

## “HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US”

These are the words National Bishop Susan Johnson spoke to delegates at synod conventions/assemblies this past summer.

She encouraged those in attendance, “Through your faithfulness, witness, creativity and hopefulness, I have learned that hope does not disappoint. We are liberated by God’s grace. We are blessed with a hope in Jesus Christ that will not disappoint us. We are being strengthened to meet the challenges ahead.”

As you meet in your Annual General Meeting, we encourage you to keep the theme of hope amid challenge in your mind.

### FAITH OUTDOORS

Outdoor ministry is—and always will be—an important part of what makes the ELCIC so special, especially in the summer months. Whether it comes by way of retreats, confirmation camps or Vacation Bible School (VBS), camp has a unique way of allowing its participants to let their guards down and open their hearts to deeper connections and lessons in the great outdoors.

With congregations typically finding themselves dealing with lower numbers in the summer months, some have taken to connecting with neighbouring churches to worship together. This not only helps strengthen the relationships within the ministry areas, but also provides the option to try out different worship stylings, share favourite music pieces, and enjoy one another’s hospitality.

In a world where much time and attention can be torn between endless tasks and activities, it is paramount to take time to retreat, reflect, and ensure that we are keeping Christ at the centre.

Being intentional about taking time to build relationships with other people of faith in one’s community is a great way to fortify resources as God’s church and connect with siblings in Christ. •



Outdoor worship at Hastings Lake Lutheran Bible Camp, east of Edmonton, AB.

### WINDS OF CHANGE



Rev. Carla Blakley



Rev. Trish Schmermund



Rev. Dr. Ali Tote

A trio of new bishops have been elected in three of the ELCIC’s five synods— Rev. Carla Blakley in Eastern Canada, Rev. Trish Schmermund in Alberta and the Territories and Rev. Dr. Ali Tote in Saskatchewan. While they’ll all be in different parts of the country, the three share a common goal—to build a kinder, more inclusive Lutheran Church.

Synods gather every three years in separate conventions, where delegates elect officers, bishops and council members. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, these in-person gatherings had not happened in six years. Through the electoral process and ecclesiastical ballot, Blakley, Schmermund and Tote were announced as bishop-elects for their respective synods, and will each have ordination services in the fall of 2024.

The bishop news doesn’t end with the synods either, as National Bishop Susan Johnson recently announced she will step down from the role she has held for the past 17 years, effective next year. The 66-year-old has one year left on her six-year term and felt it was a good time for some fresh insights and leadership.

“It’s a huge time of change for the church. Part of me wondered if I should stay on for stability, but it feels like a good time for me to step away,” she says.

“I think we need fresh leadership and a new bishop with new ideas and perhaps a little more energy.”

The election for a new National Bishop will be held next summer. •

### A COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The past year marked the first full year in which the role of assistant to the bishop for diversity, equity and inclusion was operating in the National Office. Carmen Ramirez assumed the new role in August of 2022, a position that came from recommendations of the three ongoing task forces: the Ability and Inclusion Task Force, the Task Force on Addressing Racism, White Supremacy and Racial Injustice, and the Task Force on Addressing Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia.

These task forces, which were formed out of convention action at the 2019 ELCIC National Convention, have been engaged in ongoing work and recommendations since then.

Ramirez has developed a series of four anti-racism workshops for the ELCIC. She is also working with the task forces to develop future workshops addressing ableism and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

“I’m available to those who need my help in any way, visiting churches and things like that. If you need me, I’m here, and we can set up a meeting or have a conversation in any way,” Ramirez emphasized. •



Carmen Ramirez



Bishop Johnson visits the new classrooms at the IELU school in José C. Paz.

### A VISIT TO ARGENTINA

In April, National Bishop Susan Johnson visited ELCIC partner church, Iglesia Evangelico Lutheran Unidad (IELU). The visit was a part of our fiduciary responsibility: since our church has a partnership agreement that includes the transfer of money, we are obliged by CRA rules to visit on site and make sure the funds are being used responsibly. This visit included an in-person dedication of three new classrooms for primary students—a joint project with IELU since prior to the pandemic.

The IELU school in José C. Paz is situated moments from the Armbruster Nursing Home. The home had unused space, while the school was bursting at the seams, so it was a perfect partnership. Each classroom will house up to 30 students now (the previous rooms had a capacity of maximum 21 students) and each is equipped with its own washrooms to ensure the safety of students. The visit was also an opportunity to deepen our partnership. For Bishop Johnson, it was her fifth visit to IELU. She has developed many long-lasting working relationships and friendships with the pastors and laypeople of the IELU during her time as National Bishop of the ELCIC.

“I received the gift of a cross on the trip,” Bishop Johnson said. “It reminds us that Christ continues to walk with both of our churches, leading us into a future filled with hope. Please keep IELU in your prayers. It is good to remember that we have partners from Argentina and beyond that care about and pray for our ministry.”

### ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD

*Essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.* That is the motto of the Moravian Church, with whom the ELCIC has entered into a full communion relationship with, alongside Anglicans.

The Moravian Church, like Lutherans and Anglicans, has roots in the ancient common tradition of the apostolic Church. All three have been shaped by the reformation movements of 15th and 16th century Europe. As well—throughout various moments in our early histories as Churches, we have found important points of contact and collaboration. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has been in full communion with Moravians since 1999.

