



# **Section 3**

## **Reports of National Bishop and Canadian Lutheran World Relief**

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## Report of the ELCIC National Bishop to the EASTERN Synod

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus!

As I report to you on the work of the church over the past three years since your last synod assembly, it is good to reflect on the gifts that we have received and the gifts that we have been able to share. Romans 12:6a reminds us, *We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.*

Perhaps at the time it may feel like we have very little to share in the way of gifts.

However, a former General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is known to say there is no church so small that it does not have a gift to share with the wider church, and there is no church too large that it cannot receive a gift from a smaller church. In this context I would say there is no national church, synod, congregation, or ministry that is so small that it doesn't have a gift to share, and there is no national church, synod, congregation, or ministry that is so big that it cannot receive a gift from a smaller entity.

For the gifts we have exchanged as national church, synod, congregations and ministries, I give thanks and praise to God. May we all be bold stewards of the gifts we have to use and share. And what a busy few years it has been for our church!

In 2022 we held our National Convention – online. This was the first time in the history of our church that we conducted the business of our National Convention via zoom! Then in 2023, we held our first ever Special Convention, but thankfully we were able to meet in person as there were many areas of business on the agenda and we wanted to make sure we allowed time and space for discussion and discernment. At the same time, we met with the Anglican Church of Canada for Assembly – the first time since we met jointly back in 2013.

It was a wonderful gathering and I'm so proud of the work of our church and the way we came together.

Some significant areas of business at the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention included:

- The ELCIC Special Convention and Anglican Church of Canada approved motions to bring the ELCIC / ACC / and the Canadian Churches of the Moravian Church in North America into full communion.
- Both the Lutherans and Anglicans approved motions calling on both churches to respond to opportunities for solidarity and advocacy, and to pray for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel.
- Throughout the Special Convention, delegates heard from four task forces, all which were formed out of convention action at the 2019 National Convention. Each task force had four sessions beginning with the introduction of the task force and its work. Table conversation among delegates

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followed, where they submitted questions and observations to the task force; the presenters reflected on the comments and questions and at the final session, the task force report and recommendations formed motions that came before the delegates.

- Delegates voted unanimously to adopt the report and recommendations from the Addressing Ableism and Accessibility Task Force. The recommendations from the motion included: encouraging critical conversation and intentional formation on how faith communities can better confront ableism at the congregational level, and implementing ongoing certified accessibility and ableism training, with training happening at least every three years.
- Recommendations and motions from the Addressing Racism, White Supremacy and Racial Justice Task Force were unanimously approved. Among the recommendations, the task force calls for the ELCIC to: Implement ongoing anti-racism training across all expressions of the church; review the nomination, election and hiring processes for the ELCIC.
- In a near-unanimous vote, delegate approved the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Carbon Neutrality, which includes a Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Calculator for Congregations developed by the task force to help congregations and organizations estimate their GHG emissions.
- Delegates unanimously approved a public statement of apology to 2SLGBTQIA+ folx who have been harmed by the ELCIC.
- Delegates approved the report and recommendations of the Task Force Addressing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia which includes: increasing the ELCIC's visibility as an affirming church; creating national resources which would support listening, safe conversations and discernment at all levels of the church around healthy, consensual relationships, including ethical non-monogamous relationships.

There are also many other areas of work from the past three years since your last synod convention that I could share, but for the sake of brief reporting, the following are just a few highlights reporting on the ways we have come together and the many partnerships that help enable this work to be carried out.

These will be organized by the four areas of focus that make up the National Office strategic plan: striving to be a Healthier Church, seeking to cultivate Effective Partnerships, encouraging Relational Leadership, and leading with Compassionate Justice. I would invite you to look at these areas and consider how you, your congregation and your community might also be engaged in one or more of these priorities.

