



Trinity Team

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
 10014 81 Avenue
 Edmonton, AB T6E 1W8
 Phone: (780) 433 1604
 Email: trinityedmonton@uniserve.com
 Website: www.trinity-lutheran.ab.ca

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God is Doing a New Thing

Dear friends, how do you feel about September? I am sad that the days are getting shorter and the nights cooler, that the summer festivals are over, the outdoor pools closing. But I am also glad, because of all the things that are starting: the new classes I will teach, the Faith Discussion Group I will participate in, perhaps new riding lessons after a *break* ... of a year.

September is paradoxical, a time of endings, but also of new beginnings. Perhaps you are starting university or a new job, perhaps you even just moved here. Perhaps you (or your children) are going to a new school, or are even starting school? Perhaps you find yourself alone for the first time in many years, with the youngest child having left home.

New beginnings are exciting, an adventure. I remember those brand new school supplies and seeing all my friends again after the summer. But beginnings are also scary: Beside whom will I sit in class? Will I find friends in the new school, the new city? Will I succeed in the new job? Will I be ok far away from home? How will I cope with the empty nest?

Perhaps the biggest new beginning in my life was in late August 1990, when I moved from Germany to Canada. As I said painful farewells to my family, my closest friends, my beloved Southern German hills and towns, I was wondering: Would Canada be as good, would I be as happy, as in my old life in Germany? In the midst of all my worries I heard God's voice: *"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."* (Isaiah 43:18-19) — There would be a way for me, a good way. It

was ok to leave the old behind. Even if the future looked a bit desolate, God would make rivers and oases. And so I went forth into the uncertainty, trusting that God was doing a new thing in my life.

The promise I relied on was originally given to the people of Israel after decades of exile in Babylon. They, too, were to leave behind the old and move, in their case back to their homeland Judea. Many had doubts: What was the point of returning to a country where everything — houses, farms, palace, temple — was in ruins? And why now, decades later, when they had houses and children and grandchildren in Babylon? But Isaiah insisted: God was doing a new thing now, and it was good. It was already springing forth, hidden, imperceivable except to the eyes of faith. They all would be part of it, and God would sustain them in it.

Why am I telling you this? Because it is such a hopeful story. Maybe you feel stuck somewhere in your life, or you have lost hope, given up trying, because nothing worked. Maybe God seems to have forgotten you. There is a promise for you: God is about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? Don't give up, trust the promise, trust God. Forget the old disappointments and failures, God is doing a new thing. Nothing is impossible for God.

Or are you afraid of the new thing in your life, the change, the uncertainty? Be hopeful; God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert for you.

Or maybe you are happy and excited? Thanks be to God!

Here at Trinity God is also doing a new thing, something I find very exciting and
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hopeful. It is as yet quite hidden; the dedicated members of the Church Health Team have been working away at it quietly. But this fall it is springing forth, and we will be able to perceive it more and more. I am talking about the process of "Natural Church Development" (NCD). This is not just "another thing" that we are trying, like the many things we have tried over the years. It is different because it is *assessment-based* and *holistic*.

By surveying thousands of congregations, the NCD program has established characteristics of healthy congregations. And these characteristics are holistic. They do not just include obvious things like the quality of worship, they also include less tangible factors such as how lovingly we relate to each other, or how effective our organizational structures are (see below for all 8 characteristics). Moreover, congregations can then be assessed holistically as well: NCD offers a survey of questions carefully designed to reflect how a congregation is doing in all the characteristics. It is as if someone went to the doctor because of a rash, but in addition to being physically examined, would also be asked in-depth about his or her diet, living quarters, work, hobbies, habits, finances, relationships, faith and overall outlook on life. The "prescription" then might also look quite different: Perhaps the person needs a more regular schedule of work, play, and sleep. Or he or she has to use a different mosquito repellent, or mend the relationship with his or her sister.

I believe that the NCD process is a real chance for Trinity and for all of us. It will give us the opportunity to look at ourselves in a new way, to discover things we never even thought to consider, and to make smart, informed

decisions. I believe that through the NCD process God is creating new paths for us, is making us more into His people. We can become a congregation which has more loving relationships, or holistic small groups, or passionate spirituality (or any of the other things). And from this, we will all benefit, because Trinity will be a congregation where people find inspiration and support. And not just us, others as well, for we are here for the world, not to self-preserve.

The NCD (Natural Church Development) Congregational Survey will be held on **Saturday, September 17 at 10:00 am in Luther Centre.** Anyone interested in participating is invited to attend (please call the office and let them know your intention to participate so we have sufficient surveys available for you). It is vital that all members who have agreed to complete the survey be in attendance.

I challenge you to take this process seriously and participate in it: If you have been identified to take the survey on Sept. 17, do it and give thoughtful, honest responses. (You can also still sign up to take the survey: Call the church office ASAP.) All of us, let us study the results and come prepared to the congregational meeting on Nov. 19.

In the meantime, let us pray. For the leaders of the NCD process (the Church Health Team), for our other leaders, and for each of us, whether we feel stuck, afraid, or excited. God is doing a new thing, do you perceive it?

