



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

concerning decisions from
2011 Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)

1. **Exactly what significant decisions were made at the ELCIC convention, July 14 - 16?**

National Bishop Susan B. Johnson was re-elected as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada on the second ballot.

Several areas of the ELCIC constitution were amended by removing procedures such as,

- meeting of bishops,
- operational aspects of convention,
- representation on national church council,
- tasks assigned to national church officers,
- details of financial tasks, ...

and assigned to the “Administrative Bylaws” of the Church. Other amendments were editorial in nature.

The audited financial statement and a budget was approved and a new treasurer, Ken Day was elected.

A commitment was made to promote right and renewed relationships between non-indigenous and Indigenous Peoples within Canada, implementing the values and principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In doing so, members of this church were directed to consider the Kairos resource “In Peace and Friendship: A New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples”.

Approval was given to (Motion #25) a new three-part Social Statement on Human Sexuality:

1) encountering the world in which we live;
2) finding common language to articulate the faith and theology which guides our life together; and

3) seeking to stimulate conversation about mission and ministry at the local and global level. The Statement was approved by a vote of 213 in favour and 134 against. More information regarding this new Statement, follows - see HUMAN SEXUALITY.

It was affirmed that disagreement over moral, political, or liturgical issues must not distort our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ or divide us from our Lutheran sisters and brothers in Christ. (An Affirmation Concerning the Unity of the Church) - Motion #26

The Assembly was in favour of rostered ministers presiding at, or blessing legal marriages according to the laws of the province within which they serve. They are encouraged to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders of the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture of the congregation. - Motion #27

A policy was adopted that removes sexual orientation as an impediment to ordination or consecration. It shall no longer disqualify a rostered person from seeking call in a congregation, thus rescinding the Convention actions of 1993 and 1989. - Motion #28

Recommendations of the Structural Renewal Taskforce were approved in principle, authorizing the national church council to move forward with the implementation process. More information regarding these changes, follows - see RE-STRUCTURING.

2. Who are the delegates that make up the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) convention assembly?

Voting members come from the 620 congregations of this church. Just over two-thirds are lay delegates and almost one-third are rostered delegates elected at conference conventions (by November 30th of the year prior to convention). Each parish is represented either by a lay delegate or by a rostered delegate. The Synod of Alberta and the Territories is assigned 48 rostered delegates, based on a baptized membership of just over 39,000. Although the 6 bishops (5 synodical and 1 national) have voice, they do not have vote.

Article XI (ELCIC Constitution) states that:

The voting membership of conventions shall consist of:

a. Two hundred rostered ministers (lay and diaconal) elected by the conferences as allocated by the National Church Council on the basis of baptized membership; and

b. A lay delegate may be elected by each parish not already represented by a rostered minister. An additional lay delegate may be elected by every parish with more than eight hundred baptized members. Any parish with less than eight hundred members represented by a rostered minister for two consecutive conventions may not be represented by a rostered minister at the following convention.

c. Twelve youth selected by the synods as members of the youth assembly.

3. In order to be approved, some decisions of the ELCIC Convention require a 2/3 majority while others require a simple majority vote. How is the vote margin determined?

Article XX of the ELCIC Constitution specifies that “*Adoption of an amendment (to the Constitution) shall require passage at this and the next regular convention by a two-thirds vote of the delegates present and voting.*”

Bourinot’s Rules of Order, latest edition, is the governing parliamentary law of this church, and Bourinot’s states: “*For certain important issues, the by-laws or regulations often state that there must be a two-thirds majority for a motion to carry, in routine business a simple majority is sufficient.*”

The Convention Assembly agreed that the vote on a new Social Statement on Human Sexuality (Resolution #25) required a simple majority to pass and the Re-structuring resolution required approval by 2/3 of the delegates.

4. Did our delegate vote the way I asked her/him to?

Lutheran history has never had voting delegates who have been bound to vote in a particular way. Persons are elected or appointed by a congregation to this representative position based upon his/her commitment to the Lord and the church, prayerfulness in discernment and common sense in making faithful decisions on behalf of all. The assembly seeks the Spirit’s guidance and movement through conversation and prayer.

5. What happens to our church property if our congregation decides to withdraw from the ELCIC?

Your congregational constitution (Model Constitution Article V) allocates authority for property to the congregation; and Article VI of the Model Constitution for Congregations outlines the process for withdrawing from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

6. What happens to our pastor if the congregation leaves the ELCIC?

Your pastor will need to make a decision as well. The pastor may resign from the ELCIC and continue serving the congregation. He/she may need to go through a process to be received as a pastor in a new church body.

If the pastor decides to remain in the ELCIC, he/she can either resign from the congregation, and with the Synod Council's approval be listed on the "on leave from call" roster, thus declaring his/her interest in receiving a new call in the ELCIC.

Realizing that congregations will have many questions related to the Social Statement on Human Sexuality and its implications; and, the Re-structuring Task Force and the changes that this will have on our Church, the next two sections, deal specifically with these two topics. In the final section, Bishop Mayan shares his pastoral concern.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

7. How did we get to this place in our life together as the ELCIC?

Conversation regarding human sexuality has been debated at previous national and at Alberta Synod conventions for many years. Several resources guided our discussions and shared our opinions - "Horizons for Justice" (a compilation of social statements adopted from predecessor bodies at merger); "Six Studies on Homosexuality" (Prof. Erwin Buck); essays written by various church leaders and published on the ELCIC website; actions of conventions (1989, 1991, 1993, 1999, 2005, 2007); a "Lutheran Study Conference on Homosexuality" held in Camrose on May 10 - 12, 2001; and "Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality in the Alberta Context" (a synodical pastoral statement, received in 2008).

What does this mean for our congregation?

Congregations and individual members have been given the opportunity for input at various junctures of the conversation. Although social statements, once adopted, are considered 'normative for the elected officers, staff and elected or appointed representatives of the church in representing the ELCIC', congregations may continue to write their own story of ministry, determining the direction that the congregation will take with respect to blessing of same-gender couples.

8. It appears that there are two Scripturally-grounded, faithful viewpoints on this issue that we are trying to hold in place. What is the basis for these two perspectives?

For all who support “A Statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family” (LCA, 1970), change in understanding and practice (viz-a-viz the Social Statement “A Statement on Sex, Marriage, and Family”) subordinates the Word of God to the unpredictable changes of cultural customs and human opinion. The specific features of Scripture that are considered decisive vary somewhat on the impact of the seven texts which they believe express the will of God for human behaviour. They believe these texts are binding on Christians today in much the same way as they were on their original audiences. Others focus more on the early chapters of Genesis, recognizing that natural reasoning is a part of Lutheran heritage. In those chapters they see a heterosexual intention in creation that shapes their interpretation of human sexuality and the institutions of marriage and family. Whether focusing on the biblical prohibitions or the heterosexual order of creation, these Lutherans read these texts in light of the Gospel, in the context of larger themes, and with compassion for individuals and communities, but always with the conviction that where the Word of God is clear and unified, it provides the only relevant measure of godly and acceptable behaviour.

Others who support the new “Social Statement on Human Sexuality” affirm the strong witness of the same seven biblical texts that refer to same-gender sexual conduct in their literary, historical, and theological contexts. They also understand,

however, that the witness of these texts is to condemn abusive or coercive sexual behaviour, or sexual behaviour that expresses rejection of God’s sovereignty. In interpreting the seven texts, they conclude that these scriptures oppose unhealthy and unfaithful conduct by people oriented to the same gender. They believe the texts do not in fact address the contemporary situation of people seeking to live in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships marked by the same levels of mutuality, love, and trust as are found in heterosexual marriages. They believe these texts and others convey neither a rejection of those Christians whose orientation is to people of the same gender nor a rejection of publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships that bless the world.

What does this mean for our congregation?

There will likely be a wide diversity of opinion with respect to the “Social Statement on Human Sexuality” and some may now be willing to study and discuss this issue but consensus may still elude us. “We all have biases and prejudices. When we use our biases to try to articulate God’s will, we run the risk of abusing power and authority.” (*Social Statement on Human Sexuality*) Congregations are urged to recognize and respect the faith of members whose opinions differ and to seek a common ground of understanding and practice.

9. Will Lutheran congregations be hosting gay marriages/unions even if the majority of members do not support the approved “Social Statement on Human Sexuality”?

No, it is recommended that pastor and congregation reach a prior consensus about how they will treat a request to bless a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.

What does this mean for our congregation?

Your congregation or church council may consider adopting the following declaration. When forwarded to the synod office, the document will be placed in your official file.

Declaration Regarding Rostered Ministry
at _____ Lutheran Church

_____ Lutheran Church as a congregation of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, understands that it has the right to call, or refuse to call, as a pastor or diaconal minister, any person approved for those rosters.

_____ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, declares that this congregation will not call a pastor or diaconal minister who is or intends to be in a same-gender relationship.

_____ Lutheran Church, as a congregation of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories declares that marriages, civil unions or blessings of persons in same-gender relationships will not be performed in this church building or authorized by this congregation.

10. Will Augsburg-Fortress, the publishing arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, be promoting homosexuality in Sunday School or Confirmation material?

Andy Seal, Canadian Director of Augsburg Fortress confirmed that the statement that Beth Lewis, President and CEO of Augsburg Fortress gave to the ELCA, was true for Canada as well. Beth said *“Augsburg Fortress has no plans for the foreseeable future to change the content of our resources related to any of the actions of the recent ELCA Churchwide Assembly (approving the blessing of publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; or approving for call, persons who are living in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship.) Our focus continues to be on creating excellent group use faith formation and worship resources for congregations and excellent text and reference materials for higher education.”*

What does this mean for our congregation?

