



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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Bishop's letter to all congregations and rostered ministers

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The beginning of a new year is a opportune time to reflect upon the mission and ministry of our congregations and together in our BC synod.

As I reflect upon the ministry to which God calls us, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

These familiar words remind us that we have been called and commissioned to be messengers of good news and not just with words.

Susan Johnson, our National Bishop, challenged the church in convention last summer with the theme, "In Mission for Others: Signs of Hope." This theme, which will also be the theme as we gather for our synod convention in Victoria from May 13 to 16, is a challenge and also an opportunity to give thanks to God and our congregational members for the signs of hope we see in our synod and the church-at-large.

I want to lift up some of the signs of hope that I saw in our synod during 2009:

- Five BC seminary graduates were ordained and accepted calls to parish ministry; four of them are serving congregations in our BC Synod: Nathan Fong, Vida Jaugelis, Thomas Keeley, and Kristen Steele.
- The four western synods have established a "First Call" program, an intentional three-year continuing education program designed to strengthen the ministry of pastors who are serving their first call.
- Augustana Lutheran and Christ Lutheran, Vancouver, engaged in a series of "area strategy" meetings and have now merged their two congregations; the name of this congregation is "Spirit of Life Lutheran Church."

- Grace Lutheran, Burnaby, and their pastor Nathan Fong, have committed themselves to an intentional outreach ministry to second and third generation Asian Canadians.
- Emmanuel Lutheran, Surrey, and their pastor Henry Guo, have worked together with King of Life and Good Shepherd, to develop a large ministry with young Chinese families in the Coquitlam area.
- Ascension Lutheran in Nelson is in the midst of developing a strategic plan for mission and ministry in their area; this plan includes discussion with the Anglican Diocese of Kootenay.
- Lutheran Urban Mission Society (LUMS) has found a new home in Vancouver's downtown east-side, following 18 months in "exile."
- Surrey Urban Mission Society (SUMS) and its director Jonquil Hallgate continue to offer a variety of ministries to people living in poverty and to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Surrey. SUMS recently received a grant of \$50,000 from the Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society for a new program entitled, "Building Bridges for Life."
- First Lutheran, Vancouver, provides sanctuary for one of their members, Mikhail Lennikov, whom the government is trying to deport back to Russia.
- Over 50 youth and adults gathered at Cap Owaissi, Kelowna, at the end of April. This was an inter-generational youth leadership event sponsored by the synod youth ministry committee that helped foster relationships and engaged leaders in thinking more broadly about youth leadership.
- In May, the Evangelical Lutheran Women (ELW) held their synodical convention under the theme, "Be Not Afraid: I Have Called You by Name."
- The annual Bishop's Study Conference for rostered ministers and other professional church workers was again well attended. The theme of the conference was "Reaching towards the Fullness of God's Intent." The presenter was Rev. Dr. Andrew Irvine, Director of the Centre for Clergy Care and Congregational Health.
- Discussions are ongoing with the Anglican and United churches to explore a shared ministry project in Barriere.
- The Canadian Lutheran Youth Gathering has been re-named CLAY: Canadian Lutheran and Anglican Youth Gathering, for it represents a significant step forward in our full communion relationship with the Anglican Church of Canada. The Anglican Church is grateful for our leadership in this area of youth ministry. The 2010 youth gathering will be held in London, Ontario, from August 19 to 22.
- The congregations of St. Paul's (Prince Rupert), Lord of Life Mission (Sandspit) and Mt. Zion (Smithers), have once again received an intern this year. Fleming Blishen arrived in September and is being supervised by Pastor Jim Whaley. This project is supported with funds from the Mission Development Fund.
- In August, the assistant to the bishop, Rev. Dr. Greg Mohr, accompanied six BC pastors to the Mission Development Training Conference sponsored by the ELCA. This conference equips pastors with tools, resources and a mindset not only for the establishment of mission congregations but also for re-engaging their current congregations in mission.
- Our ELCIC World Mission program is being merged with that of the ELCA's Global Mission program. This should free up more dollars to support our missionaries and our world mission program.

- The ELCIC has entered into a new Memorandum of Understanding with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR), wherein the Global Hunger and Development Appeal (GHDA) will be integrated into the work of CLWR. This will remove a lot of confusion between the two appeals and will enable the ELCIC and CLWR to better meet the needs of our neighbours around the world, enhance our advocacy for justice, and support initiatives here at home.
- The National Church Council's Structural Renewal Task Force will be making a presentation at our Synod Convention regarding the difficulties facing the ELCIC and all the synods. Several possible structural scenarios may be discussed and feedback solicited.

Travelling around our synod I am impressed with the many social ministry outreach programs of our congregations. To help us identify the types of social ministry being conducted by congregations in our synod a Social Justice Ministry questionnaire has recently been sent to each congregation. We encourage congregations to complete this questionnaire and assist us to understand the breadth and depth of social ministry within our communities. The survey may also enable a greater linking of congregations with others engaged in the same type of ministry or looking at starting a similar ministry.

We look forward to our synod convention that will be held May 13 to 16 at Church of the Cross in Victoria. At this convention we will elect a new Bishop. During this past year I have encouraged congregations and pastors to prayerfully reflect on the qualities, experiences, skills, and leadership styles that would best serve us as bishop. I look forward to the convention with confidence knowing that the Holy Spirit will guide us in the decisions we will make.

In our synod we are facing significant financial challenges that threatens to undermine our mission and ministry, including our support of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. At the present level of support from congregations it is doubtful that we will be able to continue to have a full time assistant to the Bishop.

Congregations are encouraged to prayerfully consider supporting the mission and ministry of the synod with a faithful proportion of their annual budgeted.

We are continuing our efforts to launch a capital campaign for our synod. This campaign will have a tri-fold purpose: to raise funds for the Mission Development Fund, the UBC campus centre redevelopment, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary

We do have many challenges in our synod and church; however, there are far more signs of hope. I continue to be enthused and energized knowing that God has called us to be in Mission for Others. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our Saviour in our church.

I continue to be encouraged and energized by the many faithful members of congregations which I meet as I travel around our synod. Thank you for your partnership in the gospel. Your prayers and support are a tremendous encouragement.

I especially want to thank the members of synod council, committee members, the Deans of our conferences and my assistant, Rev. Greg Mohr for their work in support of the mission and ministry to which God calls our synod.

May our gracious God continue to bless and strengthen us as we seek to be in mission for others.

Your servant in Christ,

+ Bishop Gerhard Preibisch