

**DELEGATE REPORT**  
**ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**PETAWAWA, ONTARIO**

**GENERAL**

2017 is the first year in which a new attendance procedure is being implemented. Rather than each congregation sending a delegate to the ELCIC national convention, forty-four Synod delegates were elected at the 2016 Eastern Synod conference in Toronto. Ten additional delegates were subsequently nominated by the Eastern Synod Council in November, 2016.

The 2017 National Convention was designed to be less costly than previous National Conventions by being one day shorter, having less delegates, being housed in a university setting, and having a celebration event in place of the traditional banquet. The agenda for the meeting covered a mixture of regular business items (such as elections, approval of budgets, greetings from other groups), as well as a number of thematic topics. The theme for the convention was "Liberated by God's Grace"; this theme has been used over the 2015-2017 period of time as part of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of reformation commemoration. There were three sub-themes:

- "Salvation – not for Sale",
- "Creation – not for Sale", and
- "Human Beings – not for Sale".

I was one of the Council nominations, and received an email from Synod in November which read in part, "*At their meeting on November 3-5, 2016, the Eastern Synod Council nominated you as an Eastern Synod delegate to the 2017 ELCIC National Convention to be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 6-8, 2017.*" This email also asked me to confirm whether or not I would accept the nomination, which I subsequently did.

Having accepted the nomination, I (and the other delegates) received a second email which read in part, "*At the Eastern Synod Council meeting on November 3-5, 2016, the delegate list for the 2017 ELCIC National Convention was finalized. This includes the forty-four individuals who were elected at this past summer's 2016 Eastern Synod Assembly, and the remaining ten delegates chosen at the synod council meeting.*" So fifty-four of us, representing the roughly 144 congregations of the Eastern Synod, prepared to attend the 2017 ELCIC National Convention in Winnipeg.

**ADMINISTRATION**

In mid-February all delegates received an email from the ELCIC Convention Coordinator advising us that the Registration Package will be available on the ELCIC website on Tuesday, February 21, 2017. This package would provide us with information on registration and how to make our travel and accommodation arrangements. As advertised, the package appeared on the ELCIC website, and provided much information on several convention topics: registration, meals, travel, parking, accommodations, University Centre (the large building where the convention was held), and a convention program outline.

The registration procedure was straightforward and was completed via email. Those without email or computer facilities were at a slight disadvantage, however I believe that they were contacted by mail and the registration procedures were completed via that method.

At the time of writing, the Registration Package could be found at <http://elcic.ca/in-convention/2017-Winnipeg/documents/2017ConventionRegistrationPackageBinder.pdf>

## TRANSPORTATION

My travel method was by air from Ottawa to Winnipeg. The ELCIC Registration Package provided guidance on transportation and other topics. Delegates arranged their travel plans through Continental Travel Group. Full instructions are provided and Michelle Thorvaldson was the CTG point of contact. My arrangements were made via email and electronic ticket. ELCIC provided transportation by shuttle vehicle to and from the airport to the University of Manitoba. The arrangements worked well and I experienced no problem with my travel plans.

## RECEPTION/REGISTRATION

I arrived in Winnipeg at about 6:30 PM on July 5<sup>th</sup>. When our small group was gathered by the ELCIC representative we boarded our shuttle for the University, arriving there around 7:15 PM. We received an electronic key to our room and information as to dining arrangements and further registration the next day which would be done at the convention site. Everything proceeded quite smoothly. On arrival at the convention site I visited the reception desk, confirmed my reception information and received a lanyard with an identification nametag.

## CONVENTION ORGANIZATION

In my opinion, the convention was very well organized. I experienced no problems over the four days of travel and attendance.

## GENERAL ORIENTATION

An optional one-hour orientation session was offered to all attendees at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 6. This session familiarized attendees with the university facilities, the agenda and schedule for our meetings, and other convention information. I recommend that first-time convention delegates attend this session as it provides very helpful information on how the convention will be conducted.

## NATIONAL CHURCH BUSINESS

This convention was a move away from bylaws, constitutions and the like towards real issues such as the proposed Message to Muslims in Canada and Indigenous reconciliation. The convention agenda will show that a number of standard “household” items were dealt with. These included elections of various staff, briefings on topics such as finance and budget, reports by individuals and groups, and meetings that were for specific committees such as the School Corporation. By the same token, several other items were of particular interest. These were scheduled throughout the agenda, and are listed below:

### Special Guests

Bishop Munib Younan. Bishop Younan is the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. He brought greetings to the ELCIC from his churches and addressed the convention on the topic of: “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

Bishop Munib expanded on the three sub-themes of the convention:

Salvation – Not for Sale: He cautioned us to be aware of the so-called “Prosperity Gospel” which tempts followers by saying that they will receive riches if they donate to the leader’s spurious beliefs.

Human Beings – Not for Sale; In spite of over 500 years of progress, human beings are still being treated as commodities in parts of the world through trafficking and slavery.

Creation – Not for Sale: A strong message that the church needs to speak more openly and be seen to be involved in climate change.

He also spoke about his experience surrounding the 2016 October 31 Joint Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation that took place in Lund, Sweden. This event featured Pope Francis, Bishop Munib in his role as the LWF President and other senior clergy from the Catholic and Lutheran church body.

He is a very animated speaker, and his presentation was most interesting. It was only after his address and he had departed that we found out that one of his grandchildren was about to undergo a serious operation at home. He was advised that he could leave immediately, not stay to give his speech and return to his family as soon as possible. He chose to stay, meet his obligations to the convention, and then return home. We heard later in the convention that he had returned safely and that his grand-daughter had survived the operation and was on the road to recovery.

Most Reverend Fred Hiltz. Reverend Fred Hiltz is the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. He brought greetings from the Anglican Church of Canada and took part in the Ecumenical Panel that discussed the “Significance of Reformation Commemoration (see below).

Robert Granke. Mr. Granke is the Executive Director of Canadian Lutheran World Relief. He presented an overview of the organization and its current initiatives world-wide, emphasizing that there are currently 65.6 million refugees globally. Each delegate received a small framed ceramic plaque commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. These were made at the Vocational Training Centre in Jerusalem thanks to funding by the ELCIC and the Canadian Lutheran World Relief.

Dr. Katheryn Johnson. Dr. Johnson is the Director of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She brought greetings from the ELCA and complimented our church for initiative and leadership. She became somewhat emotional when she addressed the question of how well the ELCA was doing. Speaking on the current political turbulence in the USA, she said, “This is a Dark age for our country, and there will be more.” She asked for assistance and support “in these difficult times.”

#### ELCIC Statement to Muslims in Canada

The National Church Council (NCC) proposed the following motion to the convention: “That the 2017 National Convention adopt the following *ELCIC Statement to Muslims in Canada*.” Following discussion of the motion, the motion was passed: Yes – 143, No – 1. The full statement is attached as Annex B.

## Encountering People of Other Faiths – Interfaith Guidelines

NCC proposed a second motion to the convention: “That the 2017 National Convention adopt the new Resource *Encouraging People of Other Faiths – Interfaith Guideline*.” Following discussion of the motion, the motion was passed: Yes – 144, No – 0. The full Resource is attached as Annex C.

## Ecumenical Panel – Significance of Reformation Commemoration

The Ecumenical Panel consisted of Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Mennonite clergy. They discussed the “Significance of the Reformation Commemoration.” Several lines of thought proceeded from the discussions. Some of these include: the Reformation happened in the past, it is finished, and it is now time to build and make progress on our current positive feelings about religion; Commemoration is not a celebration as there are no “winners” or “losers.” It is recognition of the Reformation and so we can continue to build and revitalize our church; our church is a creation of the Gospel. We can take a fresh look at evangelism trusting that we have the discipline to be Reformed. Each speaker brought a very different perspective; a common theme is that we continue to be in a reformation likely leading to different expressions of the church over time both in terms of how they worship and the structure. Some panel members can see the current denomination-based churches evolving into faith-based community churches, possibly with multiple linkages to different denominations. The younger generation is less attached to “bricks and mortar” and is more willing to move to fulfill their spiritual needs. The full panel discussion can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zamzXliJiHM&feature=youtu.be>

## Commemoration Service - 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation

The ELCIC National Reformation Commemoration Worship Service took place on the evening of July 7th at St. Gianna Beretta Molla Roman Catholic Church, 15 Columbia Drive. Buses departed from the Arthur V. Mauro residence between 6:10 p.m. and 6:20 p.m. Buses returned to the university starting at 9:00 p.m. following a short reception.

## Presentation – National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

*“The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) was created to preserve the memory of Canada’s Residential School system and legacy. While the life of the NCTR begins with the statements and documents from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, in future, it will house other Indigenous collections. It will also encourage dialogue on the many issues that stand in the way of Reconciliation.”* The NCTR is housed at the University of Manitoba. We heard a very interesting presentation by one of the staff members who explained the background, formation and mandate of the Centre. Regrettably, there was no time available for questions. Much more information can be found on this subject at the NCTR website.

## Approved Model Constitution for Congregations

The current model constitution was approved in 2010 and reviewed in 2012. A passing comment seemed to indicate that there is, or soon will be, a new approved Model Constitution for Congregations. I was not able to confirm whether or not this will require St. John’s to amend its current constitution. I will check with Synod to get the most up to date information.

## Reformation Challenge

The Reformation Challenge calls us to: Sponsor 500 refugees to Canada; Provide 500 scholarships for ELCJHL schools; Plant 500,000 trees; and Give \$500,000 to the LWF Endowment Fund. I am not sure of the extent to which St. John's has been involved in this initiative.

Reformation Challenge Status as of July 4, 2017:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Status</b>
Sponsor Refugees to Canada	500	540
Provide ELCJHL Scholarships	500	165
Plant Trees	500,000	80,474
Contribute to LWF Endowment Fund	\$500,000	\$150,090

Additional information and a new video can be accessed at:

<http://elcic.ca/reformationchallenge/default.cfm>

## Committee of the Whole – Hopes for the Next 500 Years

“Committee of the Whole” means that an assembly (in this case, the convention) temporarily does away with convention procedure and addresses a question or a subject. Forming into small groups (in our case, each table of about six people), members discuss the topic for a fixed period of time. After discussion, each group selects a speaker who then tells the rest of the assembly what the speakers group decided. Our Committee of the Whole looked at what were our hopes for the next 500 years insofar as our church was concerned.

Here are some of the comments: realize that there is always a need for God; become the priesthood of all our leaders; all members to become part of our mission and our ministry; be a place to serve others; accept others beliefs and look upwards for guidance; we want the Lutheran church to be a leader. A video showing many of the speakers can be accessed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8\\_wkdI5VfU&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8_wkdI5VfU&feature=youtu.be)

## Attendance

Lay	80
Youth	10
Rostered	59
Visitors	81
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>230</b>

## WORSHIP ACTIVITIES

As the convention opened and closed, we held a full communion service. In addition, opening and closing prayer services conducted by the convention chaplain took place at the end of each business session. As well, the convention held a Commemoration service on Friday evening, as noted above.

## MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES

There were no specific motivational activities. This led to a shortened convention and allowed for more focused attention on the issues of the day.

## FUTURE ASSEMBLY

The next assembly will take place in 2019. The location will be announced at a later date.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I attended this convention for two reasons. First, to report back to the members of St. John's about the convention and what transpired. Second, to see how the new method of identifying Synod Delegates in place of congregational delegates would work.

As to the first reason, this report will give you a good idea of the convention content. I also hold digital and hard copy versions of the complete Bulletin of Reports as well as other documentation (registration and travel guidance) used in preparation and travel. All are available to any who wish to see them. I'd recommend digital copies: the Bulletin of Reports is about an inch/2.5 cm thick.

Regarding the second reason, I found that the Synod Delegate system worked fairly well. A smaller delegation leads to a number of advantages: smaller venue, less expense, faster voting, less transportation resources required and (I am sure) several more that I have not yet identified.

All in all, it was a good convention. I encourage others to attend in future. You'll get a "top down" view of the church and its personnel and a clearer idea of just how the national church operates. I was happy to meet Pastor Reble from Eastern Synod on Wednesday morning. He asked that he be remembered to St. John's and especially to our recent Call Committee. I will certainly pass his remarks to them!

Respectfully Submitted,

G. Barling  
History/Archives  
Synod Delegate 2017

Annex A – Convention Agenda

Annex B - A Statement to Muslims in Canada by the ELCIC.

Annex C - Encouraging People of other Faiths - Interfaith Guidelines

Acknowledgement: I wish to note the assistance of Mr. Lawrence Lupton of St. Timothy's in Pembroke, and a convention delegate, for permission to use portions of his report to augment mine. The exchange of our respective reports helped to get a better result for each of us. Thanks, Lawrence!

**CONVENTION AGENDA**

**Wednesday, July 5, 2017**

2:00 NCC Meets

3:00–8:00 Registration/Information Desks Open

**Thursday, July 6, 2017**

*Delegate Travel*

9:00–5:00 Registration

10:00 Convention Committees

11:00 General Orientation

12:00 Lunch, *Pembina Hall Cafeteria*

**1:30–5:00 Business Session #1**

1:30 Welcome to Treaty One Territory  
Opening Worship and Opening of Convention  
- Offering for Canadian Lutheran World Relief

3:00 Coffee Break, *Russell Room*

3:30 Registration Report

Establishment of Quorum

Adoption of Consent Agenda

Adoption of Standing Rules of Order

Introduction of Convention Committees

Request to Grant Privilege of Voice

NCC items not requiring action

Introduction of Special Guests

Report of the National Bishop

Report of National Church Council

-Notice of Items Requiring Action

Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections

-First Ballot for vice-chair

Report of Committee on Nominations

-National Church Council/ Court of Appeal/2019 Committee on Nominations

-Reception of Nominations from the Floor

Report of National Church Council

Reformation Challenge Update

4:55 Announcements

Closing Prayer

5:00–6:30 Dinner, *Pembina Hall Cafeteria*

**6:30–9:00 Business Session #2**

6:30 Opening Prayer

Registration Report

Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections

-Results of First Ballot for vice-chair

6:45 Liberated by God's Grace—Bishop Munib Younan

8:00 Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections  
-Second Ballot for vice-chair  
-Balloting will continue as required for vice-chair with balloting taking place no earlier than 30 minutes following the reported results of the previous ballot. After the Election of the Vice-Chair, Elections will proceed for NCC, Court of Appeal and 2019 Committee on Nominations.  
Presentation of Leadership Award  
8:25 Announcements  
8:30 Worship  
9:00–11:00 Reception, *Marshall McLuhan Hall*

## **Friday, July 7, 2017**

### **8:30–12:00 Business Session #3**

8:30 Morning Prayer  
9:00 Registration Report  
Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections  
9:15 Greetings—The Most Rev. Fred Hiltz,  
Primate, Anglican Church of Canada  
9:30 Report of NCC  
-ELCIC Statement to Muslims in Canada  
10:00 Coffee Break, *Russell Room*  
10:30 Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections  
Report of NCC  
-Encountering People of Other Faiths – Interfaith Guidelines  
Report of Committee on Reference and Counsel  
Elections  
11:30 Standing Order—Dr. Bryan Hillis, President Luther College  
Standing Order—Mr. Wayne Hove, President LCBI High School  
11:55 Announcements  
Closing Prayer  
12:00 Lunch, *Pembina Hall Cafeteria*  
1:00 School Corporation Meetings  
-Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute  
-Luther College

### **1:30–5:00 Business Session #4**

1:30 Opening Prayer  
Registration Report  
Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections  
1:40 Standing Order—Ecumenical Panel: Significance of the Reformation Commemoration  
3:00 Coffee Break, *Russell Room*  
3:30 Deadline for Submissions to Reference and Counsel  
Standing Order—Report of Canadian Lutheran World Relief  
Robert Granke, executive director  
Standing Order—Report of ELCIC Group Services Inc.  
John Wolff, president and board chair and  
Lisa Thiessen, executive director  
Standing Order – Dr. Kathryn Johnson, director of ecumenical and inter-religious relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
4:15 Committee of the Whole—Hopes for the next 500 years



4:55 Announcements  
Closing Prayer  
5:00 Dinner, *Pembina Hall Cafeteria*  
6:15–6:30 Buses to St. Gianna Beretta Molla Roman Catholic Church  
7:00 Commemoration of 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation  
-Offering for ELCIC Reformation Challenge  
8:30 Reception  
9:00 Buses return to the University

**Saturday, July 8, 2017**

**8:30–12:00 Business Session #5**

8:30 Opening Prayer  
8:45 Registration Report  
Report of Committee on Conduct of Elections  
9:00 Report of Committee of Reference and Counsel  
9:30 Standing Order—Report of the Treasurer, Ken Day  
-Approval of 2016 Audited Financial Statements  
-Approval of 2018 and 2019 Budgets  
10:00 Coffee Break, *Russell Room*  
10:30 Presentation—National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation  
11:00 Report of NCC  
-Reporting on ongoing work  
Recognition of NCC members ending terms of service  
11:55 Announcements  
Closing Prayer  
12:00 Lunch, *Pembina Hall Cafeteria*  
NCC meeting  
1:00 Outstanding Business (as required)  
1:30 Closing Worship  
-Offering for ELCIC Praise Appeal  
3:00 Departures

**PROPOSED MOTIONS FROM NATIONAL CHURCH COUNCIL TO THE  
2017 ELCIC NATIONAL CONVENTION**

**Motion 1.** That the 2017 National Convention adopt the following *ELCIC Statement to Muslims in Canada*.

**A Statement to Muslims in Canada by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).**

*“We do not tell lies about our neighbours, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead, we are to come to their defence, speak well of them and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”<sup>1</sup> – Martin Luther*

1 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism*, Meaning of the Eighth Commandment.

We live in an age in which interfaith relationships and respect for persons of other faith communities is of the utmost importance.

We acknowledge, with regret and sorrow, that people of the Christian faith have not always been respectful of people of other faith communities. Prejudice, intolerance, stereotypes and misunderstanding have a way of infecting communities, and very few Christian communities have completely escaped this bias.

In our current context, people of the Muslim faith have been singled out for particular forms of hateful, biased and prejudiced treatment. The tone of some national debate regarding the rights of Muslims in Canada has been troubling. At times the discourse has been derogatory, prejudiced and characterized by a suspicion or fear of the other in our midst. Such rhetoric has consequences. Some incidents have been aggressive, violent and even deadly.

All this is happening while there is a growing Muslim community in Canada, and while there is a huge number of Muslim refugees around the world, including many who immigrate to Canada seeking a safe, new home. Many ELCIC members have gotten to know refugees who are Muslim by serving as sponsors to displaced persons who are welcomed to Canada.

Given our current context, the ELCIC feels called to affirm our respect for people of the Muslim faith and for Islam.

As Lutherans, we value how the teachings of our faith encourage us to love God and to love our neighbours. We believe that we are called to honestly acknowledge errors in thought, word and deed, to receive and offer forgiveness as a path to healing relationships, and to trust in God for support in all that we do. In a spirit of truth-telling, we acknowledge that there have been times within our Lutheran history when we have perpetuated dismissive, disrespectful and hostile attitudes toward people of other faiths. We seek new insight beyond any teachings from our tradition that promote hatred, violence or hostile attitudes towards people of other faiths, including Muslims.

In 1995, the ELCIC Convention adopted a *Statement to the Jewish Community in Canada*. Recalling words from this statement, we affirm our fervent wish to live our faith in Jesus Christ in love and full respect for all Muslims. Hostility toward people of other faith communities is an affront to the gospel, a contradiction of its central teachings, and a violation of our hope and calling. We pledge this church to oppose prejudice and bigotry in our own circles and in the society

around us. We pray that greater understanding and co-operation may continually grow between Lutheran Christians and Muslims in Canada.

In 2015, the ELCIC Convention endorsed the document *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders*.<sup>2</sup> Through this action, the ELCIC joined other Lutherans represented in The Lutheran World Federation in making a commitment to:

- Respect and honour the reality that the stranger may be of a different faith or hold beliefs different from mine or other members of my community.
- Respect the right of the stranger to practice their own faith freely
- Support the creation of space where others can freely worship.
- Speak of our own faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faith of others.

Jesus encourages his followers to welcome those who are different from us and new to us by saying *I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.* (Matthew 25:35 & 40.) When we say stranger, we mean neighbours who we do not know as well as we might.

In 2014, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate in humanitarian work.<sup>3</sup>

This agreement recognized that both faiths value dignity, justice, compassion, mutual respect, as well as caring and helping vulnerable communities and people affected by disasters. The agreement also made a particular commitment to address the faith-based needs of refugees. Inspired by this agreement, we hope for similar opportunities in Canada where Lutherans and Muslims might work together to demonstrate mutual respect, to build community, to care for neighbours in need and to seek social justice.

The ELCIC challenges members and congregations of the ELCIC to engage in developing respectful, meaningful and mutual relationships with Muslims. The ELCIC encourages use of the 2017 resource *Encountering People of Other Faiths: Interfaith Guidelines*. We believe that respectful interfaith dialogue can lead to deeper understanding of our own faith. We trust that God will guide us in all that we do.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. – Luke 10:27*

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

2016 was a year marked by a huge refugee migration crisis. The people fleeing their homes are measured in the millions, and the reality is that many of those who are fleeing are Muslims. The crisis continues into 2017. Many ELCIC members and congregations have been engaged in sponsoring refugees.

There is a growing Muslim community in Canada. The people of Islam represent our most numerous neighbours of another faith, followed by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jews in that order. Freedom of religion is enshrined in Canadian law, and the value of multiculturalism is encouraged. Nevertheless, there have been incidents where people of the Muslim faith have been singled out for particular forms of biased and prejudiced treatment.

Of particular note are the horrific events of January 29, 2017 when there was a mass shooting at le Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec during Sunday night prayers. ELCIC leaders began preparing this *Statement on Muslims in Canada* in the fall of 2016. The memories of the tragic

events of January 29th at the Quebec City Mosque are a poignant reminder of the importance of building respectful interfaith relationships and of addressing prejudice.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In commemorating this moment in the life of the church, the LWF has encouraged Lutherans around the world to ponder the meaning of the words *Liberated by God's Grace: Human Beings – not for sale*. We hear in this message a call to multiply the ways in which we honour the dignity and rights of all persons and each person.

As members of this worldwide family of faith, the ELCIC wants to state publicly and unequivocally its rejection of theological justification or support for biased attitudes towards people of other faith communities.

In approving this statement, we ask the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to communicate this action to appropriate interfaith leaders and to the synods and congregations of this church.

**Motion Passed: Yes – 143, No – 1**

**Motion 2. That the 2017 National Convention adopt the new resource *Encouraging People of Other Faiths – Interfaith Guidelines*.**

**ENCOURAGING PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS - INTERFAITH GUIDELINES  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada July, 2017**

**THE RELIGIOUS FACE OF CANADA**

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)*

Who are our neighbours? If we grew up in a small town or rural area in Canada, our neighbours were probably Christian. Even in our biggest cities, that was likely the case. Most of us were not concerned about interfaith matters nor did we have much opportunity to get to know people of other faiths. As recently as 1991, more than 80% of Canadians called themselves Christian; an additional 13% acknowledged no religious affiliation. Only about 4% of Canadians were people of other faiths.

We have new neighbours! By 2011, only 67% of people saw themselves as Christian, 24% had no affiliation, and people of other faiths had increased to about 8% of the population. The religious face of Canada has been changing and that means that the opportunities for Lutheran Christians to meet and interact with people of other faiths are greater now than ever before. Such interactions may be as casual as a conversation at Timmy's or as complex as helping people to sort out a new life in Canada.

In 2011, Church of the Cross in Victoria sponsored a series on "Understanding Our Neighbour's Faiths." The congregation had been involved with Multifaith Services at the University of Victoria for many years. At the dedication of a new building addition in 2007, University Chaplains representing other faiths participated in the prayers. This partnership provided a natural connection for the series. Each week a representative from one tradition made a presentation followed by questions and discussion. The series included Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and the Baha'i faith. Thirty to forty people attended each week, with about half from the wider community. The response was very positive with many people commenting on how much they learned and enjoyed the presentations and conversation with our "neighbours." When the local Muslim community opened a new Mosque a few years ago, members of the congregation were present for the opening. And recently when the Mosque, in response to violence in Canada, held an open house, a number of people from the congregation participated wanting to show solidarity with our neighbours. The presentations helped to create understanding and a relationship. Still today, people of the congregation and community remember the series, and wonder or ask when we will plan something like it again. Maybe it is time. (Pastor Lyle McKenzie, Victoria B.C.)

The people of Islam represent our most numerous neighbours of another faith, followed by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jews in that order. The Canadian Muslim community grew from about 1% to slightly more than 3% of the population between 1991 and 2001. In our larger cities the number may be as high as 6% (Montreal) or 8% (Toronto). Like Christians, Muslims reflect both great commonality and great diversity in faith, tradition, language and culture of origin. Like us, they're not all the same. That's something Christians and Muslims have in common!

We have greater opportunity than ever to encounter the stranger—and people of other faiths—in our own communities. There were 65 million refugees at the end of 2015 according to the UN-

HCR. A significant number of these have come, or are seeking to come, to Canada. Some months into 2016, the ELCIC had surpassed its Reformation Challenge refugee resettlement goal. Behind every congregational story which contributed to this good news, there was some sort of encounter between a Lutheran community and some folk who were, for the most part, people of another faith. Many were/are Muslim.

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13: 1–2)*

In 2015, the ELCIC endorsed *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders*. All major religions embrace compassion, caring and respect, and the rule of granting protection to those in danger. In *Welcoming the Stranger*, representatives of major faith groups, including The Lutheran World Federation, created a code of conduct for faith leaders in welcoming migrants, refugees and other displaced persons. It affirms that compassion, mercy, love and hospitality are for everyone: the native born and the foreign born, the member of the community and the newcomer.

When I was a student at the Vancouver School of Theology, I was asked by First Lutheran Church, Vancouver, if I could facilitate a session on Christian-Muslim relations. I said yes, as long as I could bring along a Muslim friend. They agreed, and so I asked my friend Khaled to come with me. He is a Palestinian Muslim who had been born in a refugee camp, where his family had lived for generations since 1948. He had come to Canada to study and work. He was apprehensive, though, as he had been ill-treated by a Lutheran pastor in the past. Still, he agreed to come. On the appointed day, we all met outside in the beautiful sunshine after worship. We spoke about Islam. We spoke about Christianity. We spoke about Khaled's family and his experiences as a refugee. At the end of the afternoon, everyone had a much deeper appreciation of the Muslim faith and Khaled experienced healing in the care of a very gracious congregation. And for an afternoon, at least, there was peace, there was understanding, and there was healing. (Pastor Michael Kurtz, Winnipeg Man.)

Our Christian faith invites us to greet the stranger with humility and a sense of hospitality that is more than mere tolerance, and in a manner that is loving and merciful. How do we welcome people whose faith is different from our own? How do we demonstrate the love of Jesus? The following guidelines were created to offer a word of encouragement and some examples to follow.

## **INTERFAITH GUIDELINES**

*(Jesus asked ...) "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 36-37)*

Take a look at *Welcoming the Stranger; Affirmations for Faith Leaders*. While its title suggests that it's for "faith leaders", in fact, it lays out some important attitudes and actions for all of us as we seek to welcome strangers. See also the World Council of Churches' *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* for a distinctively Christian voice.

It is important for every Christian to witness to the love of Jesus. However, in the real-world of day-to-day and sometimes in-crisis—as in refugee resettlement—interfaith encounter, we often do well to allow our actions to speak *before* our words or even *as* our words. Sometimes it's more important to love with the love of Jesus than to say anything at all. Our gifts—our entire witness—may lie in the web of our good works, offered diligently and silently for the love of

God and the good of our neighbour. It is almost always the case that a faith well-lived will invite interest and openness to conversation.

The question “Why do you do what you do?”, asked of a Christian, will yield a far more helpful opening than “Why are you telling me this?” Both questions may issue in the answer “Because of Jesus.” The one, however, opens the door to conversation and makes Jesus look good—you’d want to get to know that sort of Jesus. The other does not.

