

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Minutes of the National Church Council Meeting
September 12-13, 2024 | Online for NCC

Bishops, Staff and Officers met in-person at the Alt Hotel, Winnipeg, Man.

Present:

Officers: National Bishop Susan Johnson
Gene Blishen, Treasurer

Bruce Cook, Vice-Chair
Linda Grainger, Secretary

Council: Rev. Chris Bishopp
Sheryl Dubois
Bill Gastmeier
Rev. Sheldon Gattinger
Sarah Harrington
Stephen Holmes

Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb (Meeting Chaplain)
John Nilson – *absent on Thursday*
(*ABT Synod Rostered Rep. – vacant*)
Heidi Van Schaik
Rev. Katrina Vigen

Synod Bishops: Bishop Kathy Martin, BC Synod (*present on Sept.12*)
Bishop Trish Schmermund, ABT Synod
Bishop-Elect Ali Tote, SASK Synod

Bishop Jason Zinko, MNO Synod
Bishop-Elect Carla Blakley, Eastern Synod
Bishop Michael Pryse, Eastern Synod

Staff: Peace Anthony-Idoko, Director of Finance and Administration
Trina Gallop Blank, Assistant to the Bishop, Communications and Resource Generation
Rev. Paul Gehrs, Assistant to the Bishop, Justice and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
The Very Rev. Peter Wall, Assistant to the Bishop for Worship
Carmen Ramirez, Assistant to the Bishop, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Desiree Mendoza, Office Manager, Meetings and Communications Coordinator

Guests: Kristen Opalinski, Manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Lisa Thiessen, Executive Director, ELCIC Group Services, Inc.
John Wolff, President & Chair of the Board, ELCIC Group Services, Inc.

Regrets: Deacon Gretchen Peterson, Assistant to the Bishop, Youth & Leadership
Dorothy Patterson, CoGS Rep to NCC

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2024, 4:30 P.M.- 8:00 P.M.

Opening Prayer

Meeting Chaplain Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb led the Opening Prayer.

Business Session One:

Vice-Chair Bruce Cook called the meeting to order.

Recognition of Territory / Welcome

Vice-Chair Bruce Cook cited the Land Acknowledgement at the beginning of the meeting.

I recently heard someone raise a concern about land acknowledgements and how in many cases they have become nothing more than absent minded genuflections.

Today, I want all of us to take some time to quietly reflect on the land and territory where each of us reside.

Think about time gone by before our days were polluted with noise and exhaust...

Generations ago...

Hear the call of a bald eagle...see it soar

Hear the sound of clean water flowing – effortlessly winding its way across Turtle Island...

Think about the salmon swimming to spawn...

Hear the thundering hooves of the bison roaming...

Feel the heat of the sweat lodge...

Smell the smoke of the smudge...

Hear the song and feel the dance of the Powwow...

See the smiles...

Listen to the stories of the knowledge keepers...

Be one with nature and your surroundings...

Now...imagine...

Your children being taken away to residential school...

Child welfare coming in and scooping children from their communities and families...

People taking your land...

Settlers erasing your traditions, your culture, your identity...

Today we come in truth and we come in reconciliation. Today we all take time, now, to acknowledge the sacred land that we are on. These lands have been the homes of the Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. We thank them for their knowledge and their stewardship of these lands and we thank them for their gracious kindness as we strive to reconcile – as we strive to listen more, to learn more and to do more.

Welcome

Vice-Chair Bruce Cook welcomed newly ordained ABT Synod Bishop Trish Schmermund (Ordained on August 24th), and Bishops-elect Ali Tote, SASK Synod (Ordination on October 12th) and Carla Blakley, Eastern Synod (Ordination on September 28th). He also welcomed newly appointed NCC members Rev. Sheldon Gattinger (Rostered, SASK Synod) and Sheryl Dubois (Lay, ABT Synod); and ELCA guest, Kristen Opalinski, Manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs of the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Part of the greeting and welcome was the acknowledgment of Bill Gastmeier's 50th wedding anniversary celebration, and the acknowledgement and heartfelt sympathies in the recent passing away of Sheryl Dubois's son, Jason.

M/S That NCC grants voice to Bishops-elect Carla Blakley and Ali Tote. **CARRIED.**

Approval of Agenda

M/S That NCC approves the meeting agenda. **CARRIED.**

Code of Conduct

The Complaint Handling Committee (CHC) for this meeting consisted of Linda Grainger and Stephen Holmes.

