

SUMMARY OF THE 2008 BC SYNOD CONVENTION

In Mission for Others: A People Called
April 17-20, Christ, Kelowna

This summary is based on the report written by Ms. Kathie Michalyk, the Lay Delegate for Mt. Zion, New Westminster. It has been edited by Rev. Clifford Reinhardt, and supplemented by him with material from Rev. Marlys Moen, Rev. Kim Staus, and the draft version of the minutes recorded by the Synod Council.

The 2008 Convention of the BC Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *In Mission for Others: A People Called*, was hosted by Pastor Patricia Giannelia and the Congregation of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kelowna, April 17-20. The convention opened on Thursday evening with a Worship Service for which National Bishop Susan Johnson served as Presider and BC Synod Bishop Gerhard Preibisch as Preacher. Thursday evening also included a short business session, chaired by Bishop Gerhard.

Worship of God was an integral component of the convention: the agendas for both Friday and Saturday began with services of Holy Communion, Evening Prayer followed the session on Friday evening, and the convention concluded with a festive service of Holy Communion. Business sessions were punctuated by prayers offered by the convention chaplain, Rev. Kathy Martin.

Elections were held to fill 7 positions on Synod Council. Two of these positions were Officers and the other 5 were Directors. Some of these positions needed to be filled by Clergy while others could be filled by Lay or Clergy members of the Synod. It took 5 ballots to elect a Secretary to BC Synod Council but finally Rev. Cliff Reinhardt was elected and accepted the position. John Boucher, who for the past year has served the Office of Vice Chairperson in an interim capacity, was elected to the office.

Of note from Friday's business sessions were the following:

- BC Synod Bishop's Report,
- the presentation of the 2008/09 Budget,
- the Treasurer's Report, and
- the Secretary's Report.

In his report, Bishop Gerhard emphasized the theme of the Convention – *In Mission for Others: A People Called* – and noted that while mission outreach is happening and cross-cultural ministries are flourishing in a number of our congregations and our benevolence funds are making mission possible in a number of communities across our province, **we can do more**. He recommended that congregations, especially those in Greater Vancouver, explore areas of ministry where they can work cooperatively, that congregations be encouraged to develop an area-mission strategy, and that congregations be encouraged to explore ways in which they can enable the birth of a mission congregation.

Bishop Gerhard also reported on a visioning session held with representatives of the Synod Standing Committee, Synod Council and the Conference Deans. Coming out of this session were four statements selected as the primary ones that should be the focus of the Synod for the next two years:

- to be a church in mission,
- to be an inclusive church where all are welcome,
- to excel in shepherding our congregations and rostered ministers, and
- to enhance our effectiveness through creative models of ministry.

In both the budget presentation and the Treasurer's Report Synod Treasurer Gene Blishen noted that, except for the Vancouver Island Conference, support to the Synod from area Conferences is down. He pointed out that significant proportions of synodical benevolence supports the Seminary in Saskatoon, the National Church, and the work of several synodical Committees.

The Convention Key Note Speaker and Theologian in Residence was Dr. Christian Eberhart, Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon. In the first of two lectures he invited the convention to consider what it means to be a people in Mission for Others. The centre of our mission is Jesus Christ, who deeply cared for people, particularly those on the margins of society. Eberhart described Jesus as a reformer who challenged the priesthood's monopoly on forgiveness, thus bringing trouble upon himself.

In his second lecture Eberhart took up themes reflected in his doctoral studies, sacrifice and atonement in the Bible. Moving from blood sacrifice in the Old Testament, to Paul's notion of Christ being the end of the law, to Eucharist and the meal fellowship of Jesus, he portrayed mealtime in Jesus' presence and sphere of influence as occasions of encounter that transcended boundaries of status, ethnicity, religion, and gender. Thus our contemporary celebration of the Eucharistic is an experience of salvation rather than an exercise in obedience to a book of rules.

While the depth of Eberhart's study left some a little puzzled, most delegates nevertheless warmed to his presentations. During refreshment breaks and meals, delegates engaged him in further conversation.

On Friday afternoon delegates had an opportunity to attend a number of different forums, all of which were important to the region in which the convention was held and to the Synod as a whole:

- affinity fraud;
- how to introduce a new liturgy for use in your congregation;
- a visit to a local residential facility for women which provides rehab from substance abuse to a visit;
- a local working orchard where such issues as sustainability, market competitiveness and migrant workers would be discussed;
- to homelessness; and
- a forum exploring the theme that dying well is about living well.

Friday evening delegates participated in Listening Circles as we prepared for a motion that would go to the convention floor on Saturday pertaining to welcoming gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered persons into the life of the Synod. The intent of the listening circles was to allow everyone to share experiences, thoughts, and feelings in a respectful and encouraging environment.

Although we woke up to about three inches of snow on Saturday morning that left many (especially those who had come to Kelowna in summer clothes!) wondering what had happened, by mid-afternoon the sun had come out and the snow was gone. But from the temperatures remained quite cool for the rest of the weekend.

Saturday was the day for Committee Reports. The Assistant to the Bishop, Rev. Dr. Greg Mohr, presented all the reports on behalf of the standing committees, while the Chairperson for each provided a synopsis and entertained questions. The standing committees of the BC Synod are:

- Faith and Society,
- Missions,
- Specialized Ministries,
- Stewardship,
- Worship,
- Youth Ministry, and
- Lutheran Student Foundation.