In my case, God has made a way for me in Canada. The way has its ups and downs, and sometimes I still miss Germany. But it includes a

family and friends here, a city with interesting people and a beautiful river, an oasis in my own back yard. God has opened my eyes to the simpler, starker beauty of the prairies and mountains, and above all, I have come to do a work which deeply challenges and fulfills me: helping a First Nation preserve their language.

So, as a congregation, and as individuals: Let us listen, trust God, and go forth to the new thing — the path will appear as we take step after step.

Andrea Wilhelm

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT: 8 CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Empowering Leadership | Gift-based Ministry |
| Passionate Spirituality | Effective Structures |
| Inspiring Worship Service | Holistic Small Groups |
| Need-Oriented Evangelism | Loving Relationships |

KEY DATES GOING FORWARD

September 17, 2011, 10am -- NCD Survey - Luther Centre

October 2011 -- Survey results: Publication and study of survey results.

November 19, 2011 -- Congregational Meeting: Discussion of the survey results, brainstorming, and setting a focus of action for the next year. Please come all; your thoughts are important. Childcare will be provided.

Questions, info: Church Health Team (780.433.1604); <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/>

Bishop's July / August 2011 Message

The backyard is beckoning to me. Dianne has the green thumb – not me. Our yard isn't a prizewinner.

But Dianne's years of patient and consistent nurture have not been in vain. Our yard is a testament to the glory of God's creation. Taste (and look) and see that the Lord is good! It's possible to live through a summer without pauses for wonderment of the good earth. But I don't recommend it. It's hurtful to the soul. Better to lift your eyes up, open your ears, and enter the song.

In a devotion based on Psalm 104 +J. Robert Jacobson (a former bishop of the ABT Synod) writes this entry in his book *All Nature Sings* (Franciscan Press, 2002, pp. 191, 192):

“No one ever really gets used to it,
The greening of the earth in spring and early summer,
The transformation of a world of dead stalks and lifeless strands
Into a paradise of green things
Bursting,
Stretching,

Straining upward...

Warmth and water return

And suddenly the world is full of miracles!

Livestock and wildlife,

Often leaned out to the point of desperation,

Almost overnight find themselves in the middle of a feast.

People of the land,

Hanging on to life by the slimmest thread,

Suddenly don't know what to do with all the food at their disposal...

It's summer!

God's season for fattening up our bodies

And filling up our larders

To get ready for the lean months to come.”

I wish you all a time of rest and refreshment as you glory in this summer season!

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop

Synod of Alberta and the Territories

Called into Giving

Happy is the person, who is generous - Psalm 112: 5 & 9

Opportunities to help Relieve World Disasters

Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) issues emergency appeal for East Africa drought victims

UPDATE: CLWR is now leading a second food distribution project in Ethiopia, where over 8,000 children will receive four months worth of Famix, a nutritional supplement, and vegetable oil. This project is worth \$200,000 and is being carried out in partnership with Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Support for Sustainable Development. (August 19, 2011)

Emergency Appeals Issued to Assist those Affected by Wildfires in Alberta and Flooding in Manitoba

Winnipeg, 17 May 2011--The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), through its partnership with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR), is appealing to its members for financial support for humanitarian aid to assist Canadians displaced by wildfires in Alberta and flooding in Manitoba.

CLWR is issuing an appeal for funds to support humanitarian efforts which could include: help relocating those affected to safe areas; providing emergency shelter; pro-

viding food; and supporting congregational programs that provide assistance which fills potential gaps already provided by governmental emergency services. Based on currently available funds, \$5000 for the Alberta wildfires and \$5000 for Manitoba flooding is being committed to relief for each of these domestic disasters. The ELCIC and CLWR work in effective partnership with lead agencies which are providing front line services.

ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson is also calling for members to pray for the people who are threatened by the wildfires and flooding. She has prepared the following suggested prayer: "God of the Universe, you have created this world in which we live and have called it good. And yet at times the forces of nature seem out of control. We pray for all those who are affected by the flooding in Manitoba and the wildfires in Alberta. Help them, and us, to put our trust in your love and care. Motivate and equip those who are reaching out with hands and hearts to serve those in need. In our faithful prayers, in our generous response, help us to be a church *In Mission for Others*. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

Contributions to CLWR can be included with your regular Sunday offering - please note where the funds are to be targeted.



By National
Bishop

Susan C. Johnson

Growing in Gratitude

We can't talk about strengthening our discipleship without mentioning the "M" word: money. Take a moment to calculate your contributions and consider how and why you might increase your support.

We are nearing the end of this series focusing on the call to spiritual renewal and deeper discipleship within our church (Pray, Read, Worship, Study, Serve, Give, and Tell), and this penultimate column will focus on the call to give.

Talking about money and how we use it is difficult. In our society, it's one of the most private topics of conversation there is. I know of spouses who don't share financial details with one another! But talking about money is precisely what I want to do.

Scripture is full of references to the tithe, which literally means one-tenth—one-tenth of your money or your goods or your crop given in thankfulness to God to support works of charity or a religious organization.