NCC Covenant

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Approval of March 1–3, 2024 NCC Meeting Minutes

M/S That NCC approves the March 1–3, 2024 NCC meeting minutes. **CARRIED.**

Approval of E-vote Minutes

M/S That NCC approves the June 28, 2024 e-vote minutes.

NCC-2024-13 “That NCC approves the 2023 audited ELCIC financial statements (see attached).” **CARRIED.**

CARRIED.

Report of the National Bishop

Bishop Susan Johnson gave an oral report to NCC in addition to her written report. She mentioned that NCC member Sheryl Dubois is the new lay representative for the ABT Synod replacing Kathleen Jensen while Rev. Sheldon Gattinger is the new rostered representative for the SASK Synod replacing Rev. Dr. Marc Jerry. As an update, NCC member Rev. Dr. Kevin Powell from the ABT Synod had left a vacancy that needs to be filled between now and the next NCC meeting in March.

Bishop Susan acknowledged that the synod bishops (including the bishops-elect) had their Conference of Bishops (COB) meeting. On the other hand, the National Officers met with the National Office staff. She added that NCC hopes to meet everyone in person in March 2025.

Referring to her written report, Bishop Susan mentioned that she was not able to join the solidarity visit to Palestine back in August. With regards to the work within the National Office, Peace Anthony-Idoko, Director for Finance and Administration did wonderful work on our strategic plan by looking at our budget. Information on that was included in the financial report.

Bishop Susan acknowledged and thanked Secretary Linda Grainger for her valuable work on Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute (LCBI). Linda guided LCBI through their difficult governance and assisted in amending their Act (Legislature of Saskatchewan) under a new governance structure. LCBI will no longer hold their annual general meetings at ELCIC National Conventions in the future. This will be a new reality for Lutherans under LCBI. It's also noteworthy to say that Linda spent more than three years working on this matter.

With regards to ELCIC's support to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy land (ELCJHL), a letter of thanks was received from Bishop Azar. Bishop Susan said that we surpassed our financial goal to assist ELCJHL and that generous gifts from NCC, the Eastern Synod, and various sources were already sent.

10% of Gift Attribution

Bishop Susan mentioned that we made a policy in which ten per cent (10%) of undesignated donations will go to fund the LWF Endowment Fund as part of ELCIC's commitment as a member church. ELCIC has given more per capita than any other member churches, and we would like to acknowledge that. The ELCJHL has opened an endowment fund and no amount is going to that fund yet. Bishop Susan asked NCC if we might consider changing our policy on undesignated funds which currently are to be given to the LWF Endowment Fund and instead, forward that amount to the ELCJHL Endowment Fund. Bishop Susan asked NCC to consider this.

As a background, Jeff Pym sits on the LWF Endowment Board. Bishop Susan can ask on the historical details on what the ELCIC allocation was, and what the fund was for at that time.

Appointments

NCC-2024-14 That NCC re-appoints Mark Heinen, Synod of ABT, to the Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) Board for a third term: September 2024 to September 2027. **CARRIED.**

Report of the Officers

Secretary Linda Grainger presented the report to NCC.

M/S That NCC approves the Officers' Minutes of the Meeting on March 6, July 11 and August 1, 2024. **CARRIED.**

Report of the Synod Bishops

Each Synod Bishop provided an oral report to NCC.

Conference of Bishops

Bishop Jason Zinko gave an oral report to NCC. He mentioned that COB looks forward to working together and alongside with Bishop Susan in doing the work of the church.

ELCIC Pre-Identification Process – for the Election of a Bishop

Secretary Linda Grainger spoke in addition to the task force’s written report on *Pre-Identification Process for the Election of a Bishop*. She informed NCC that together with Stephen Holmes and Bishop Susan, they spoke with synods and put forward matters for NCC’s consideration.

NCC-2024-15 That NCC approves the *Pre-Identification Process for the Election of the National Bishop*. **CARRIED.**

Discussion will be carried over in next day’s session.

Vice-Chair Bruce Cook turned the chair over to Bishop Susan.

Communion Practices

Bishop Susan reminded NCC on the homework that was tasked to them. She enumerated the various documents for review. The documents included were: Alternate Route for Admission to the Roster of Ordained Ministers; Authorized Lay Ministries Guidelines; Authorized Lay Ministries Policy; Reimagining Our Church – Public Ministry in the ELCIC; Reimagining Our Church – Public Ministry in the ELCIC (Reader’s Guide); and Theology and Practice of Online Communion.

NCC was encouraged to take some time to read over the documents and reflect on how God is calling us to be a church. NCC was asked to look into those policies that are not being utilized and identify the barriers which can also turn into opportunities.

Things to consider — What might be the parameters for that discussion.

Closing Prayer

Led by meeting chaplain Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024, 11:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M. & 3:00 P.M.– 4:30 P.M.

Business Session Two:

National Bishop Susan Johnson called the meeting to order.

Opening Prayer

Led by the meeting chaplain.

ELCIC Pre-Identification Process – for the Election of a Bishop (continuation)

Suggestion to revise point 4 under *Notes on the Pre-Identification Process*:

M/S That the National Church can assist with covering expenses for those pre-selected candidates who would like to attend the National Convention. **DEFEATED.**

NCC-2024-16 That Bullet 4 be deleted from the *Notes re Pre-Identification Process*:

4. Need to advise potential candidates that ELCIC will not cover expenses to attend convention. This needs to be sent out as general communication church-wide.

CARRIED.

NCC-2024-17 That NCC appoints the following members to the Pre-Identification Process Committee (for the election of a bishop): Linda Grainger, Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb, and Stephen Holmes. **CARRIED.**

Letter from Bishop Larry Kochendorfer and Diaconal Minister Karen Wedman for the ABT Synod Council

NCC reviewed the letter from ABT Synod along with a motion put forward from Finance Committee.

NCC-2024-18 That NCC approves an in-person meeting be held with Synod and National Executives no later than January 25, 2025 to discuss and provide a report by March 2025 National Church Council meeting. The focus of the meeting to be on the following subheadings:

- a. a current Synod and National finances, for the purpose of examining and exploring future sharing of resources and the sustainability of our church;
- b. the use of Mission funds;
- c. the effects of decreasing congregations within the synods;
- d. the current Synodical and National operating structures;
- e. the definition of church membership (understanding the parochial report); and
- f. other warranted items of concern.

CARRIED.

Presentation from ELCA Guest

Kristen Opalinski, Manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs of the Office of the Presiding Bishop for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) shared some words to NCC. She updated NCC on the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church in which the commitment was to dismantle racism. The work of this commission will be forwarded to the 2025 Assembly. Kristen requested NCC for continued prayers and extended her gratitude to Bishop Susan Johnson for her role in the earlier part of this process, and for sharing her gifts of time and wisdom.

Kristen then shared to NCC the various works being done by the ELCA. The current social writing projects of the church were posted on their website: <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>. She asked NCC to celebrate with them for their church's progress on the diaconate in which an agreement was passed in both Lutheran and Episcopal church bodies. For her final point, Kristen, on behalf of Bishop Eaton, thanked the ELCIC for their continued relationship especially through Churches Beyond Borders. This partnership is a gift to the church with our work in North America, the ELCJHL, and with our Indigenous

brothers and sisters. Kristen also thanked ELCIC Secretary Linda Grainger for her attendance in the ELCA Council Meeting back in April of this year. More prayers especially for peace are requested for the ELCA and the US during these uncertain times, with federal elections coming up in November.

Finance Committee Report

Treasurer Gene Blishen presented the Finance Committee Report.

Audit Committee

Stephen Holmes provided a brief report on the Audit Committee.

Constitutional Committee

Secretary Linda Grainger presented the Report of the Constitution Committee. She thanked both Kimber McNabb and Sarah Harrington for their work on the committee. Linda reported that the committee received an amendment from the Chinese Special Conference but it's not ready yet for approval.

NCC-2024-19 That NCC approves the Synod of ABT Constitution and Bylaw amendments as presented. **CARRIED.**

NCC-2024-20 That NCC approves the MNO Synod Constitution and Bylaw amendments as presented. **CARRIED.**

Governance Committee

Heidi Van Schaik, Chair of this committee presented the Report of the Governance Committee.

Nominating Committee

Bishop Susan mentioned that the Nominating Committee used to be elected at Convention but now members are appointed by NCC. She asked NCC on how they would want to proceed to allow for some input from task forces.

M/S That NCC will appoint members to Nominating Committee via an e-vote. **CARRIED.**

(Discussion)

M/S That NCC requests Secretary Linda Grainger to work with National Office staff Carmen Ramirez, to contact the chairs of the task forces on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia; Racism, White Supremacy, and Issues of Racial Injustice; and Ableism, to seek names for the Nominating Committee.

CARRIED.

Request from ELCIC Task Force Addressing Ableism

NCC-2024-21 That NCC approves the change of the name of the Task Force Addressing Ableism to the Ability and Inclusion Task Force. **CARRIED.**

Letter from Rev. Karen Kuhnert – 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of Lutheran Women in Canada

Bishop Susan highlighted to NCC that we are to lift-up the 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of Lutheran Women prior to the Lutheran Day of Learning Paper and Panel Discussion to be held on November 5, 2024. This will also be highlighted and lifted up during our National Convention in 2025. NCC is encouraged to mark this important anniversary.