## Healthier Church

The Program Committee for Leadership for Ministry (PCLM) met over zoom in January of this year to go through the Advanced Study Grant applications. A record number of 16 grants are being awarded this

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year. The depth and breadth of the studies is quite fascinating and exciting. The committee approved over \$100,000 in grants for 2024! In 2023 the committee approved \$85,712.40!

Earlier this year, I developed a discernment resource for congregational and individual use as we begin to journey towards the 2025 ELCIC National Convention. ELCIC members are invited to prayerfully consider the call to this position and the gifts needed to carry out the role of National Bishop. The resource invites reflection on “When do we as a community of believers need to discern the will of God?” and “How do we go about doing spiritual discernment as a group?” In addition to discernment of the call and election of National Bishop, the resource can also be helpful for other group discernment processes. You can download a copy of the resource from the documents section of our website and we will have copies available at your synod convention.

*Eternity for Today* – a long-standing daily devotional resource – is now being entirely produced by the ELCIC National Office following the closure of Parasource last spring. We recently completed the 2024 renewal process for congregational subscriptions. Current subscribers were brought our new a circulation management program and congregations can now manage their own group subscriptions to *Eternity for Today* and pay online. If you don’t currently subscribe, consider getting an individual subscription by using the following link:

<https://www.simplecirc.com/subscribe/eternity-for-today>.

You can also purchase a gift subscription by using the following link:

[https://www.simplecirc.com/give\\_a\\_gift/eternity-fortoday](https://www.simplecirc.com/give_a_gift/eternity-fortoday).

Each fall, the ELCIC National Office produces Annual Report Covers and sends them out to all ELCIC congregations that request copies. These resources are produced for congregations to use to organize their AGM reports. The Annual Report Covers share stories of our congregations and ministries from across the ELCIC as a way of telling the stories of our church, members and communities. The National Office provides these to congregations at no cost (although we appreciate donations to offset mailing and courier costs).

At the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention we were pleased to recognize our ELCIC Leadership Award recipient. Pat Lovell was honoured on Saturday evening of convention with the ELCIC Leadership Award and recognized for the numerous ways she has served church and community, and all expressions of the ELCIC. <https://assembly.anglicanlutheran.ca/news/pat-lovell-presented-with-2023-elcic-leadershipaward/>

### Effective Partnerships

Anglican Church of Canada Archbishop Linda Nicholls and I continue to share joint Christmas and Easter messages whenever possible, along with speaking publicly on advocacy issues of mutual priority for our two churches. All of these statements and videos can be viewed on our joint website:

<https://www.anglicanlutheran.ca>.

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At the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020, National and Synod Bishops and Assistants to the Bishops worked on a joint initiative that would see them providing sermons to congregations across the church from June to September. The Summer Sermon Series is now entering its fourth year and has been very well received by congregational leaders and members as a way of not only assisting in providing sermons during vacation time, but as a way of providing a variety of voices and introducing national and synod leaders across the synods.

Following the closure of Parasource in May of 2023, the ELCIC has been working with 1517 Media – formerly Augsburg Fortress – to ensure ELCIC congregations have access to the various print resources they would have previously ordered from Parasource.

In August 2023, over 200 youth and leaders, guests and volunteers gathered for the first in-person youth gathering since 2018. It was exciting to be together in-person in Waterloo, Ontario. The theme *Ashes and Embers* was explored by keynote speakers Rev. Aneeta Saroop and Rev. Nathan Fong.

In response to the crisis in the Holy Land, the ELCIC has issued a special appeal for our partners – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). The goal is to raise \$263,000 to assist in covering one month of salaries for pastors and for teachers in ELCHL schools. An ongoing list of updates, statements and resources regarding the current situation in the Holy Land, including information from our partners in the region is available here: <https://www.elcic.ca/holy-land>.

The LWF Assembly met September 13–19, 2023 in Krakow, Poland. News from the Assembly can be found on the website, <https://www.2023.lwfassembly.org>. During the Assembly, ELCIC member Rev. Katherine Gohm was elected as Vice-President North America. The ELCIC was well represented at the Assembly with over 15 members serving in various capacities, including on the worship planning team, as advisors and delegates, and as seconded staff.