The average ELCIC Lutheran gives two per cent of his or her income to the wider church. Now I know that means some people give much more and some people give much less. And I know that our society, built on conspicuous and competitive consumerism, lures us away from generosity to selfishness.

When I talk about giving, I frequently encounter people who get defensive. I often hear that it's not just about money, but rather how we use our time and talents as well. Many people tell me, I can't give much money now, but I give in many other ways. I understand the statements, but I want to push back a little.

Jesus taught us *for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. (Matthew 6:21.) When I was about 23, I finally started to take my financial stewardship seriously. I began by making a pledge to support my congregation on a monthly basis. I then figured out what percentage that was of my annual salary. It wasn't much. So I made a commitment to work at increasing it over time. I just tried to keep giving a little more every year. Eventually I got to the point where I was tithing my net income, then tithing my gross income, and I keep trying to work on it. What this commitment has taught me and helped me do is keep my heart in the right place. With God. There are many times I want to take some of that money back—to pay bills, to buy something I want—but I don't. It helps me see the difference between my wants and my needs.

Please hear me, I am not trying to judge anyone, and I am not trying to pretend that I have learned all there is about giving. Deuteronomy 12:11 refers not just to tithing but to *your burnt-offerings and your*

sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the Lord. I know I can still learn a lot more about giving.

I do know that our society is in bondage to money, and most of us are in bondage to debt. Learning how to give generously is one way to help us break free of that bondage and experience new spiritual growth.

Our Lord reminds us again and again that we are invited to follow him into a life of generosity. Jesus' teachings were pretty specific. We are shown as a positive example the story of the widow who gives, while not much, everything she has. And by contrast, we are told the story of the rich young ruler, who when asked to give away everything he has and follow Jesus, turns away, unable to fulfill the request.

If you have never checked it out, visit the Global Rich List (www.globalrichlist.com), a website where you enter your annual income and see how you are ranked in terms of all of the people of the world. You will likely be surprised at how rich you are. And if you haven't done so, I also urge you to have a conversation about gratitude and generosity using the outline we've posted on the ELCIC website www.elcic.ca/stewardship/documents/elcicgenerosityworksheets.pdf.

I give thanks to the many people who have generously supported the work of the wider church, through their regular offerings, through designated gifts to areas like Global Mission, to appeals like the Forward in Mission Appeal, or through special offerings through the Evangelical Lutheran Women Praise Offering Service. And for support going forward of the new ELCIC Praise Appeal (www.elcic.ca/praiseappeal).

How is Jesus calling you to give? What proportion of your household income is God calling you to give to support the ministries of your church? What do you need to assist you in growing in gratitude and generosity?

Post your giving ideas on the ELCIC Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CanadianLutherans. God bless you as you continue to deepen your discipleship!

+ Susan C. Johnson

Called into Learning

As I learn your righteous rulings, I will praise you with a pure heart. - Psalm 119: 7, 15, 130

Reflections on the National Convention

by Pastor Renita Falkenstern

Although I have been a pastor for 13 years, this was the first national convention I have attended. I wasn't sure what to expect. Many people who attended said it was quite exhausting—perhaps because the motions we were discussing were quite emotional at times. The most passionately debated topics were the Sexuality Statement and the related motions. There were long lines of people at each of the microphones and we debated the question for over two hours. In the end, the Social Statement passed by 61%. Some people quietly celebrated. Others grieved. It was important that people were given an opportunity to be heard. It was a respectful debate.

Three motions came to convention from the Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee. The first motion was a call to unity. The second motion gave pastors the option of officiating at same gender marriages in consultation with their congregations. The third motion now enables a person in a same gender marriage to be ordained. These motions provide a local option. However, no congregation will be obliged to marry a same gender couple or call a pastor.

For many, these are issues that tie their stomach in knots. Some people feel angry and betrayed by what is happening to their church. Others feel that this is what it means to faithfully live out the gospel. Others are just exhausted from the debate and want to move on.

Times like these are difficult because they call our self-understanding into question. Who are we as people of faith? Who are we as Lutherans? How do we interpret the Bible for today? How do we live? It is at times like these, when the ground is shifting under our feet, that we must remember this is Christ's church. The Spirit of Christ invented the church, not us. The winds of change, the wind of the Spirit, will blow where it wills and it will sometimes shake us to the core. In the midst of the storms that shake the church, we can cling to Christ. He is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall between us. It is only in and through Christ that we can come together. In his classic book, *Life Together*, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

"Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ....the community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone....a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among men there is strife. 'He is our peace,' says Paul of Jesus

Christ (Eph. 2:14). Without Christ we should not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to Him. But without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and they can serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only by way of Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through him are we bound together. To eternity he remains the one Mediator" (p. 21, 23, 24).

This is why worship is so important at a national convention. We began each morning with a service of Holy Communion in which the Word was preached and the bread and wine is offered to all with the promise of forgiveness and new life. Around Christ's table all became one—men and women, urban and rural, east and west, conservative and liberal, young and old, rostered leaders and laity, gay and straight. We were not one because we agreed with each other on every issue. Rather, we were one in spite of ourselves. In other words, we experienced our unity as a gift. Because Christ has gathered each and every one of us to himself, he has also drawn us together into one family.

