



Reimagining Our Church Public Ministry in the ELCIC

READER'S GUIDE

Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC

Reader's Guide

ELCIC National Convention
July 2019

This brief *Reader's Guide* is designed to introduce convention delegates and others to *Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC*. For many, this *Guide* will serve as an orientation to the major ideas of each Section and will be read along-side *Reimagining Our Church*.

At the same time, it is recognized that not every delegate will be interested in all of the foundational material which is necessary for an honest and credible treatment of issues and ideas related to orders of ministry, *diakonia*, diaconal ministry and more. Fair enough!

For you, this *Guide* will serve to make you conversant in the main ideas of the foundational material while giving you permission to move more quickly on to Section 5 which is the main thing.

Section 5 is at the heart of *Reimagining Our Church*. It is here that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is being invited to live into, and be governed by, a series of important principles, aspirations and recommendations. The nature of Section 5 is such that it does not allow for the same treatment (the gathering of main ideas and key questions) as the previous Sections.

Every convention delegate is asked to read Section 5 carefully and in its entirety.

Introduction (pages 4–7)

This section describes how and why the paper came to be written, and how it fits with other documents of the ELCIC and those of other church bodies.

Introduction— Key Concept

- The term “public ministry” as it is used in this paper refers to the ministry of those who are called by a particular community of baptized Christians to perform certain functions in public, and on their behalf.

Section 1 (pages 8–19)

The paper begins by describing what we see around us in our culture, society and in the ELCIC. It is hoped that when you read pages 8–19, you will resonate with the description of shifts in the place of religion in Canadian society; of our increasingly multi-faith country; and of the changing attitudes and preferences of current generations of people in Canada.

Two important concepts are introduced which will appear throughout this paper, namely, “nimble” organizations, ones which strive to be more flexible and to be able to quickly and easily adapt to changing conditions; and “movements” (such as *Black Lives Matter* or *Idle No More*) which are groups of people who are not necessarily geographically close, nor members of the same geographic communities, but who are connected by their interest or passion. Both may be helpful for the ELCIC.

Several important challenges for the ELCIC arise from changes in its Canadian context as well as from its own history:

- the traditional “pastor-centric” model for ministry, in which the pastor is the leader and the main person doing ministry;
- the church’s narrow understanding of ministry which has not encouraged laypeople to recognize their ministries in the world, resulting in a disempowered laity with a diminished role in serving God’s mission;
- the idea that the mission of God is about sending experts to convert the people to Christianity;
- the fact that our church does not seem to be nurturing disciples very well;
- the ELCIC’s timely response to the changes and needs in our society and world continues to be thwarted by a culture within the church which favours the past over the present or future.

One more important idea presented in this section, but crucial to the whole document, is that of *diakonia*. All baptized persons and all communities of the baptized are called into a life of service in the world, referred to by the Greek word *diakonia*. It involves responding to immediate needs such as sponsoring refugees and providing food for the hungry. It also includes being agents of change to transform the unjust structures and violence that marginalize people, and to safeguarding the earth.

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Section 1—Key Concepts

- Changes are occurring in Canadians’ participation in organizations, including churches. We can understand these changes through demography and sociology.
- Traditional models of organization and leadership may no longer be effective in communicating and responding to the Gospel.
- All Christians are called into a life of “delegated service,” *diakonia*. All are called to represent Christ in serving creation.

Section 2 (pages 20–28)

The earliest parts of the New Testament describe the Jesus movement. After Jesus' death and resurrection, its leaders began to see the need for some structure and for authorized leaders. By the time of the Pastoral Epistles, one can see the emergence of forms of public ministry.

Both Luther and the Lutheran confessions say little directly or consistently about the shape of public ministry. For Luther, the purpose of the clergy is to preach the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone, and it is the responsibility of the laity to assure that the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone is being preached. The Lutheran confessions stress the priority of preaching the Gospel and rightly administering the sacraments. Because the Lutheran movement took organizational shape in a number of different settings and circumstances, the Lutheran confessions recognize that the unity of the church does not rest in uniformity of organizational structures. There is not just one correct way to organize public ministry; its structure can be shaped by the context.

“Contemporary theology of mission focuses on Christian communities ... being communities of forgiveness, reconciliation, discipleship and service.”

Following the Reformation, many different ways of organizing public ministry were adopted in the state churches of Europe and Scandinavia. When Lutheranism came to North America, different structures had to be developed in the absence of state churches. The ELCIC was formed by a merger

of church bodies, some of which were organized in an adaptation of a synodical model (like the former LCA) and others with a more congregational model (like the former ALC and former ELCC).

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, missionaries, and leaders of churches which had resulted from their work, began to realize that there were flaws both in the methods used up to that point and in the theology of mission which had motivated these methods. There is now a concern for maintaining a careful balance between speaking the Gospel aloud in a contextually appropriate manner and being agents of change, transforming unjust structures and challenging violence in the world.

Section 2—Key Concepts

- Early Christianity was a movement with fluid leadership. Over time the Christian movement formalized and institutionalized into the Christian church with structured, officially authorized leadership.
- The Lutheran Reformation was primarily focused on the necessity of communicating the Gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone rather than requiring a particular way of structuring the church.
- Lutheranism in North America was shaped both by its European roots and its North American context. This applies also to church structures and understanding of leadership.
- Contemporary theology of mission focuses on Christian communities such as congregations being communities of forgiveness, reconciliation, discipleship and service.

Section 3 (pages 29–34)

What might our theological tradition suggest as we consider how to organize our public ministry in the ELCIC today so that all of us are better equipped to provide an effective witness to the truth of the gospel in contemporary Canada?

The first priority of the church is mission, and so the church is to be organized to be an effective agent of mission. Does the way we structure and practice our public ministry focus our church on the mission of

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God? In carrying out this mission the church is empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Does the way we structure and practice our public ministry allow the free movement of the Holy Spirit in our practice of mission? Both a focus on mission and the freedom of the Spirit are expressed through the life of delegated service of every Christian and every Christian community (*diakonia*). Does the way we structure and practice our public ministry facilitate *diakonia* for each person and each community connected to our church?

The church’s practice of public ministry should reflect the church’s theology of mission. The continued existence of the church is not dependent on our institutional caution. Jesus’ promise is not that our particular organizational form of church will last forever. We are here for the moment to do what we are called to do, so that the gospel is heard by the people of our particular time and place.

Section 3—Key Concepts

- The Gospel is divine, Spirit-infused anarchy which is communicated in the world by a humanly organized community of Christians with called public ministers.
- The mission of God to restore and reconcile creation is at the core of being the church. Any Christian community is evaluated as both movement and as institution by the criterion of God’s mission.
- Communities of Christians exist in the world as simultaneously holy and flawed.
- Structure serves mission; mission must never be truncated to serve structure.

Section 4 (pages 35–44)

The vision of the ELCIC that emerges from engaging the insights of Section 3 is one of a church in which every Christian and every community of Christians participates in God’s mission in the world. Each Christian recognizes their baptismal call to serve the world by speaking and living the gospel promise. Every baptized person and every community of baptized persons is called into a life of *diakonia*, or delegated service, which is rooted in the gospel promise and not in duty to the Law.

“The mission of God to restore and reconcile creation is at the core of being the church.”

Working with other Christians, people of other faiths, and other people of goodwill, the ELCIC and its people are aware of the current social and cultural times, and work to challenge the roots of injustice, to speak and

Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC

act prophetically, and to accompany those on the margins of our society and to advocate for them. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada seeks to offer our world a witness and ministry which are *missional, diaconal* and *prophetic*.

The first tasks and challenges for the ELCIC in realizing this vision for our church include communicating a new understanding of God's mission; shaping a more robust laity; becoming more nimble; encouraging collaborative leadership; and nurturing intentional partnerships.

Currently the ELCIC has public ministers who are deacons, pastors or bishops. The church has the freedom to designate additional or different functions to its public ministers, or to designate additional types of called public ministers. There are characteristics to which all public ministers might aspire in a missional, diaconal and prophetic church. The list is found on page 40. As well there are common training and skills, such as being able to read the signs of the times, which are helpful for all public ministers in the current context.

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The present challenges facing the ELCIC and the renewed emphasis on its part in God's mission provide an opportunity to reimagine the public ministry of deacons as a role that offers leadership to laypeople and communities in participating in God's mission in the world.

Deacons can help others serve, identify needs in the local context, build relationships and partnerships with other groups in the community, and accompany and advocate for those on the margins of our society.

The present situation of the church in contemporary society requires consideration of further changes in the role of pastors. To move away from the pastor-centric model in congregations, further changes should be considered in the role of pastors. In a missional, diaconal, and prophetic church, pastors must recognize that one of their important tasks is to enable laity to exercise their vocations both in the congregation and in the world. The pastor becomes a supporting player in the missional church.

