

## President's Report

### Part II

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

On page E 1-8 of the *Convention Workbook* you will find printed Part I of the Report of the President to the members of Lutheran Church–Canada. The report, as the handbook requires, centres on the state of the Synod. It also details the various actions and activities carried out by the president in fulfillment of the responsibilities laid upon him. Any questions you may have relating to this report will be welcomed at the “Presidents Forum” held this afternoon.

At the conclusion of that written report was also a listing of the resolutions passed at the 1999 convention together with the office, board or commission to which they were assigned and the action taken. It is hoped that this listing together with the various board and commission reports printed in the *Convention Workbook* will also be helpful as you have occasion to meet with some of these boards and commissions during the afternoon forums.

Part I therefore centred on the work of our Synod and the blessings experienced these past three years by God's grace. Part II of this report is more in the nature of an address intended to help set the convention in the context of our theme, a theme that incidently will be also used by the districts during this triennium. It will also outline a vision for a church that **with great boldness** proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ that **all may know His name!**

The context of the theme verse from the Acts of the Apostles is most interesting. Peter and John had been arrested for sharing the message of Jesus and proclaiming in Him the resurrection of the dead. Arrested and thrown into prison for the night, they appeared before the Sanhedrin the next morning. This court, the very group that had condemned Jesus, were more cautious than they had been at his trial. There was no doubt in their minds that these men had to be stopped, but the crowds who had heard their message and witnessed the miraculous signs -- what about them? The decision finally made was to release them with a severe reprimand and warning “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

Released, Peter and John gathered with the believers in Jerusalem. They told them everything that had happened to them and then together they prayed. Remembering that God's people have always had to face a hostile and persecuting world from the time of David to the present moment, they prayed that God would enable them, in the midst of all of it, to speak His Word **with great boldness**.

Someone said to me, “The problem with your church is that it is stuck in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. My response was, “It's worse than that. We've regressed. We are now back in the first century.” The days of an alliance between Christianity and western culture initiated by Emperor Constantine are all but over. We now live in a post-Christian era, one not unlike that faced by those first century believers in the book of Acts. In saying this, I'm not telling you something new. Dr. Lehmen, our first synodical president spoke about it almost 10 years ago at a synodical convention. But I wonder if we have really heard that message or have adjusted to this not so

new reality?

Listen to how Dr. Lehman in his address to the third delegate convention of Lutheran Church–Canada put it.

Our society is not on friendly terms with the Christian faith. Notwithstanding the fact that recent surveys suggest that 70% of Canadians still believe in God and nearly 60% attend church at least occasionally, the voices that shape our values: the media, the educational system, political systems, literature and the arts are overwhelmingly unchristian and frequently anti-Christian. We need to face the fact that the church and the world are no longer on mutually friendly terms. We can complain about that – and as citizens we are entitled to do that. But as a church, we should not be so surprised. We're back to where the church was in the first few centuries. And is that such a bad place to be? Because that means we are also back to the days when 12 men were challenged to take on the world with nothing but the power of the Gospel. And how they and their children changed that world! It means that we are back again to depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, instead of the strength of our numbers, back to sacrifice – figuratively and perhaps literally.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, we are back to praying the prayer of those earlier believers, “Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word **with great boldness.**”

God heard the prayer of those first century believers. Luke reports that the place in which they prayed began to shake and all who were present were filled with the Holy Spirit and they “spoke the word of God boldly.”

Now I don't know if this convention hall is going to shake or for that matter if any cloves of fire may appear on the heads of some of our delegates, but I do know that God will answer the prayer of His people. He will answer your prayer and mine. That's His promise, a promise He gives in His Word, a promise that He will answer as He enables us through Word and Sacrament. So join me in this 1<sup>st</sup> century prayer. Let's make it the daily prayer of this convention. Let's take it with us when we leave and pray it regularly in our congregations and homes. Pray it with me now: “Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word **with great boldness.**”

So what is a people, a congregation, a church like, that speaks the word of the Lord **with great boldness?**

It is first of all a church that knows that Word and finds its life in that Word. It will therefore be a **strong biblical and confessional church.** It's a church that recognizes that what

---

<sup>1</sup>Lehman, Edwin, “Report of the President - Part Two,” Lutheran Church–Canada Convention Proceedings, 1993

gives it life and vitality is not of human origin, but comes to us from above. Indeed it has come. Yes, He has come. He came, in God's appointed time, born of the Virgin Mary to suffer under Pontius Pilate, to be crucified, to die and to be buried. But that was not the end of His story.

On the third day, He rose from death to life; He rose to declare to the world, Forgiveness for all! New life for all! "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them."

Here is the Good News of God. Here is the power of God, the power unto salvation. Here is the means, God's Word and the Sacraments, the means by which the Spirit grows His church and every individual in that church. Through it He calls, gathers and enlightens. Through it He gives life and vitality to the church.

A church that proclaims God's word **with great boldness** will be a church that plants itself firmly in that Word. Following the example of the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, it's people gather regularly to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest that Word; they gather regularly around Word and Sacrament because they know it to be the water of life and the food for eternity. Without it they know they will surely die!

So "Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." Enable your servants to be a strong biblical and confessional church.

A church that speaks the Word of the Lord **with great boldness** will also be a **strong missionary church**. It is one in heart with those ancient believers of King David's day in desiring that **all** the peoples of the earth **may know His name** and fear Him. (II Chronicles 6:35) It's a church that recognizes that all humanity is by nature estranged from God. Separated from Him they are dead in their trespasses and sins. Being therefore dead to God, they follow the ways of this world and the ruler of this age; chained as they gratify the cravings of their own sinful nature.

There is only one Word that can break that chain. There is only one message that can generate a new beginning, a new birth. There is only one Name by which the peoples of the world can be saved. That name is the name of Jesus. That Word, that message is the Good News of His grace and love, that God so loved the world that He "gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

A church that prays for boldness is a church that understands the exclusive claim of the Gospel and the mission that has been given to it. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ and we are called to proclaim Him. We are called to be in mission to one another, to our communities, to our country and to all the nations of the world. Lutheran Church-Canada in its inception understood this calling. We wrote in our constitution that one of the reasons for forming this church body was the conviction that such an organization would facilitate our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our country and throughout the world.

That's what a strong missionary church seeks to do. It sends out evangelists and

missionaries to share the word with those who have not heard or not yet come to believe. Congregations equip their people so that they are prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks concerning the hope which they have. They strive to have all their programs and organizations relate to the mission of the church and they have a vision for mission that reaches beyond their community to the whole world. Lord, make us that kind of church.

Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Lord, enable us to be a strong missionary church.

Enable us to be a **strong caring church**. A church that prays for boldness to proclaim the Good News is a church that has a heart for people. “Look at how they love one another” was the observation made of those first century believers. And love one another they did. It was a love that extended beyond their own spiritual community to those outside, even to those who were their enemies. Christ’s love constrained them and it constrains us. A people concerned about the deepest need of humanity doesn’t shy away from caring for the whole person. Indeed that care often becomes the setting which provides the opportunity to share the Good News that touches the deepest need.

Our congregations can become “havens of hope” for those who are assailed by life’s trials and some of our congregations are just that, “havens of hope” providing a strong Christian witness by the care they provide for those in need. It takes boldness to do that, great boldness to attempt to meet the physical and emotional needs of the multitudes and yet this is the example our Lord sets when he fed the hungry, healed the sick, shared His presence with the broken and outcast, the tax collectors and sinners. Indeed Jesus suffered great opposition when He extended the Father’s love and forgiveness to the outcasts of society, but He did it because the Father’s Word and the Father’s Kingdom extend to all who are in need.

Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word **with great boldness**. Lord, enable us to be a strong biblical and confessional Church, a strong missionary church, a strong caring church.

We do need to pray this prayer? Only 35% of those identified as baptized members of Lutheran Church–Canada congregations actually attended worship on a given Sunday morning and slightly less than 60% of those identified as communicant members received the holy supper during the past year. There are members in God’s family who are starving. Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

We do need to pray this prayer? Membership in the congregations of our Synod has remained static in spite of the fact that the population of this country continues to grow. In the past year over one half of our congregations did not baptize or confirm a single adult. Only 12 congregations received 10 or more new members through baptism. Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

We do need to pray this prayer? People speak of wanting anonymity, but they desire community; they speak of individualism, but crave relationship. What better place to find it than

in that community that proclaims that the relationship between the Creator and His creation has been restored in Jesus Christ, a restoration that impacts every relationship including the one that we have with our neighbour.

Lord, enable your servants to speak your Word **with great boldness**. Give to your people a love for your Word, a zeal to reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a heart that responds to that Word with love and compassion for all people. Lord, enable your servants to speak your Word **with great boldness**.

May such a prayer be on our lips as we now take up the work of this sixth convention of Lutheran Church–Canada. May He so guide our hearts and our minds that all we do may be for the advancement of the Kingdom of God and so bring glory to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, enable your servants to speak your Word **with great boldness!**