There were many other issues discussed at national convention. I brought forward two motions related to ethical investing. The first asked that members, congregations and synods of this church reflect on their investing practices. It also asked the National Church to create resources to assist with this effort. The second motion asked that our ELCIC pension plan explore options for ethical investing. Both motions passed easily.

The theme of the convention was "Covenant People: In Mission for Others." The word "covenant" is also a synonym for "treaty." The theme provided an opportunity to explore how we as a church and as Canadians are treaty people. We were challenged to reflect on our relationships with indigenous people through a creative and educational activity lead by Ed Bianchi of KAIROS called, "The Blanket Exercise." Over the course of about an hour, a group of about 40 people re-enacted the history of indigenous and non-indigenous relationships in Canada—from the coming of European settlers, small pox epidemics, loss of the buffalo, signing of treaties, The Indian Act, The White Paper, ... see **Reflections** - page 6

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residential schools, the gradual loss of indigenous land and the creation of reservations. At the beginning of the exercise, the indigenous people were numerous and were able to freely move about the land (represented by blankets spread all over the floor.) As the exercise continued, the indigenous people gradually were eliminated and lost more and more land. By the end of the exercise, there were just a few indigenous people left standing on just a few blankets which were folded into tiny squares. The small folded blankets represented reservations. Each delegate was given a copy of the resource, "Peace and Friendship" and this exercise could be re-dramatized within the congregation.

The convention also passed a motion in support of the United National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). We asked re-elected Bishop Susan Johnson to write the Government of Canada to request that they endorse the Declaration without qualifications.

Another significant action of convention was to pass the church restructuring plan in principle. Although it will take several years before it is fully worked out, the hope is to find a more flexible and sustainable structure. One important feature of the plan is to move from five to three synods. Alberta would join with British Columbia to become one synod. Saskatchewan and Manitoba would combine as well and the Eastern synod would remain the same. There will be roughly the same number of congregations in each of these three new synods. National conventions

will be smaller and occur every third year. Synod conventions will also occur every three years. In the third year, we will have local area church gatherings. The restructuring plan also envisions local area Teams or clusters of local churches who will work together on some projects. There are a lot of details that still need to be fleshed out.

In short, the National Convention was a bit of a marathon. I did not initially know what to expect but I was surprised to discover that my experience of being part of a larger church was so meaningful. In the big scheme of things we are a tiny church but I was glad to be a part of it. We really do share so much more in common than we disagree on. It was an honour to gather and listen to the voices of our brothers and sisters who seek to live out the gospel in their own corner of the country—from Victoria, BC to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

In her closing sermon, Bishop Susan Johnson preached on the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mt. 13:24-30). She said: "In today's parable we see the owner of the field caring for the crop – both wheat and weeds – watering, fertilizing, making sure that it all grows. And that is what we are to do as well." She also encouraged us to "stop erecting barriers that separate 'us' from 'them.' Let the image of God in me recognize and honour the image of God in you. And let's get on with the work of caring for the field – weeds and all! This is my prayer, for myself and for this church." Amen. So what are we waiting for? We've got work to do!

Report from the National Convention

On July 17-19 the ELCIC met in convention for the 25th time since its inception 50 years ago. We knew right from the beginning that this was no ordinary convention, special task groups have been working on two major issues for the last 6-8 years: the ELCIC position on homosexuality and the structure of the church in light of shrinking membership and resources. We knew right from the opening that God was doing a new thing within our ELCIC; regardless of the outcome of the decisions coming before this convention we knew that at the end of it we would have been changed.

Statement on Human Sexuality

The issue of human sexuality, especially the church's acceptance and blessing of same sex relationships was first brought to a national convention in 2005 by request of the Eastern Synod. This issue was not decided at those conventions because there had been no thorough study of the issue and no clear statement on what the ELCIC believed the scriptures said on this issue. These early discussions resulted in a comprehensive study process – a special taskforce was formed, including people with a wide range of

views on this issue, to develop a statement for the ELCIC to consider. The taskforce followed an extensive process to engage people from across the church in studying and guiding the creation of a new statement defining the ELCIC's position on many important questions of Human Sexuality. This included creating a 6 part study on the issues being considered (Trinity participated in this study in 2009). From the study the taskforce received over 550 submissions providing input on what the social statement should contain. A first draft of the social statement was then created and circulated for comments to all congregations and members of the ELCIC. Based on feedback on the first draft, a final draft statement was developed which was presented at this convention for approval.

Discussion of the issue started on the first evening of convention (Thursday) with an open question and answer session (committee of the whole) with the members of the taskforce that created the statement. Delegates were free to ask questions about how the draft was developed to clarify who was asked for input and how that input was

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Called Into Learning

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used to craft the statement.

The motion to accept the statement was debated on the second day of convention. Long lines of delegates formed at all the microphones, both those speaking for and those speaking against the acceptance of the new statement. As on Thursday, comments covered a wide range of subjects, including the interpretation of scripture, church tradition, theology, and human rights. Many shared personal stories and many quoted the Bible.

“The statement is honest,” said a delegate in favour of the statement. “The church is conflicted but the statement full of love and grace.”

Another delegate said that the social statement acknowledged homosexual orientation as a genetic reality. “Our loving God gave them these characteristics,” he said. “The least we could do is love them the way God does.”

Speaking against the statement, one delegate noted, “Nowhere in the Bible do I see anything in support of same-sex relationships.” He continued, “One day we will stand before God and we will be judged not by the UN Declaration of Rights or the Canadian charter, but by God’s holy laws.”

Others said the statement was not appropriate at this time for the church. “It’s so ambiguous no one understands it,” said a delegate. “This isn’t our solid ground that we stand on. After ten years of debate, we still do not have a consensus. We don’t have anything but divisions.”

After the allotted hour-and-fifteen-minute session during Friday morning’s session, the question had not yet been called. National Bishop Susan C. Johnson, chair of the meeting, proposed that delegates return from dinner one hour early to finish the discussion and vote. Following another hour of debate and with people still lined up at the microphones, a delegate asked for the question to be called.

I have had the opportunity to be at previous conventions where this issue was debated and I was struck by two things about the debate at this convention: 1. The debate was very respectful, there was no cheering or comments or applause when people spoke for or against the issue and 2. There were as many people speaking for acceptance as there were speaking against acceptance and for the first time I felt that those supporting the new statement were every bit as passionate, as convicted, and as guided by scripture as those opposed.

The vote to approve the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality proceeded after a number of procedural issues were dealt with (see <http://www.elcic.ca/news.cfm?article=276> for more details). Further discussion and action on the issues of Human Sexuality were dependant on the results of this vote, so while the ballots were being counted the delegates waited and waited, then Bishop Susan invited everyone to stand and the whole convention

was lead in a spontaneous hymn sing until the results were available. As we sang hymns together the tremendous tension in the room seemed to relax – it really left me feeling that the Holy Spirit is already at work to make all believers whole.

At around 7:30 p.m., Bishop Johnson announced the statement had been adopted by a vote of 213 to 134, plus two spoiled ballots. Following the announcement and prayer, Bishop Susan acknowledged that many in the assembly were heartened by the results and many were grieving the decision; she encouraged everyone to seek the unity of the Spirit going forward.

In some ways, the approval of the Statement was the easier part, now the convention had to decide on what changes in practice this statement required. Three motions were before the convention:

A motion for unity – urging people and congregations that disagree with the new social statement of the ELCIC to remain within the ELCIC and continue to speak their concerns as the Spirit gives them conviction and also urging people and congregations that agree with the new social statement to remain open and loving towards those that believe it is a mistake. For as Martin Luther points out, it is only in our conversations around our disagreements that the Spirit can lead the church to new reformation.

A motion to permit pastors to bless and marry same sex couples where allowed by law, and where the congregation is ready. The motion reads: “All rostered ministers serving congregations are encouraged at all times to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders in the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture within which the congregation serves.”

A motion that “It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that sexual orientation is not in itself a factor which disqualifies a candidate for rostered ministry or a rostered minister seeking a call.” Delegates were assured that the call process would not propose openly homosexual candidates to congregations that have indicated they would not accept such a candidate.

Again the debate was long and passionate, but in the end all three motions were passed by slightly more than 60% of the delegates.

Restructuring of the ELCIC

Discussion of this issue also started with a 2 hour question and answer session (committee of the whole) between the delegates and the Restructuring Taskforce to help everyone understand what was being recommended and how the recommendations were developed. The vote occurred on Saturday, July 16, the third day of business for convention delegates. (A copy of the Structural Renewal Task

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Force Report can be viewed here: elcic.ca/Structural-Renewal.)

The recommendations in the report of the Structural Renewal Task Force include: that the ELCIC be re-organized into three synods (Alberta/BC/Territories, Saskatchewan/Manitoba/Western Ontario, Eastern Canada); existing conferences be reconfigured into "areas" (smaller groupings of local congregations) supported by leadership teams; conventions of the National Church and synods be held triennially; and National Conventions be smaller in size.

Delegates spoke passionately about finding a structure that meets both the church's current reality, but also holds potential for growth. Some delegates expressed concerns that the taskforce was driven too much by economic factors, while others were encouraged that the ELCIC structure would be "right-sized" to best meet the church's changing needs. Delegates also encouraged the use of technology to bring people, congregations and decision makers together.

This motion was approved which means that National Church Council will now consider how to best move forward with the next steps in the implementation process, including defining the structures and responsibilities more clearly and taking further motions to Synod Conventions in 2012.

