



BRITISH COLUMBIA SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

80 East 10th Avenue, New Westminster, British Columbia V3L 4R5

Tel (604)5241318 · Fax (604)524-9255

**Bishop's Report to the Fall 2009 Conference
Conventions.**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ.

Greetings in the Name of our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ!

On September 30, 2009 I returned from a three months sabbatical. I give thanks to God and the BC synod for granting me this sabbatical from the first of July to the first of October. With the following exceptions, for the most part my sabbatical was uninterrupted.

- I attended and preached at the DELKINA (the North American Lutheran Interest Conference) on September 12 -14 at Christ Lutheran in Kelowna.
- I presided at the 50th Anniversary service at Our Saviour Lutheran in Richmond on September 27, 2009.
- I presided and preached at the ordination of Vida Jaugelis on September 27, 2009

I am grateful to the assistant to the Bishop, Rev Dr Greg Mohr, for his faithful service during my sabbatical and for his assistance in preparing this report.

In May I had the privilege of attending the convention of our Synodical ELW at UBC. The theme of the convention was "**BE NOT AFRAID I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME**"- which is a quote from the prophet Isaiah.

I commended the ELW

- for their continued commitment to our church . . .
- for their faithfulness in Bible study and prayer . . .
- for their advocacy for justice . . .
- for their generosity of spirit which undergirds so much of congregational life. . .
- and for their stewardship and service.

On June 25 - 28 the BC Synod hosted the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC. The theme of the convention was "***In Mission for Others Signs of Hope***" and was also held at UBC.

In this report I want to highlight some of the signs of hope which I see in the BC Synods and our church.

This year we had five candidates for ordained ministry examined, approved and recommended for call in our church.

- **Sabine Milewski**, was ordained March 7, 2009 at Grace Lutheran in Winnipeg and is serving St John Lutheran in Winnipeg.
- **Nathan Fong** was ordained March 15th at New Life Chinese and installed March 29th at Grace Lutheran in Burnaby. Nathan's call to Grace includes a special mission project which seeks to engage 2nd and 3rd generation Asian Canadians - particularly those who have limited or no church background.
- **Kristen Steele** was ordained May 2, 2009 at Our Saviour's in Richmond and is serving as associate pastor at Shepherd of the Valley in Langley.
- **Thomas Keeley** was ordained June 28th at St. Paul, Maple Ridge and is serving Dunbar Lutheran in Vancouver.
- **Vida Jaugelis** was ordained and installed on September at Oakridge Lutheran in Vancouver. Vida will serve Oakridge Lutheran on a ½ time basis. She also works ½ time as a chaplain at Eagle Ridge Hospital, Port Moody.

I give thanks to God for these new servants in our church. I entreat you to pray that God will send more servants into the ordained ministry.

In response to the need for more well-equipped pastors, the four western synods of our church have established a First Call Program. This is an intentional continuing three year education program for rostered ministers during their first call to ministry.

Program goals relating to ministerial identity, skills and context include:

- Successfully retaining newly rostered leaders in ministry
- developing habits of sustainability i.e. preventing burnout
- addressing expectations for ministry of rostered leaders, congregations and judicatory bodies
- recognition of public vs. private roles for rostered leaders
- strengthening collegial relationships among rostered leaders i.e. support, accountability and respect
- foster appreciation for continuing education
- sharpening skills for congregational development
- reinforcing skills in equipping the saints in leadership for ministry
- gaining tools for and recognizing the importance of understanding the context of ministry

- strengthening faith commitments of members
- live into a larger understanding of their work and life as one of continuous teaching and learning
- develop opportunities to provide leadership in their local community
- develop skills for being practitioners in their community & seeing themselves as part of a larger community of practice
- build relationships that enable members to learn from each other
- understanding the context in which they are practitioners of ministry
- creating strong, well-resourced communities
- facilitate the development of accurate congregation mission profiles
- address expectations for ministry of rostered leaders, congregations and judicatory bodies
- strengthening collegial relationships among rostered leaders
- learning to identify, prepare, and support first call congregations recognizing signature ministries
- learning to identify, prepare, and support first call congregations

The Canadian Lutheran Youth Gathering (CLYG) has morphed into CLAY - the Canadian Lutheran and Anglican Youth Gathering. This represents a significant step forward in our full communion relationship with the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church is grateful for our leadership in this area of youth ministry

In our synod, over 50 youth and adults gathered at Camp Owaissi, Kelowna, at the end of April of this year. This was an inter-generational youth leadership event which helped foster relationships and engaged leaders in thinking more broadly about youth leadership. The event further fostered a sharing of ideas and resources.

The annual Bishop's Study conference for Rostered Ministers and other professional church workers in April of this year was again well attended. The theme of this year's study conference was, "**Reaching Towards the Fullness of God's Intent.**" The theme presenter was Rev. Dr. Andrew Irvine, Director of the Centre for Clergy Care and Congregational Health at the Toronto School of Theology. His message for clergy and congregational health was both timely and well received. For the past few years I have invited our BC seminary students to the study conference. They have enjoyed attending.

Christ Lutheran, Vancouver, and Augustana Lutheran, Vancouver, are moving toward merger and giving birth to a new congregation on the site of the present Christ Lutheran on 10th Avenue West. The two congregations held a "Travelling Service" on Sunday, August 23; they began their worship service at Augustana for the Service of the Word, and then travelled to Christ Lutheran for the Service of Holy Communion.

We continue to invite congregations and individuals to support All Saints Lutheran, our mission congregation in Kelowna. This mission congregation needs our financial support in order to continue their outreach ministry.

Our newest congregation, Emmanuel Lutheran, also needs our continued support. Emmanuel continues to see growth in their ministry to recent immigrants from mainland China. They are also developing a network of younger Chinese families in the Coquitlam area and have entered into discussions with King of Life and Good Shepherd to develop that ministry jointly.

We are having discussions with the Anglican and United Church to explore a shared ministry project in Barriere, BC.

St. Paul's, Prince Rupert; Mount Zion, Smithers; and Lord of Life, Sandspit, with assistance from the ELCIC Church Extension fund, once again has received an intern this year. BC student, Fleming Blishen, arrived in September and is being supervised by Pastor Jim Whaley, the pastor at St Paul's Lutheran in Prince Rupert.

In August the assistant to the Bishop, Rev Dr Greg Mohr, accompanied six BC pastors (Anita Desjardins, Patricia Giannelia, Vida Jaugelis, Thomas Keeley, Kathy Martin, and Kristen Steele), to a Mission Development Training Conference sponsored by the ELCA. This conference equips pastors with tools, resources and mind set not only for mission congregations but also for re-engaging their current congregations in mission.

Our ELCIC World Missions 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, since it will be administered by the ELCA office in Chicago. [See the Summer 2009 edition of *"Mind for Mission"* which was recently sent to parishes.]

In January of this year my wife and I together with Susan Johnson, our National Bishop, and three other synod Bishops, partnered with the ELCA to participate in a Bishops Academy to the Holy Land. We were invited and encouraged to make this pilgrimage by Bishop Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Even though the invasion of Gaza started just before we were scheduled to leave for the Holy Land, Bishop Younan encouraged us to come with these words "this is the time when we especially need your support and your accompaniment." We visited sacred sites and also met with Israeli and Palestinian religious, political and community leaders.

The primary purpose of the pilgrimage was:

- To support the mission and ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)
- To learn what life is like for Israelis and Palestinians in that region and
- To advocate for peace and justice for all people there.

Winn and I are grateful to have been able to participate in this once in a life time experience. We especially enjoyed meeting and speaking with the children in the schools we visited. I only wish I could spend more time today sharing with you the many joys and sorrows of our experience.

As I mentioned earlier, at the end of June the BC Synod hosted the Twelfth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC. One of the many things which came before the national convention was the new Memorandum of Understanding which the ELCIC has entered into with CLWR. Under this new MOU the work of ELCIC's 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. It will also enable the ELCIC and CLWR to better meet the need of our neighbours around the world as well being an advocate for justice and supporting initiatives here at home.

The NCC has appointed a task force to consider restructuring proposals for the ELCIC. Rev Dr Greg Mohr is our representative on this task force.

The task force is considering:

- The need to develop a structural framework for our church which is flexible, affordable and sustainable
- That the proposed structure equip us to be a church In Mission for Others
- The appropriate number of synods
- The relationship between synods and the national church
- Questions around leadership (i.e. Number of bishops)
- Program priorities and how they are achieved between the national and synodical levels of the church
- Staffing for all levels of the church
- The relationship to congregations
- The function, format and size of national convention
- The implications for our seminaries

Our next Synod convention will be held May 13 - 16, 2010 at Church of the Cross in Victoria. We will build on the theme of the national convention "**In Mission for Others Signs of Hope**" We are looking for suggestions for workshops and break-out groups. At this convention we will elect a new Bishop. I have suggested to the Deans of our conferences to assist in the discernment process in determining who might best serve as Bishop, by inviting delegates at the conference convention and congregations to begin to consider the following:

- What are the synod's priorities for ministry?
- What are the current and future challenges and opportunities to the synod?
- What are the priorities and emphases desired for leadership of our synod?
- What are the qualities, experiences, skills, and leadership styles that would best serve us?

In April, Winnie Fong, our office secretary and receptionist for the past two years, went on maternity leave. We miss her and her excellent work for our synod. We give thanks to God for our new secretary/receptionist, Ashley Russell.

The BC Synod council is in the process of appointing a task force to address specifically how we

might improve and expand our use of the electronic media in our synod i.e. our Website, Synod Council and Committee meetings, and Communications for Rostered Ministers and Congregations.

There are many other signs of hope in our synod and in our congregations. I could speak at length about the life-giving ministries of LUMS and SUMS. Their ministries are signs of hope for hundreds and thousands of people each year. However, I also want to address some challenges which we face.

As already mentioned we need more pastors. Presently two congregations in our synod, Benediction Lutheran in Delta and Hope Lutheran in Nanaimo are searching for a pastor. In addition, Gloria Dei, North Vancouver, is in the early stages of the call process.

The synod is experiencing a significant financial deficit which threatens the mission and ministry of our Synod, the Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. I am encouraged, however, by the response to the Bishop's 2008 Advent letter - approx. \$25,000 was received.

Finally I want to address a mailing which was sent to every congregation in the ELCIC just before our national convention by an organization called Solid Ground. Although the mailing came in an envelope stamped ELCIC Convention, it should be noted that Solid Ground is not an official organization of our church.

It is disappointing that Solid Ground did not send the letter and petitions to the Bishops of the church. A copy of the documents was kindly forwarded to me by one of our pastors.

In a pastoral letter to all congregations in the BC synod I made the following response:

The letter and the larger document which Solid Ground sent to congregations are disturbing in that many of its statements are misleading and some simply not true.

1. For example, the document stated that the BC Synod is engaged in a lawsuit against a former congregation. It should be noted that the lawsuit was filed by a former congregation against the BC Synod and the treasurer of the BC synod and me personally. We are defending the lawsuit in order to preserve a vital ministry of our synod, SUMS.

2. The document also suggested that, in the Model Constitution and Bylaws presented at the 2008 BC Synod convention, congregations in the BC Synod will be required to include in their constitution the following section:

Section 7. Should this congregation desire to sever its relationship with the ELCIC, as provided in Bylaw 3, Section 6, the property owned by this congregation shall, prior to such event occurring, be transferred to the British Columbia Synod at a nominal consideration and the officers of this congregation shall do all things necessary to give effect to this provision.

In actual fact, it was clearly stated in the document presented at the 2008 BC Synod convention that congregations were only invited to consider adding this provision to their bylaws.

To suggest that the BC Synod and the ELCIC desires to own or control the assets which are owned by congregations of our church is absurd and not true!

The document also suggested that “some members of the ELCIC hierarchy” wish to merge with the Anglican Church of Canada. First of all I did not know we had a hierarchy in the ELCIC. Perhaps the authors of the document have forgotten that being baptised is the highest office in the church! I want to state for the record that in past six years, since I have been serving as Bishop of the BC Synod and also as an advisory member of the National Church Council, there has never been a discussion of merger with the Anglican Church of Canada.

The statements in the document referring to the unfunded liability of the ELCIC pension plan shows a lack of understanding of the issues involved and also an insensitivity towards lay people and pastors who have faithfully served our church and whose pensions are in jeopardy because of the unfunded liability.

Please note that we are fortunate to have the past chair, Rev Brad Senften and the current chair, Mr John Wolff, of GSI, the administrator of the ELCIC pension plan, as members of the BC synod. I am sure that both are willing to supply further insights into the ELCIC pension fund and the actions which were taken in the best interest of the church.

Recent News and other updates

- LUMS has found a new home in the downtown eastside!
- As directed by the 2008 synod convention, the Faith and Society committee is in the midst of preparing resources for congregations to consider becoming Reconciling in Christ congregations.
- Two young adults from the BC Synod participated in the KAIROS annual gathering in Kitchener/Waterloo in June. KAIROS is trying to expand its membership among young people, and in conjunction with the national office, paid for the registration, travel, and accommodation for our two delegates.
- Rev. Anita Desjardins has resigned as pastor of Faith, Kelowna affective October 31, 2009.
- Rev. Ron Bjorgan has resigned as pastor of St. John's, Oliver, due to health reasons, affective December 31, 2009
- Trinity, Delta, celebrated the 100th Anniversary of their church building on Sept. 13, 2009.
- Our Saviour, Richmond, celebrates its 50th Anniversary on Sept. 26 -27, 2009.
- Grace, Victoria, celebrates its 100th Anniversary on Thanksgiving weekend.
- Mt. Olive, White Rock (Surrey) also celebrates its 50th Anniversary later this year.
- The Campus Ministry Board for UBC continues to explore options for the renewal of the campus centre. Since it appears more likely that we will need to do so on our own, the Board has established a sub-committee to develop a business plan for this scenario. The campus ministry continues unabated, however, with Stephanie Olson once again agreeing

to serve as peer minister for the coming school year.

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 want to especially thank the Deans of the conferences for their work on behalf of the bishop's office.

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