

# It's a Wonderful Synod

The movie *It's a Wonderful Life* is a Christmas favourite in many households. The unlikely hero, George Bailey, finds himself in a crisis and contemplates suicide. His guardian angel grants George's wish never to have been born and together they visit a Bailey-less version of his community. After seeing this dark alternative world George renounces his suicidal wish, decides that his life has had value after all, and returns to present reality.

Individuals and congregations donate one and a half million dollars annually to fund the work of the wider church. People sometimes ask: "What good does that money do? Couldn't we get along just fine without a synod or national church?"

Let's imagine what congregational life would be like if the wider church had never been born.

## Congregations

Without the Synod, there would be no funds to buy land, pay a mission pastor's salary or subsidize a newly formed congregation in its early years. Is your congregation less than 100 years old? If so, there's a strong likelihood it might not even exist today if the Synod hadn't been there to act as midwife at its birth.

How would congregations worship? Without the ELCIC and our sister church in the U.S. there would be no distinctly Lutheran worship books. Without the Synod there would be no seminars introducing church musicians and worship leaders to new hymns, liturgies, sacramental practices or church art.

If the Synod had never been born, there would be no outside resources for youth and young adult ministry. There would be no church camps, no youth gatherings, no programs on university campuses, no websites connecting Lutheran students. There would be no scholarship programs to assist students entering post-secondary education. How many of today's clergy and lay leaders give credit to these programs for nurturing and forming their faith? Without these programs, where would congregational leaders come from?

## Pastors

Congregations would have pastors, but they would not have been shaped in the Lutheran tradition. Without a wider church, who would establish standards for ministry? Who would maintain programs to recruit and support pastoral candidates? Where would pastors be educated? Waterloo Lutheran Seminary was created by the



Synod in 1911 and to this day a significant proportion of its operating budget comes in the form of a synodical grant. No Synod, no seminary.

In the absence of a wider church, who would ordain pastors? Who would assist congregations in the process of calling a pastor suited to fill a ministerial vacancy?

Without the Synod there would be no ongoing professional development for clergy, no retreats or conferences. And if a pastor encountered a personal or vocational crisis, who would be there to provide counselling or financial assistance? When a congregation sought health, dental, life insurance or pension benefits for its pastor, the costs would surely be higher for an individual person than for a group of several hundred.

### **Impact in the World**

Public institutions such as hospitals, social service agencies and universities can all trace their origins back to the church. (Both Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo have their roots in the Eastern Synod.) Social movements that started in the churches include the abolition of slavery, civil rights and the end of apartheid, the concept of socially responsible investing, and the treaty banning land mines, in which a graduate of our seminary played a key leadership role not many years ago. Advocating and organizing on behalf of the wider social good is something that churches have always done.

Could congregations accomplish these things acting on their own? Not likely. Strength and influence come from many individuals and organizations banding together. Without a wider church there would be no ecumenical movement drawing us closer to other denominations. We would not have relationships with Lutherans and Anglicans around the world. Canadian Lutheran World Relief might exist, but it would not be nearly as effective without the Lutheran World Federation. Who supports the LWF? National denominations. Who provides the resources for the ELCIC? The Synods. Without benevolence offerings to sustain the Eastern Synod the dominoes would fall across Canada and around the world.

### **What You Can Do**

We are called to engage in God's mission to the world, and most of us do that largely through local ministry. But local ministry cannot do everything, and it will not survive in its present form without a wider church. Regional and national expressions rely on money and leadership from individuals and congregations. We depend on each other.

The amount you give in benevolence offerings will determine whether the Eastern Synod and its ministries will exist in the future. Please give generously to maintain not just the institutions and programs, but the many supportive relationships that allow us to be a church in mission for others.