



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

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

BISHOP'S REPORT for Congregational Annual General Meetings, 2016

As I travel around our synod, I am always amazed at the many ways that congregations seek to minister within their contexts, living out our Lord's call to be salt and light in our neighbourhoods and communities. I am privileged to participate in the gathering of God's people for worship, study and prayer, and to hear stories of the ministry of service and care undertaken by congregations. It is good to be in partnership in ministry with you, and I am grateful for your ongoing prayers and encouragement.

I pray that each of your congregations may be strengthened in ministry, that your fellowship may be enriched, and that your service in Christ's name may be a blessing to so many in your community.

As I reflect on the year 2015, I once again need to express my deep appreciation for the time of sabbatical this past year. It was an incredibly renewing time, incorporating a balance of educational opportunities as well as rest. I engaged the Executive Leadership Training, which included a "360 survey" regarding my leadership and ministry. It helped me identify strengths and areas of growth, and I worked with a consultant to delve more deeply into this learning. I am grateful to those who took on extra work during my absence, in particular the Officers of the Synod, Rev. Cliff Reinhardt, Darlene Johnson and Stephen Holmes, as well as office secretary Kimberly Bortnak.

A2B4MR?

This past year saw significant changes to our Synod's staffing. Having received a special grant from the ELCIC's Church Extension and Capital Fund, we were able to extend a letter of call for a half-time position to Rev. Kathy Martin, who now serves as the "Assistant to the Bishop for Missional Renewal." (She and I often use the abbreviation of A2B4MR in our correspondence.) We are grateful to the people of King of Life Lutheran Church, Coquitlam, who have been willing to share their pastor with us all.

Rev. Martin's position involves a lot of organizing, administration, and meetings! But more than that, she also has unique gifts well-suited to the missional journey we are on as a Synod. Her abilities in facilitation, networking, training and pastoral care all come to the fore as she works with clergy cohorts and congregational guiding teams, and as she consults with other congregations who are in need of her insights and gifts.

I am grateful to Rev. Martin and to all the members of the Missional Renewal Task Force for their guidance and commitment to this missional process.

The past fall saw the beginning of a fourth clergy cohort and a third group of congregational Guiding Teams. In addition, we have begun providing resources to congregations not yet in the formal part of the missional renewal process but who desire some guidance as to their congregational ministry.

We are learning a lot during this process. Based on an action-learning model, congregations are engaging in experiments, trying this and that, reflecting on what they have learned from their experiments and what they have learned about God. They continually ask the questions of "What is God up to in our neighbourhood and community?" and "What is God calling us to?" We typically are very good at thinking in terms of "meeting needs" or of wanting to invite people to come and join us at our church and sit in our pews. But the missional process raises different types of questions and invites different ways of thinking about God's activity in the world.

BC SYNOD CONVENTION

April 28 to May 1, 2016, Coquitlam

“Liberated by God’s Grace.” This theme shall guide us as we gather for our biennial BC Synod Convention in Coquitlam this year. From across this province we will gather together for worship, conversation, breaking bread, drinking coffee, and yes, attending to some business. There will be motions and amendments, discussions and debates, decisions and referrals. But in and through it all we seek to be faithful to what God is calling us to be and do as a church. We live our lives as Christians in the utter hope and assurance that we are indeed liberated by God’s grace.

Over the years I typically hear two contrasting comments about church conventions. Some people tell me that they find church conventions boring. I have to admit that, yes, sometimes they are boring. While we try to plan things so that there is a mix of learning, studying, sharing, and being inspired, sometimes it takes a lot of effort to slog through amendments to constitutions and bylaws or to listen to speaker after speaker talk about being in favour or opposed to whatever motion is being debated.

On the other hand, a lot of people say that they have found church conventions to be incredible experiences of learning about the breadth of the church’s work, that they were inspired by the stories shared by delegates, and that they were deeply moved by the worship. Some have even said they enjoyed the business sessions!

The reality is that for most people their experiences will fall somewhere in the middle of that continuum. Nonetheless, we will gather together in convention, trusting that in doing so, God’s spirit works in and among us, guiding us in our decision making, inspiring us, prodding us and, as Luther said, “enlivening us.”

