

**FACTORS THAT LED TO A CALL FOR A MAJOR OVERHAUL OF THE LCC STRUCTURE  
AND  
HOW THE NEW STRUCTURE IS DESIGNED TO MAKE THINGS BETTER**

**By Rev. William Ney – Pastor Emeritus, Lutheran Church-Canada**

**INTRODUCTION**

For almost two years the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure has been diligently working on producing an entirely new structure under which Lutheran Church–Canada would operate in the future. This has been a totally “ground up”, not a “top down” design process. The opinions and ideas and input of lay people, pastors, and deacons from across Canada have been or will be sought in five primary ways and have shaped the Bylaws the CCMS and the LCC Board of Directors have prepared for consideration at the 2017 Fall Convention:

- a. First through a National Survey, and in the presentation of results and discussions that followed,
- b. Second, through personal meetings and contacts in 26 of our 33 Circuits across the country,
- c. Third, through online and personal feedback on “The 37 Decisions” which form the pillars of the new structure to be proposed at the 2017 Synodical Convention,
- d. Fourth, through seven Regional meetings with members of LCC which will take place in April/May/June of 2017 at which the proposed new structure as seen in its new Bylaws will be shared.
- e. Fifth, through electronic means at two online presentations following the Regional meetings.

This changing of the operational structure of Lutheran Church–Canada was contemplated and worked on even prior to the activation of Lutheran Church–Canada in 1988. At that time, however, there was great concern about maintaining as close ties as possible with our parent church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and even though the Handbook of the LCMS was written and developed over many years for a 2.5+ million-member church body, in order for Lutheran Church–Canada to actually become operational the Canadian delegates to the 1987 Convention of the LCMS agreed in writing to adopt the Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as its own operational Handbook.

Prior to the activation of LCC, our Lutheran congregations were divided into three Missouri Synod Districts in Canada, the Ontario District, the Manitoba-Saskatchewan District, and the Alberta-British Columbia District. These Districts historically never related closely to one another but rather to the St. Louis, Missouri based Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod of which they were three Districts.

After the activation of Lutheran Church-Canada beginning in 1989, the Districts renamed themselves, The East District (1993), The Central District (1990), and the Alberta-British Columbia District (1988), and continued to operate separately as three separately constituted and registered organizations.

The only connection of Lutheran congregations and other institutions faithful to the Lutheran Confessions, to Lutheran Church-Canada, now based in Winnipeg, was an ecclesiastical one, not an operational or corporate one.

The original decision to utilize the Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri produced the unfortunate result that the Districts and LCC were further separated from each other in matters of corporate and sometimes even ecclesiastical operation and decision-making, and often pursued separate strategies with little or no consultation.

Thus, LCC's history is replete with examples too numerous to mention here of Districts taking actions that impacted LCC and impacted other Districts, sometimes in a positive way but sometimes in a negative way.

Over many years, the Central District pleaded for a change in structure, but their pleas were largely ignored or rebuffed, (especially at the Niagara Falls Convention of LCC), which led to the moving and down-sizing of the District Office to Winnipeg. There was no significant help coming their way from the other Districts or from Lutheran Church—Canada. They were and still are a stand-alone corporation and therefore were indeed left to stand alone. It seems that the voluntary ecclesiastical relationship (and perhaps even James 2:15-16) has been over-shadowed by the corporate independence of the Districts and Lutheran Church—Canada. That was all directly attributable to the current structural defects. The LCC Board of Directors wanted to help but could not divert funding/resources to help, since the Districts hold the purse-strings, and the other two Districts determined that they would not give any more or it would jeopardize their own budgets and programs. It was and always has been, “everyone for themselves” in each of the Districts and clearly shows the disconnect between the Districts and between the Districts and LCC. Our current uncoordinated and individual approach to the mission and ministry of Lutheran Church—Canada and the Districts is not the best approach for such a small church body. Together, with unified purpose and stewardship of available resources, we will be better positioned to respond to the needs of the Church and the world we serve if the new proposed structure is approved.

