



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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Dear Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Three years ago the officers of every synod and the National Church met in consultation. We looked at trends in the church including decreases in membership and finances. As a whole group we agreed that our church was not operating as efficiently as it could and asked National Church Council (NCC) to set up a task force to look at options.

NCC did just that, and the Structural Renewal Task Force worked for the next two years. They looked at all possible options from more synods, to no synods, and to no National Church. They consulted widely—at synod conventions, with the whole church via a survey, with conference meetings, with bishops and synod councils. And finally at last year’s National Convention they put a plan forward that the National Church adopted in principle.

The “in principle” part was because all of the details were not yet in place. Over the past eight months a National Implementation Team and three Synod Implementation Teams have been working hard to try to put flesh onto the proposals that were brought to National Convention. There is a lot more “flesh on the bones”, but the reality is that synods will be asked to vote on proposals that are a “work in progress.” These proposals will continue to be refined in the next two years. I know this means a leap of faith—trust in the direction of the work that has taken place and trust that the remaining work will be satisfactorily completed in the next two years.

For some this may cause anxiety. These are big changes and we will not be the same church as we move forward. We will work together differently as congregations, areas, synods, and as a National Church. There will be compromises made and some things that are dear to us will have to be sacrificed so that we can move forward. It’s painful.

But what St. Paul says is correct. We are all parts of the body and we need each part in order to function. I believe we all need to make these necessary changes so that we can continue to faithfully be part of God’s mission to love and serve the world.

The other great change taking place in our church is spiritual renewal. I’m so deeply excited about the way that this call to deeper discipleship is being picked up all across the church. I know this type of transformation does not happen overnight. But as we continue to grow as disciples in our spiritual practices and especially in our ability to share the good news of Jesus with those around us, we will grow as a church—in depth and then in numbers. Structural renewal

allows us the time and redistribution of funding to allow this spiritual renewal to take place. It takes time to grow.

Let me speak very candidly to you. If we do not move ahead with structural renewal, including the amalgamation of synods, the reality is that synods will continue to be forced to make cuts to the National Church in order to balance their own budgets. This is already happening. And it won't take much more until the National Church will not be able to function.

Without a National Church structure, synods will lose their ability to be members of an international and ecumenical church through the Canadian Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches. They will not have the ability to relate nationally to our full communion partner, the Anglican Church of Canada. They will lose the ability to work with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in areas like Global Mission. We will end up a small and very narrow-focused church, and I do not believe that is what God is calling us to do.

I urge you to pray for each of the upcoming synod conventions, that God will lead and guide us and show us the way forward. Dates for the upcoming conventions are as follows:

- April 26-29: Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod Convention
- May 10-13: British Columbia Synod Convention
- May 24-27: Synod of Alberta and the Territories Convention
- June 1-3: Saskatchewan Synod Convention
- July 5-8: Eastern Synod Assembly

If you are a delegate to a synod convention, I ask you to carefully and prayerfully read all of the materials in your bulletin of reports. Come with open ears and hearts so we can listen together to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. Come prepared to hope and dream a bit together...and yes even to debate as together we make decisions for the ELCIC, this corner of God's church that we call home.

This is God's church! We know that no matter what decisions we make God will be with us to guide, bless and bring new life.

So let us commit ourselves to renewal—structural renewal and spiritual renewal—so that together we can grow in discipleship and truly be together a church *In Mission for Others*.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan C. Johnson", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson  
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada