



Exploring systemic sexism

We all need to engage in this work.

By Bishop Greg

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This past June, our BC Synod committed itself to a journey that explores systemic sexism in our church. I want to take this opportunity in my bishop's column for the Canada Lutheran to apprise you of our synod's commitment and to invite your prayers for us as we begin this journey.

On behalf of our synod council, I wrote the following pastoral letter to all the rostered ministers and congregations of our synod:

Female rostered ministers in the BC Synod face discrimination, misogyny, and sexism on a regular basis. This issue is not fabricated or anecdotal. It is a consistent and systemic reality that affects their daily lives and ecclesial settings, as well as their full potential in ministry, thereby preventing them from thriving in their ministry settings. The health and well-being of all rostered ministers in the synod are affected when half of its members struggle to be seen and heard for their unique contributions they make to the church.

We need to be reminded regularly that the full glory of God's reign will not be realized without the fullness of humanity being represented. God's decision to be fully human in Jesus mandates that the church celebrate and tend the fullness of humanity. When a portion of persons are treated as less than, we are falling short of God's vision for the church.

As a synod, we have committed ourselves to living fully into a missional mindset, which is identified by three central practices: connection, collaboration, and communication. Realizing this mindset and recognizing these missional practices, we as the BC Synod must set out a plan to attend to systemic sexism and to address the status of females among our rostered ministers.

We have engaged the services of Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis, Professor at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, and author of many books, including [She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry](#). She is ideally suited to provide direction, accompaniment, and accountability in this work.

In conversation with Dr. Lewis, Synod Council is initiating a year-long plan to begin to address the truth of systemic sexism within our church. It is not enough to recognize this truth; it takes intentionality in our organizational structure so that all levels and members of the church know their contribution to and complacency in this problem. This plan is not for the sake of a determined goal, but to lean into a way of being as a church that embodies confession, vulnerability, awareness, and advocacy. This is about changing our culture and commitment to shaping the ethos of our synod for the good of the whole. This will be uncomfortable and challenging work.

Dr. Lewis will begin her work among us by facilitating listening sessions for current and retired women clergy and deacons. Later in the process, she will engage all rostered ministers as well as lay leaders in additional listening sessions. A synod Sexism Task Force will work closely with Dr. Lewis to initiate Regional and congregational sessions as well.

This timeline does not imagine a simple or quick-fix process. Instead, it commits to a certainty that this is an ongoing and embedded issue. Regular, ongoing assessment and review will be needed in subsequent years as we live into this important and necessary work.

There will be various opportunities throughout the coming year to join Dr. Lewis in conversation, reflection and discernment. We all need to engage in this work. I strongly encourage all of you to enter into this journey with me.”