

## **Delegate's Report to Council on the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, June 25-28, held in Vancouver BC**

I take this opportunity to thank Council for granting me the honour of representing the ELCOC at this Convention. I deem it to be the acme of my near half-century relationship with this congregation.

It is difficult to imagine a more spiritually uplifting venue to hold this august gathering of our saints than the UBC campus at a time of year when the world famous Rose Garden is just coming into its immanent glory.

The purpose of this convention was to be a “ calling together in Mission for Others: **Signs of Hope**”. We were told that the National Church Council, the NCC had determined that by focusing on **five** areas or pillars of prayer, discernment and discussion we could respond to the question” where is God calling the National expression of our Church”.

My understanding of these five initiatives is as follows:

- A) **Compassionate Justice.** In collaboration with our many partners we must strive to be a prophetic public voice and actively address social, environmental and justice issues locally, nationally and internationally.
- B) **Spirited Discipleship.** By living out our call to be “In mission for Others” we are to strive to share our faith through everyday actions.
- C) **Focused Framework.** We must work to build a strong administrative structure within our church with open lines of communication that fosters relationships among all expressions of the church and generates the courage to face the challenges of the new realities that come before us.
- D) **Diverse Faces.** We are to strive to be a church that represents the landscape where God has planted us; where ALL are welcome at the table and where our unique gifts enable us to be a church truly ”In mission for others”.
- E) **Effective Partnerships.** We are to recognize the multiplier effect of our work by collaborating with other Lutherans in our community and by living ecumenically on a broader scale.

These five religious concepts provided the structure upon which the agendas were based.

Appropriate worship services began and ended each business day of the convention.

**Moving right along,** I found Bishop Susan Johnson's four page well-written report to be most informative. Here are some highlights:

- 1) Unlike recent conventions, petitions from congregations were not included in the Bulletin of Reports. In other words petitions from individuals or congregations could not come to the floor unless the Committee of Reference and Counsel had had the opportunity to review the petitions and make recommendations to the convention. Not having had occasion to study the Bylaws I was quite prepared to accept that this was in order. However a number of delegates such as the Solid Ground Ministry/Canada were noticeable upset and rose to challenge the Chair

whenever the recommendation from the NCC was for “**No Action**” on a motion requiring approval from the convention. As a consequence the atmosphere was poisoned and the tension palpable. In the end Bishop Susan easily survived a call questioning her authority to act as Chair. As I understand it, this highly politicized matter prevented delegates from debating issues that were either dead or up for review by the NCC in the coming months.

- 2) The NCC and the CLWR (Canadian Lutheran World Relief) have entered into a detailed MOU (memorandum of understanding), which will harmonize the exemplary efforts of the ELCIC’S GHDA (Global Hunger and Development) in our determination to care for our sisters and brothers in need around the world.
- 3) Further to the 2001 Waterloo Declaration I sense that the attempts to merge with the ACC (Anglican Church of Canada) have failed. However both churches have clearly accepted the reality that they have so many of their core values in common that a deepening relationship is a rational solution to the concern of declining memberships and financial support. It is to be noted that Rt. Rev. Colin Johnson of Preeceville Sask, was elected to be the ACC representative on the NCC.
- 4) The Bishop and the NCC obviously agree that a reawakening to our roots in the **ELCA** (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) needs to be encouraged. Not only in educational areas such as an understanding of human sexuality but also in gaining meaningful support in a new model for the ECIC Mission in the World (MW) which we doubtlessly will be hearing more about in the future.

