



“Celebrations”

*A publication of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories
July 25th, 2007 – Special Report*

Synod Consultation



Stephen Wildfang (left)
and Bishop Ron Mayan (right)

“There is one God,” **Bishop Ron Mayan** began in his opening address at the Synod Consultation on July 23rd. “I come this day with that prayer in my heart.” He spoke with deep conviction. “God loves us to death. His own death with Jesus on the cross.” He proclaimed, “No matter how deep our divisions, we cannot escape this fact [that God loves us].” Bishop Ron summed up his message with, “Jesus Christ remains the same.”

Rostered church workers in our synod and one lay representative from each congregation were invited to attend a consultation from 9:00 until 3:30 at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Red Deer, AB. The agenda included

four main items. First, the 196 participants heard about and reflected on the National Convention. Secondly, they pondered the results of questionnaires sent to all rostered workers and each congregation in preparation for this event. Thirdly, participants worked both in small groups and as a large group to plot a path forward. Finally, participants discussed and endorsed the formation of a task force to work on marriage and family issues.



Participants conducted themselves in love and grace.

Bishop Ron clarified, “Our official position today is that we don’t bless same-sex unions.” He went on to say, “We have spun our wheels enough. Our purpose is to find a way forward.” With such a busy agenda, he asked for any prepared statements from congregations, promising to review them and include a summary with the consultation report. Next, he introduced **Stephen Wildfang** as the moderator for the day.

The morning continued with an ELCIC National Convention report by Bishop Ron. The report as a whole was quite general, but specific to the day was the information on the local option motion. The motion failed. However, with only 200 opposed to the motion and 181 in favour, it is clear that we are divided on this issue. The National Convention report was followed by a report on the Anglican church’s recent action and vote on same-sex blessings by **Bishop Victoria**



Bishop Victoria Matthews

Matthews, Bishop Ron's Anglican counter-part. Although they did not pass a similar motion, they did come to two conclusions. The issue of same-sex blessings is not an issue that changes the doctrine of God. Thus, it should not be a church splitting issue for them. Also, they decided that international opinion is as important as national and local opinions. Participants were given time for questions and suggestions for future national conventions were received.

Unfortunately, of the surveys sent out prior to the consultation, only about one third were completed and returned. From those results, it was clear that both Scriptures and Confessions are important to ministry. Without them, we have no mission.

The fears indicated in the surveys included: a lack of vision in our church, a lack Biblical knowledge among our members, a compromising of the Word to meet societal expectations, a fear of separation, a concern about the many rostered and lay leaders leaving due to stress, declining church membership and a fear that a smaller church will not have the resources to support our mission in the world.

The hopes expressed were: a desire to get beyond the "issue", a desire for growth and equipping people for discipleship and mission, to speak the Gospel to our world in need, to increase ecumenical missions, to recruit clergy and lay leaders, to bring healing to congregations and professional workers, that there would be no schism, for increased unity in our synod and the national church, and that we would have contagious fun as a church in mission for others.

The responses to the question about reaching out and making others welcome included a number of thoughts. Some felt that we are rather poor in reaching out to the unchurched and making them feel welcome. Some ways already being used to make people feel welcome include mailings, emails, advertising cards and letters, one to one contact, greeters who welcome and invite newcomers for coffee, statements of welcome, being involved in community programs, welcome packages for visitors and user friendly worship materials.



The top six social issues according to the survey, beginning with the most important, were: the environment, homelessness, poverty, family breakdown, affordable housing and hunger.

In the responses about the effect of the same-sex blessings debate on our church, it was clear that there is a lot of hurt, mistrust, anger, sorrow, stress and division. Some feel that it has been a waste of time and resources and that it has inhibited our ministry of outreach. On the positive, some feel that there have been good conversations and Bible study on this issue. Some feel that we have become more deliberate in our welcoming. Others reported little or no effect on their local congregation.



Small group discussions

Participants discussed in small groups and then shared with the group at large their reactions to the results of the survey. These included what surprised them, what was confirmed for them, and what they saw as implications for our synod as we move forward.

Unfortunately due to time, Bishop Ron's presentation on Biblical perspectives was not shared that day, but will be transmitted electronically for everyone to read. He did indicate that pastors interpret the Scriptures with reverence and very seriously. He has no intention to bind us to his interpretation, as that doesn't help us to move forward.

After lunch, participants continued with more small group discussions and large group sharing. The vast majority of participants agreed, with some reservations, to endorse the forming of a task force to address Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality in the social, cultural and spiritual context of the ABT Synod. The vast majority of participants agreed to continue to work within the ELCIC, although some agreed reluctantly. Participants agreed to keep working together in "mission for others". However, many felt a need for better focus in our mission.



Thanks to those who provided the delicious lunch!

The final discussion for the day was on our mission. Biblical literacy among our members and equipping disciples were most often mentioned. Youth, family and "Partners in Faith" were also very important, as well as facilitating parish programs.

The information from the day will be considered by synod council and the task force, once it is established. Thanks to Pastor Larry Brotherton and the members of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd for hosting the day, to those who provided the lunch and the stewards. Thanks to the synod office staff for all their work on the consultation. A special thanks to all the participants for conducting themselves in grace and love.

Before parting, everyone joined to worship, sing and share the Lord's supper together in Christ.



**"Celebrations" IS A PUBLICATION
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ITS PURPOSE is...

...to connect the people and congregations of our synod.
...to provide a forum for celebrating the people, places and mission of the congregations in our synod.
...to help us learn from each other and encourage each other in our work for Jesus Christ.

SUBMIT articles and photos about the life, work and mission of the congregations of our synod to the "Celebrations" editor, Lisa Rude at:

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Please include name, phone number and email or address with all submissions. All submissions will also be considered for the ABT Synod section in *Canada Lutheran*.

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