Other Highlights

Bishop Susan Johnson was elected to a second 4 year term as bishop. Bishop Susan expressed her gratitude for the trust the convention put in her leadership: "Four years ago you honoured me with this election," she said, "and I feel just as honoured today." In her report Bishop Susan continued her call for a Spiritual Renewal and living a deeper discipleship. Throughout the convention, and in particular through our worship together, we explored aspects of this call to read, pray, worship, study, serve, give and tell. Bishop Susan expressed her hope and prayer that all would leave convention called to spiritual renewal, committed to deepening our own discipleship and eager to take that invitation home to our families, friends, co-workers, congregations and specialized ministries. The National Office has worked to prepare resources which were distributed at convention to help our congregation do just that.

Several important guests greeted the convention on behalf of their churches or organizations.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) enthusiastically addressed delegates, guests and visitors at the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC. Archbishop Hiltz expressed joy in building relationships within the ELCIC— in particular, his close friendship with National Bishop Susan Johnson. "We speak on a monthly basis; we commiserate and support

and encourage one another. And I am blessed to have Susan as my colleague and friend." Archbishop Hiltz noted that in recent years the two churches have taken bolder steps toward living out their full communion relationship, including bringing together their national church councils for meetings in April and planning joint national conventions for 2013.

Delegates welcomed special guest Saskatoon Tribal Chief Felix Thomas with a standing ovation during Friday morning's business session. National Church Council vice president Sheila Hamilton introduced Chief Thomas by acknowledging that this year's convention in Saskatoon is taking place on the traditional lands of the people he represents. Chief Thomas stressed the importance of working together and working with common purpose to improve the lives of all indigenous people in Canada.

Rev. Dr Willard Metzger, General Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada, brought warm greetings to the Thirteenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC Saturday morning. Relations between the ELCIC and MCC have been renewed since July 2010, when The Lutheran World Federation offered a historic apology to Mennonites for past persecutions.

The ELCIC and MCC have worked to apply this global statement of reconciliation in local churches. Metzger promoted the use of the joint ELCIC-MCC study guide, *Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ*, which was given to all delegates. The guide raises awareness about the churches' relationship and reconciliation. Bishop Johnson thanked Metzger for his greetings and offered a gift. "This is a sign of hope for whole church," she said, "That if we as churches can move towards reconciliation, within our own church we can find that same reconciliation."

Another highlight was that the convention was being streamed live over the internet so that anyone who wanted to watch the proceedings was able to do so using the internet. This is something we will publicize more for future conventions so that anyone interested can participate without having to travel to the convention and attending as a visitor.

Worship

As usual, Worship at convention was both inspiring and convicting. Worshipping at convention is always a special experience, in part because I can always feel the Spirit moving in our midst, in part because so many of the delegates love to sing and in part because those bringing the message usually teach just what is needed at the time. That certainly held true for me at this convention. Most impactful was the message from one of our chaplains Pastor Ali Tote who comes from Sudan and joined the rostered ministers of the ELCIC recently.

In Pastor Tote's message on Saturday morning after the

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long and emotional debate on the Human Sexuality Social Statement the night before, highlighted what it was like to have to leave everything including his work as a minister in Sudan and come to Canada as a refugee. He marveled at the welcome he received by fellow Pastors in the ELCIC; as more and more people helped him get settled, get the information together, attend the training to qualify as Pastor Tote said he felt so loved and so accepted and so supported that it was beyond his wildest dreams. Pastor Tote praised our ability to accept, love and support the outsider, and called our welcome miraculous.

This ability to openly accept and love the outsider he said was indeed the Good News about the ELCIC – then he brought the bad news. He called us to task for not supporting, loving and accepting each other in spite of our differences. He said that as a Pastor from Sudan he was openly accepted and loved for who he was and what he had to share, but among ourselves we seemed to need to bend others to our ways of thinking and acting before we are willing to accept and love them. He called on us all to consider how we can become a more loving, accepting and supportive church within our own communities, welcoming people as God has made them in His image and not trying to conform them to our own narrow understanding of what God's image looks like. He prayed that we might learn to love ourselves as children of God.

The opening and closing services were especially meaningful, from wonderful music to a great message to an enlivened liturgy and Holy Communion, all parts of the

services combined to leave me feeling uplifted and loved. To get a sense of what the services were like go to: <http://www.elcic.ca/In-Convention/2011-Saskatoon/videos.cfm>.

Impact on Trinity

So what does all this mean for Trinity? There will be no change within the next few months. Church council will consider the impact of the actions from convention and develop policies for our own worship practices. The policies will be shared with you in the next Team. The longer term implications of the convention decisions will be considered in all our planning, especially as we work through the NCD process to identify areas of our ministry that need strengthening.

For more information please see the Pastoral letter from Bishop Mayan and the synod Frequently asked question document on the major convention decisions (later in this Team).

We will continue to keep everyone informed about what is happening.

In closing I would like to thank the congregation for sending me as one of our delegates. It has been an honour to serve you in this capacity and I encourage anyone with questions or concerns to speak with me directly.