Congregations may continue to rely on printed material that supports the former social statement.

RE-STRUCTURING

11. How did we get to this place in our life together?

In May of 1985, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada was voted into existence by 524 delegates; and supported by the 215 visitors who attended the historic event. There was an underlying excitement and hopeful joy. The new church officially began January 1, 1986 with an optimistic budget and a dedicated staff. Although efficient leadership conscientiously served the Church, by 1989 it was evident that there needed to be structural adjustments to make this Church more affordable. Since then, there have been reductions in staffing, both volunteer and paid. Most recently, the National Church Council gave a “Structural Renewal Task Force” the responsibility of looking at renewal with a “view (1) to equipping the church to be In Mission for Others and (2) to developing a structural framework which is flexible, affordable and sustainable.”

What does this mean for our congregation?

There are many ways to faithfully and creatively do “a new thing” always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As ecclesiastical structures and organizations are amended again...and again...in order to find a way to best serve, congregations and members individually, must continue to keep “the main thing, the main thing” - that is, to share the Gospel with others and “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (*Micah 6:8*)

12. How will these changes happen?

National and Synodical Implementation Teams will be appointed and will prepare proposals - both constitutional and programmatic - which will be presented to the next Synod Convention (May 24 - 27, 2012) for approval.

What does this mean for our congregation?

Congregations will have opportunity for further input into the emerging synodical structure by sending a delegate to the next Synodical Convention.

13. What significant changes will take place?

- There continues to be a national (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) office, but there will be three (instead of five) synodical offices; British Columbia Synod/Synod of Alberta and the Territories; Saskatchewan Synod/Manitoba Northwestern Ontario; Eastern Synod;
- Regional organizational structures, previously called ‘conferences’, led by deans, will no longer exist;
- ‘Areas’ and ‘area leadership teams’ will be created to offer support to congregations;
- Conventions of the synod and of the national church will take place triennially, not biennially. With this comes the change in the term of bishops - from 4-year terms to 3- or 6- year terms;
- Fifty delegates to the national church convention, will be elected at the BC/ABT synod convention.

What does this mean for our congregation?

Congregations who have budgeted either for a synodical or a national convention each year, will find the new triennial cycle to be a cost saving.

Congregations may not necessarily be represented at a national convention - the delegates will be elected at the synod conventions so it will be important to participate in the convention of the synodical level of the church.

The new 'areas' and 'area leadership teams' may be able to offer more local mission support to congregations.

BISHOP'S NOTE

14. How can I, in good conscience, remain a member of the ELCIC if I am against these decisions?

As your bishop, allow me to speak to this from my personal perspective. For Biblical and Confessional reasons, I did not support the resolutions pertaining to those in lifelong, monogamous, same-gendered relationships. However, I must acknowledge that many who did vote in support of these resolutions did so for reasons that they sought to ground in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. As you know, this has been a very difficult conversation. The debates occur among those who have a deep desire to be faithful to the Lord by whose Spirit they have been called to faith, a deep love for the unity of Christ's Church and those with whom they disagree, and a profound disagreement about

what the obedience of faith looks like in this present discussion.

I appreciated the "Affirmation Concerning the Unity of the Church" (Motion #26) because I understand that the Christian Church has a long tradition of splitting in the face of disagreement where most quote Scripture and display a certainty regarding the will of God. We do not do so well at disagreeing in a manner which conveys the love of Christ to the other or to the world which observes our witness and often asks, "Why would I want to be a part of that?"

Given our human nature that is prone to division, it is not surprising that our Lord Jesus prayed for his disciples, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:1). Similarly, St. Paul will remind a divided congregation, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit". (*I Corinthians 12:12 - 13*)

I do not want to minimize the anger and disappointment that many feel with respect to this matter. But neither do I want any of us to minimize what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ in which we do have need for one another, even in the face of strong disagreement about this or many other matters.

One of Synod's core values is: "In mission with others, the congregations, rostered leaders and ministries of The Synod of Alberta and the Territories work together in the Spirit of Christ to be the reconciling and welcoming love of Jesus Christ in all homes and communities." That is easy to do when things are going well and we don't disagree or disappoint one another. It is much more difficult to do in the face of deep disagreement.

At this point I am pleading with you to recognize that which unites brothers and sisters in Christ in this Synod and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. This Synod needs you and your perspective. We also need each other to tend to the ministry that Christ has entrusted to us. While not neglecting those matters which test our unity in Christ, I pray that the Holy Spirit will not allow us to be distracted from the ministries to which we are called.

With respect to our leadership, the Synod staff and I will continue to accent the centrality of God's promises in the crucified and risen Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit will work at keeping that Good News at the centre of our lives as individuals, as congregations, and as a Synod. We will continue to insist that our confidence is never in our "rightness" with respect to a given debate, but in the righteousness with which we are clothed in Jesus Christ.

(Please duplicate as required)

The Rev. Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop
The Synod of Alberta and the Territories