



Report of the National Bishop

Called to Journey Together

I want to start my report by first and foremost saying, Thank You! What a year this has been. To our members and rostered leaders — you have really inspired me. Thank you for the ways you have continued to support your congregations and communities and continue your ministries in safe and appropriate ways. I have enjoyed the opportunity to worship with so many of you.

We have had to be creative and flexible in so many ways this past year.

We are in this together. Not just as Canadians but as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. I feel like we are much more connected between all expressions of the church than ever before. There are so many stories of people worshiping with one another, praying for and with one another, and I appreciate the work so many of us have been able to do together. We are all doing our very best.

I want to focus my report on just some of those ways we have come together and the many partnerships that help enable this work to be carried out. There are many things I could share but for the sake of brief reporting, here are just a few of the highlights.

These will be organized by the four areas of focus that make up the National Office strategic plan: *Courageous Innovation, Reconciled Relationships, One Body Working Together and Empowered Disciples*. I would invite you to look at these areas and consider how you, your congregation and your community might also be engaged in one or more of these priorities.

Courageous Innovation

If ever there was a time for courageous innovation, this is it. The many ways we have all come together across the church as we have gone through various stages of restrictions, and then opening up, and then in some cases increased restrictions again has been admirable. It was not widely felt when the first online worship services were set up that this would be something we'd continue to carry on one-year later, and beyond.

Innovative interaction with the community

There have been many joint communication pieces from the National and Synod leaders to ELCIC members since the start of the global pandemic. The hope for these has been to offer support, guidance and prayers as we journey together. You can find these letters and updates online: www.elcic.ca/publichealth/.

The ELCIC website devoted a special section of the website (www.elcic.ca/publichealth/live_streaming.cfm) to listing all the live streaming and pre-recorded worship services from across the church, in addition to other COVID-19 related resources (www.elcic.ca/publichealth). We saw this page grow from a small handful to a list of over 200 congregations very rapidly. And this continues to be one of the most accessed pages of the website as we look to some congregations returning to in-person worship and offering hybrid online/in-person options.

In March of 2020, I began a daily practice of sharing daily hymns and prayers, inviting ELCIC members to sing and pray along with me. These are shared on social media and via a daily email and have been very well received. This continued into the Fall of 2020 and tapered off just before November 2020 when I began a three-month sabbatical. I also took on this hymn/prayer journey for the seasons of Lent and Easter this year.

National and Synod leaders offered three sermon series in the last year. From June 14 to September 13, 2020, National and Synod Bishops, along with Synod Assistants to the Bishops shared sermons as part of the Summer Sermon Series. Video and text of the sermons were made available to all congregations as a means of providing support, offering different voices, and introducing congregational members to Bishops and Assistants from across the church. From January 10 to February 14, 2021, National and Synod Bishops offered a series of six sermons for use in congregations using this similar format. And in this summer, National and Synod Bishops and Assistants to the Bishops shared sermons from mid-May to mid-September. All of these sermon series resources were well utilized by ELCIC congregations.

Flexibility in sharing and deploying financial resources

ELCIC National and Synod Treasurers, along with the ELCIC Director of Finance and Administration, and the Assistant to the Bishop for Communications and Resource Generation, have been holding regular meetings via Zoom since the Government of Canada began announcements on financial support for COVID-19. The purpose of these meetings has been to assist one another with navigating through the current financial challenges that congregations may be facing and to identify areas of mutual support. The meetings have been very productive and resulted in almost monthly communication pieces for congregations. You can read these letters and updates here: www.elcic.ca/publichealth/.

Reconciled Relationships

Inclusive vision of the church

The ELCIC has been a supporter of the World Council of Churches (WCC) *Thursdays in Black* campaign for many years now — a weekly reminder of our commitment to end gender-based violence including domestic violence. For several years I have been a WCC *Thursdays in Black* Ambassador which means I have been involved in issuing statements urging awareness of gender-based violence.

On April 23, 2020, the Ambassadors issued a statement urging awareness and protection from the “dual pandemics” of COVID-19 and gender-based violence: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/thursdays-in-black-ambassadors-we-must-enable-and-promote-safe-spaces-for-all>.

On March 4, 2021, I joined with our Synod Bishops to write to the church to express our ongoing concern for domestic violence in our country and within our church. Social isolation and current lockdown measures have led to a dramatic increase in domestic violence. The UN describes this as a shadow pandemic alongside COVID-19, “a pandemic within a pandemic.” You are invited to join in this campaign by wearing black on Thursday: https://www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=593&fbclid=IwAR0bs0h-FpRcYmWv4sF3cb5vG7ykRG6H3r3SqnsTsvLPM_dfBVo3l1uDDcc.

Following a 2019 convention motion, three new task forces formed. The Task Force addressing Ableism, the Task Force addressing Racism, White Privilege and Racial Injustice, and the Task Force addressing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia have all begun their work.

Challengers of racism and privilege

On March 21, 2020, I joined with Anglican and United Church leaders to issue a statement lifting up the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent as an opportunity to eliminate anti-black racism: www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=552.

On June 2, 2020, in response to the demonstrations across the United States and Canada in the wake of the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, and The United Church of Canada issued a joint letter: <https://www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=569>.

On June 4, 2020, the Synod Bishops and I issued a pastoral letter acknowledging that racism is within us and within our communities. We call on all congregations and members to commit to doing the hard work and change our ways of thinking and our actions that demean and hurt: <https://www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=570>.

On June 19, 2020, I joined with other ecumenical leaders to encourage the UN Human Rights Council to address racism: <http://wcrch.ch/news/wcrch-joins-ecumenical-call-against-racism>.

On July 1, 2020, eight additional churches joined the ELCIC, United and Anglican churches in committing to recognize and celebrate the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024) and to addressing anti-Black racism.

On July 29, 2020, I sent a letter to the Prime Minister supporting private member’s motion for Parliament to designate August 1 of every year as Emancipation Day in Canada: <https://elcic.ca/From-the-Bishop/documents/20200729LettertoPrimeMinisterEmancipationDay2.pdf>.

On November 30, 2020, the National Bishop and the leaders of the Anglican Church of Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and The Episcopal Church joined together to offer an

Advent message: *Churches Beyond Borders – Advent Call to Address Racism and White Supremacy*: www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=586.

Healthy relationship with the earth

The national bishops for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) and The Episcopal Church (TEC) prepared devotions for each Sunday during the Season of Creation, September 1 to October 4.

Work to End Poverty in Canada

On May 3, 2020, I joined other Anglican and Lutheran Bishops in a letter to the Prime Minister calling for Guaranteed Basic Income: www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=565.

On March 20, 2020, I joined with Anglican and Presbyterian Church leaders in a letter to the Prime Minister lifting up the need to support the non-profit sector during the pandemic.

Ecumenical and interfaith partnerships

The ELCIC has been in the process of deepening relationships with the Moravian Church in North America. There are currently 19 Moravian congregations in Canada (9 in Alberta, plus 1 mission ministry; 1 in Toronto, Ontario; and 10 in Labrador). In the US, both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Episcopal Church have full communion relationships with the Moravian Church. In September 2020, National Church Council approved a motion to authorize representatives of the ELCIC to participate in a task force to pursue the possibility of: 1) a trilateral mutual recognition as churches, and 2) a ministry and public witness partnership between the Anglican Church of Canada, the Northern Province of the Moravian Church in North America and the ELCIC.

In October 2007, Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals came together to unanimously declare the common ground between Christianity and Islam. Since then, *A Common Word Between Us and You* has been encouraging Muslim-Christian dialogue and understanding. In 2018, the ELCIC National Convention and the Anglican Church of Canada General Synod each acted to endorse *A Common Word*. In January 2020, more than 70 people gathered to celebrate this endorsement. The event included scripture reading, prayers, keynote addresses by two Muslim scholars, and I joined with Archbishop Linda Nicholls as we participated in a ceremonial signing of *A Common Word*. The event also marked the launch of www.acommonword.ca which features resources and a toolkit supporting Muslim Christian dialogue.

One Body Working Together

Shared vision across all expressions of the church

The Vision Statement Task Force continues to work to carry out its duties related to ELCIC motion CC-2018-25. The task force has been involved in broad consultation across the church and presented their final recommendations to National Church Council at its September 2021 meeting.