Rev. Paul Schallhorn, the current Secretary of LCC has given a good and accurate picture of our current structural situation. He said: *“If we don't listen and work together, the ship is going to sink because of the structural holes on the inside, regardless of how “good” it may look to those on the outside. A fresh coat of paint won't do. We need to get back to pooling our resources together and working together on a common vision (sic) [for mission and ministry].”* Our current uncoordinated patchwork way of doing mission and ministry separately simply cannot continue if we are, as a small church body, to be about our Father's work in this spiritually sick and needy world.

The bottom line is that the Lutheran Church—Canada President and Board of Directors were forced to act in a vacuum structurally without the ability to make ministry decisions based on income according to need, but could only make decisions according to the availability of funding from the Districts for the Synodical work of supporting the educational institutions (which also were not bound by Lutheran Church—Canada but were in a voluntary ecclesiastical relationship with the Lutheran Church-Canada), and the domestic and foreign mission work that presented itself to LCC during the first 26 years of its operations. Because of a lack of corporate connections to the Districts, the Synodical Board of Directors could not influence the decisions or conduct of any District for corporate actions and in some cases, even ecclesiastical actions.

This resulted in the classical situation of the “tail wagging the dog.” For example, while most people, lay, pastors and deacons all believed that Lutheran Church-Canada “owned and operated” Concordia University of Edmonton, Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, and Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, the reality came home to all when Concordia University of Edmonton severed its ties altogether with Lutheran Church–Canada by fiat.

There was no discussion of this separation on a formal level between the Board of Directors of LCC and the Board of Regents of the University. The Board of Regents simply made a unilateral decision to no longer be a part of the voluntary ecclesiastical relationship it had enjoyed since 1922 with LCC.

Sadly, the CUE Board of Regents were able to do that without any compensation being offered or given to our Church for the land and the buildings worth many millions of dollars on which and in which they operated, and most of which, members of the LCC had paid for over the history of that educational institution.

It was a problem in the original organization of our Church over the years that made this potential tragedy a reality. There was nothing by way of agreement or in the original structure of our Church that could have prevented such a move. There was no Memorandum of Understanding between Lutheran Church-Canada and the University to provide LCC an interest in the land and property and so Concordia University of Edmonton was free to make a decision to walk away from the decades of ecclesiastical relationship and support that Lutheran Church–Canada and our Church generally had provided, without discussion or compensation. That action could occur because the level of trust that almost everyone put into the “ecclesiastical” relationship between LCC and CUE without any agreements to protect the contributions of our Church.

It also became evident that the Alberta-British Columbia District Church Extension Fund was in trouble.

In fact, a number of unfortunate circumstances led to the ABC District applying for CCAA protection under the Courts in order to prevent further depositor losses. This resulted in the forced selling off of all District holdings, even including the District Office in Edmonton. It also meant the loss of all District workers at the District Office except three. And it resulted in court action requiring congregations with loans from the CEF to either find new financing and pay off their debt to the Church Extension Fund in full, or have their building foreclosed upon and sold.

I would like to note that, in my personal view, it was a series of decisions made over many years regarding the building of the complex at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church and School in Calgary that contributed in a major way to the collapse of the CEF which provided the bulk of the funding for that project. Those decisions were made by good, dedicated Christian people, fellow members of the body of Christ and of congregations of the ABC District, all of whom were committed to spreading the Word of God, with no intent whatsoever to have the project fail.

Those decisions were also made without input or direction or correction from the church as whole through Lutheran Church–Canada’s structure. Why? Because the structure did not allow Lutheran Church–Canada to intervene, or to effectively offer constructive criticism or warnings of potential risk in the on-going investment of significant CEF funds in the Prince of Peace project.

Why? Because many of the provisions in the Synodical Bylaws simply reflect an expectation and, without an acceptance of that expectation by the entities named in the statement, nothing can be done to prevent an entity from acting differently from that expectation should they decide to act differently.

Another example of the weakness of our current structure: Synodical Bylaw 2.217, 2014 Handbook, page 28, “**Other Extension Funds and Foundations**” states: “*Since Lutheran Church–Canada Financial Ministries serves all the Synod, no new Foundations or Church Extension Funds shall be established by districts, colleges, seminaries, or agencies without prior approval of the Board of Directions of Lutheran Church–Canada.*” This Bylaw is simply unenforceable if one or more of the entities listed should decide to form a new CEF or Foundation.

