



**SYNOD OF
ALBERTA
* AND THE *
TERRITORIES**
Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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A Pastoral Letter To the Synod of Alberta and the Territories

ELCIC 2011 National Convention Actions

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 persons of gay and lesbian (or other) 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.

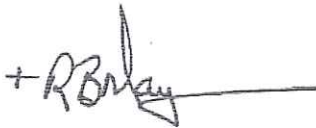
In the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, we are doing everything we can to educate and encourage towards an *evangelizing culture*. There are many ways of "being Christian" and "doing church" but unless the foundation is being missional people, in missional congregations, in a missional Synod, there 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!

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name 'R. B. Mayan' in a cursive script, ending with a horizontal line.

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
The Commemoration of James, Apostle
20 July. 2011