



## Report of the National Bishop

# Liberated by God's Grace



Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Very soon your synod will come together to meet for its 2016 Synod Convention. I'm really looking forward to being with you and sharing with you a little more about the mission and ministry of the National expression of our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The coming two years are especially exciting in the life of our church. Along with 72 million Lutherans around the world who are part of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we are in the midst of commemorations leading towards the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The theme adopted by the LWF and endorsed by our church is *Liberated by God's Grace*. There are also three sub-themes: *Salvation—Not for Sale*, *Human Beings—Not for Sale*, and *Creation—Not for Sale*.

You will see this theme and sub-themes at gatherings across our church leading up to the anniversary. I love the way the theme grounds us in the central aspect of our Lutheran identity—that we are saved by grace through faith alone and it lifts up the contemporary challenges that beckon us forward as a church that is constantly being reformed.

In the midst of this anniversary commemoration, we continue to implement our strategic plan. The work at the National Office is formed around the four strategic directions identified by National Church Council (NCC) and affirmed by our National Convention: Spirited Discipleship, Healthy Church, Compassionate Justice and Effective Partnership.

The following is a small glimpse of the work at the National Office around the four strategic areas and how we carry out our call to be a church *In Mission for Others*.

### Spirited Discipleship



*By living out our call to be In Mission for Others, we strive to share our faith through our everyday actions.*

*Whether it's being involved in one of the ELCIC's ministries or sharing the good news in our own unique way, members of the ELCIC are signs of hope and of God's amazing grace.*

Pray, read, worship, study, serve, give, tell. If you have heard me speak at any gathering across our church over the last few years or read my columns in *Canada Lutheran* you are hopefully able to say these seven areas of focus from the *Call to Spiritual Renewal* along with me! If you and your congregation haven't done so already, I invite you to join me and with others across our church, individually and as congregations and specialized ministries, to strive for a deeper discipleship as we live out our baptismal covenants. If you are already involved with the *Call to Spiritual Renewal* then

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I encourage you to continue to find ways to further your engagement and consider how you might share this call to deeper discipleship with your friends, family, congregations and community. At the 2015 ELCIC National Convention we introduced a new resource: *Call for Spiritual Renewal: Ideas for Individuals, Congregations and Communities*. Find out more at [elcic.ca/CSR](http://elcic.ca/CSR)

Many congregations around the ELCIC participated in the 2015 ELCIC Praise Appeal. Thank you for the significant extra-mile giving to support the work of the wider church. In 2016, we are once again asking for your support of the ELCIC Praise Appeal and to designate one Sunday, at a time that works best for your local circumstances, to highlight the appeal. The theme for this year's ELCIC Praise Appeal is *Liberated by God's Grace, Human Beings—Not for Sale*. Lifting up the theme of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation allows us to remember and reflect on the Reformation and what it means for us now, living as Lutheran people within the whole body.

### Healthy Church



*Being effective as a church body means articulating a common vision for our church that enables us to: develop and promote a culture of mutual trust and accountability; improve the financial health of the church; and align communication efforts with the strategic plan—all while having the courage to face the challenges of the realities before us.*

Delegates to the 2015 ELCIC National Convention passed a motion asking the National Church to look at more cost effective options for future National Conventions. At the fall 2015 meeting of NCC, council discussed and considered what this might look like moving forward. With changes to the number of delegates at convention and how often conventions are held, it presents an opportunity to shape our church conventions in a new way. NCC members passed a motion recommending for 2017 National Convention planning we consider: a university setting, one less day, shared cost with National Church, and a celebration component in lieu of banquet.

A *Policy Regarding Authorized Lay Ministries* was passed at the 2015 National Convention (<http://elcic.ca/Documents/documents/LayMinistriesMotionFINAL.pdf>). Work has now begun to look at a study of Diaconal Ministry and Orders of Ministry. The Faith, Order and Doctrine committee provided an update at the fall NCC meeting and noted this work is well underway. A church-wide study guide will be prepared for distribution later this year with findings to be presented in 2017.

Two years ago we initiated the production of the first *ELCIC Annual Report*. This 28-page report highlights the work being done across all expressions of the church—congregations, synods, national, global, and how these expressions work together to fulfill our call to be a church *In Mission for Others*. This report has again been prepared for this year. The most recent publication will be shared with you at your Synod Convention (you can also view online: [elcic.ca/about-the/ELCIC/overview.cfm](http://elcic.ca/about-the/ELCIC/overview.cfm)). Additional print copies are available from the National Office. Please consider how you might share this resource with members of your congregation, your church council, and even new members looking to find out more about the ministry of the ELCIC.