Respectfully,
Frank Thede

A Pastoral Letter

To the Synod of Alberta and the Territories
ELCIC 2011 National Convention Actions

By Bishop Ronald Mayan

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

The Apostle Paul, writing to a divided Corinthian church, tells them: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." What does this mean? Paul elaborates: "The body does not consist of one member but of many. God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you' ... God has so arranged the body... that there may be no dissension... but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has been, and will continue to be, a Church which is not of one mind on issues of human sexuality, interpretation of Scripture, application of the Lutheran Confessions, and qualifications for service in ordained or consecrated ministries. In the

final analysis, Christian unity (even within the ELCIC as a denomination) is not a human accomplishment, but the gift that is bestowed in the crucified and risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. What is it that ultimately binds the Church together? - Christ, Cross, Baptism and Eucharist - or, in classical Lutheran parlance: Word and Sacrament.

The Church in Convention has adopted the Social Statement on Human Sexuality and the accompanying resolutions that will alter ministry policies - notably that sexual orientation will not be an impediment in and of itself to serve in the ordered ministries of this Church. The Social Statement acknowledges same-sex relationships that are lifelong and monogamous. These matters have been before our Church for a decade and more. The actions of the National Convention are heralded by many in this Church as the beginning of a process to right injustices against per-

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sons of gay and lesbian orientation. There are those who are rejoicing. At the same time there are those who are weeping. Now, more than ever, is a time to bear one another's burdens to practice extraordinary kindness and patience toward one another. Lutheran Christians who believe in the authority of Scripture, the witness of the Lutheran Confessions, and who love the Lord and the Church, nevertheless disagree on matters of sexuality. Similarly, Lutheran Christians are not of one mind on the age of first communion, the frequency of Eucharist, or even such trite matters as the color of the chancel carpet.

These matters have been highly contentious for a number of individuals and congregations in the ABT Synod. Even the passing of resolutions in convention will not quell those contentions. This means that still others of our brothers and sisters will opt to leave the ELCIC - as heart-rending as this is for all of us. For our part, this Synod will continue to extend love and grace to congregations and individuals who feel the need to leave. We will bless them, not curse them or worse yet - ignore or disdain them. We will help them to do what conscience tells them they must do.

But the pressing question right now is what does this mean for your congregation? Congregations in the ELCIC and in our Synod have never been forced to call a rostered worker who did not suit them. That will not change. The Synod staff will continue to work with congregations, institutions and agencies in the call process to find the best candidates. What the passing of the resolutions means is that a congregation whose search process leads it to consider a candidate who is in a same-sex committed relationship potentially may be permitted to call such a candidate if it understands that he or she best fits that context. Considering such a candidate will require the congregation to have reached a prior consensus that they are open to this possibility. It is also important to note that this new possibility for some candidates and congregations will not happen immediately. Policies and procedures will need to be reviewed by the National Church Council and the Conference of Bishops.

While we may not all agree about the resolutions that have been adopted, we have come to that moment when Gamaliel's wisdom can inform and instruct us (see Acts 5): " .. if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow [it] - in that case you may even be found fighting against God."

Despite the attention given to the Social Statement on Human Sexuality and the resolutions regarding ministry policy, this is a prime moment to remember that the concerns of this Church are not limited to a single issue.

In the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, we are doing everything we can to educate and encourage towards an

evangelizing culture. There are many ways of "being Christian" and "doing church" but unless the foundation is being missional people, in missional congregations, in a missional Synod, there will not be that life which is apparent when the people of God are truly in mission for others. In a wholesale way, we need to re-capture the Main Thing: Jesus' call to us, Jesus' claim upon us, and Jesus' Commission for us, and all of the implications for our life together that flow from this. We need shared answers and convictions as a Synod and as a Church when it comes to why we are here, what we are to do, and how it ultimately matters. The reign of God will come - with our help, or in spite of us. We pray (as Luther aptly reminded us in the Small Catechism) that the reign of God would come among us also.

There is reason to be heartened as a Synod when we hear and see innovative people setting their creativity free to try new ways of being in mission and ministry. There are many such people in our congregations who bring their creativity to bear both within the walls of the churches, but also and especially outside those confines in the larger community. We are all increasingly aware that the paradigm is changing, that "being church" is evolving towards destinations we cannot even picture yet. These are the kind of times the Holy Spirit loves, because we are realizing that we really need to pay attention in these changing times to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. It's frighteningly exciting / excitingly frightening when God continues his commitment to doing a new thing. It is up to us to discern it!

It is a privilege to serve as your bishop - in moments of joy, opportunity, sorrow, and challenge. I renew my commitment to keep my arms folded around the diversity of this Synod, its people and congregations. May we pray and work for the well-being of our life together in this Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. By God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit may we continue to be a Synod in which we bear witness to God's creative and redeeming Word to all the world. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories

Bishop- Mayan has also put together an extensive list of Frequently Asked Questions about the convention decisions. A complete copy of the FAQ document can be obtained on the Synod website:

<http://www.albertasynod.ca/>

or from our church office

Our Church Family

How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together like brothers and sisters - Psalm 133:1

Summer Musicians

We want to thank all the musicians that played or sang at our services this summer for their help beautifying our "summer services"



A special thank you to Cherie Larson for her work in contacting, coordinating and accompanying all our summer musicians.

