

Synod of Alberta and the Territories Fall Synod Council Meeting Highlights

Bright fall colours, warm sunshine and clear blue skies greeted Synod Council as we met on September 12 – 14, 2019 at Mulhurst Camp for our Fall Retreat. Informative presentations were heard from guests, decisions were made to move our Synod forward, and all attendees were well-nourished with delicious meals prepared by Cathy Kochendorfer. Holden Evening Prayer liturgy was shared each evening after the day's business work was completed; the Thursday evening session was done by candlelight under a starry sky! Each day began with Dwelling in the Word on a passage from Luke 15 and sharing eucharist together. Some of the highlights of our time together are provided below:

- Guests to the retreat included Trina Gallop Blank, Assistant to the Bishop, Communications and Resource Generation, Jeff Pym, Executive Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Foundation of Eastern Canada, Rev. Dr. James Hendricksen, ABT rostered representative on National Church Council (NCC), and Kathleen Jensen, newly elected ABT lay representative on NCC. A special highlight was having Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life, Rev Prema Samuel, attend her first Synod Council meeting. Pastor Prema was installed at a special service at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Red Deer on the afternoon of Saturday, September 14.
- An orientation session was provided for Erika Rodning, Synod Council's newly appointed lay representative from the Northern Area. She will complete the term begun by Senior Seminarian Mike Harmon.
- Retired Pastor Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson will be assisting the Synod in the role of Consultant for Property and Dissolution of Congregations. Thanks was expressed for the many years of service in this capacity by Bishop Don Sjoberg. Thanks was also expressed for the work by Lorelei Betke as Synod Editor for the *Canada Lutheran*. Richard Janzen has now taken over this role.
- Pastor Daranne Harris is part of a committee to review the vision statement of the National Church and challenged Synod Council members to dream into the future about what this might be.
- Trina Gallop Blank provided many updates from National Church Council and from the National Convention held in Regina in July. Some of the details included the following:
 - A very full agenda awaited all participants at the 17th ELCIC National Convention of our church under the theme: *Called to Journey Together: The Ministry of Reconciliation*; much work was completed
 - Former document 95-11 has been revised into *One Body Working Together*. This document was approved and outlines the responsibilities and interconnectedness of the National Church, the Synods, and the congregations, of the ELCIC.
 - Three task forces, arising out of the work of Reference and Counsel at convention, are being appointed and will begin their work at the National Church level.
 - The Faith Order and Doctrine Task Force has completed their work on a new document entitled: *Decisions at the End of Life*. This document is being well received by ELCIC members.
 - A new document entitled *Reimagining our Church – Public Ministry in the ELCIC* was presented and approved. The goal of this document is to make our church more missional, diaconal and prophetic.

- Much work was done towards helping the environment. The Sustainable Development Goals were reaffirmed with a renewed commitment to implementing steps to achieve them. Convention also reaffirmed the work being done under the ELCIC Stewardship of Creation initiative under the focus entitled: Greening of Faith Communities. A motion seeking to eliminate single-use plastics was also put forward and approved.
 - This is the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) It is this partnership work that led to the joint commemoration of the Reformation in Lund Sweden in 2016 and the document *From Conflict to Communion*.
 - A new focus from Bishop Susan will begin this fall. It is called Living our Faith and for 2019-2020 the focus is on prayer. As Bishop Susan writes: *God is calling us into this deeper relationship – a call to living out our baptismal covenant.*
- ABT Synod had a full contingent of 28 delegates to the National Convention: 2 youth delegates, 11 rostered delegates and 15 lay delegates. A video, a pdf of photos and script from our delegates is available on the Synod website. All congregations are encouraged to view and discuss the information provided about the Convention.
 - Jeff Pym, Executive Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Foundation of Eastern Canada (ELFEC) spoke on the investment guidelines of ELFEC. Our ABT Synod has made an initial investment with ELFEC with funds donated through an estate designated for ministry in the north.
 - The terms of reference for Standing Committees of Synod Council were reviewed. Terms of Reference for Examining Committee and Candidacy Committee were approved.
 - The Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers for 2020 was presented and approved. It recommends a cost of living salary increase as well as increases in other areas of compensation guide. The copy of the guidelines can be found on the Synod website. A Synod budget for 2020 was also presented and approved. A narrative budget document is being prepared to include with the Bishop's Report for AGMs next year. Also since benevolence continues to decline, Synod Council past a motion directing Bishop Larry to form a task force on Resource Generation to better meet future Synod needs.
 - *A Code of Conduct for Participants in Events Organized by the Synod of Alberta and the Territories* was approved for use at Synod events. This is modeled after similar Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and ELCIC documents.
 - Bishop Larry shared a report on his participation with the LWF Council. He was invited to preach at the opening eucharist at the Council meeting in June in Geneva and shared the report he presented to NCC.
 - A new Communication Strategy was presented to Synod Council. It is an overview of who our stakeholders are, the various methods used to share information, the various components of our communication messaging, and some indicators used to gauge who our communications are reaching in the Synod and beyond.

- Changes to our Governance Manual were presented and approved by Council to bring it in line with the 3-year convention cycle. The biggest changes were to the Bishop's Annual Review policy and the scheduling calendar for consistent policy review and revision.
- Bishop Larry presented his verbal report on his activities since the spring retreat. Most of his work focuses on the four mission priorities we have established as a Synod: Spirit-Led Leadership, Hope-Filled Discipleship; Innovative Tradition, and Collaborative Partnerships. Many examples were given of Bishop Larry's meetings and travels that related to accomplishing these four mission priority areas.
- The Bishop's Performance Review Committee members were appointed for the spring review. The committee consists of two Rostered Ministers and two Lay Councillors.
- The topic of the Area Gatherings scheduled for this fall is Welcoming the Future (Matthew 6:33). Members from the congregations in each area are encouraged to attend to learn about Flourishing Congregations from Joel Thiessen, Director of Flourishing Congregations Institute, and hear from the Bishop and the Area Leadership Teams. The timing for the next Area Gatherings will switch to spring 2020 and the Congregational Life Event and All Ministry Team Meeting will be held in the fall.
- Bishop Larry reported on the two Synod delegates who travelled to our companion Synod in Columbia – The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Columbia (IELCO) to take part in a Women's Ministry Retreat. Appreciation was expressed to Rev Barbara Groote and Cathy Kochendorfer for taking part.
- Another Ponder Anew type of event is being planned for 2020. This will be an opportunity for members at 6 different locations across the Synod to connect with one another and to hear about the good news from the Synod.
- Our Full Communion Synod Council Member from the Anglican Church of Canada, The Venerable Alan Perry, Diocese of Edmonton, attended our meeting and brought greetings from the newly elected Primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Linda Nicholls. He also shared that since our full communion partnership agreement 18 years ago, each church body has grown and changed through the close cooperation existing between the two church bodies.
- Bishop Larry will be having Collaborative Partnership Gatherings with congregations in one region of the East Central Area and two regions of the West Central Area to discuss future possibilities of ministry in those regions.
- The Congregation Constitution and By-Law Review Committee recommended approval of three congregational constitutions and by-laws. Each was approved. A fourth member from Calgary was appointed to this Standing Committee of Synod Council.