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Are you on social media? Is your congregation? Share with others across the church what you connects you with the ELCIC, being Lutheran and your faith by posting your selfies, social media posts and photos using the #myELCIC hashtag. We LOVE seeing your #myELCIC posts and others across the church do to! Click on the #myELCIC hashtag (on Facebook, twitter and instagram) and see what others are doing across our church.

### Compassionate Justice



*The ELCIC, alongside our many partners such as Canadian Lutheran World Relief, KAIROS, and others, strives to be a church In Mission for Others by being a prophetic and public voice to actively address social, environmental and justice issues locally, nationally and globally.*

The ELCIC is committed to working towards Right Relationships with Indigenous peoples. At our 2015 ELCIC National Convention last July, we were honoured to welcome Truth and Reconciliation Commission Marie Wilson to be our keynote speaker. Also at this convention we passed a motion a motion to calling on the Canadian government to convene a public inquiry concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

One of the resources we introduced at last year's National Convention was an online mapping of ELCIC congregations, First Nations communities, resource agencies and Residential School locations (<http://elcic.ca/Reconciliation/>). This resource is intended to be a first step in becoming more aware of the Territory where you live and Indigenous Peoples across Canada. By locating your congregation on the map, may you begin to identify pathways to growing and renewing relationships.

At the 2015 ELCIC National Convention, delegates passed a motion calling the National Church to review our current *Resolution on Decisions-at-the-end-of-life*. A task force will be working on this and part of the process will involve conversations across our church regarding the needs of people in times of death and dying. A church wide study guide will also be prepared for distribution later in 2016.

### Effective Partnerships



*Our work In Mission for Others is multiplied when we work together with our partners both within the Lutheran community and ecumenically. The ELCIC strives to be good stewards of the resources we have been given by working alongside our partners and rejoicing in the gifts we can share together.*

One of my main responsibilities as National Bishop is nurturing and maintaining the many partnerships we are so blessed with through the ELCIC.

- Our partnership with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) continues to grow and strengthen. Through this partnership we are able to challenge the causes and respond to the consequences of injustice and poverty such as helping to support Syrian refugees who have fled communities in Jordan and Iraq. Within Canada, CLWR provide leadership in refugee resettlement.

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- Our partnership with the Anglican Church of Canada also continues to grow and strengthen. Senior staff from the two churches meet annually to connect on areas of joint work, and planning has begun for a second joint assembly between our two churches to take place in 2019.
- The four leaders of the ELCIC, Anglican Church of Canada, The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have been meeting annually for several years now. This allows us to connect with one another on areas of common mission and ministry, and look for opportunities to have a united voice on areas of mutual concern
- Our partnership with The Lutheran World Federation is so very important in the life of our church. LWF is a leader in refugee services, including those related to conflicts in Syria and South Sudan. As LWF prepares for it's 12th Assembly in 2017 (in Windhoek, Namibia), we look to them as they take the lead in the 500th anniversary preparations of the Reformation.

I love our church, and I'm proud of the ministry we do. I know that the impact of our ministry together is greater than the sum of our separate parts. We may have fewer members and financial resources than when our church was formed back in 1986 but from what I observed at our National convention last summer and from what I have seen and heard from synods, congregations, and ministries across this church—there is a new and exciting spirit within our church. We are becoming a mission-focused church. We are becoming more spiritually grounded and vibrant. We are uniting in common vision and aims. And we are learning how to respect and even rejoice in regional differences we experience throughout the church.

How else can you explain a church undertaking something as bold and exciting as the ELCIC Reformation Challenge? I'm so excited for our church to sponsor 500 refugees; raise funds for 500 scholarships in schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; plant 500,000 trees in Canada, Ethiopia and Palestine; and raise \$500,000 for the LWF Endowment Fund ([elcic.ca/reformationchallenge](http://elcic.ca/reformationchallenge))!

As Romans 5:5 reminds us: "...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Through your faithfulness, witness, creativity and hopefulness, I have learned that hope does not disappoint. We are liberated by God's grace. And we are blessed with a hope in Jesus Christ that will not disappoint us.

Yours in Christ,



**The Rev. Susan C. Johnson**

**National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**