Bishops, both national and synodical, play a pivotal role in this vision. They can guide and inspire a missional vision in congregations and among public ministers. As bishops walk with pastors, deacons, congregations, and specialized ministries, they are in a good position to raise up and encourage leaders, and to encourage imagination and experimentation, even if these should lead to failure. Bishops can identify and encourage areas of potential collaboration and partnership. They will be helpful in encouraging conversations about a more nimble, collaborative church.

Section 4—Key Concepts

- Every Christian and every community of Christians participates in God's mission in the world. In this light, the ELCIC desires to be a missional, diaconal and prophetic church.
- A missional, diaconal and prophetic church requires reclaiming a robust laity and creating a nimble organization.

Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC

- Reimagining the ministry of deacons and refocusing the ministry of pastors is a necessary part of enabling a robust laity and creating a nimble organization.
- A nimble church encourages collaborative leadership and nurtures intentional partnerships.

Section 5 (pages 45–53)

Section 5 is a collection of aspirational statements that describe what the ELCIC would be like if it fully embraced the vision set forth in Section 4.

“Section 5 is at the heart of *Reimagining Our Church*.”

Again, these statements or propositions are *aspirational*. That is, they are composed as if they were already fully-realized and true. However, we know that we’re not everywhere and always there yet. Our people and our communities, our leaders and our partners-in-ministry will need time to live into, and grow into, the vision this document proposes.

As was suggested at the beginning of this *Guide*, Section 5 is at the heart of *Reimagining Our Church*. It is here that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is being invited to live into, and be governed by, a series of important principles, aspirations and recommendations. Thus, the nature of Section 5 is such that it does not allow for the same treatment as for previous sections. Every convention delegate is asked to read Section 5 carefully and in its entirety.

Reflection prior to Convention

Once you’ve completed your reading of *Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC*, you’re invited to do some reflection prior to convention. You could do this on your own, but you might consider doing this with friends or colleagues who will be attending with you. Either way, you’ll be able to share your ideas in some table group conversation when we gather in Regina.

1. In your reading of *Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC*, what are your first impressions? Is there anything which particularly pleases you or delights you? Is there anything which concerns you?
2. Choose two or three of the “principles and aspirations” offered in Section 5 and think about how they might contribute to a renewed vision for our church in your congregation/community, or your area/conference or your synod. Be concrete: “I learned a lot about supporting volunteers in my workplace. Might that be helpful to my congregation or conference?” or “Now I think I understand what a deacon is. Maybe I know some people who have gifts for this kind of ministry.” or “Our community needs a safe place for children to go after school. I wonder if the congregation could partner with other churches, or with the Optimists, to make this happen.” or “All the congregations in our conference are too small to do ... Maybe we can do it together.” You may find that you can come up with more than a couple of possibilities!

Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC

3. Now that you've focussed on some possibilities, consider what *you* might do to help bring this vision to life. Again, be concrete: "I will offer to help identify people in my congregation with gifts to organize a food bank for our community." or "I will talk to Joe and to Susan about the role of deacons, and encourage them to explore it further." or "As a congregational leader, I will approach two other groups in our community to see if they could help with..." or "As dean, I will start a conversation about doing this together." Once more, you may find that there is more than one thing you can do and there may be others to do things with you!

Enabling Resolutions

At our national convention, a series of seven enabling resolutions will be brought before the assembly. You'll find these listed in the 2019 ELCIC National Convention *Bulletin of Reports*. These motions will help our church to live into the vision proposed in *Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC*.

Prior to convention, locate the seven motions in your *Bulletin of Reports*. They are part of the *Report of our National Church Council* (or "NCC Report"). Here's a guide to what you will find.

Deacons

The first 3 motions have to do with deacons. With the 1st motion, we agree to *ordain deacons*. With the 2nd motion we agree to create a liturgy with which to ordain pastors, bishops *and now deacons*, and each to their particular functions. With the 3rd motion we set out conditions under which deacons may preside at *weddings or funerals*.

Implementation

The 4th and 5th motions have to do with implementation. With the 4th motion, the ELCIC's Program Committee for Leadership for Ministry is tasked with the revision of policies and procedures. With the 5th motion our synods and seminaries are invited to take account of our new direction in their preparation of candidates for ordained ministry.

Reimagining Our Church

The 6th motion is the main motion. With the 6th motion, we approve *Reimagining Our Church—Public Ministry in the ELCIC* in its entirety and, through the companion motions, begin the journey of living into the vision it proposes.

Constitution and Bylaws

The 7th motion does some housekeeping. With the 7th motion, we clean up some of the language in our *Constitution* and *Bylaws* to take account of the three-fold ordination of deacons, pastors and bishops.