



A Letter to the Church from National Bishop Susan C. Johnson

April 8, 2008

Dear Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! I want to share with you some of the recent work of National Church Council (NCC). This past March, NCC spent time together visioning – worshiping, doing bible study, and asking ourselves, “What is the future to which God is calling the national expression of the ELCIC?” Through this process five organizing pillars emerged which we believe will guide and support us in our work as a national church as we continue to strive to be a church *In Mission For Others*. Those organizing pillars are: Effective Partnerships, Diverse Faces, Compassionate Justice, Focused Framework, and Spirited Discipleship.

I will be describing these pillars a little more fully in my presentations to Synod Conventions, but let me share with you some thumbnail sketches.

For years the ELCIC has worked in a variety of partnerships – so what do we mean when we start talking about **Effective Partnerships**? It’s a realization that we no longer have the resources to be able to do everything by ourselves, it’s a challenge to encourage us not to do things on our own, and it’s a change in mindset where we want to always ask the question, “Do we need to do this on our own?” If the answer is no, then the next question is... “who is the best partner or partners to work with in this area.” It’s good stewardship but even more so it’s a stronger witness to the rest of the world!

Diverse Faces means that we want to reach out into the communities where we find ourselves and invite people to participate in life in the gospel and life in the church. Diverse Faces says something about ethnicity for sure, but it also says something about being a place where people of every age are welcome and have a voice. Where women and men, young and old, play key roles in leadership and service. A place for people of all socioeconomic background, of all kinds of ability. It has something to do with being a place where all people can discover and share their gifts as together we strive to be *In Mission for Others*. This is going to say something about the way we do evangelism for sure. However, it is also going to push us to share leadership and we have to be prepared to accept that it will change us, just as our families change when we add new faces to the table!

Compassionate Justice means reaching out with compassion, providing humanitarian aid, advocating for those who do not have a voice including our creation. Some of the ways we’ve done this recently is through our Stewardship of Creation initiative and our partnership with the Anglican Church of Canada to launch a national campaign against homelessness. Much of the

work of the Global Hunger and Development Appeal (GHDA) is done in partnership with other organizations. One of GHDA's most important partnerships is with Canadian Lutheran World Relief and it is through that partnership that we as a church are able to respond to humanitarian emergencies, carry out international development, assist refugees and support alternative trade.

Focused Framework is not always the most exciting aspect of the mission of the church, but the reality is that addressing a number of structural and relational matters within our church will help us focus on being a church *In Mission for Others*. This is again partly to do with responding responsibly to decreasing resources, but it is mostly about clarifying relationships and responsibilities so that we can focus on becoming the church God is calling us to be. Some of the areas we think we need to look at include the size of NCC, the size and focus of convention, the number and sizes of committees, maybe even the number of synods.

We have also had to look at the size and focus of the National Office. This has involved the very difficult decision to reduce the size of our staff and has necessitated letting go a very bright and talented member of our national staff, the Rev. Ryan Andersen. It is not an easy or a pleasant thing to do, but it is part of what we are called to do to be good stewards of the resources you entrust to us. I want to clarify that while making this difficult decision we are still committed to ensuring that the important work of justice and stewardship continue in the life of our church.

Even as we attempt to face the realities and challenges of decreasing membership and resources, we know that God is calling us on a different trajectory. The reality is that there is a huge mission field at our doorsteps, sometimes starting within our own families. The final organizing pillar that NCC has adopted is **Spirited Discipleship**. We feel that God is calling us deeper into discipleship. We think God wants us to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit and to be able to show that to those around us. We think that God wants us to feel positive about our faith and our church. We think that our spirited discipleship needs to play out in all the ways we come together as church – in our worship, in our bible study, in the way we share our faith, in our compassionate justice – in all of the ways we are called to be *In Mission For Others*.

For the next period of time we in the National Office are going to be going through a lot of transition as we explore new partnerships and make decisions about what ministry areas we need to continue and what ministry we need to stop. There may be some bumps on the road – but we move ahead in confidence hopeful for the future of our church, because we know that in the end it is God's church. We may not know for sure how things are going to turn out, but we do know that with God they will be good. We will be blessed and God will help us to be a blessing to others.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan C. Johnson', written in a cursive style.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson, National Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – *In Mission for Others*