Let our actions speak at least as loudly as our words and, in the main, we might allow them to speak first. It is important for every Christian to witness to the love of Jesus ... in a way that is humble and welcoming, merciful and loving. And credible. And inviting.

Here are some guidelines concerning how we might cultivate an inviting disposition within ourselves and a climate of welcome in our communities. To welcome people—“our neighbours”—of other faiths, we *learn, connect, pray* and *act*.

### **Learn**

In response to a Syrian refugee sponsorship effort taking place in early 2016, the Adult Bible Study group of the Lunenburg Lutheran Parish realized that many people in the area had authentic questions about Islam. So they invited the Imam of the local mosque to address these questions. The process of invitation took on a life of its own and eventually the whole town was included! Two sessions were held at Zion. The first dealt with expectations for interfaith dialogue and was led by the pastor. Participants included Christians, as well as Jews, Buddhists and people of no affiliation. Indeed, the turnout was so large that the session with the Imam was moved to the sanctuary. At the second session, over 70 were present and the father of one of the refugee families, who is Muslim, attended. After the presentation, many questions were asked by participants, refreshments were served, and much good will was created. The most commonly heard statement following the event was, “Thank you for hosting this. This was important.” (Pastor Rick Pryce, Lunenburg N.S.)

- What learning might be helpful for people in your congregation? Are there authentic questions about Islam or about any other neighbours we might encounter?
- Do people know how to greet their Muslim or Jewish or Sikh neighbours? What might people need to know about dietary observances, holy days or social customs before they can be fully welcoming?
- Organize a movie or book discussion which portrays people of another faith in a good light.
- Consider reading and studying some Canadian books which offer a cross-cultural and interfaith perspective. Four are recommended among the resources at the end of these guidelines.
- Set up exchange visits with a nearby mosque, synagogue or temple.
- Make visits to local temples, synagogues, mosques part of your confirmation program.
- Create adult learning sessions in which people of other faiths are invited to speak about their own faith, experience and concerns. Consider making this a regular, perhaps annual, effort.

### **Connect**

In 2016, Jennifer Ardon, a program officer with Canadian Lutheran World Relief, in conversation with a Muslim friend, learned of his community’s interest in resettling families from Syria. However, the local masjid (mosque) did not have the mechanism to act as, or with, a local Muslim “sponsorship agreement holder”, one like CLWR. At the same time, CLWR was not mandated to work directly with the masjid. She explained this reality to people at Christ Lutheran

Church, Waterloo, Ont. where a project to resettle people from Burundi was already underway. Very soon thereafter, representatives of the masjid and the congregation came together and a new effort was begun. By linking the congregation and masjid, CLWR could work directly with the Lutheran community using regular sponsorship documents while the Lutheran community could work with the masjid via a simple Memorandum of Understanding. (Pastor André Lavergne, Waterloo Ont.)

- Take the initiative! Pastors could contact the local mosque, synagogue or temple and introduce themselves to the imam, rabbi, granthi or other leader. Follow up with a request for coffee. Do a little Googling about the community, its leaders, customs before you knock on the door.
- When people move into the neighbourhood, introduce yourself to your new neighbours. Where they represent another culture or faith, hear their stories with gentle curiosity and openness. An invitation for tea or coffee goes a long way to break the ice.
- Our first instinct is often to find a Lutheran congregation or to look to the Christian community for a refugee resettlement effort. Consider opening your project to other faith communities.
- School functions and the community playground are good places to connect with people of other faiths with parenting and the living of daily life as shared interests. Your children or grandchildren may have friends of any number of different faiths at school.

Years ago, Dr. Roland Miller invited Rabbi Jeremy Parnes, Zarqa Nawaz (Creator of Little Mosque on the Prairie) and me to sit on a panel as "Children of Abraham." The three of us met and presented as "siblings" with a deep appreciation and understanding of each other's' faith traditions. Fast forward to 2016, and the three of us still meet for monthly lunches. We've also planned a new yearly event called, "The Tents of Abraham". We invited our communities together to eat a meal, and to listen to Lyndon J Linklater, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, about commonalities. A large number of people came together from four communities, and we played "Spiritual Pursuit," a game written with questions from our faith traditions. We learned, we talked, we listened, we ate, we deepened understanding and it was good. (Pastor Carla Blakley, Regina & Winnipeg)

## **Pray**

Every Saturday, I tweet out a number of timely prayer concerns which may be retweeted and worked into the Sunday prayers. These often pertain to people and places of various faiths and cultures and often address the bruised and broken places of God's world. Frequently, the particular ties to family touch our neighbours deeply. If, in our prayers, we can bring a neighbourhood face and local names to such hurt, this can help to build enduring bridges to people of other faiths. (Bishop Susan Johnson, Winnipeg)

For several years, Bishop Johnson has called our church into a process of spiritual renewal and deepened discipleship. She has asked us to *pray, read, worship, study, serve, give* and *tell*. How might each of these contribute to a loving and humble witness to our neighbours of other faiths? How might each of these inform a witness that is merciful and welcoming?

