



RE-FORMING OUR CHURCH

A LETTER ON THE CCMS' RESTRUCTURING PLAN

by Bill Ney

Now that the summer of 2016 has passed, the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure (CCMS) wishes to update the church on the progress it has made thus far toward providing a Plan for the restructuring of Lutheran Church-Canada (LCC) as mandated by the three Districts and the Board of Directors of Synod.

We are now in *Stage 4 – “Church-wide Discussions”* a period lasting from September 1 to December 15, 2016. The CCMS has completed a proposed Plan for restructuring the Synod and has now requested the Circuit Counsellors to present this proposal to the church at Circuit Convocations to be scheduled during Stage 4. At the Circuit Convocations the proposed plan will be discussed in great detail and the CCMS, wherever possible, will have members present to explain details, make clarifications, and answer questions. They will also—perhaps most importantly—listen to the laypeople and church workers present and take notes to share with the rest of the CCMS. This will help the Commission to finalize the Plan that it will present to the Convention in October of 2017.

While the main tenets of the Plan are in place, discussion and input are needed from the church as the details of the Plan are being finalized. The notes taken at the Circuit Convocations will be sent to me and our Consultant, Rev. Les Stahlke, for compilation. All the information will then be discussed at the CCMS' November 28-29 meeting.

The following items for discussion will be on the agenda at Circuit convocations:

A. Foundational structural elements that will not change:

The CCMS proposes no changes for these elements of LCC structure.: Membership – Doctrine and Practise – Congregational Structure – Objectives and Services of the Synod – LCC as a Family of 26 separately incorporated entities in a strategic relationship with one another –Categories of strategic relationships – Composition of the LCC Board of Directors – LCC Board of Directors' authority between Conventions – Accountability of Commissions and Committees – Three Commissions (Commission on Adjudication; Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure; Commission on Theology and Church Relations) – Election of the Synodical Bishop (formerly “President”)

B. Recommendations for Change and Invitation to Respond (Items for discussion and guidance from the laypeople and church workers of LCC):

1. One Administrative Structure – The CCMS, based upon all of the responses from the National Survey and follow-up meetings across the country with Synodical and District leaders, as well as information received from Circuit meetings, recommends that the Synod move to one administrative structure, delivering the eight services mandated by the current *2014 Handbook* (Article III, Page 8) directly to the congregations without three separate District corporations. Since each of the three Districts is a legally incorporated entity in its own right, the Synod cannot simply “dissolve” the

Districts as some think. If the Synodical Convention accepts this recommendation, then the Districts would be in a position to wrap up their operations following a vote of the District in Convention to do so. For legal reasons, a District may need to remain in place “on paper”, (e.g., to administer a CEF operation in eastern Canada) but would no longer be involved in the delivery of services to congregations, pastors, and deacons in LCC.

The eight services would then be delivered by the Synod through “*Regional Pastors*” (the number yet to be determined) who would not have corporate responsibilities as the three District Presidents currently have. The *Regional Pastors* would then have full-time responsibility for providing ecclesiastical supervision, building community, and caring for members under the authority of the *Synodical Bishop*. *Circuit Counsellors* with enhanced responsibilities would assist on the local level with this work.

2. Convention Schedule – The CCMS recommends that LCC move to a 4-year Convention cycle beginning with the next Convention in 2021. This would result in considerable financial savings.

3. Delegates from Every Congregation – If the Districts are no longer in place, then the CCMS recommends that every congregation be represented at the national Synodical Convention every 4 years by two delegates. Each congregation would choose a *pastoral and lay delegate* (as is currently the practice for District Conventions). Thus Circuits would no longer elect national Convention delegates.

4. Pastoral Voting Delegates to Conventions – It will be the recommendation of the CCMS that Pastors not serving a congregation—but functioning as a vacancy pastor at a particular congregation—may be chosen by that congregation as its pastoral delegate to the Convention.

5. Dividing the President’s Responsibility – The CCMS plans to recommend to the Convention that the current responsibilities of the Synodical President be divided in order to create two new positions: a *Synodical Bishop* (elected by Convention) who will have responsibility for the delivery of ecclesiastical services, and a *Synodical Administrator* (hired by the Board of Directors of Synod) who will have responsibility for corporate services (i.e., financial services and LCC Infrastructure).

6. Accountability of the Synodical Bishop – The CCMS plans to recommend to the Convention that the Synodical Bishop would continue to be elected by the Convention, but once elected and between Conventions would be accountable to the LCC Board of Directors

which itself will continue to have the authority (with specific limitations) of the Convention that it already has under the *2014 Handbook*. The CCMS will also recommend that the Synodical Bishop not be a voting member of the Board of Directors.

7. Titles: Synodical Bishop, Synodical Administrator, Regional Pastor, Circuit Counsellor

Synodical Bishop: In the responses to the National Survey, there was a very clear divide between the opinion of the lay and of the clergy on the question of the utilization of the title: “Bishop”. The lay people by a significant majority did not favour the use of that term, indicating that they thought it conveyed a sense of hierarchical power as in the Roman Catholic tradition. The pastors, on the other hand, favoured the use of “Bishop” by a significant majority, seeing it rather as an ecclesiastical/pastoral title that more accurately reflected the work of the synodical and district presidents of “pastoral care”.