The ELCIC Mission Fund advisory committee is responsible for overseeing the use of the ELCIC Mission fund and encouraging our church in its missional pursuits. Over the last five years, the ELCIC Mission Fund has dispersed over \$2,700,000 to synods to assist with mission projects within the synods, congregations and ministries.

Our National and Synod Treasurers have continued to meet monthly on zoom over the past three years to discuss matters of mutual concern, provide ongoing support for congregational treasurers, as well as to consider forward-looking financial matters. The treasurers work together to prepare regular updates for congregations and their treasurers on important updates related to insurance, benefits, year-end charity return, the Clergy Residence Deduction from CRA, updates on Health Insurance Premiums, changes to note for charities, and more. These updates can be found here: <https://elcic.ca/treasurers-resources/>.

In February and March of this year, the National Office hosted two webinars with AON Insurance for congregational treasurers and those responsible for congregational insurance. The webinars were very well received and provide an opportunity for Q&A on specific congregational insurance questions.

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## Relational Leadership

The last Sunday of February is Diaconal Ministry Sunday, the day the ELCIC celebrates the witness expressed through service (diakonia). Through our baptism all Christians are called to share God's word and to serve our neighbours in Christ's name. It is also a day to recognize and give thanks to God for all of those who serve in official calls as deacons in our church. Each year the ELCIC National Office develops resources for Diaconal Sunday, which are available here: <https://www.elcic.ca/diaconal-Sunday.cfm>.

The ELCIC National Office has developed several Racial Justice workshops. Workshop 1 - on awareness, common language, self-identity and a history of racism in Canada - was first piloted with Task Force members in February 2023. This was in preparation for the session one to be presented to NCC in March 2023. Workshops sessions 1 and 2 were made available to all ELCIC members in November, 2023. Two more sessions are planned for Spring, 2024.

The ELCIC website now has a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion website page, which can be found here: <https://elcic.ca/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>.

Several Deepening Understanding for Intercultural Ministry (DUIM) workshops have taken place in the last year. In March 2023, a residential five-day program was held in Hamilton. A second session was held in the Synod of Alberta and the Territories in July 2023. Two more sessions are currently being planning for spring 2024.

## Compassionate Justice

On October 7, with the horrific attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel and the subsequent war on Gaza, the context in Palestine and Israel has changed painfully and dramatically. The ELCIC seeks to accompany the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and to advocate for peace. You can find updates, statements, and resources on the Crisis in the Holy Land section of our website: <https://www.elcic.ca/holy-land/>.

The most recent statements are:

- Dec 14: full communion letter to the Prime Minister in support of UN ceasefire demand
- Jan 24: a global call to stop arms transfers to Israel and Palestinian armed groups by civil society organizations.
- Feb 1: full communion letter to the Prime Minister on the ruling of the International Court of Justice.
- Feb 5: a Canadian call to stop arms transfers to Israel and Palestinian armed groups by civil society organizations. Project Ploughshares offered leadership for this initiative.

We have launched an Emergency Appeal for our partners in the ELCJHL with the goal of raising \$263,000 to cover one month of expenses for the ELCJHL. <https://www.elcic.ca/2023/11/03/elcic-emergency-appeal-for-our-partners-in-the-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-jordan-and-the-holy-land/>.

In January 2024, I was asked to visit our partners in the ELCJHL by Bishop Azar as a sign of solidarity. While I was there, we issued a joint statement:



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<https://www.elcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-01-31-Joint-Statement-ELCJHL-and-ELCIC.pdf>

Each year on the first Sunday in February, we lift up Global Mission Sunday. This annual emphasis affirms the importance of Global Mission in the whole ministry of the ELCIC. Global Mission is one way the ELCIC is able to grow and strengthen relationships with its partner churches. This year, we lifted up particular emphasis on our partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and how they have been affected by the Israel/Hamas war. I created a sermon for the Sunday, and a new video was created with highlights from my travels in January 2024 to the region. The sermon, video and additional resources for Global Mission Sunday can be viewed here:

<https://www.elcic.ca/global-mission/global-missionsunday/>.

On behalf of the church, my role as National Bishop includes writing to leaders and speaking out on important areas of advocacy. Some of the letters I have recently shared, include the following:

- November 29, 2023: I joined church leaders in a letter to the Prime Minister following the World Council of Churches statement on climate justice
- November 3, 2023: I joined church leaders in a letter to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
- October 4, 2023: myself and MNO Synod Bishop Jason Zinko sent a letter to Premier-designate Wab Kinew following his recent election as the first First Nations leader of a province in Canada
- September 5, 2023: I joined church leaders in calling for a search of a Manitoba landfill.

All of these letters and more can be viewed on the National Bishop Messages and Statements page of our web-site: <https://www.elcic.ca/partnerships/messages-and-statements-from-elcic-national-bishop-susan-c-johnson/>.

In closing, I want to thank you for the many ways that you as individuals, congregations, ministries, and as a synod have contributed gifts to the life of our church. We hope that you have also received the work of the National Church as a gift to further our shared ministry and mission in the gospel.

Yours in the name of the living and loving God,



Rev. Susan Johnson  
National Bishop, ELCIC



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# Canadian Lutheran World Relief



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Greetings, on behalf of the Board and staff of Canadian Lutheran World Relief, on the occasion of the 2024 Eastern Synod Convention! We are proud to be partners in ministry with the ELCIC, in mission for others, as together we respond to God's love in Christ by serving others.

We are continually inspired by all of you throughout the Eastern Synod for your commitment to the work of justice and peace, and your incredible generosity. It's my honour to offer you this report on our recent work — because this is ultimately a report on the good that you have made possible. As the world faced disaster, war and growing hunger, you responded with urgency, generosity and faithfulness. I'm pleased to report that the last few years at CLWR have been characterized by healthy budgets and growing support, including a new high mark last year of over \$17m in revenue. This incredible result is only possible because of the support of congregations like yours.

## **HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

Your faithful support has meant our partners around the world have been able to respond immediately when communities face catastrophe. Over the last years, millions have been displaced by the war in Ukraine, and tens of millions more were affected by flooding in Pakistan and the earthquake in Türkiye. And now, the crisis in Gaza has pushed millions into crisis. Closer to home, families in B.C. struggled to recover from the devastating floods at the end of 2021. With your partnership, families facing disaster are receiving food, clean water, shelter and supplies, plus care for trauma. Through Lutheran World Federation and the ACT Alliance, CLWR has local partners in each of the affected communities who can make sure we're first on the scene, then guide our response to make sure we're responding with exactly what people need. In our 2023 fiscal year, we responded to crisis in Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Pakistan, South Sudan, Uganda, Ukraine, Venezuela as well as in Canada, sharing hope and tangible relief with a total of over 200,000 people.

## **FOOD SECURITY & LIVELIHOODS**

After decades of progress, hunger is on the rise again. Years of historic droughts and increased weather variability have pushed millions to the brink, and some of the hardest hit are the small-scale farmers who feed so much of the world. Together with Canadian Foodgrains Bank, CLWR gives families the food they need today plus the skills and supplies to grow their own food — and food for their communities — tomorrow. With your support, we're working with small-scale farmers to improve their food production and increase their incomes through the provision of agricultural and marketing training, constructing irrigation systems, protecting watersheds and preventing soil erosion.