Choir at Trinity

I'm now entering my fifth year as Music Director at Trinity, and in looking at the piles of music still to be filed from last year, and being prepared for the upcoming season, I'm reflecting again on how much the choirs do here at Trinity, and how much music we have made over a period of four years. The choirs really are a major part of our worship here at Trinity between September and June. Besides that, they also form integral community for the members of the choirs within the larger community that is Trinity church. I know I've felt this community strongly myself in the four years now that I've worked with these two groups of people, and I know how much more it must be the case for those of you who've been singing together for decades!

I'd really like to encourage members at Trinity, whether or not you've sung in a choir before, to come out and give one of our choirs a try.

Maybe you're someone who, like so many people I've spoken with, has sung in the past and would enjoy choir but you have trouble making a year-long weekly commitment. Please talk to me about the prospect of joining us for a month or two for a start, or for advent, or in the new year, and we'll make that work.

English choir meets on Wednesday nights at 7:15 and German choir on Thursday mornings at 10:30, and the requirement to sing in either is... show up!

Please talk to me if you wish on any Sunday about the choirs at Trinity or music in general. See you at church! I'll be the busy-looking guy with the red robe.

Jordan Van Biert

Youth - Tag and Triniteens

I would like to introduce our Youth Leaders for this year. They are: Julianne Watson, Ella Wilhelm, Aidan McBride, Nathan Hay and Andrew Lotz. They will be introducing themselves to the youth and their families and are looking forward to spending time getting to know all the youth at Trinity. I look forward to working with this great group of leaders. Watch the youth bulletin board for Up-coming events.

The youth will focus on three major events this year, the fall retreat, the Easter vigil and the National Youth Gathering which will be held in Saskatoon Aug 16th to

19th. The youth leaders are planning 2 events per month and there will be 4 CLAY-Edmonton events. Clay-Edmonton is the Lutheran/Anglican churches which get together as a large youth group so that youth have a chance to get to know their neighbors.

The goals for that the youth leaders have set this year are to develop a strong youth community, to work with the confirmation youth, to plan monthly events and to get involved in the lives of the youth so as to provide a role model for the youth of Trinity.

Church News

Confirmation

Third year confirmation class will begin on Wednesday September 14th at 6:00 pm.

First year and Second year Confirmation Information and registration night will be held on Wednesday September 21st at 6:00 pm. Confirmation classes will start on Wednesday, October 5th, at 6:00 pm. Please call Diaconal Minister Karen at 780-433-1604 if you have any questions.

The Confirmation service will be held on Sunday October 30th. We have 5 youth who will be confirmed ; Aaron Lotz, Sam Rehlau, Jeff George, Jacob Janke, and Katie Rudkevitch. Everyone is invited to this special service.

Sunday School

We have a great Sunday School, a great curriculum and marvelous teachers. We require a few more teachers this year and ask that you prayerfully consider joining our teaching team. Team teaching means that you teach one Sunday/month and two Sunday the next month. The fourth Sunday is for our intergenerational service held in the Sanctuary and there is not Sunday school on statutory holidays. If you can help please contact Diaconal Minister Karen at 780-433-1604.

Children's Chapel

We have a brand new children's chapel filled with wonderful toys, lots of space and best of all parents can still see and hear the service. Check it out and enjoy the brightness of this new room.

Trinity's Leaf Groups

Thank you to all the leaf groups for making the Sunday Worship experience so nice for everyone. Here is the schedule for this year.

September	Red Leaf
October	Dark Green Leaf
November	Orange Leaf
December	Beige Leaf
January	Royal Leaf
February	Light Green Leaf
March	Yellow Leaf
April	Red Leaf
May	Beige Leaf
June	Yellow Leaf

If you have any questions or are not part of a leaf group yet please contact Karen Triomphe at 780-433-1604.

Looking Ahead

Sunday, September 11th, following the 11:00 service:

The Sunday School are hosting a barbecue on Rally Day . Everyone is welcome to join them to kick off the fall season. There will be a jumpy castle for the kids, music, hot dogs and we ask everyone to bring a salad or dessert to share.

September 30-October 1st

The northern conference meeting will be held at Emmaus Lutheran Church on September 30-October 1st. Karen Triomphe and Paul Ellison will be attending as our delegates but it is open to anyone wishing to experience a conference meeting to learn more about our church at large.

Sunday October 30th - 11:00 AM

Confirmation (see announcement above)

First Sunday of Advent - November 27th:

The advent service and craft fair will be held on the first

Sunday of Advent. Start your baking and reserve this date to start the advent season off with music, food, fun and fellowship.

The Trinity Team is a publication of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Edmonton, Alberta. The Team is published 3-4 times a year - in August, in December, in February, and in May under the auspices of the Communications Committee.

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Deadline for submissions for next issue - Oct 31, 2011

The Team is intended to serve the members of Trinity Lutheran Church as a comprehensive communications tool. The editors welcome your comments or questions.

Please submit all Team articles, information, comments or questions to:

TrinityTeam@shaw.ca or

drop them off at the church office - Attn: Trinity Team

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