



Report of the National Bishop

Liberated by God's Grace

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

As I think back on the past two years since your last Synod Convention, the first thing that comes to mind is the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and the lasting impact it will have on the ELCIC. The commemoration of the Reformation may be officially over but the way it has strengthened our Lutheran identity, the way it brought us together in common witness and service through the Reformation Challenge, and its core message of being *Liberated by God's Grace* will continue to shape our life together as a church in Canada.

In September of 2017, our National Church Council began working on a new five-year strategic plan. The National Office uses this strategic plan to help shape and focus our work. We are energized by the new four areas of focus in our strategic plan: Reconciled Relationships, One Body Working Together, Courageous Innovation, and Empowered Disciples. I would invite you to look at these four areas and consider how you, your congregation and your community might be engaged in one or more of these priorities.

The following is a small glimpse at the work of the National Office reported around these four new strategic areas, and how we carry out our call to be a church *In Mission for Others*.

Reconciled Relationships

In 2011, the ELCIC made a commitment to promote right and renewed relationships between non-indigenous and Indigenous Peoples within Canada. In July 2015, the ELCIC renewed this commitment to truth, reconciliation and equity by repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. At this year's National Convention delegates welcomed Kaila Johnston, research coordinator for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). The NCTR opened in the summer of 2015 and was created to preserve the memory of Canada's Residential School system and legacy. It is the permanent home for all statements, documents, and other materials gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). In her presentation to delegates, Johnston shared that she is frequently asked what people can do to be involved in reconciliation. She listed several actions of reconciliation, including: "Learn the history of Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, understand the history and legacy of Residential schools, explore the unique intersections between treaty, constitutional Indigenous and human rights, recognize the rich contributions Indigenous peoples have had to this country, take action to address historical injustices and present-day wrongs, as well as teach others." I encourage you to consider how you

and your congregation can learn more about the TRC's 94 Calls to Action and how you can be involved in the important work of reconciliation.

The 2017 ELCIC National Convention affirmed *A Statement to Muslims in Canada by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada* (<http://elcic.ca/ecumenical/documents/StatementtoMuslimsinCanadabytheEvangelicalLutheranChurchinCanada.pdf>) and a new resource titled *Encountering People of Other Faiths—Interfaith Guidelines* (<http://elcic.ca/ecumenical/documents/EncounteringPeopleOfOtherFaiths-InterfaithGuidelines.pdf>). These are important documents for our church given the fact that hate crimes are rising within Canada. Following the January 2017 fatal attack at le Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec, I called on the members of our church to reach out in a genuine expression of love for our neighbour (<http://www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=459>). I continue to urge you to speak out against all forms of racism and violence against Muslims and to work to build relationships with your interfaith neighbours.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation provided the opportunity to strengthen relationships with Roman Catholics in Canada and around the world. There were services of Common Prayer co-sponsored by Lutherans and Roman Catholics all across the country, from Whitehorse to Vancouver, Sault Ste. Marie to Halifax. Other events that took place as part of the commemoration of the Reformation gave us the opportunity to strengthen relationships with many of our ecumenical partners. This was evidenced at the 2017 National Convention, where partners from the Canadian Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church in Canada, United Church of Canada, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Anglican Church of Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Mennonite Church Canada participated in an ecumenical panel on the convention floor and then participated in our National Service of Commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

At the 2015 National Convention we adopted an "ELCIC Resolution on Climate Justice:" This action expanded the commitments we made in 2007's resolution on the Stewardship of Creation. Our continued commitment to working for reconciliation with all of creation is done at the congregational level through efforts like the tree-planting component of the Reformation Challenge, and nationally and internationally through work with partners.

One Body Working Together

To be a fully functioning church we need to have effective working relationships between congregations, synods, national church, and national and international partners. The body of Christ is bigger than any one of its component parts.

The Synodical and National Officers met at the beginning of December 2017 to look at ways we can work more closely together. At a time of challenge and opportunities, with fewer resources, we need to work together to set focused priorities that will enhance our ability to fulfill the mission to which God is calling us.