It is a reminder that we do not exist as individual Christians nor as individual congregations. Rather, we are connected one to another.

NEW AT CONVENTION: SYNOD LEARNING EVENT

There will be something new at this year’s convention: a Synod Learning Event. It will take place on Saturday, April 30, and we invite ALL to attend, not just convention delegates. We will spend the day together with our guest presenter, Rev. Dr. Craig van Gelder, as he leads us in reflection, study, engagement, and story. More information will be distributed in the coming weeks, but I want to highlight this event for you and encourage as many of you as possible to attend the Saturday event.

Van Gelder brings a wealth of experience and insight into the missional life of the church. Until his recent retirement, he served as Professor of Congregational Mission at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. He will challenge us, call us and encourage us. Throughout this day we will consider what it means that God is up to something in the world around us. We will explore who are we and what we are to be about.

PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Treasurer’s year-end report was e-mailed to congregations at the end of January. I encourage you to review that document and to reflect on what your congregation’s “fair share” financial commitment might be with respect to your ministry as “the church-at-large.” Synod Council works very hard to keep our expenses as low as possible, but there are many things which we, as congregations and individuals of the Synod, seek to do. At each successive Synod Convention, we all make decisions as to what our ministry priorities shall be and the congregational delegates vote on those proposed budgets on behalf of their congregations.

I think it is important to remember that when we talk about the Synod’s budget we also are talking about the funds that are passed along through the Synod to the ministry of our seminary and the national

church. In turn, some of these funds then go to participate in ministry around the world under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation.

As I was reviewing the financial situation of the Synod with the Treasurer the other day, we noted that many congregations face financial challenges. Yet we also noted that so many seek to give generously to the broader work of the church and for that we are thankful.

Each congregation's constitution and bylaws makes it clear that we are committed to work together with other Lutheran congregations in this thing we call the BC Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Perhaps the best way to picture this is to think of the ministry of the BC Synod as being an extension of your very own congregational ministry. So, too, is the ministry engaged by the ELCIC an aspect of your own congregational ministry. The two million refugees being cared for at camps operated by the Lutheran World Federation are part of your congregational ministry. The schools being operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land are an extension of your congregational ministry.

Closer to home, the Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth Gathering and the Synod's Confirmation Camp are part of your congregational ministry. So, too, is the providing of mission support dollars for congregations engaged in special initiatives part of your congregational ministry, just as is the use of "compassionate justice" funds for congregations engaged in food security, community engagement, and other justice endeavours. In the same way, the worship resources you use and the Augsburg Fortress curriculum for confirmation and Sunday School are made possible through your congregation's offerings. The friendly voice on the other end of the phone when you call Synod office (I'm talking about Kimberly's voice, not mine) is part of your congregation's ministry. And when you need a reimbursement cheque mailed back to you just as quickly as possible, Robert is able to do that since he is an extension of your congregation's ministry.

The same is true as I travel around the synod visiting with pastors and congregations or when I spend hours each day on the phone with pastors, congregational chairpersons or other church leaders. I do so as an extension of your congregational ministry, for we are partners in ministry. As Paul reminds us, we are connected one to another in this body of Christ, and when one suffers we all suffer together, and when one rejoices we all rejoice together. We are partners together in ministry. And to that we must say, "Thanks be to God."

REFORMATION 2017: A COMMEMORATION OF 500 YEARS

The Lutheran World Federation invites us to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation during the years 2015-2017. I encourage you to make use of the many resources found on the ELCIC and the Lutheran World Federation websites. There you will find study documents, theological reflections and, of course, the Reformation Challenge.

I have been in preliminary conversations with a couple of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops and their staff people as to what we might do in our various regions to commemorate this 500th anniversary in an ecumenical way. I trust that some exciting things will come of these conversations. In the same way, I hope that you will have conversations with neighbouring congregations to see what things you might do together to commemorate this historic occasion in your communities.

May God's grace and peace be with you all.

+Bishop Greg Mohr