I also found the eight-page report from **the National Office** to be most interesting. Here are some personal observations:

- 1) The vast majority of the efforts of this office are devoted to meetings and discussions with our many partners in the world of religious activity. A strong relationship with the LWF (Lutheran World Federation) and it’s various committees’ makes for good reading. Support for the ELCJHL (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land) seemingly takes up a lot of their time. Then there is the CCC (Canadian Council of Churches), the ESM (Ecumenical Shared Ministry), and the ELW (Evangelical Lutheran Women) to name but a few.
- 2) It is reported that The Task Force for the Development of **a Social Statement on Human Sexuality** continues its work and that the first draft may be available for presentation to the 2011 Convention and hopefully ready for ratification at the 2013 meeting. It was noted that the ELCA began this process in 2001 and it is still a work in progress.
- 3) Direct involvement with the five synods appears to have been minimal.
- 4) A Communications Task Force has been put in place in an effort to counter allegations of a lack of transparency.

***Getting back to business:***

Much of our time was devoted to the election of the Vice-President, Sheila Hamilton, the National Church Council, ELCIC Group Services, the Court of

Adjudication and the 2011 (Saskatoon) National Convention Committee employing the ecclesiastical balloting process. This system is, in my humble opinion, flawed in that we as delegates were expected to vote intelligently for total strangers based solely on cleverly scripted biographies. Even members not present as delegates could technically be instated in positions of authority in our National office without ever having appeared in person. The table talk at mealtime and during the nutrient breaks was all about how time consuming and unfair the process was. At the very least it would seem that all nominees should be given the opportunity to address the convention perhaps by some form of teleconferencing if nothing else.

**The full slate** of election results can be viewed on line but of interest to us might be that fellow Calgarian, *Barb Stolee (All Saints Lutheran)* was elected to serve as Lay and Pastor Trish Schermund (Leduc) was elected as Ordained members on the NCC. Bishop Ron was elected to the Advisory Board.

The report from the treasurer revealed some interesting statistics:

- 1) There are currently 612 congregations in the ELCIC with a total membership of 160,957. In the past five years membership has **dropped by approximately 25%** but financial support seems to have “flat-lined”.
- 2) Benevolence contributions from our synod were second only to the Eastern synod.

The Report from Ruth Vince, the executive director of **the ELW** was an eye opener for me. Firstly because she referred to the July Calgary convention based on the “Be Not Afraid” theme, a lead in to Bishop Hanson’s address to the Convention. Secondly I needed to be reminded of the splendid work this organization has done and is doing with the CLWR. I believe a new Memorandum of Understanding with Bishop Susan has recently been endorsed. It was reported that the 2010 Esprit would be published solely as a magazine.

**On a different note:**

Some 21 motions all dealing with amendments to the Constitution and the Bylaws were then brought to the floor and voted on for ratification of the convention. Mostly in the form of tweaking the wording to reflect the changing times. For example, the word “Ordained” was replaced with the word “Rostered” and the word “Lay Diaconal Minister” was replaced with “Diaconal Minister” so the word Rostered Ministers now includes Diaconal Ministers in all matters of the constitution and the bylaws. A significant change. All of these motions were carried.

The annual general meeting of the Luther College of Regina was held and the new board elected.

Considerable time was spent in receiving and acting upon the reports from the Committee on Reference and Council. Some points of interest might be the following:

Motion 2.1 relating to **KYOTOPLUS**:

A long winded motion that dealt with the issue of global warming, included a request “that Bishop Susan write to our Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments urging them to support the KYOTOPLUS goals”. Carried.

**Motion 2.2**, a resolution to encourage the LWF in its determination to cancel illegitimate foreign debt such as “dictator's Debt” where the borrowed money has never been used for the benefit of the people. Carried.

**Motion 2.3**, a motion to establish a task force to come up with some recommendations to increase Seminary Enrolment. Carried.

**Motions 2.4 and 2.5** motions of “**no Action**” be taken to restrain participants in gay or lesbian marriages and or/on the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Carried  
**Motions 3.1 and 3.2** motions of “**no Action**” be taken regarding Entrance to and Exit from the ELCIC and regarding the asset settlement with congregations who have chosen to leave. Carried.

**Motions 3.4 and 3.5** moved that the ELCIC in convention commend the council and congregation of First Lutheran Church in Vancouver, and their Pastor, Richard Hergesheimer, for their faith and courage in extending sanctuary to Mikhail Lennikov (former KGB translator), and encourage Bishop Susan Johnson to send a letter to the appropriate federal minister, requesting a reversal of the deportation order for Mr. Lennikov. Carried.

#### **And Finally:**

*Some random observations that may be of interest.*

- 1) Total attendance was 175 lay and 165 rostered voting delegates plus 120 visitors.
- 2) For Bible study on Friday Bishop Rt.Rev. Dr. Munib Younan, Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land gave a very long and impassioned plea for our prayer and support for establishment of permanent peace in the Holy Land. As a result, a motion was MSC(moved,seconded and carried) that the ELCIC in convention endorses a 14-page position paper developed by the LWF in collaboration with other religious organizations.
- 3) John Wolff, Chair of GSI (Group Services Inc.) reported that as a result of increasing the pension fund contributions by 4% and with the sale to SUN-LIFE, of 90% of its annuity obligations the fund, which has recently been in a state of negative rate of return, is projected to be out to of debt by 2013.
- 4) The many volunteers mostly recruited from local churches did a masterful job in keeping the event moving and the hospitality friendly.
- 5) The Saturday evening banquet (sans meal) of accolades and award presentations that was MC'd by Bishop Susan was a hoot and a much-appreciated respite from the seemingly endless long days of intense engagement.
- 6) The worship services were deeply spiritual and the invitation was there to receive “laying on of hands and anointing” as well as opportunities to behold the sensuous movements of Liturgical Dancer, Carmelle Mohr.
- 7) The theme of the convention was “**Signs of Hope**” and we were continually admonished to look for signs that could be taken as the work of the Holy Spirit. I confess that at the beginning I had trouble with this but in the end I did see **some signs**, which I will now **share** with you.

The address by Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the ACC, asked us to imagine what “Bold Steps” we could take together as we work towards deepening our relationship. It is obvious that he and Bishop Susan are committed to collaborating in our joint efforts to fulfill our mission to others.

The in-depth presentation by Rev. Robert Bugbee, President, Lutheran Church-Canada in which he stated that the differences between our churches **will not** prevent us from partnering fully in the proclamation of the Gospel as our core values are identical.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America preached a long sermon on how we must stop thinking of God as a dead noun and realize that **God is a verb**. He talked about the Holy Spirit as the Church’s oxygen and how the Church is God’s muscle on earth. He talked about how differences can be a source of joy and not sorrow. He talked about how the common phrase “peace be with you” is not just a form of absolution but it also implies a commissioning to do better. He talked about the sad state of **fearful** churches that act like a fortress or a **military outpost** or a retreat centre called **nostalgia** or one that sees every other Christian church in the neighbourhood as a competitor for the capturing of souls in a consumer market. Finally Bishop Hanson talked about the need for us as a community to “*go with the flow of the Spirit and to adopt an hermeneutic of joy.*”

I see **hope** in that our Bishop clearly understands that we may not be able to make it on our own but that the machinery is in place to seek other churches in our communities that we can merge or partner with. We have her blessing and that of the National church office to make it happen.

Lastly I see great **hope** in the way that the entire assembly unanimously voted to support Pastor Hergesheimer and the Congregation of First Lutheran in Vancouver as they provide safe haven for the Lennikov family. In summary, when faced with diminishing attendance the congregation merged with another church in the area, bought more land, renovated the old church, built a low-income housing facility, and literally opened the doors to all comers. In his own words Pastor Hergesheimer “*fed them first by inviting All to the communion table and then washed them later with Baptism in the Lutheran church*”. The church is now reported to be totally non-denominational, non-racial and non-sexually oriented. It has become a proud **community church** that is truly in mission to ALL and has totally accepted the risk of providing a safe home for a political fugitive.

So you see, there **is hope** for our Church in Canada.

Respectfully submitted,  
Edwin Mattheis  
July 6, 2009