Shared vision and mutual trust is not only important within the church, but also among our church and our various partners. We are currently working towards a new *Memorandum of Understanding* with our partner Canada Lutheran World Relief (CLWR). We give thanks for the wonderful leadership Robert Granke has provided to the organization and offer our prayers on his retirement. At the same time, we welcome Rev. Karin Achtelstetter and look forward to our ongoing partnership in the ministry of CLWR.

In May of 2017, I had the privilege of participating in the global life of our church through The Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia. As we gathered from many churches and countries and spoke and sang in many languages, I was reminded again of how much we gain when we are one body working together.

I was honoured to preside at communion at our Sunday worship service, a global celebration of the reformation anniversary. To look out over the crowd of 10,000 and see Lutherans gathered from around the world, worshipping God, commemorating our shared history, joining with ecumenical partners and celebrating the steps towards reconciliation we have shared, lifting up our shared mission and ministry—it was a spiritual highlight for me!

I had a similar spiritual highlight when I presided at our national commemoration service in July. Seeing our church gathered from across the country along with her ecumenical partners reminded me of my Windhoek experience. What a joy to feel the Spirit alive and in our midst whether carrying out ministry in our local communities or gathered together at a convention.

Courageous Innovation

We recognize that we are in a time of change and that we are going to need to be flexible and patient with one another as we discover together how God is calling us to be the Lutheran church in Canada at this time.

The ELCIC's Church Extension and Capital Fund (CECF) is in the middle of a five-year initiative where they are doing experimentation to figure out new ways of doing ministry given that the old model of congregational development has proven to be too expensive and/or no longer effective. CECF has provided a total of \$300,000 to each synod for Synod Mission initiatives. Funds will be used for activities that are experimental in spirit and genuinely seek to explore what it means to participate in God's mission in the world today.

We are excited about walking with synods in this process. Each of the synods are allocating their funds in different and creative ways. In your synod, one example is St. John's, Hamilton—Mission Outreach: a 3-year project that is building relationships with agencies and individual, particular newcomers to Canada, and also encouraging and fostering spirituality of mission and behavior towards mission in the congregation.

Being courageous innovators involves balance—on the one hand we need to remember the boundaries we live in as expressed in the constitution and bylaws of this church and on the

other hand allow for the freedom of colouring outside the lines. We need to hold these together in a healthy and creative tension as we continue to discern possibilities and try out new ministries across the church.

By naming Courageous Innovation as one of our strategic priorities, National Church Council is recognizing that God may indeed be calling us to new things and new ways and we may have to try things and fail and learn from our failures as part of our faithful discipleship.

Empowered Disciples

Now as in all times of the church there is a need to create and nurture faithful participation in God's mission in the world. In an effort to inspire a church that is prophetic, missional, and diaconal, the ELCIC's Faith, Order and Doctrine committee has published *Public Ministry in the ELCIC: A preliminary draft* for review, reflection and response by September 30, 2018.

At the same time, we are looking at new ways of calling and equipping Rostered leaders in our church for specific ministries. We believe the new *Congregational Employment Agreements* and updated *Letters of Call* will enhance the quality of your vocational relationships and deepen the bonds of mutual care and accountability.

And, in this year of synod conventions, we also look forward to two national gatherings—the Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth (CLAY) gathering (www.claygathering.ca) and the National Worship Conference (www.nationalworshipconference.org). Both of these Lutheran/Anglican events serve to strengthen faith and empower people in witness and service.

Thank you for your participation in the ELCIC Reformation Challenge. I was overwhelmed and proud by the contributions, large and small, that individuals, congregations and synods make to help us meet our goals. We may not have met all of our challenge goals but together we raised the equivalent of about four million dollars for ministry in Canada and around the world. How amazing is that!

In his 2018 New Year's message to the Lutheran World Federation, General Secretary Martin Junge declared that despite the many challenges we face, there is no better time than now to be the church. By acknowledging these challenges, it reminds us to stay focused on what has been given to us without cost, and share it with the thirsty in the world—offering a life-giving witness. "It is a good year to be the church. We have our hands filled with gifts to share," says Martin! And I agree.

Friends, it's a good year to be the church. We too have our hands filled with gifts to share.

Yours in Christ,

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