The CCMS struggled with this for a long time and sought the guidance of the two Seminary faculties. Both faculties affirmed the use of the term “Bishop” if the CCMS so chose, describing it as a legitimate biblical term to use. But they suggested that if used, there would need to be a clear definition of what it meant so as to prevent its misuse, and some process of education throughout the church to bring comfort to the laypeople who feared its misuse.

Therefore, the CCMS has taken a blended position. We are recommending the use of the term “*Bishop*” in place of the current Synodical President designation, but are recommending the term “*Regional Pastors*” (not Bishops) for those leaders who would work on the regional level with the Circuit Counsellors, congregations, and church workers residing in their geographical area of responsibility.

Regional Pastor: The CCMS believes that this term would more accurately reflect their leadership role in providing the services of Ecclesiastical Supervision, Community Building, and Caring for Members as required by the Objectives of Synod as laid out in the LCC Handbook. The nomenclature, “Regional Pastor”, clearly identifies the primary purpose of the individuals holding that position, namely, to be a pastor to the congregations, circuit counsellors, pastors and deacons living and serving in the geographical area of their responsibility.

Circuit Counsellor: The Circuit Counsellors would continue to use the same title, but would become even more significant within each region as spiritual leaders that deliver the first three services to the congregations, pastors, and deacons in each of the current 31 circuits.

C. Invitation for Input – For Recommendations Yet to be Made

1. Role of the Regional Pastor – While in the ecclesiastical sense, the Regional Pastor’s role would be very similar to that of the current District President, it is intended to be a support role to the members of LCC, not a hierarchical or authoritarian one. At the Circuit Convocations we will seek additional input on the role of the Regional Pastor who will work very closely and under the authority of the Synodical Bishop. One of the primary differences between the role of the Regional Pastor and the role of the current District President is the absence of administrative duties related to being the chief executive officer of a District corporation. The Regional Pastor would be accountable, not to a District Board of Directors, but to the Synodical Bishop.

2. Number and Boundaries of Regions – With the transition to one administrative structure, LCC would move from the designation of districts to regions. Where the former Districts were governing administrative structures of a separate legally incorporated entity, the new *Regions* will be a natural extension for delivering the eight services within the infrastructure of LCC under the leadership of the Synodical Bishop and Synodical Administrator. The CCMS is of the opinion that the recommendation about the number and boundaries of the Regions should flow from the experience, insights, and advice of the members who reside in those regions.

3. Role of the Circuit Counsellor – The CCMS views the role of the Circuit Counsellor as fundamental to the mission and ministry of LCC. Although not suggesting a name change, the CCMS would like to see the role of Circuit Counsellor become more prominent in providing the first three of the eight services, Ecclesiastical Supervision, Building Community, and Caring for Members. The CCMS envisions a more structured role for the Circuit Counsellors with specific responsibilities for working with the individual congregations, fellow pastors and with deacons. In the revised structure, Circuit Counsellors will be chosen more deliberately, perhaps in a new way. We are asking the Synod to consider reimbursing the congregations where the Circuit Counsellors serve for the specific number of days in which they are engaged in non-congregational pastoral work in the Circuit.

4. Number and Boundaries of Circuits – The CCMS is requesting input from across the country on what the laypeople and church workers would see as a workable, reasonable, number of Regions (and thus, the number of Regional Pastors also) that would enable the eight services to be delivered in the most personal, effective and efficient manner. We are asking for input on the size and boundaries of both the Regions and Circuits.

5. Revised Handbook Contents – The CCMS expects to significantly revise the current LCC Handbook. It will contain the Act of the Parliament of Canada incorporating LCC in June of 1959 and the Statutory Bylaws. The current contents of the Constitution and Synodical Bylaws would be distributed among the new (Statutory) Bylaws, new Memoranda of Understanding with our partners in mission in the Synodical family, and a new Governance Manual for the Board of Directors of Synod. It is important to note that the current “*Article II – Confession*” of the Constitution will be retained in its entirety exactly as it currently reads in the 2014 Handbook. There will be, as previously stated, no change to the doctrine and practise of Lutheran Church-Canada.

6. Ministry and Administrative Costs – All organizations incur administration costs related to their infrastructure. LCC is no different. This aspect of restructuring the Synod is being worked on currently but the CCMS is concurrently asking for concerns, ideas and thoughts as regards possible administrative cost savings from our members. In 28 years of LCC history there has never been a combined study of what the cost of administration is for the three Districts and the Synod combined.

Therefore, we are not only working on such a study of costs but also are seeking the input of the members of LCC as to what you think should be included in “administrative costs” and what the costs have been (in your view) during the period of the so-called “federation of districts” with four separate boards of directors and four separate staffs, and what percentage of the total budget is acceptable going forward for one administrative structure. We will be laying out in the meetings what the CCMS considers costs that need to be included in the cost of Mission and Ministry and also the potential cost of administration as we see it. But, we are very open to the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions of all laypeople and professional church workers in the area of administration.

In Conclusion

It is the hope of the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure that large numbers of our laypeople, pastors and deacons will provide feedback and input through the upcoming 31 Circuit Convocations so that we may finalize our work on the Restructuring Plan and have a revised Handbook prepared well in advance for presentation to the 2017 Synodical Convention. Thank you in advance for your assistance!

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