

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a delight to bring you greetings on behalf of your sisters and brothers in Christ from coast, to coast, to coast across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Thank you for choosing to participate in the ELCIC Praise Appeal and for your support of the work of the wider church.

The theme for this year's Praise Appeal is ***Human Beings—Not for Sale***.

From this year until 2017 we are joining Lutherans from around the world in commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. *Liberated by God's Grace* is the anniversary theme being used by the Lutheran World Federation and by our church. *Human Beings—Not for Sale* is one of the three sub-themes that we are using.

When I think about this theme, *Human Beings—Not for Sale*, one of the first things I am often reminded of is slavery. There are some who think there is no longer slavery in our world, but that is most certainly not the case. Slavery still exists and it takes on different forms in different parts of the world.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 20.9 million men, women and children around the world are in slavery. Someone is in slavery if they are forced to work through mental or physical threat; owned or controlled by an 'employer'; dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'; physically constrained or has restrictions placed on freedom of movement.

Slavery exists today despite the fact that is illegal in all the countries where it is practiced. Forms of modern slavery include bonded labour, child slavery, early and forced marriage, forced labour, and descent-based slavery. It also takes the form of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ removal. (You can learn more about human trafficking by reading the bulletin insert.)

Slavery and human trafficking are ways that people claim ownership over the lives of other human beings. The spirituals of African American slaves remind us that slavery gives owners control over a person's body, but it may not gain control of their minds, hearts and spirits.



Our theme, *Human Beings—Not for Sale*, also makes me think of the ways we can lose control of our minds, hearts and bodies. This can include being recruited to extremism. It also, I believe, speaks out against our modern culture where consumerism, including the fashion, diet and cosmetic surgery industries, can feed on our self-doubts and sense of unworthiness. This in turn can encourage people to spend vast amounts of money chasing a goal of physical perfection to satisfy unarticulated emotional or spiritual needs.

Our lessons today remind us that our God is a Liberating God.

God rescued God's people out of slavery in Egypt. God challenges the dominant culture to remind us of the value and equality of every human being. In the Gospel lesson we are reminded of the freedom we have been given through our baptism into Christ. We are much beloved children of God—just the way we are! No hoops to jump through and no pretense to be maintained.

Because of this freedom we gain through Christ, we know that in the end it is God's world and that we are part of God's church! We do not know for sure how things are going to turn out but we know that with God they will be good.

As faithful people committed to living out our discipleship as those who have been liberated by God's grace, we know that with God we will be blessed and that with God's help we will be a blessing to others.

Through your gift to the Praise Appeal you join with the whole creation in praising God. You are a blessing as you help the ELCIC National Church live out this call through:

- Our partnerships with KAIROS and the Anglican Church of Canada as we work in the areas of homelessness and affordable housing and responsible resource extraction;
- Our partnership with The Lutheran World Federation and Canadian Lutheran World Relief as we work to support refugees around the world;
- Our partnership with churches in Argentina and Peru as we help support ministry in indigenous communities within these churches;



- Continuing the Call to Spiritual Renewal, working to deepen the discipleship of all our members and learning new ways to reach out in faith to those around us;
- Building better relationships with other denominations and faiths here in Canada, through the Canadian Council of Churches, and around the world through the World Council of Churches.

Individuals and congregations are encouraged to generously support the 2016 ELCIC Praise Appeal, which is a significant source of revenue for the ELCIC.

Thank you for your commitment to deepening your discipleship and being spiritually renewed. Thank you for the ways you work to live out the freedom we have received through Christ. Thank you for your support of our collective work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Thank you for your support and participation in this Praise Appeal. May God bless and strengthen your ministry both individually and together.

