



Discussions on restructuring at the Synod's 11th Convention in October at Kitchener, Ontario will likely be intense. That's all right. The issue is important. It deserves a strong dose of talking and listening. I hope you are praying that the Lord guides the delegates, as I am doing, nearly every day.

I believe that Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC) urgently needs to simplify its structure. The structure we took with us into our life as a self-governing church in 1988 was a close copy of what we knew in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. That is a church body many, many times our size. There were likely compelling reasons to do it, but early on in our brief history, people began to sense it wasn't working as well as we needed it to.

Attempts to change the structure in a deep way were sometimes turned back. Other times those attempts were pared down and became just a matter of “adjusting” a few components here and there. As a result, the feeling did not let up that we could shape the structural side of our life better than it is now. Overtures to successive conventions expressing this were sometimes “killed” by committees before they ever got to the floor. Resolutions that were successfully adopted in recent years expressed the same recurring sentiment.

I'd like to begin by setting some things straight. Members of the Synod's Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure (CCMS) have worked long and hard on proposals for this fall. I've been troubled at times by the criticism that they are “rushing” this process

through, “pushing too fast.” In fact, they are simply trying to carry out the resolutions passed—by overwhelming margins—at all three LCC District conventions in 2015. Those resolutions asked that exactly this be done, that proposals be brought to our 2017 Synod Convention. It is very rare that all Districts would pass resolutions on the same subject at the same time, and would all do so nearly unanimously. We ought to be grateful to the CCMS for tackling this demanding assignment, even if some of their details aren't your first choice.

It has also grieved me to be told on occasion that grassroots delegates at 2015 District conventions only voted for restructuring because they were angry about the CEF crisis in western Canada. Grassroots people had good reason to be upset at that time, but nobody has the right to claim that their thinking was somehow faulty or their decisions illegitimate because of their pain. Nor do the restructuring proposals prove that the church has no respect for Districts and the work they have faithfully done since the “Canada District” (a predecessor of our East District) was organized in 1879. Beyond all that, it is simply not true that the Synod's leaders believe that structure is our deepest concern or that restructuring will, in and of itself, fix all the challenges we face.

The most basic change of the current restructuring proposals is that we should henceforth streamline and operate with one administrative structure. At the present time, our three Districts—in addition to LCC itself—are corporate entities. I recently did some statistical digging and learned that our entire church in

Canada is only slightly larger than the Missouri Synod's Iowa District West. And yet, small as we are, we carry the burden of four separate corporate structures. Each has to have its own CEO, its own Board of Directors, its own schedule of conventions, its own financial and budget structure, its own Handbook and bylaws, its own set of committees or departments to populate, its own policy and procedures manuals, and on it goes. Can anyone doubt that precious time and effort is being expended to maintain these four corporations beyond what would be needed if we reduced them to one?

Nor is it just a matter of money and meeting time. The Committee on Convention Nominations, preparing for this fall's Convention, has done thorough work under the chairmanship of Reg Tiegs. They will have a respectable slate of candidates to present to the delegates. That didn't happen easily. Reg had to amend the "excel table" well over one hundred times as homework was done to identify candidates, contact them, wait for responses, and go back to the drawing board if people declined. It has taken concentrated effort to assemble a full slate of servants to do the work of just our one Synodical "corporation." Can anyone doubt that we struggle at times to identify the necessary human resources to fill the slate for not just one but four corporate structures?

This does not mean that the Synod needs no presence out in various parts of our far-flung country. The proposed system of "regional pastors" can focus on providing spiritual supervision and ministry support without each of them having to carry the demands of a separate corporate structure in his area. This is in no way to minimize the hard work done over the years by the district presidents of our church. But we don't need separate corporations to set them free to exercise the pastoral gifts the Lord has given them.

Among other proposals is that we should shift to one large convention every four years, at which every

parish is represented. In our current three-year cycle, we have either a District or a Synod convention in two out of every three years. To me it would be liberating if we had more non-convention years! We could put together "non-legislative" gatherings to spend more time studying the Scripture, grappling with how to reach people in our rapidly secularizing country, and in nurturing each other across the many miles that separate us.

I respect the concerns expressed in recent months that proposed bylaw-type documents need to be strong and clear in expressing things that must not change in the Synod; that is, our confession of Christ, His inerrant

Word, our subscription to the Lutheran confessional writings, and the clear objectives for which the Synod was created to begin with. These concerns are being taken to heart. Homework is being done this summer as I write these lines to see that they receive the proper attention.

The final form of all the restructuring proposals has not yet appeared. That will happen with the prescribed lead-time before the Convention outlined in our current LCC Handbook for the kind of constitutional changes we have been considering. I am hopeful that the final form will express a way forward for us that is Biblically rooted, doctrinally orthodox, legally sound, and more efficient in using the financial and people resources with

which the Lord Christ has blessed us.

I'll say it again: I support restructuring. It is not because I expect structures, constitutions, or bylaws to ever accomplish what only God can do by His Word and Holy Spirit. But I am persuaded that we are dragging along far more corporate machinery than we need to carry Christ and His unchanging Gospel to a world around us that is dying to know Him.

Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee is President of Lutheran Church—Canada.

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