National and international partnerships

In September 2020, National Church Council approved a motion to designate \$100,000 to The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Rapid Response Fund. Many of the 148 LWF member churches live in contexts that are particularly vulnerable for emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented challenge for these churches. The LWF Communion Office has created a space for showing solidarity to these member churches by setting up a COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund. The fund provides short-term grants for the implementation of specific COVID-19 prevention and response work.

On May 31, 2020 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada joined together for *One Family in Mission* — an online Pentecost Sunday afternoon event. The seed of inspiration for this joint worship came from a vision for what would it look like to have Lutherans and Anglicans from across our two churches praying the Lord's Prayer together — in our own versions and languages. The online gathering included an opening hymn featuring two Winnipeg singers along with myself, Archbishop Linda and Archbishop Mark; greetings; a reading; reflections; prayer; and a closing hymn. The highlight of the event was the coming together of our Lutheran and Anglican voices in the saying of the Lord's Prayer.

Submissions were requested from across our two churches during the beginning of May. Not knowing what kind of response we might receive, we set our sights on a goal of 100 submissions. To our great surprise, we actually ended up receiving 150 responses (59 Anglican, 89 Lutheran and 2 from joint ELCIC/ACC communities). Thank you to all who made a recording of yourself praying the Lord's Prayer and sent it in. You can still watch the event online at <https://anglicanlutheran.ca/pentecost/>.

Anglican and Lutheran staff meet regularly to discuss shared work in the areas of communication, justice, and ecumenical and interfaith relations. While these meetings used to be in-person, the move to online has meant that these meetings have been able to take place more frequently which has allowed for a continuity of discussion and work flow.

While unfortunately the 2020 National Worship Conference (NWC) had to be postponed due to COVID-19, it took place online July 6-7, 2021 as an online event. Details about the event, *Disruption and Grace: Learning edges in liminal times*, and the Companion of the Worship Arts recipients can be found here: <https://www.nationalworshipconference.org>.

Support CLWR's mission

We continue to work very closely with our partner in international relief and development, Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR). While we have both mostly been working from home and not at our shared office space at 177 Lombard in the last year, we continue to meet regularly to discuss joint areas of work.

CLWR made a special appeal for COVID-19 relief. A portion of funds raised was designated for relief in Canada. A total of \$11,400 was distributed to synods to help vulnerable people in Canada.

This year, CLWR celebrates its 75th anniversary. In acknowledgement of this milestone, the ELCIC has designated Sunday, September 26 as CLWR Sunday.

Empowered Disciples

Baptismal vocation

The *Living our Faith* four-year emphasis completed its first year's focus on prayer at the end of August 2020. As we began our second year of the emphasis in September 2020 we shifted our focus to Read — a study of the books of the Bible. We have been so encouraged by all the Bible Book Clubs that have been organized across the ELCIC. And it's still not too late to join in! Each month we will read a book of the Bible and resources are provided for discussion at a monthly book club that you can coordinate however best works for your context (in-person with appropriate social distancing, or online!): www.elcic.ca/livingourfaith. In September 2021, we began a third year of the emphasis with a focus on worship and personal devotions.

Engaged/empowered youth/young adults

Due to COVID-19, the 2020 Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth (CLAY) gathering was postponed and rescheduled for 2021. To help bridge the gap a video event was planned and brought together many groups from across the country and from both the ELCIC and Anglican Church of Canada on August 22, 2020.

Due to the ongoing uncertainty of the global pandemic, the difficult decision was made for CLAY 2021 to be hosted as an online event. The event took place August 20-22, 2021. There were three hours of group gathering time each day featuring: worship, workshops, and a large group gathering with CLAY band, drama team, and keynote speaker Sarah Bessey. There were late night spots every day, and activities to engage in the National Youth Project. Highlights from the event can be found at: www.claygathering.ca.

I want to end this report as I began — by thanking you for your faithfulness and for your partnership. 2020 was a challenging year and 2021 has been no different thus far. But we are people of hope, Christ is with us, and together we will manage the challenges and faithfully live into the next chapter.

Yours in Christ,

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