This includes a significant new undertaking around the Lake Chad basin, in Chad and Cameroon, where an ecosystem that supported life for millennia has unravelled in recent years. In consultation with hundreds of families there, we've just launched an initiative called Nature-Based Solutions which is being carried out alongside thousands of local farmers as we restore land, reforest, push adoption of sustainable farming and water management practices, and

include voices that have been left out. We expect that in the 2.5-year lifetime of this project, over 128,000 people will benefit directly from an improved ecosystem—with better nutrition, water access, crop yields, and sustainable futures—and an additional 640,000 people will be able to live and work in ecosystems that will have been restored.

## EDUCATION

Conflict and disasters disrupt the education of vulnerable young learners worldwide. In the West Bank, women have far fewer opportunities than men to find employment, and the opportunities that do exist are difficult to access. For women with disabilities, the situation is even more difficult. Your support is giving children access to education in a safe, supportive environment. And through our five-year project called GRIT, with the support of Global Affairs Canada, you're giving Palestinian women technical and vocational training so they can secure their own futures and financial independence. Even now, as the war in Gaza has caused significant new instability in the West Bank, our partners in LWF-Jerusalem and local colleges are doing everything they can to support students and maintain this vital program. In February, the project was honoured with one of the inaugural Development Impact Awards from the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation.

## REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

In 1946, CLWR was created to help people displaced by the Second World War. Our commitment to refugees continues to this day through refugee resettlement. CLWR is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with the Government of Canada. Through CLWR, congregations and groups are able to sponsor refugees from abroad and help them build new lives in Canada. In our 2023 fiscal year, 220 people went from refugee to Permanent Residents in Canada thanks to Lutheran churches and community groups across the country! Our thanks to the dedicated congregations and individuals across the Eastern Synod who make this ministry possible.

At the time of your last convention, we were in the midst of CLWR's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which we celebrated in 2021. At the time, there was great uncertainty about what the pandemic would mean for our work, but you quickly showed us that whatever happened, you would not forget those we serve around the world. Throughout our 75<sup>th</sup> year, we saw the same spirit of generosity and sacrifice that birthed this movement and has sustained CLWR for all these decades. Seeing a world in crisis, you responded. It's because of that generosity that we are now able to offer a report of hope and to tell you that your partnership has truly made a difference.

Your partnership has been vital, and it has been truly-life saving. In each of these emergencies, this community of Lutherans and friends in Canada has responded immediately, and in doing so you have saved lives. And crucially, you have allowed us to continue the rest of our critical ongoing work to provide hope, help communities secure their long-term access to food and water, and challenge the oppression that marginalizes and restricts so many. We are also



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especially excited about a recent new initiative called Welcoming the Stranger, which is a partnership CLWR negotiated directly with the UNHCR. Through this effort, we were able to establish a unique relationship which allowed us to facilitate the arrival of a first sponsored family from the US-Mexico border.

### **YOUR KINDNESS AT WORK**

Because of your kindness, there are so many *good news* stories happening in our world. They may not make the news, but as communities have faced the threats of conflict, disaster and climate crisis, your support has changed lives and shared hope.

In 2023, inspired by the generosity of congregations across Canada, our Board authorized the launch of the Apple Tree Fund, a new long-term impact fund for major church and individual gifts. Through this donor-designated fund, the first 1/7th of a gift will have an immediate impact, while the remainder will be invested and allowed to grow and then used over seven years, ensuring long-lasting and significant impact.

This report offers only the smallest glimpse of the impact your partnership has made in these last years. We take such inspiration from the steadfastness of your compassion and your faith, and it is our prayer that this report might offer a little encouragement in return. I hope that during this gathering, you will visit our display to hear the real stories of the impact your generosity has made.

Our thanks to Bishop Mike for years of faithful leadership and partnership in mission. We also thank the special individuals from your Synod who have served on our board in recent years, including Pauline Klemencic, Reverend Doug Reble, and Reverend Adam Snook. And our thanks to all the pastors, deacons, lay leaders and congregations of the Eastern Synod for your partnership in ministry. May God bless this gathering, and may God bless your ministry.



Karin Achtelstetter  
Chief Executive Officer – Canadian Lutheran World Relief