The above quoted Bylaw is an unenforceable ecclesiastical agreement, more of a “gentleman’s agreement”, because the entities that are listed are all separately incorporated organizations which cannot be controlled by Lutheran Church–Canada or any other outside entity or corporation.

No doubt the CEF crisis in the Alberta-British Columbia District was a major catalyst, but certainly not the cause, in moving the restructuring of Lutheran Church–Canada forward. Across the country there had been talk about major restructuring of Lutheran Church–Canada during the entire history of LCC but it was most likely the situation of the failure of the ABC District Church Extension Fund that moved all three Districts in their 2015 District Conventions to petition the CCMS to provide a comprehensive plan for the restructuring of Lutheran Church–Canada for the 2017 Synodical Convention.

The following points describe some of the structural deficiencies embedded in the current Handbook of Lutheran Church–Canada that have caused significant problems for Lutheran Church–Canada since its operational beginning in 1988:

1. From the inception of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, it was always the intention that the clergy and lay people work together in the decision-making processes of the church in mission and ministry. Another strong pillar of the Missouri Synod structure was the fundamental right of the congregations to be the ultimate authority in the Synod, not the Districts and not the Synod in Convention. Article IV, of the current 2014 Constitution of LCC, modelled after the Missouri Synod’s Handbook, says: “*A Convention shall be the paramount decision-making authority of Lutheran Church–Canada, subject to the provisions set out in the Statutory Bylaws, the Constitution and the Synodical Bylaws.*” But the representation at a Convention is by circuit delegates elected by the congregations. This is also made even clearer in Article VII of the Constitution, again modelled on the Constitution of the Missouri Synod, that states: “*Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned.*”

As a result, the unique arrangement was put into place, after the Altenburg Debates, to give **congregations alone** the right to vote in Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Conventions. (You can read about this in detail in the book *Zion on The Mississippi* from Concordia Publishing House.) Thus, every congregation was given two votes to cast in Convention, one to be cast by its called pastor and one to be cast by a lay person chosen from its midst.

When the Missouri Synod was still small, all congregations were represented in this way, but as the Synod grew, and as it formed more and more Districts, the voting arrangement, though still maintaining a balance between the clergy and laity, moved to Circuit representation.

This is the system in use today in Lutheran Church–Canada for Synodical Conventions. This system places the decision-making and thus control in the hands of fewer people than if every congregation were represented and it waters down the authority of the local congregation in Synodical matters, both nationally and internationally.

The Districts, however, do have every congregation represented in District Conventions, but with the unforeseen result that Districts tend to “do their own thing” without regard to the mission and ministry needs of the church at large, including Lutheran Church–Canada and other Districts, nationally and internationally. Each District has become a kingdom unto itself and has turned its focus inward and not outward, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and distrust, of east versus west and west versus east.

This should not be a surprise to anyone in Canada, since we have simply followed the lead of successive National governments since 1867 which have created inter-Provincial strife and severe differences and distrust across the nation as the Parliament in Ottawa and the various Provincial Legislatures are almost always in tension and disagreement. This reality has created undeniable discord and mistrust between east and west in our country. The church, through its current structure, has unwittingly set up the same scenario that results in mistrust between the east and west.

Because of our current structure this has been and often still is the case in Lutheran Church–Canada. Having served both in the East District and the Alberta-British Columbia District, I can testify to the misunderstandings and mistrust of fellow Lutheran Church–Canada Lutherans between the east and the west during all of my 44 years in the pastoral office. Our current structure has clearly fostered such mistrust and misunderstanding. The proposed new structure will help to eliminate most of this old mistrust and enable all work across Canada to be coordinated and communicated and supported by all Canadians who are members of LCC, regardless of where they live.

The new proposed structure will also prevent just a few people from making decisions that will impact very many people.

Many people will be involved in the decision-making on all levels for the mission and ministry in Lutheran Church–Canada through Regional Mission and Ministry Councils, the President’s Ministry Council and Circuits, all of whom will have direct input into the ways in which all mission and ministry will be done by LCC together across Canada and beyond our borders.

Laypeople, pastors, and deacons from Vancouver Island to Prince Edward Island will have the ability to guide and direct all mission and ministry undertaken in our country and in foreign countries also by having input to the Board of Directors who will make financial allocations

according to mission and ministry needs both in Canada and abroad as communicated by the members of Lutheran Church–Canada to them.

2. Our current structure has also enabled elections both on the District and National level to become popularity contests in many cases. In many (if not most) cases individuals are not vetted in a consistent and in-depth manner for election to specific Boards or Committees and often are elected again and again because they are well known or have “connections”, but may occasionally be ill-suited for the position to which they are elected.

One tends to also find the exact same people being chosen as delegates to Conventions, to the degree, that many people in LCC joke that they know before the delegates are chosen (for the most part) who will be present as delegates at Conventions of the District or Lutheran Church-Canada. This is extremely unhealthy in my view.

In our Canada-wide meetings, the CCMS sometimes heard the terms like, “cronyism” and “control” used to describe the way in which current District Boards of Directors operate. This becomes quite apparent when we look at the relative few numbers of youth, young adults, especially Millennials, who are engaged and active in their congregations and in District and National operations. In fact, in our Synodical Bylaws, although youth representatives are given opportunity to attend and even speak at Conventions, we restrict them by writing in our Bylaws, that “They may speak at the request of a floor committee and by express permission of the chair.” I have spoken with numerous youth representatives at Lutheran Church–Canada Conventions over the years who were utterly aghast and offended at not having the opportunity to address issues on the Convention floor like advisory delegates, but were restricted by only being able to speak at the request of a Floor Committee and then, only with the express permission of the Chairman. They have simply been treated as “visitors” with no real right to speak.

I have noted that Millennials in particular, (those between 18 and 36 years of age) are not sought to fill positions of leadership in both National and District levels, to say nothing of congregations. They have been neglected. Without meaningful input and inclusion of some of these younger members, the church is doomed to simply maintain the status quo in the ways in which it engages in mission work and ministry in our cities, in the countryside, and around the world. A great untapped reservoir of excitement and skill and leadership lies dormant in our church because we have neglected to “recruit” such young people to serve in leadership positions in a mentorship relationship along-side the patriarchs and matriarchs of our congregations, District, and Synod. Their perception is often that only “old people” get to serve in **meaningful ways** in their congregation, and in the Districts or Lutheran Church-Canada.

The proposed new structure puts measures into place that will help prevent this from happening. Prevention will occur by virtue of the vetting processes that are being built into the new Bylaws for all elected and appointed offices and service on all levels. From Regional Mission and Ministry Councils to the Board of Directors of Lutheran Church–Canada, from Regional

Pastors and Circuit Counsellors, to Synodical President and Vice-President, all candidates will go through a reasonable but comprehensive process of vetting in order to make sure that people with the necessary skills and abilities are placed into nomination for election to positions of service and oversight.

Also, with more control placed in the hands of the local congregations and Regional Mission and Ministry Councils, there will naturally arise a new interest among the Millennials and other younger people to become engaged in the church as they see opportunities to provide meaningful service and leadership and to identify new opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with their neighbours and friends and others around the world and, quite simply, to be acknowledged and enabled to contribute in a meaningful way to the work of Lutheran Church–Canada.

3. In any organization, clear lines of expectations and accountability are critical to the successful operation of that organization. In the current Handbook (2014) there is much information written on authority and expectations but very little on accountability. And sometimes the two are confused and even set in opposition to each other. This is particularly true in terms of the relationship between Lutheran Church–Canada and the Districts.

Because of the reality of four separate corporate entities (three Districts and Lutheran Church–Canada), it may appear in the current Constitution and Bylaws that Lutheran Church–Canada has influence over the Districts (most of which consists only of expectations which rely on voluntary compliance) and that there is a method to establish accountability of the Districts to Lutheran Church–Canada in such matters as finances, ministry support, mission direction, and parish services. The situation is such that the Districts do not request permission or formal or input from Lutheran Church–Canada in their operations in those areas and others when making ministry or financial decisions.

