



**ELCIC**

*In Mission  
for Others*

# Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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August 20, 2015

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2  
[pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

Dear Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), I am writing to encourage you to address the challenges in the criminal justice and correctional systems in Canada, and to express our support for restorative justice approaches that facilitate the righting of harms done, and foster the healing of relationships between offenders, victims and the larger community.

July 8-12, 2015 the ELCIC gathered in Edmonton, Alberta, for our biennial National Convention. One action of the convention was to adopt “ELCIC Resolution on the Criminal Justice and Correctional Systems in Canada.” The convention asked me as National Bishop to share the concerns raised in this policy resolution to the federal government and to the governments of each province and territory.

Currently the criminal justice and correctional systems faces several challenges:

- Delays in the scheduling of trials which result in significant numbers being held on remand awaiting trial.
- Overpopulation of both provincial and federal correctional facilities.
- Increasing rates of incarceration.
- Prevalence of adversarial procedures and punishment, rather than practices that promote reconciliation, rehabilitation, healing and social harmony.
- Prison populations include a disproportionate number of Aboriginal Peoples.
- Prison populations include many people with mental illnesses.
- The importance of addressing the unique needs of women and youth in correctional facilities.
- Many who are released from prison go on to reoffend.

In this resolution, the ELCIC affirms our understanding that crime is the breaking down of human relationships among victims, offenders and the larger community, rather than simply the breaking of laws against the state. Therefore, we support initiatives that facilitate the righting of harms done, and foster the healing of relationships between offenders, victims and the larger community.

The ELCIC affirms restorative justice approaches and supports initiatives that facilitate the righting of harms done, and foster the healing of relationships between offenders, victims and the larger community.

The ELCIC encourages the use of conditional sentences, probation and parole rather than incarceration as means of seeking correction and rehabilitation in the lives of offenders. The ELCIC supports judges being given sufficient discretion in sentencing to consider the circumstances of each particular case. The ELCIC encourages positive community based relationships with offenders and parolees in order to foster safe reintegration and crime prevention.

The ELCIC encourages initiatives to reduce the numbers of those awaiting trial, the numbers of those incarcerated and held in custody and measures that eliminate the overcrowding in Canada's prisons.

The ELCIC affirms that fostering economic justice, access to affordable housing, an effective public health system and encouraging healthy family relationships and the care of children are measures that help reduce deviance and crime in our society.

The ELCIC recognizes the impact that social inequality has on an individual's experience of the criminal justice and correctional systems. The ELCIC encourages reflection on meaningful approaches that will be effective for women, the aboriginal community and those who experience mental illness.

The ELCIC affirms that in the face of the expansion of correctional facilities, that increased funding for preventive, rehabilitative and re-integrative processes and programs be encouraged.

The ELCIC supports best practices in the operation of correctional facilities, including addressing the specific and unique needs of all those who are convicted.

The ELCIC regards the operation of correctional facilities in Canada as the responsibility of governments. This church urges extreme caution in any consideration of private ownership or administration of correctional facilities.

The ELCIC supports those who are victims of crime, through compassionate pastoral care, community support and constructive programs that may assist victims to deal with trauma, psychological and emotional distress and the loss of resources.

The ELCIC affirms the role of chaplains and other spiritual care providers who serve those in the criminal justice and correctional systems, and supports the public funding of these services.

As a church, the ELCIC is dedicated to a prayerful approach for addressing the challenges of the criminal justice and correctional systems in Canada, and commits to praying for all who are affected by crime and the criminal justice system, including victims, offenders and all who work in the corrections and public safety fields. We have encouraged our members to address challenges in Canada's criminal justice and correctional system by becoming more informed and by engaging in projects, programs, and ministries that provide support for victims, offenders and others involved in the criminal justice system.

Recognizing the role that governments play in creating fair and effective criminal justice and correctional systems, we include all leaders in our prayers. I wish you God's blessing as you carry out your many duties, and as you work for restorative justice fosters the healing of relationships between offenders, victims and the larger community.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan C. Johnson", preceded by a small cross symbol.

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

c.c. The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition  
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada  
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada  
Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois  
The Honourable Peter Gordon MacKay, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada  
ELCIC National Church Council