NCC has decided that there will be no need for a meeting tomorrow, September 14th and will adjourn its meeting at the end of the last business session this Friday, September 13th.)

CoGS Report

No report at this time.

Business Session Three:

National Bishop Susan Johnson called the meeting to order.

2025 National Convention

Bishop Susan informed NCC that we're looking at a potential theme for next year's National Convention which is "Rejoicing in Hope" based on Romans 12:12.

Opening Prayer

Led by the meeting chaplain.

ELCIC-Group Services, Inc. (GSI) Annual Information Meeting

Lisa Thiessen, Executive Director of ELCIC Group Services, Inc. chaired the GSI Annual Information Meeting and presented to NCC. The meeting was then co-chaired by John Wolff, President and Chair of the Board, who also presented to the group.

(Appendix A: GSI Minutes of the Annual Information Meeting)

Closing Prayer is led by the meeting chaplain.

New Business

Talking Points/Meeting Highlights

(Appendix B: Meeting Highlights)

Meeting Evaluation

NCC suggested that if the group will be meeting online (via Zoom), it should all be on Zoom (no hybrid). If the meeting is set to be held in-person, then it should all be in-person for everyone.

Closing Prayer

Led by the meeting chaplain.

Next Meetings:

2025

March 7- 9 (Friday-Sunday) *in person*

Chaplain – MNO Team

30-minute Bible Study – Rev. Katrina Vigen

National Convention Dates (July 10-13) *NCC will meet on (TBD).*

September 11-13 (Thursday-Saturday) *in person; meeting with the new National Bishop*

2026

March 6- 8 (Friday-Sunday)

September 10-12 (Thursday-Saturday)

Meeting Adjourned.

DRAFT

**ELCIC Group Services Inc.
Minutes of the GSI Annual Information Meeting at the
National Church Council Meeting | September 13, 2024 (online)**

Bishops, Staff and Officers met in-person at the Alt Hotel, Winnipeg, Man.

Present:

Officers:	National Bishop Susan Johnson Gene Blishen, Treasurer	Bruce Cook, Vice-Chair Linda Grainger, Secretary
Council:	Rev. Chris Bishopp Sheryl Dubois Bill Gastmeier Rev. Sheldon Gattinger Sarah Harrington Stephen Holmes	Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb John Nilson <i>(ABT Synod Rostered Rep. – vacant)</i> Heidi Van Schaik Rev. Katrina Vigen
Synod Bishops:	Bishop Trish Schmermund, ABT Synod Bishop-Elect Ali Tote, SASK Synod Bishop Jason Zinko, MNO Synod	Bishop-Elect Carla Blakley, Eastern Synod Bishop Michael Pryse, Eastern Synod
Staff:	Peace Anthony-Idoko, Director of Finance and Administration Trina Gallop Blank, Assistant to the Bishop, Communications and Resource Generation Rev. Paul Gehrs, Assistant to the Bishop, Justice and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations The Very Rev. Peter Wall, Assistant to the Bishop for Worship Carmen Ramirez, Assistant to the Bishop, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Desiree Mendoza, Office Manager, Meetings and Communications Coordinator	
Guests:	Kristen Opalinski, Manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Lisa Thiessen, Executive Director, ELCIC Group Services, Inc. John Wolff, President & Chair of the Board, ELCIC Group Services, Inc.	
Not in Attendance:	Deacon Gretchen Peterson, Assistant to the Bishop, Youth & Leadership Dorothy Patterson, CoGS Rep to NCC Bishop Kathy Martin, BC Synod	

Annual Information Meeting

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2023, 3:00 P.M.

Lisa Thiessen called the meeting to order.

Lisa Thiessen, Executive Director of ELCIC Group Services, Inc. presented to NCC. She started off her presentation with GSI’s governance framework and encouraged everyone to look at GSI’s annual report for more information. Some of the items presented at the meeting were financial highlights and stats, and the Resolution of the Sole Member (acceptance of financial statements and appointment of auditors). John Wolff, President and Chair of the Board also presented to NCC by sharing their experiences at the various synod convention gatherings and provided brief updates on their strategic plan. Note that ELCIC requested for a copy of GSI’s Strategic Plan but John Wolff clarified that there is no such document.

Bishop Susan thanked Lisa and John for their presentation, and dedication to their work.

