

BISHOP'S REPORT for Congregations' 2015 Annual General Meetings

“Journeying.” The word itself implies an on-going activity. It’s not finished. There is more to come. Each of us as individuals and each of our faith communities are on a journey. It sometimes is a daunting task to be a faith community these days. Uncertain about survival, wondering about diminishing numbers, sensing that we often are ignored and considered irrelevant to much of our world – all these things challenge us, affect us, and make this journey a difficult one.

But another word needs to be paired with the word “journeying,” and that is the word “together.” We do not journey alone. We are journeying together. We often speak of the concept of “the communion of saints,” and while we tend to think of those who have gone on before us, it also is vitally important to remember the communion of the saints alive here and now. We are called to bear one another’s burdens and we are called to rejoice when someone rejoices. We are called to be in prayer one for another, support one another, and accompany one another.

I remember hearing the phrase years ago: “You cannot be a solitary Christian because the very nature of being Christian is to be in relationship.” I believe that to be true. The brokenness that we speak about in the book of Genesis is the brokenness not just between individuals and God, but between individuals and each other, and between individuals and creation. We are in relationship.

And so we continue on our journey together. We need each other – for support, encouragement, ideas, creativity. We need each other – to be challenged, pushed, held accountable. We need each other – to share our burdens, express our frustrations and fears, and offer a word of hope one to another.

Journeying together also means keeping “eyes open” – looking for and discerning what God is up to in our world. We know and believe that God is at work in this world. God’s activity is all around us. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “The spirit blows where it will.” And God calls us to be part of this activity in our neighbourhoods and communities.

Having companions on the journey of faith is vitally important and it is indeed a blessing. So next time you gather at church, say thank you to those around you who journey together with you; thank the pastor; thank the children and youth for being there at church and blessing you by their presence; thank your family for journeying with you; and thank the janitor – I don’t think they ever get thanked enough.

May God’s peace be with you all,
+Bishop Greg Mohr

Living into a Missional Renewal Synod

In my report to the 2014 Synod Convention, I suggested that it is time for us to take a concerted look at our synodical committees and structure in order to discern what best serves us as a Synod with respect to our ministry. There are many important areas of ministry that we engage as a Synod. However, it is time to undertake a review that will help us stay focused on the key areas and find ways to best engage the gifts and interests of people from across our Synod.

In addition, Synod Council already has begun a process of discernment, as we ask the question as to how our Synod could embody the Missional Renewal process in all of the Synod’s activities and ministries? What would that look like? What changes do we need to make? How can we best engage the activities of listening and discerning, and practicing action-reflection model? The Missional Renewal task force has two days of planning scheduled in February and Synod Council has set aside a day and a half at its April meeting in order to attend to these issues.

I know I will repeat myself over and over and over again in these coming years. This is a difficult time to be the church. Many (most?) of our congregations are struggling financially and in terms of numbers of people also struggling with sense of mission. What does it mean to be the church today?

I firmly believe that organizations like The Missional Network can assist us in discerning that to which we are called. They can help us explore how God is at work in our world, and to challenge us to live out our calling as churches, wherein God invites us to be part of that which God is already up to in our neighbourhoods and communities.

The Missional Renewal process begun in our Synod is a multi-faceted approach to leadership development, mission creativeness, and community-based relationships. As we develop our own internal coaches and facilitators, we are better able to work together with congregations across our Synod who are in different phases of their congregational life. Our goal is that every congregation will be able to participate in this vitally important endeavour. We are currently in the planning phase for a 3rd grouping of congregations and rostered ministers to begin the process in the fall of 2015. We also are looking at ways by which the Missional Renewal process can be engaged by congregations who do not have a resident pastor.

Special Funds Received

As announced previously, the Lutheran Urban Mission Society (LUMS) was dissolved in 2014. After all expenses have been attended to and the final report has been received from CRA, approximately \$12,000 has been deposited with the BC Synod. The funds have been set aside in a Restricted Fund, with the proviso that they be used “to support Lutheran or Anglican mission and ministry on Vancouver’s downtown eastside (DTES), including the equipping and training of individuals to undertake that mission and ministry.”

In addition, the congregation Christ, Terrace, voted in 2014 to dissolve the congregation. The proceeds from sale of their land and facility were dispersed, a portion of which was remitted to the BC Synod. We are grateful for that gift and extend our appreciation to the members of that congregation.

According to BC Synod policy for the receipt of undesignated gifts over \$1000, 10% of this gift received from Christ, Terrace, has been remitted for the ministry of our national church. As for the remainder, Synod Council approved a request that a portion of the funds be designated for use in the Missional Renewal process. Also in keeping with the policy, the remainder of the funds were placed in the Extraordinary Gifts Reserve Fund of the BC Synod.

2014 Synod Convention: Prince George

Our 2014 Synod Convention was held in Prince George this past spring, and was wonderfully hosted by the congregation of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church. 75 voting delegates from across our synod journeyed together in worship, conversation, discussion, debates, and learning. Draft minutes of the 2014 Synod Convention have been distributed to every congregation and soon will be posted to the synod website.