For clarification, one additional example of the confusion of authority and accountability is the authority and accountability of the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure. On the one hand the Synodical Bylaws give the authority to the Board of Directors of LCC to appoint the CCMS (Synodical Bylaw 2.101) but on the other hand the accountability of the CCMS is to Lutheran Church–Canada directly in Convention (2.103 d). Thus, there was much confusion recently as the CCMS began the task of restructuring the Synod. This becomes even more confusing when Statutory Bylaw 12.02 is taken into consideration which states that the Board of Directors has “all the powers of the Convention” between Conventions, except that these powers are “subject to any restrictions which the Convention may from time to time make”.

While the CCMS felt a moral obligation to keep the Board of Directors involved in and well informed of its work and its decisions, it did not feel obligated to follow the suggestions of the Board of Directors in every case because in the end the CCMS is accountable to the Convention and only the Convention can change or alter its findings or decisions. (Synodical Bylaw 2.103 d). The Board of Directors does not have that ability according to the Bylaws, only the Convention has that authority.

This situation creates confusion and uncertainty because of the weak and confusing structure whereby the Board of Directors appoints the Commission but has no authority over the decisions and directions that the CCMS may take. This situation is addressed in the new proposed structure by having the Commission on Constitutional Matters and Structure (Commission on Governance and Structure) elected by the Convention and not appointed by the Board of Directors. One can find other examples of such conflicts within the Bylaws of Synod. Such problems with the current structure are so numerous and so pervasive that a simple “tweaking” of the Handbook could not offer a reasonable repair and the CCMS early on determined, on the advice of the Districts (2015 Convention action), that a total restructuring was necessary.

4. As the CCMS led Circuit Meetings across Lutheran Church–Canada, from Ottawa in the East to Vancouver Island in the West, we were surprised to discover the common level of dissatisfaction among the lay people and many of the pastors and deacons with the current structure of Districts and Lutheran Church–Canada. What we encountered was stated repeatedly by participants in those meetings, namely, that they felt a great disconnect between the District and themselves, and the Synod and themselves.

Despite the best efforts of District and Synodical staff and boards to get the message of District and Synod work out to the members in their congregations and parishes (groups of two or more congregations working together with one or more pastors), the members had little idea of what was going on in their District and Synod, and why the decisions were being made to expend their mission offerings in the ways that the mission money was being spent.

It is important to understand that, as I have stated in other documents I have produced, there were only a very few personal attacks made on anyone serving on any board or committee or against a District President or other workers in a District Office.

The vast majority of comments were always directed at the failure of the structure to provide for the perceived needs of the congregations, pastors, and deacons. The exact same sentiments were repeated over and over again in every part of the country and in every District. Most often the frustration of the people was heard in the words: “Something is broken. This structure isn’t working. We feel no connection to our District or Synod....it needs to be fixed!”

The most common concern across the country was with the perceived inability of the District Presidents to provide what the congregations, pastors, and deacons most desire. This sentiment was also strongly seen in the responses in the National Survey. The Circuit meetings and subsequent other meetings have substantiated and restated these concerns.

What was it that the members of Synod wanted most and were most vocal about? It was simply that they would be able to experience a close, personal, pastoral relationship with the District President and other District workers. Examples of District Presidents being perceived as aloof

and uncaring were shared when situations were vividly described about when a church worker had been hospitalized or had been undergoing psychiatric care or suffered the death of a loved one and received no direct, personal, pastoral help and support from his/her District President. Once again, no one blamed the District President being referred to. All made excuses for him. "He is just too busy to be able to respond to all of these situations," they said. "He is so busy with the work of 'running the District' as the Chief Executive Officer of the District that it is understandable why he was unable to meet our need...." When asked if they had spoken with the District President about this, they said: "No, we didn't want to bother him...."

My personal observations after serving ten years in the ABC District Office as the Executive Assistant to the President for Parish Services was exactly the same as the laypeople and pastors and deacons were sharing with us in these meetings.

An example: Early into the presidency of President Harold Ruf, he made the decision that he and the other Executives would visit every pastor and his wife in the ABC District. As I recall, it took a solid month or more of personal visits in every Circuit and, according to those involved, was the best thing that was ever to come out of our District Office. Years later, pastors and their wives would stop us and thank us for doing this. They did not have the words to describe how much our visits meant to them and how helpful they were. But soon after the visits were made, reality set in and never again did we do this. Why not, since it was so meaningful and successful in the eyes of all with whom we had spent time? It was because the "work" of the District operations... the work of the Corporation had to go on.

Whether it was the District President, the Missions Executive, the Parish Services Executive, or the District Services Executive, we all had our areas of work to do in our appointed areas of responsibility. For me it was Parish Services, which covered parish education, Lutheran Schools, Sunday schools, evangelism, stewardship, youth, family ministry, and seniors' ministry. Providing ideas and direction and programs in these areas did not allow me the time to just simply visit church workers for the purpose of visiting church workers and encouraging them in their work.

It was also my observation that the President was far more confined to his administrative responsibilities than was I or any of the other District Executives. It is the structure of our Church, including the presence of independent Districts, that has prevented our Presidents from being pastors to the pastors, deacons and congregations in their District in a way that the churches and church workers could say, "President X, he's someone I can go to and who will be able to spend time with me in my time of trouble and turmoil in ministry or in my life."

Because of the President's corporate image and responsibilities, this close, personal relationship with the church workers and congregations is only possible in a limited way. All of our District Presidents whom I have personally known since the inception of Lutheran Church-Canada have been tremendously talented, and dedicated servants of Christ and His church, and have all wanted this special relationship with the members of their District also, but have been frustrated for the most part by the corporate requirements of their time and energy. Some may even now think that they actually have that relationship, but the people of LCC across Canada

have said otherwise. Obviously, in many cases our Presidents do have a very close, personal, and pastoral relationship with some members of Lutheran Church–Canada in their District, but those numbers are rather limited.

The new structure is designed to enable the spiritual overseers of our church to have the ability and time to be able to spend time with and encourage *all* members of Lutheran Church–Canada (all congregations, pastors, and deacons) in their particular Region. We have named them Regional Pastors and eliminated the corporate responsibilities with which the District Presidents have been weighed down since the beginning. Also, we are suggesting the addition of Regional Mission and Ministry Councils made up of pastors, deacons, and laypeople from every Circuit, that will assist the Regional Pastor in countless ways to identify ministry needs and mission opportunities and which he will assist them personally to pursue and pursue himself. A large part of his responsibilities will be to implement yearly (minimum) visits with all church workers and congregations in his region for pastoral purposes in order to offer support and counsel especially for church workers in their service to God and the church. Without corporate responsibilities, the Regional Pastor will be freed up as never before to be able to provide the close, personal and pastoral support that the members of LCC are requesting.

5. Last, but certainly not least, especially in the eyes of our laypeople, is the “cost of doing business.” In a shrinking church body (since 1999) which numbers approximately 10% of the size of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, many people expressed to the CCMS their belief that the cost of doing business under our current structure is way too high and lacked the “bang for the buck” that one would want. Over and over again, we heard the concern that the cost of paying for three District Offices with many full-time employees, clergy and lay, was simply not needed in order for this small church body to do its mission and ministry work effectively. Many did not realize at the time that neither the ABC District nor the Central District had a District Office building any longer and that their staffs had been cut back in a major way.

When we shared that information with them some indicated that they felt that once the CCAA process was over that the ABC District, if the structure did not change, would likely expand again and eventually purchase Office space outside of the Seminary in Edmonton and add additional workers if that institution should continue to grow and space there became unavailable to the District.

The CCMS is very soon about to receive a cost analysis from the Synodical Administrator regarding a comparison of the administrative cost of running three District Offices and a Synodical Office verses just one Synodical Office with Regional Pastors. It seems reasonable at this point to think that there will be major cost savings involved. Eliminating three of four corporate structures with all of their attendant operating costs, would seem to most people to result in a major savings in administrative costs.

Another means to save large administrative costs will be to move from a three year to a four year convention cycle, thus eliminating the three District Conventions every three years. More will be shared as information from the Synodical Administrator becomes available.

However, it should be noted that the main aim of the restructuring is not just to “save money” but to provide the kind of ministry being requested by the members of Synod even if it might cost the same as before.

## **CONCLUSION:**

It is my hope that this paper is helpful to the Church in understanding why LCC needs to make major changes to the way in which we do the work of the church in ministry and missions today. I hope that I have been able to show that the decision to engage in restructuring was not a “knee jerk reaction” to the crises in the Alberta-British Columbia District. But rather, it has been in the works, so to speak, since our very beginning in 1989. This restructuring plan does not address some very important concerns that will need to be raised in the years following the 2017 Convention. For instance, there continues to be a concern among the Deacons and others that although members of the Synod, Deacons have only voice and no opportunity to vote at Conventions. Since this is a very large issue for the Church and involves theological considerations, the CCMS felt it better not to address this issue at this time but has committed itself to begin working on possible deaconate voting and have a report with recommendations ready for the 2017 Synodical Convention.

Another issue that was raised many times during our cross-Canada Circuit visits was the need for some work to be done to assist the local parishes to strengthen and clarify their structure and the means by which they reach out into their own communities with the Gospel.

It is my prayer that the proposed new structure that will come before the church in a few weeks will go a long way in correcting the deficiencies in our current structure, deficiencies that now impede our work together as a Synod and enable mistrust and a lack of common will and direction in ministry among us in Canada.

The scattered, uncoordinated structure under which we currently operate is most certainly not the sole reason by any means that our Synod has been steadily shrinking over the past two decades, but without fixing the structure it seems to me that there is no hope of returning to growth. By saying this I am not implying that “our structure” will cause growth. I understand fully that growth in the Holy Christian Church and therefore in Lutheran Church–Canada is accomplished by God alone working through the proclamation of the Gospel and the proper administration of the Sacraments, but I am stating here the simple truth that “structure” can get in the way of God’s working because He has chosen to also work through sinful human beings who rely on good structure to facilitate, not impede, their service to God and man. Having repaired and put into place a structure that is responsive to the will and needs of the congregations, pastors and deacons, Lutheran Church–Canada can then begin to tackle other factors that are preventing growth, the building up of our people, stronger mission work, and also differences in theology and practice.

The Objectives of Lutheran Church–Canada, as expressed in the Article III of the current Constitution, clearly define eight services that the Synod is expected to provide to the congregations in order to assist them in faithfully carrying out Jesus’ commands to baptize and teach and reach out with the Gospel to the world into which God has placed them. It is the belief of the CCMS that the proposed new structure will enable just that.

A small window into what can be accomplished was opened when the various listed service organizations, districts, and auxiliaries met for a Planning Conference in Winnipeg in the Fall of 2016. Although future planning conferences will be more comprehensive and in-depth, the great blessing that came out of that first planning conference was the realization of the huge amount of mission work and ministry that Lutheran Church–Canada is doing across Canada and around the world! Many times I heard participants say: *“I never knew we were doing so much....!”* We have illustrated these relationships and described them as a Synodical Family, an orchard, in which Lutheran Church–Canada (the corporation) is but one of the trees that is in a common ecclesiastical bond with other trees, some of which are also separately incorporated (Auxiliaries, Listed Service Organizations, Seminaries, Canadian Lutheran World Relief etc.) entities.

The other great benefit of the planning conference was the networking that went on in just a brief amount of time which resulted in at least one instance of one mission agency formally offering to assist another mission agency that was struggling to keep its head above water. The Synodical Secretary, Rev. Schallhorn, has said: *“We can only imagine what might happen if this becomes a guided permanent fixture to coalesce LCC’s vision and planning where everyone sits at the table [together].”*

I do not claim that the proposed new structure will solve all our problems, or that it is perfect and will not need some additional work as we begin operating under it, but it is a positive first step and will eliminate many of the forces that have kept us apart and operating separately in the past. It is my sincere hope and prayer to Almighty God that the proposed new structure will assist us in being able to move forward in unity in the work that God has called us to do for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever our feet hit the ground.

*Rev. William R.A. Ney*  
Pastor Emeritus – Lutheran Church–Canada  
Currently Chairman of the Commission on  
Constitutional Matters and Structure