Resolution of the Sole Member

M/S That NCC approves the Resolution of the Sole Member and that the signing officers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) be authorized to execute the resolution.

CARRIED.

(See Attachment: Signed Resolution of the Sole Member of ELCIC Group Services, Inc.)

Meeting adjourned.

RESOLUTION OF THE SOLE MEMBER
of
ELCIC GROUP SERVICES INC.
(herein called the "Corporation")

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

- (1) as recommended by the Board of the Corporation, that the financial statements of the Corporation (consisting of a Statement of Financial Position as at December 31, 2023 and Statement of Operations and Net Assets for the financial year then ended) and the ELCIC Pension Plan (consisting of a Statement of Net Assets Available for Benefits as at December 31, 2023 and Statement of Changes in Net Assets Available for Benefits for the financial year then ended) together with the report or comments of the auditors be thereby received; and
- (2) as recommended by the Board of the Corporation, that PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP is hereby appointed auditor of the Corporation to hold office until the next annual meeting of members at such remuneration as may be fixed by the directors, the directors being hereby authorized to fix such remuneration.

The foregoing resolution is hereby signed by the sole member of the Corporation entitled to vote thereon at a meeting of the member.

DATED the 13th day of September, 2024.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

Per: 
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Per: 
Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Linda Granger



September 2024 National Church Council Meeting Highlights

The ELCIC's National Church Council (NCC) met September 12 & 13, 2024 for their fall meeting. The meeting was a combination of in-person and hybrid. With three new synod bishops elected at Synod Conventions across the church earlier this year, the Conference of Bishops decided to have their first meeting in-person. The officers of the church also met in-person.

The following are just a few highlights from the recent council meeting. For specific wording on motions and additional actions from the meeting, please view the draft minutes which will be available online: <https://elcic.ca/national-church-council/>

Rev. Dr. Kimber McNabb led NCC in prayer at the beginning and end of each session. Each of her prayers included a prayer pose as an intentional way of holding space and being more engaged in the prayers.

Discernment and pre-identification process for National Bishop

At the 2025 ELCIC National Convention, taking place July 10-13, 2025 at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba, delegates will elect a new National Bishop. Following 18 years of service, current National Bishop Susan Johnson has announced she will not be letting her name stand for re-election.

In anticipation of this, NCC has reviewed and approved a process to assist the church in discerning the skills, gifts and call of potential candidates. While our current bylaws will ensure that the first ballot for bishop is still an ecclesiastical ballot (all rostered pastors within the ELCIC are eligible for nomination on the first ballot), this discernment process allows for an intentional time of inviting congregations and communities to engage in prayer and conversation about the role of the National Bishop, consider a "job description" for the call to lead the church, and allow names to come forward through a pre-identification process.

ELCIC members will start to see this roll out very shortly with a *Discernment Study Guide* and accompanying job description. Starting in January, ELCIC members will be complete a pre-identification process for those candidates they wish to put forward. This process will be open until March 31, 2025. After that time, a task force will share out more information about those pre-identified candidates via biographical information and video interviews. The *ELCIC Bylaws* will still be the guiding document to the election process when delegates meet in convention in July 2025. Detailed information will be posted to the ELCIC website in October.

Review of documents around lay communion

NCC reviewed documents pertaining to Communion Practices in the ELCIC, including: Alternate Route for Admission to the Roster of Ordained Ministers; Authorized Lay Ministries Guidelines; Authorized Lay Ministries Policy; Reimagining Our Church – Public Ministry in the ELCIC; Re-imagining Our Church – Public Ministry in the ELCIC (Reader’s Guide); and Theology and Practice of Online Communion. NCC was asked to look those policies that are not being utilized more fully and identify any barriers to engaging in these policies and procedures.

NEW NAME – Ability and Inclusion Task Force

At the September 2024 NCC meeting, a motion was put forward by the Task Force on Addressing Ableism and Inclusivity to change their name to the Ability and Inclusion task force. It was felt that the word ability is a more universal term, with the focus of the committee more on lifting up abilities that people have, instead of highlighting disabilities.

National, Synod Officers to meet in January 2025

NCC members reviewed and discussed a motion brought forward from the Finance committee to hold a National, Synodical Officers consultation in January 2025, with a report provided to the March 2025 NCC meeting. Agenda topics for the meeting include: current National, Synod finances, the use of ELCIC Mission Funds, effects of decreasing congregations within the synods, current National, Synod operating structures, definition of church membership and other items of mutual concern.

Next Meeting

The next NCC meeting is scheduled to take place March 7-9, 2025. This meeting will take place in-person.