



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD
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Bishop's Report to 2018 Congregational Annual General Meetings

January 2018

Grace and peace be with you all.

As you gather for your Annual General Meetings, I want to convey to you how thankful I am for your partnership in ministry, for your deep commitment to the Gospel, and for your life in Christ lived out in the communities and neighbourhoods in which you live. I continually lift you up in prayer, and I know that you also remember me in your prayers. I am so very grateful for that.

Annual General Meetings are a time to reflect upon your ministry of this past year and to lay the groundwork for the year ahead. As I travel throughout the BC Synod, I am constantly impressed by how deeply committed people are to God's calling, to faithful living, to their congregations and ministries, and to engagement in their communities.

As I travel, I also hear many concerns. There is anxiety about diminishing numbers and capabilities, but also concerns for one's community, and a recognition of the struggles that people are having, whether it be with respect to housing and homelessness, addictions, health issues, or creating livable communities.

I am buoyed by the commitment to be the people of God together, to learn and explore, and to continually ask what it is that God is calling us to. These are questions of faith, of discipleship, and of openness to God's spirit.

As a Synod, we also ask these very questions. If we have learned and experienced anything through this missional process, it is an openness to look and see, to question and ask, and to be expectant that God is indeed up to something, that God is at work, and that God is faithful. Our numbers may be smaller than they once were, but our calling remains. Our life in Christ remains. Our love and care for our neighbours remain. Our being nurtured in word and sacrament remains.

2018 will see us gather once again for our **BC Synod Convention**. This year, we are being hosted by the congregation of Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Langley. The convention will take place Thursday, May 24, through Sunday, May 27.

This year's convention marks the beginning of our three-year cycle (Year 1: synod conventions; Year 2: national convention; Year 3: off year). The transition to a three-year cycle means that all positions on Synod Council will be up for election, including that of the bishop. Information regarding the nomination process soon will be provided by the Nominating Committee. In addition, the Synod Convention will be electing delegates to represent us at the 2019 National Convention. The process for nominating people for those elections also will be sent to congregations shortly. We currently are in the process of finalizing arrangements with a guest speaker for the Synod Convention and hope to announce that very soon. Our guest speaker will help us deepen our conversations and learnings about being the people of God in our communities and congregations.

The **missional process** in which we are engaged as a synod continues to take root and grow across our synod. Clergy cohorts continue to meet for study, reflection and encouragement. Numerous congregational guiding teams continue to learn, explore, discern and experiment. Lay and clergy coaches continue to work

with cohorts and guiding teams. We make much use of technology for many of these meetings, but also know how important the occasional face-to-face gathering really is. To witness the excitement and encouragement that people receive by being together to share their stories and experiences is so very gratifying to see.

Rev. Kathy Martin has been leading and facilitating this missional process in our synod for the past two years. She has been working on a half-time basis for the synod and half-time with the congregation of King of Life Lutheran Church, Coquitlam. However, Synod Council recently extended a call to full-time ministry with the synod, and Rev. Martin has accepted that call. She officially begins her new position with the synod on February 1st. Rev. Martin's title is rather lengthy, but it tries to convey the breadth of her work: **Assistant to the Bishop for Missional Renewal and Congregational Support**.

As I noted in a communication memo earlier this year, while the need for a full-time Assistant to the Bishop position has been evident for some time, it was not until recently that we were in a position to consider this. This expansion to a full-time ministry position was made possible in several ways: (1) through a special donation made by one of our congregations upon the sale of its facility, (2) utilizing reserve funds that previously had been set aside by Synod Councils, and (3) through mission grant funds.

Synod Council and I have been discerning for some time how best to provide the support, encouragement and leadership resources required by congregations and rostered ministers. We have noted the challenges and the competing demands on time and resources. We have listened to the concerns and hopes you have raised, that we might better be able to support your ministry as you discern God's activity in your congregations and in the communities around you.

One of the clauses in the Letter of Call outlining the scope of Rev. Martin's work is the following: to call our Synod into a ministry of expectation and hope. Yes, this is a calling that each of us undertakes — as bishop, assistant, rostered leaders, and lay members — to be people of hope and to live in expectation. But specifically and very intentionally, we ask this of Rev. Martin — to accompany us on our missional journey in this very full and demanding way.

Synod Council is currently engaged in a review of the **Standing Committees** for the synod. A sub-committee recently distributed a questionnaire regarding this and we have received numerous submissions. The sub-committee will continue to explore this question of which ministry areas are needed within our synod at this point in time. Your thoughts and perspectives on this issue are always welcome.

2018 also marks a year of further amendments to congregational **Constitution and Bylaws**. The recent changes to the provincial legislation have necessitated some amendments. In addition, the national church has completed its revision to the Model Constitution and Bylaws for Congregations. The BC Synod constitution committee has reviewed the national model and made changes to it in order for it to be compatible with the new BC Societies Act. The BC Synod version is now on our synod website. A letter from the constitution committee soon will be sent to each congregation, along with a "marked-up" version of the Model, making it easier to see which parts need to be changed to bring it in line with the new BC Societies Act.

One prayer from our Evangelical Lutheran Worship continues to be a touchstone prayer for me. It is this: "O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.

Peace be with you all.

+Bishop Greg Mohr