

For information visit the website <[www.spiritoftheland.ca](http://www.spiritoftheland.ca)> or e-mail <[caringforallcreation@gmail.com](mailto:caringforallcreation@gmail.com)>.

## **REVIEW OF COMPANION SYNOD RELATIONSHIP**

Several BC Synod congregations have developed a “companion congregation” relationship with congregations in Peru. However, our synodical relationship has been dormant these past few years. To that end, I have asked the synod’s Mission Committee to undertake a review of our Companion Synod relationship. A periodic review is something that is part of the official Companion Synod agreement, to ensure that a companion relationship continues to be of interest and benefit to both parties.

## **SPECIAL GIFTS RECEIVED**

As a synod, we are deeply grateful to the congregation of Spirit of Life, Vancouver, for the generous financial gifts it has provided to the BC Synod, SUMS, LUMS, and UBC Campus Centre, following the sale of the former Augustana Lutheran Church building. Their gifts have truly left a legacy among us.

## **SYNOD FINANCIAL STATUS**

It is exciting to report that the synod’s audited financial statements (fiscal year end of June 30<sup>th</sup>) show . . . and this is where it gets difficult to report. The statement shows a deficit of \$15,000. However, approximately \$30,000 of our expenses during the year were planned programme related costs that were covered by designated funds on hand. If I was doing this in my cheque book at home, it would show as a surplus of \$15,000. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately!) the audited statements need to show things differently than does my own cheque book. So in terms of cash flow, we ended the year in the black, with an approximate \$15,000 surplus.

Thank you to all individuals and congregations who met the challenge presented by the Synod Convention of 2012, which passed deficit budgets for 2013 and 2014. Some congregations reviewed their benevolence giving to the synod and increased their gifts. Several special gifts from individuals also were received. Sadly, there are some congregations who have chosen to significantly reduce their contributions to the ministry of the synod.

I encourage each of you to discuss your congregation’s financial commitments to the common ministry we all share synodically, nationally and internationally. There is much we do together that cannot be done individually. Further, we know that there is more that we could be doing collectively that we currently are unable to do. Certainly there are many financial pressures facing congregations – some are struggling more than others. But let us all contribute our fair share (regular, proportionate, first-fruit giving) whether it be for our home congregations or whether it is from congregations to synod to national/international ministries.

In Christ's service,  
+Bishop Greg Mohr