Some items of note from the Synod Convention:

(1) National Bishop Susan Johnson reported that the Lutheran World Federation has called upon all Lutheran communities to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation (2017). The LWF theme for this commemoration is “Liberated by God’s Grace,” and the three sub-themes are:

- a. Salvation: Not for Sale
- b. Human Beings: Not for Sale
- c. Creation: Not for Sale

I encourage you to consider ways by which you can observe this Commemoration in an ecumenical context. Resources are gradually being added to the Lutheran World Federation website. It's not often we get to celebrate a 500th birthday.

(2) The following motions were passed by the Synod Convention:

- that the BC Synod in Convention commit to working towards reconciliation with our indigenous sisters and brothers, and direct the BC Synod to provide materials and resources to each BC Synod faith community and congregation.
- that the BC Synod in Convention urge all its congregations and faith communities to consider ways that they can acknowledge the traditional lands upon which they gather at their services, meetings or other gatherings.
- that the BC Synod in Convention recommend our congregations study the "Responsible Resource Extraction" document found in the Joint Assembly Declaration on Homelessness and Affordable Housing and Responsible Resource Extraction (endorsed by the Joint Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church in Canada, July 2013, Ottawa), and do the following:
 1. give prayerful consideration to embracing the commitments listed in the statement;
 2. take specific steps to participate in the BC Synod Green Parish Accreditation Program, which is part of the ELCIC Stewardship of Creation Initiative;
 3. consider hosting and/or engaging in local gatherings in 2015 of the Caring for All Creation series.

(3) And, yes, there were a lot of motions pertaining to amendments to the BC Synod's Constitution and Bylaws.

3-Month Sabbatical Granted

I am grateful to Synod Council for granting me a 3-month sabbatical in 2015. I will be taking this sabbatical from the last week of April to the last week of July, which then will be followed by four weeks of vacation time. This sabbatical is granted in recognition of my work for the synod as Assistant to the Bishop and as Bishop from 2007 to the present. I am extremely thankful for this opportunity.

There are two primary components for sabbatical. As the Sabbatical Guidelines document states: "A sabbatical provides not only opportunities for more in-depth learning and renewal but also rest from labour. A sabbatical should be holistic, in that it includes time for prayer, reflection, rest, and care of the body, as well as developing gifts for ministry."

To that end, I will be contracting with The Missional Network in order to participate in the Executive Leadership Training or, if that course is not available during the months in question, to design a comparable program in consultation with Alan Roxburgh. As our synod explores ways by which we might embed the Missional Renewal process in the life of the Synod, this course will assist me in reviewing the role and office of the bishop, and identify areas and means by which the Missional Renewal aspects may be lived out in my work and life. In addition to the Executive Leadership Training, I also recognize that there are key books central to the missional process that I have purchased but which remain unread on my bookshelf. Time is a precious gift, and I intend on using some sabbatical time to read through several of these books.

The other aspect of sabbatical is to enable reflection, rest and care of the self. I look forward to time away from the "mantle of the office," from the pressures and burdens of this position.

During my absence, the Officers of the Synod, along with the Deans, Synod Council members, and pastors in our synod, will attend to the various tasks that need to be undertaken. Someone will always be on call, to assist congregations as needed.

Note for Congregations whose Pastors are Delegates to 2015 National Convention

It is recommended that congregations also elect an alternate lay delegate and submit that person's name to the national office prior to the deadline. In the event that your pastor is not able to attend the convention, the alternate lay delegate is then able to attend. If the alternate's name has not been submitted by the deadline announced for congregations, then no other person can take the pastor's place as a delegate.

Financial Stewardship of the BC Synod

The ministry of our synod is dependent upon the financial gifts provided by congregations and individuals. Thank you to those who so regularly and faithfully support this ministry. The ministries of the synod – the programs, congregational support, missional Renewal process, and staffing costs, to name but a few – all are made possible through your financial contributions.

It is important regularly to review your congregational commitments and discern what is your fair share in upholding the ministry that you tell us to do. In other words, the budget for the Synod's ministry is your budget. It is voted upon by representatives from each congregation. This is *our* budget. It is decided by all of us as we gather in convention. Therefore, we all must participate in making sure that what we commit to also is funded properly.

As a Synod, we commit 17% of Synod offerings to the work of our national church, which in turn forwards a portion of those funds for the work of the international expression of our church through the Lutheran World Federation. In addition, we commit 10% of funds received to support the ministry of our seminary in Saskatoon.

Attached to this report for Congregational AGMs is a report from the Treasurer of our Synod. There are two portions to that report:

1. Congregational Benevolence to the Synod for the calendar year 2014
2. Directed Gifts from congregations that flow through the Synod (such as CLWR)

Please review these reports carefully. And please contact our Synod treasurer if you find a discrepancy between your congregational figures and those found on these documents. We want to make sure that these figures are accurate.

Respectfully submitted,

+Bishop Greg Mohr
BC Synod – ELCIC