Full communion is an important statement about the visible unity of the church. Though the full communion relationship was only affirmed in 2023, the intentional partnership between the churches has been nurtured for years and spearheaded especially by those in the ABT Synod.

Diaconal Minister Faith Nostbakken, an ecumenical officer in the Alberta Synod, has been an instrumental part in fostering the ELCIC’s relationship with the Moravian Church.

“Wherever we can, let’s foster closer relationships with other churches and do more together, because I think it reflect better to the world that Christians work together,” Deacon Nostbakken said. “Let’s expand our understanding of what it means to be the body of Christ. Let’s make our church walls more porous. Full communion relationships enrich our experience as Lutherans and creates more opportunities to work in a larger body.” •



Rev. Susan Climo and Deacon Faith Nostbakken participating at the 2024 Synod of the Canadian District of the Moravian Church’s Northern Province.

### INTRODUCING THE NEW ELCIC LOGO

Earlier this year, the ELCIC National Office unveiled a new logo and tagline, inspired by a new vision statement that was developed through extensive consultation with members across the church.

At the request of the ELCIC’s National Church Council, a dedicated task force spent several years crafting a vision statement through churchwide consultation to capture the collective hopes and dreams of ELCIC members: *God’s grace and unconditional love calls us to be a diverse, inclusive community that celebrates all and upholds life-giving relations.*

The new logo draws on several key visual elements: a dove and olive branch are meant to symbolize love, peace and hope; the cross represents the heart of one’s faith, embodying Christ, the Holy Spirit, and forgiveness; and the open hand represents God’s grace, welcoming, and openness.

Visually, the logo comes together in a modern, contemporary design, signifying energy and forward momentum.

The new tagline encapsulates the heart of the ELCIC’s vision: *Living out God’s Grace and Unconditional Love.* •



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**  
Living Out God’s Grace & Unconditional Love

#### ICON ELEMENTS



The dove and olive branch

+



The cross

+



The open hand

• With files from Trina Gallop Blank, Carter Brooks, ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson, Geoff Kirbyson, Hanne Kuhnert and Sarah Malina.



## OPENING WORSHIP

### LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

You are encouraged to acknowledge Indigenous lands in a way appropriate to your context at the beginning of your annual meeting. The following words are provided as an example.

*We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the [Name of Indigenous Peoples for where your community is located]. We recognize and respect their enduring presence on this land and express our gratitude for the opportunity to live, work and learn on their territory.*

Let us take a moment to reflect on the history of this land and to consider our roles in working towards reconciliation and understanding.

### PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for gathering us together into your church — whether it be in person, online or a combination of the two.

Our community is more than an organization; it is a family united by a shared purpose and mission, to discern the work you call us to do. In this time of reflection and planning, grant us clarity of mind and openness of heart. May our discussions be guided by wisdom, understanding, and a spirit of unity. Help us to see beyond the details and numbers, recognizing the greater purpose and impact of our collective efforts.

May we seek to be generous, compassionate, loving people of God. Keep us mindful of the many other needs in the world — conflicts, refugees, poverty, and all other concerns that we name before you now.

All this we pray in your name. *Amen.*

### READING 1 Timothy 6:17-19

*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*

**HYMN** God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending — EvLW, #678

### LITANY

The prayers below are based on the ELCIC's four vision priorities.

**Leader:** We come before you today, humbled by the depth of your love that calls us to strive for a Healthier Church. Instill in us the wisdom to foster collaboration among all expressions of the church. Grant us the grace to develop a strong sense of connection, rooted in trust, good communication, creativity and collaboration. May these qualities be the pillars that uphold the foundation of our faith community.

**All: Open wide our hands in sharing.**

**Leader:** As we seek to cultivate Effective Partnerships, open our hearts to the richness of engagement with others. As we navigate the path of collaboration, may our efforts be guided by your love and bring forth abundant fruit.

**All: Open wide our hands in sharing.**

**Leader:** In our pursuit of Relational Leadership, grant us the strength to deepen diversity and equity in our community. Inspire us to embrace inclusivity, creating spaces that reflect the boundless love you have for all your children. May our leadership reflect your grace, fostering an environment where every individual feels valued and heard.

**All: Open wide our hands in sharing.**

**Leader:** Let us lead with Compassionate Justice, guided in our reflections and actions. May we be a voice for justice on issues that matter, advocating for the well-being of all your creation. Grant us the courage to stand up for what is right, inspired by the compassion you have shown us through Christ.

**All: Open wide our hands in sharing.**

**Leader:** Gracious and loving God, bless us with creativity and perseverance as we navigate the challenges ahead. May our actions be a testament to your love, shining a light that draws others closer to you. All this we pray in your name.

**All: Amen.**

## CLOSING WORSHIP

**Leader:** Bless our community with a sense of purpose and direction for the coming year. We thank you for the diverse talents and gifts represented in our congregation and community. May we use these resources to show others the blessing of your unconditional love.

**Leader:** In your holy name we pray,

**All: Amen.**

**HYMN** Lord of All Hopefulness — EvLW #765

**Leader:** Go in peace — in love, justice and a commitment to serve one another and our wider community.

**All: Thanks be to God.**



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## CONGREGATIONAL



# ANNUAL REPORT



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

Living Out God's Grace & Unconditional Love