



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ. May grace and peace be with you all.

As congregations gather for their Annual General Meetings, there will be much discussion about ministry and what the future might bring as we all seek to be faithful to God's calling. I want to encourage you in your ministry and I pray God's blessing upon you all. I also want to express my thanks to you for your prayerful and financial support of the ministry of our synod. We are partners together — in our congregations, our synodical ministry, and our national and international ministry.

Paul's use of the imagery of the body is an apt one to use when we talk about the church. We are connected one to another. When one part of the body suffers, all suffer; when one part of the body rejoices, we all rejoice. So it is true among us. In the midst of the daily challenges and struggles, we continue to live in faith, hope and trust in the one who has called us, named us, nurtured us, and sent us. As you review your ministry from this past year and consider the coming one, it is important to continue to ask these questions: Where is God leading us? What is it that God is calling us to? How is God at work in our neighbourhoods and communities?

I always take great comfort in knowing that Christ goes before us. May our discernment, prayers and fellowship be guided by this knowledge.

The Missional Renewal process within our synod continues to be nurtured and explored. I am grateful for the incredible work being undertaken by Rev. Kathy Martin, Assistant to the Bishop for Missional Renewal, as well as to the team of leaders and coaches that have been shepherding this process. There are many new beginnings taking place this coming year. The 4th cohort of congregations and rostered leaders soon will be starting, so if you have not yet had opportunity to participate in this missional process and would like to do so, please contact us at synod office as soon as possible.

Across our synod, 26 rostered leaders and 22 of our congregations are currently involved in the missional process. In addition, there is a strong network of gifted congregational leaders serving as coaches, trainers, and facilitators. To date, over 120 people have been involved in congregational teams.

In late spring and fall of 2016 we began to explore how Ministry Areas might take shape in each of the Regions of our synod. The hope is to create a space where congregations and rostered leaders can come together more intentionally to learn with and from one another, to provide support and encouragement, to discover if there are ways they might share resources or expertise, and to continue to develop the missional skills and capacities of our congregations and our synod. What we have been learning in our missional process is that congregations value the opportunity to learn with and from one another. In a way, this is about becoming more of a community of congregations so that we can explore our hopeful future together as we join God's mission in the world.

How Ministry Areas take shape will be different in each of the four Regions of our synod. Geographical distances are a challenge, but even so, congregations in a Region are able to come together through conference calls and other formats. In some Regions, congregations are able to meet face-to-face more frequently. Many of those who have attended Ministry Area meetings are new to the missional process but seem eager to gather to do this work together. One Ministry Area recently had 30 people in attendance. One of the rostered leaders commented that they had not really been looking forward to crawling out of bed early on a snowy Saturday morning but they left feeling hopeful and inspired by the group, God's Word, and the work they had done together that morning. We trust and hope that the Ministry Areas will continue to forge new and renewed relationships across our synod, as together we follow God's leading into our neighbourhoods and communities.

In 2016, we gathered for the **BC Synod Convention**. We tried something new — a Synod Learning Day was incorporated into the convention. Approximately 80 people joined convention delegates, doubling our convention numbers. Dr. Craig van Gelder led us in a journey of learning and reflecting, and started us on the process of identifying the adaptive challenges that we face.

The **Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth gathering (CLAY)** was held in Charlottetown, PEI, in August 2016. Many of the youth groups that attended added a few extra days to their schedule in order to visit other areas of the Maritimes. It was fun to hear their stories and see their pictures. I want to express my gratitude to all of you for your support of our youth — for CLAY as well as for the summer Confirmation Camp. Your prayers and financial offerings enable us to continue these events. They are places where friendships are formed, faith is deepened, and a life of service is supported. We owe a debt of thanks to the youth leaders in our congregations who so lovingly and faithfully give of their time. May God richly bless them in their ministry among us.

The **Lay Academy** is a collaborative program of the four western synods and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon and seeks to provide continuing education opportunities for laypeople with respect to theology, leadership, worship and service. Initial funding has been secured, enabling us to hire a part-time coordinator. An initial one-day presentation led by Rev. Tim LeDrew helped to test the logistics and technological issues for the academy. Beginning January 21st, Bishop Marlin Aadland will lead a four-session study on “Galatians: Famous Lost Words.”

The **Study Conference for Rostered Ministers** will be held March 27-29 at Loon Lake retreat centre near Maple Ridge. We will be joined by Dr. Sharon Smith, executive director of Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries, who will assist us in exploring mental health issues, examining the role of pastors and deacons in caring for people, and studying the theological, sociological and psychological foundations for caring.

The **Lutheran Theological Seminary**, Saskatoon, has formally initiated a search for its new president. We are grateful for Acting President Michael Nel’s leadership and guidance during this time of transition these past two years. Continue to pray for our candidates for ministry and for the faculty and staff at our seminary. Pray, as well, for God’s spirit to nudge, encourage and lift up new leaders for our church.

As we enter into this 500th Anniversary year of the **Reformation**, it is good to hear that so many of our congregations are engaging the study guides and worship resources prepared by the Lutheran World Federation and the ELCIC. I regularly hear of congregations forming study groups with neighbouring Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations. The synod’s Worship Committee is planning regional hymn festivals. I also am participating in several Lutheran-Roman Catholic study sessions and will be involved in several ecumenical worship services. I will be in Victoria on January 29, participating in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, along with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops. On October 1, there will be a joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic worship service in the Lower Mainland, with Archbishop Miller in attendance. Then on October 29, I will join the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches in Prince George for a worship service, along with the Roman Catholic bishop in that Diocese.

The Reformation Challenge continues to capture the imagination of our church. Many congregations and individuals are involved in refugee sponsorships. As I travel throughout the synod I hear many stories from people describing how the local churches and community groups have worked together to sponsor refugee families. In addition, people are contributing to the scholarship fund, planting trees and seedlings, and donating to the Lutheran World Federation endowment fund.

We were able to send two representatives from our synod to attend a **Global Missions Consultation** this past November. They were able to engage in conversation with the leadership of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru (IL-P), as well as with representatives from the two ELCA companion synods who also relate to IL-P. We will be holding further conversations this year with respect to our companion relationship, so that we might renew our commitment to one another and work more closely and appropriately together.

Thank you for your partnership in ministry, for your prayers, and for your faithful financial stewardship which undergirds the ministry of the church at large.

Peace be with you all,
+Bishop Greg Mohr