- Commit to praying for the well-being of your neighbours and for their kin in foreign lands. Pray for them by name.
- As you get to know your neighbours, ask them what they pray for and tell them that you and your community will join them in their concerns and prayers.
- Pray for Muslim refugees still in war-torn countries or trapped, with little or no future, in refugee camps or detention areas.
- Pray for the faith assemblies in your neighbourhood by name (The Waterloo Masjid, The Cedars Community ...). Let their people know that you are doing so and that you do so regularly.



- Inquire whether you might be invited to accompany a friend to their mosque, temple or synagogue for prayers, sometime. Ask what might be expected relative to dress or other customs. Let them be your guide.

## **Act**

Some years ago, the cemetery of the Jewish community in Kitchener was vandalized. A meeting was planned at the synagogue where people could show solidarity with the Jewish congregation. The practice at St Peters Lutheran Church in Kitchener was to arrange a visit to the synagogue for the Confirmation class, but because of the vandalism, we decided to go with the class to the meeting. As well as listening to Jewish leaders and seeing an unfamiliar worship space, the youth were part of a huge group of people of all faiths showing their concern, sympathy and support for the Jewish congregation. (Jackie Nunns, Kitchener, Ont.)

- Invite your Muslim neighbours to work with your congregation on a community service project—perhaps a Habitat build, community clean-up day or safety effort.
- Invite your Sikh neighbours to help create a community garden on some congregational land.
- Offer to host ESL classes for recent immigrants with coffee and conversation afterward.
- The needs and concerns of the local community or neighbourhood—such as affordable housing, desire for an arena, kids on the streets—can serve as a helpful focus for interfaith encounter and positive action.
- Working together at a foodbank or in a winter clothing drive is a terrific way to get to know your neighbour of another faith.
- Be clear about your support for your neighbours when they face issues of discrimination, injury to their religious freedom or other injustice. Tell them of your support and tell those who can help to make a difference.
- Following the violence in a Canadian mosque, Bishop Susan wrote a letter of support to the Canadian Council of Imams and a pastoral letter to our church. In times of sadness and celebration, how might you communicate your love and the love of Jesus to your neighbour?
- Knocking on the door and asking “How can we help?”, when a community of another faith is hurting, offers a powerful Christian witness.
- Invite your neighbours of other faiths to observe World Interfaith Harmony Week with you. Take up a community service endeavour together. The ELCIC signed on in 2012 following the lead of The Lutheran World Federation.

## **RESOURCES**

It is important for every Christian to witness to the love of Jesus in ways that are humble and welcoming, merciful and loving, credible and inviting. These guidelines were created to offer a word of encouragement and some examples to follow. For further study or discussion here are some resources.

### **Meeting Our Neighbour**

Created by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with input from The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), *Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders* was endorsed by the ELCIC in 2015. *Welcoming* is a brief, clear and accessible-to-all code of conduct for anyone whose life or ministry takes to interfaith boundaries.

The World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Evangelical Alliance have published *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*. This guide complements the UNHCR's *Welcoming the Stranger*.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has produced *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a multi-Religious World* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2016.) An experience-based resource for community reflection which is especially appealing to young adults. Available from [www.lutheranupress.org](http://www.lutheranupress.org).

The National Council of Churches in the USA has published a number of accessible on-line study guides on *Interreligious Relations and Collaboration*. These are geared toward church leaders.

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota offers some excellent *Resources for Congregations* dealing with interfaith and other contemporary realities.

Here are four Canadian books which offer a cross-cultural and interfaith perspective.

- Tasneem Jamal, *WHERE THE AIR IS SWEET* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2014; Ismaili Islam)
- Madeleine Thien, *DO NOT SAY WE HAVE NOTHING* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2016; Chinese)
- Camilla Gibb, *SWEETNESS IN THE BELLY* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2005; Islam)
- Shyam Selvadurai, *THE HUNGRY GHOSTS* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2013; Sri Lankan Buddhism)

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

For resources regarding interfaith dialogue—the process of engaging people of other faiths in focused, intentional conversation—see this *Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue* page of the Scarborough Missions website.

The ELCA has produced *Talking Points* for interfaith dialogue with Muslims & Jews, together with helpful sets of guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations and Lutheran-Muslim Relations. All are available on the same Resources page.

In 1995, the ELCIC offered a *Statement to the Jewish Community. A Statement to Muslims in Canada by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)* is coming to the 2017 National Convention together with this *Encountering People of Other Faiths: Interfaith Guidelines*.

**Motion Passed: Yes – 144, No - 0**