The convention also heard from Karen McKenzie who is the BC Synodical ELW President. Karen informed the Convention that the ELW faces the same challenges as the Church: declining numbers, which equates to declining financial resources with which to carry on the work of the organization. Resolutions will be brought to the floor of the Quadrennial Convention in Calgary in July 2008 that will seek to address these and other issues. An interesting comment that Karen made at the end of her presentation relates to the new hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. She explained that our church shouldn't refer to it as *the ELW* because "ELW" has been patented for Evangelical Lutheran Women. (Others suggested that we refer to it as *our Worship book* since "Worship" is the word that's printed on the spine.)

Following the lunch break on Saturday our National Bishop, Susan Johnson, presented her report, focusing on the theme, *In Mission for Others*. She spoke of work done through the 2004-2006 National Youth Project where Lutheran youth raised \$146,000 for Habitat for Humanity. She gave thanks for our missionaries serving in El Salvador, Thailand, and Cambodia and noted that gifts to GHDA and CLWR have increased from 2006 to 2007. It's through these donations that our church helps make a difference in the lives of the world's poor and marginalized.

Bishop Susan recognized that our work has its challenges: an aging demographic, the need to discern and understand how our church does or doesn't connect with young adults and learning how we can assist in making the Gospel known in today's skeptical and hectic, modern world where people are faced with so many societal demands.

In March 2008 the ELCIC's National Church Council devoted time and energy to discerning the mission and vision of the ELCIC and determining the strategic priorities for our church in the coming years. To that end the Council developed 5 pillars to support the *In Mission for Others* theme:

- Effective partnerships,
- Diverse faces,
- Compassionate justice,
- Focused framework, and
- Spirited discipleship.

The final report presented on Saturday was that of the Reference and Counsel Committee. This convention committee examines motions intended for the convention floor, edits them for clarity, checks them against the church's constitutions and bylaws for propriety, and sometimes even consults with the mover so as to clarify the intent of the motion. The Committee's goal is to deliver clearly-worded, "in order" motions to the convention floor for debate and vote. The Committee's report included the following motions, some drawn from the Bulletin of Reports and others formulated by delegates at the convention. This list is not comprehensive, and of the motions presented here, the first generated the most debate by a wide margin.

- From the Committee for Faith and Society:
 - That the BC Synod in convention affirm that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities share the worth that comes from being persons created by God and are welcomed into the full life of the synod, in accordance with its constitution and by-laws, and its policies. **Carried.**
 - That the BC Synod in convention encourage congregations to go through a process of study that will enable them to consider becoming Reconciling in Christ congregations. **Carried.**
 - That the BC Synod in convention petition, through the office of the Bishop, the Premier and the Minister of Labour to raise the minimum wage in the Province of British Columbia to \$10.00 an hour. **Carried.**
 - That the BC Synod in convention petition, through the office of the Bishop, the Premier and the Minister of Labour to eliminate the \$6.00 an hour training wage, effective immediately. **Carried.**
 - That the BC Synod in convention petition, through the office of the Bishop, the Premier and the Minister of Labour to index the minimum wage to the cost of living. **Carried.**
- From the floor of the convention
 - I move that the BC Synod in convention memorialize the National Church to initiate a study process to review the policy of Holy Communion for those who are not yet baptized. **Carried.**
 - I move that the BC Synod in convention memorialize the National Church to allow individual congregations to apply for lottery funds in order to assist the congregations with their individual projects. **Defeated.**
- From the Committee on the Report of the Bishop
 - That the BC Synod in convention request that congregations in Greater Vancouver and the rest of BC enter into consultation with the office of the Bishop to explore areas of

ministry where they can work cooperatively, including with their Anglican neighbours.

Carried.

- It is moved and seconded by the Committee that the BC Synod in convention request that all congregations of this Synod develop an area-mission strategy. **Carried.**
- It is moved and seconded by the Committee that the BC Synod in convention request that all congregations of this Synod adopt the “Green Parish Accreditation Program.”

Carried.

Other business during included bylaw changes so as to streamline the governance of Lutheran campus ministry, and to vest management of the UBC campus ministry properties in the Synod (rather than in the Lutheran Student Foundation, a pre-ELCIC body no longer serving any helpful purpose). The Synod in convention also passed a bylaw amendment which paved the way for the creation of a single Examining Committee for the four western synods, thus enhancing the stewardship of resources for the admission of ministers to the synodical rosters.

Some significant personnel, facts, and figures

Chaplain – Rev. Kathy Martin

Managers – Ms. Stephanie Staus & Mr. Armen Petznik

Parliamentarian – Mr. Don Storch

Worship planners – Rev. Brenda Nestegaard Paul, Rev. Karen Johnson-Lefsrud, Ms. Lorraine Reinhardt

Maximum attendance – for Business Session 6, on Saturday at 1:30 pm: 74 Clergy, 60 Lay, 48 Youth, for a total of 182 registered (134 voters)

Pastors honoured at the banquet for milestone anniversaries:

25 years – Kebede Dibaba, Peter Hanson, Greg Mohr, Sharon Betcher, Brian Heinrich

30 years – Robert Goos, Timothy Johnson, James Whaley, H. Walter Johanson

40 years – Gordon Hoeflicker, Lorin Koss, H. Kendall Harris, Harry Kapeikis, Erling Lindstrom

50 years – Ferdinand Baglo, Larry Deneff, Donald Johnson, Peter Mathiasen, Wallace Bergman, Frank Schmitt

60 years – Herman Bickel, Rudolf Busch

Venue for next synodical convention (2010) – Lutheran Church of the Cross, Victoria