



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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April 3, 2011
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Grace and peace to you.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. —*Ephesians 4:1-3*

The National Church Council (NCC) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has been meeting in recent days (April 1-3, 2011). As we began our work, the Council was deeply aware of the responsibilities commended to us by the church and we are grateful to all who have held us in their prayers.

Many of you have been anticipating our efforts as you have participated in the work of our committees and task forces. All of NCC's work will be reported out in the *Bulletin of Reports*. For now, with a view to openness and transparency, NCC would like to share with you some decisions around two matters: Structural Renewal and Human Sexuality.

Structural Renewal Task Force: Report

National Church Council considered the *Report of the Structural Renewal Task Force*. The Task Force was given the responsibility to look at possibilities for 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.

The report proposes that the ELCIC be re-organized into three synods, that existing conferences be reconfigured into "areas" (groupings of congregations) supported by leadership teams, that conventions of the National Church and synods be held triennially and that National Conventions be smaller in size.

As soon as the final text of the report is available, it will be published online and included in the *Bulletin of Reports*.

Council deeply appreciates the careful church-wide consultation and thoughtful analysis which are reflected in the *Report*.

NCC adopted the following motion: That the National Convention approve the recommendations of the Structural Renewal Task Force in principle and authorize the National Church Council to move forward with the implementation process.

Human Sexuality Task Force: Social Statement

National Church Council considered the *Proposed ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. This proposed statement was prepared according to the vision and process articulated in *The Public Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: A Policy on How the Church Addresses Social Issues (1991)*. Both documents are available on the ELCIC website (www.elcic.ca).

The *Statement* has three sections: “Encountering the World in Which We Live” names, without judgment, some of the current issues of sexuality that face our world; “Facing God and Being Church” seeks to find common language to articulate the faith and theology which guide our life together; and “Doing Ministry” seeks to stimulate conversation about mission and ministry at the local and global level.

NCC adopted the following motion: That NCC approve and recommend for adoption to the 2011 National Convention the *Proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality*.

NCC is grateful to the members of the Human Sexuality Task Force for the care and integrity with which they went about their work and for the breadth of their consultation.

Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee: Three Motions

National Church Council asked the Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee to review the *Proposed ELCIC Social Statement on Human Sexuality* and to prepare appropriate motions arising from the statement.

Council is grateful for the sound scholarship and pastoral sensitivity the Committee brought to their work.

NCC approved and recommended for adoption to the 2011 National Convention the following three motions:

1. Motion on the Unity of the Church

MOVED that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in convention adopt the following affirmation as representing the position of this church and communicate this action to congregations, partner churches in Canada, sister churches in the Lutheran World Federation and other Lutheran church associations in Canada.

An Affirmation Concerning the Unity of the Church

As a confessional Lutheran Church which bases its life and teaching on the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada affirms with the confessors at Augsburg in 1530 that “it is enough for the unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments” (AC VII).

We affirm that the church ought not be divided because of disagreement over moral issues, no matter how distressing such disagreement might be. We believe that any attempt to divide the church because of disagreements over morals, polity or liturgy is an unacceptable confusion of Law and Gospel, which will lead inevitably to a distortion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We encourage ELCIC members, congregations and synods and churches who share our commitment to the scriptures, creeds and confessions and who disagree with one another over issues of morals, polity (including standards for ordination or consecration) and/or liturgy to remain in dialogue and unity with one another and maintain unity in the gospel and the sacraments as St Paul recommends in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. We encourage all Lutherans to work for and nurture the unity of the confessional witness to the Gospel which is essential to the Lutheran tradition. We ask those persons, congregations, synods and/or churches who are in disagreement to refrain from actions that will divide the body of Christ.

2. Motion on Presiding at or Blessing Marriages

MOVED that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in convention adopt the following policy statement:

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that rostered ministers may, according to the dictates of their consciences as informed by the Gospel, the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, preside at or bless legal marriages according to the laws of the province within which they serve. All rostered ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are encouraged to exercise due diligence in preparing couples for marriage. All rostered ministers serving congregations are encouraged at all times to conduct their ministry in consultation with the lay leaders in the congregation and with sensitivity to the culture within which the congregation serves.

3. Motion on Standards for Ordination and Consecration

MOVED that convention actions NC-1993-16 and NC-1989-96 be rescinded and that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in convention adopt the following policy:

It is the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada that sexual orientation is not in itself a factor which disqualifies a candidate for rostered ministry or a rostered minister seeking a call. Candidates and rostered ministers are in all cases expected to adhere to the qualifications and standards as set out in the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and of the synod within which they serve. Synods and congregations are expected to evaluate candidates for ordination or consecration and rostered ministers for call in accordance with a conscience informed by the Gospel, the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

National Church Council recognizes that there are other areas of exploration that arise from the proposed statement which may require further study or action such as: “Stewardship of Media”, “Oppose Sexual Exploitation”, “Act for Justice” and “Create Safe Spaces” (items drawn from the third section of the statement).

A Call to Prayer

NCC is keenly aware that our commitment to a common faithful journey may sometimes challenge us or lead us into places of unease or hurt or pain. At the same time, we seek, as best we are able, to maintain the unity of the Spirit and to support one another on the journey.

At the National Convention, there will be many reasons for celebration and rejoicing: our National Bishop has called us into a time of spiritual renewal; our relationships with other Christians continue to grow; we are renewing relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people; we are making an important witness around matters of justice; we have a wonderful 25th anniversary to celebrate; and much more.

We invite your prayers for congregations and leaders preparing for convention; for the officers of the church; for NCC; and for all who will gather at our 2011 ELCIC National Convention in Saskatoon to consider the important matters set before us and to experience spiritual renewal.

Please consider the substance of this letter and take the opportunity to study the various documents to which this letter points. As you have opportunity, please take the time to offer a word of thanks to the many people who have sought to do the church's work, on our behalf, between conventions.

Grace and peace to you.

National Church Council
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada