

# Highlights from the ELCIC 2023 Special Convention

written by Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum



## ELCIC delegates approve resolution on Peace and Justice in Palestine and Israel

An amended motion calling the church to respond to, “opportunities for solidarity and advocacy” and pray for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, was passed during the Saturday evening session of the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention.

The resolution came forward to convention delegates as a joint motion between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and was the result of many months of listening to partner voices and reflecting on existing statements by the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion, and review of reports from Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations. It also comes after a visit to the Holy Land by ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson and ACC Archbishop Linda Nicholls in which they listened carefully to the worry, frustration, and challenges of Palestinian Christians and Muslims in the Occupied Territories.

On Friday, during a joint session of Assembly 2023, Anglican and Lutheran delegates received an introduction to the resolution and heard from Bishop Michael Pryse, Eastern Synod, ELCIC; Bishop Andrew Asbil, Diocese of Toronto, ACC; and Rabbah Gila Caine, Rabbi at Temple Beth Ora congregation, Edmonton. “The resolution before us today is informed by the voices of our partners in the Holy Land – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, the Episcopal Diocese in Jerusalem – who are pleading for us to accompany them in prayer and in action,” said Bishop Pryse.

Following the joint discussion, the resolution was part of the separate business sessions of the Special Convention and General Synod in order to be formally addressed and voted on.

On the floor of the ELCIC Special Convention, discussion on the motion centred around an amendment to remove recommendation four, which called for reflection and study to, “reflect upon the parallels between the dispossession of Palestinians from their homes and lands and the experience of broken treaties and the occupation of unceded territories of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.” During the earlier joint session of the two churches, Rabbah Caine, shared her concern over the same recommendation.

The amendment to remove recommendation four was passed. ELCIC Special Convention delegates passed the amended motion overwhelmingly in favour.



## Delegates approve amended report and recommendations from Task Force Addressing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia

On Saturday evening, delegates to the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention approved an amended report and recommendations from the ELCIC Task Force Addressing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, which was formed out of convention action at the 2019 ELCIC National Convention.



Among the recommendations, the ELCIC is called to: appoint a taskforce to continue the work of addressing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in the ELCIC; increase usage of pronouns; increase the ELCIC's visibility as an affirming church; issue a public statement of apology to 2SLGBTQIA+ folx that have been harmed by the ELCIC; create a naming liturgy service to publicly affirm and celebrate transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse members of the ELCIC; ongoing sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) training; a national office staff person with dedicated responsibilities for diversity, equity and inclusion; encourage congregations in the ELCIC to begin a "Reconciling in Christ" process; and create national resources which would support listening, safe conversations, and discernment at all levels of the church around healthy, consensual relationships, including ethical non-monogamous relationships.

An amendment from the floor of convention also added back in a recommendation from the 2022 report, “that the ELCIC and its synods suspend any current or future decisions against rostered leaders based on sections D & E in the current manual *Discipline of Rostered Ministers* where it is determined there is no harm caused.”

Speaking to the motion, delegates were respectful and at times emotional. Several delegates expressed not only how important it would be to pass the recommendations but also what it would look like if the church did not pass the task force recommendations. Prior to announcing the results of the one of the amendments, Bishop Johnson addressed concern around, “anxiety and tension in the room.” Bishop Johnson reminded delegates of the song she invited them to sing with her during her report on Wednesday evening, “Courage, my friend, you do not walk alone. We will, walk with you, and sing your spirit home.” “We have differing opinions, we are not divided,” she counseled.

Convention chaplain Deacon Faith Nostbakken was asked to lead the convention in a prayer prior to the call for the vote. “As we come to this time may we sense the love we have for one another, the respect we have for one another, and the willingness to acknowledge the dignity of every person as part of this decision,” she prayed.



## **Report and recommendations from the Task Force Addressing Racism, White Supremacy and Issues of Racial Injustice Approved**

Delegates voted unanimously in their Saturday afternoon session to adopt the report and recommendations of the Task Force Addressing Racism, White Supremacy and Racial Injustice.

Throughout the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention, the task force had four sessions to address delegates – an opportunity to introduce the task force and their work, time for question and answers, table conversation, and a final session where the task force recommendations formed the motion for consideration by convention delegates.

In a session on Friday afternoon, task force members Rev. Aneeta Saroop and Dr. Joy (Mary) Philip shared the story of Rizpah.

“How many of us know the story of Rizpah?” asked Rev. Saroop. “Who is Rizpah?”

Walking delegates through the story of Rizpah, Dr. Philip noted, “we have been blessed by Rizpah – she teaches us that injustice requires a response. Racial discrimination demands a response from each and every one of us.”

Dr. Philip urged delegates to “walk the talk. Live out what we say. It’s not enough to say we are an anti-racist church. We need to be an anti-racist church,” she said, calling on delegates to consider Rizpah’s witness about doing the hard work and doing something radical.



Among the recommendations, the task force calls for the ELCIC to implement ongoing anti-racism training across all expressions of the church, as well as the creation of synod racial justice committees, a National Church Theological Study on Anti-Racism, White Supremacy and Issues of Racial Injustice, frequent public statements from National and Synod Bishops condemning Systemic Racism and calling for ongoing reformation in the church, as well as a review of the Nomination, Election and Hiring processes for the ELCIC.

ELCIC Special Convention delegates passed the motion overwhelmingly in favour.



## ELCIC Special Convention delegates approve report and recommendations from the Task Force on Carbon Neutrality

In a near-unanimous vote, delegates to the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention approved the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Carbon Neutrality.

Earlier in the session, task force member Louis Giguere walked delegates through a Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Calculator for Congregations (<https://elcic.ca/stewardship-of-creation/congregational-stewardship-resources/>).



The GHG Calculator tool was developed by the Task Force to help congregations and organizations estimate their GHG emissions.

“Our hope is that congregations begin to regularly keep track of this data, and update their GHG Inventory on an annual basis,” said Giguere. “We’d even encourage them to report it in their annual report, alongside their treasurer’s report. This makes it easy to set targets for emissions reduction, and track how you are doing year by year.”

Several of the recommendations approved by delegates have a GHG emissions component, including that the ELCIC seek to be carbon neutral by 2050 and that the ELCIC commit to greenhouse gas reduction targets of 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050.





## Pat Lovell presented with 2023 ELCIC Leadership Award

On Saturday evening, the ELCIC Leadership Award was presented to Pat Lovell of the Eastern Synod. Introduced in 2017 as a part of the ELCIC's commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the award is given to an individual – rostered or lay – who demonstrates leadership and is committed to advancing the mission and ministry of the ELCIC.



“Tonight, we honour an individual whose involvement in the church truly represents what it means to be a leader throughout all expressions of the ELCIC,” said Trina Gallop Blank, Assistant to the National Bishop for Communications and Resource Generation, during the award presentation. “[Pat] is an embodied expression of God’s grace, and she is a most deserving recipient of this distinguished award.”

“Not only is Pat a great leader,” added ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson, “but I think she has just about the biggest heart of anyone I know.”

Lovell is just the third recipient of the ELCIC Leadership Award. She joins recipients Don Storch (2017) and Carolyn Ethier (2019).

“I am honored and deeply humbled to receive this leadership award, for work that I sincerely enjoy and deeply care about,” said Lovell, addressing delegates as she accepted the award. Lovell shared with delegates a quote from Maya Angelou that was a guiding principle for her, “when you are kind to others, it not only changes you, but it changes the world.”

A member of St. Philip Evangelical Lutheran Church in Etobioke, Ontario, Lovell has served the wider church with distinction in numerous ways. She has held various roles on boards and committees at both the Synodical and National levels:

- Local Arrangements Committee Chair for the ELCIC National Convention
- Member of the Eastern Synod Committee for Theological Education and Leadership
- Member of the Eastern Synod Council
- Member of ELCIC National Church Council
- ELCIC member of the Anglican Church of Canada Council of General Synod
- Canadian Council of Churches Governing Board
- ELCIC Racial Justice Committee

Pat is also a recipient of an Eastern Synod Leadership Award for Outstanding Service to the Wider Church.



## **Convention delegates affirm recommendations from Task Force Addressing Ableism**

Friday evening, delegates to the 2023 ELCIC Special Convention voted unanimously to adopt the report and recommendations of the Task Force Addressing Ableism.

The motion came moved and seconded by the ELCIC’s National Church Council. The report in its entirety can be found in Appendix 16 of the Bulletin of Reports (<https://elcic.box.com/s/hxc8vn3bfj6b0bjk95ha2a2hiboy9xa9>).

Prior to the motion being before delegates, the task force had an opportunity to introduce the members of the task force and its work, time for question and answers, and table conversation.



Recommendations that were passed with the motion include:

- That the ELCIC implement ongoing certified accessibility and ableism training for national staff, National Church Council, and national committees. Curriculum should address privilege, power structures, and movement towards more equitable representation at ELCIC decision making and governance tables. Training should happen at least every three years.
- That Synods, Seminaries, and Schools that all rostered leaders, Synod Councils, Synod Committees, Board members, employees, candidates for ordination and students participate in ongoing certified accessibility and ableism training at least every three years.
- Accessibility and ableism training for congregational councils, committees, leaders, and all employees of the local congregations. Encourage critical conversation and intentional formation on how faith communities can better confront ableism at the congregational level.
- That the work of this task force continue for (at least) another three years with for an expanded community of ELCIC members with lived experiences of disability and allies committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion the opportunity to serve.
- That the national office provide for staffing with dedicated responsibility for diversity, equity, and inclusion.





## Anglicans, Lutherans approve resolution to be in full communion with Moravian church

The ELCIC Special Convention and ACC General Synod, have approved motions that will bring the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Canadian churches of the Moravian Church in North American into full communion.

The resolution, [\*One Flock, One Shepherd – Lutherans, Anglicans and Moravians – Called to Walk together\*](#), was introduced during a joint session of Assembly 2023 on Friday, June 30. During the joint session, delegates heard words of greeting from Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller, president of the Moravian Church Northern Province.

“I’m delighted to share that June 23 our synod unanimously approved moving to full communion relations with the ELCIC and ACC,” she said. “Your Moravian siblings both in the US and Canada join in praying for you. We look forward to hearing how your deliberations lead us forward in the prayer that Jesus offered – that we may be one.”

In the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been in full communion with the Moravian Church in North America since 1999. The US-based Episcopal Church has been in full communion with the Moravian Church since 2011. In 2019, the conversation began considering a similar relationship between the ELCIC, ACC and Canadian churches within the Moravian Church in North America. There are Moravian congregations and ministries in Canada, with congregations in Alberta, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The resolution means that all three churches will now commit themselves to: welcome members of their churches to receive pastoral and sacramental ministrations of one another’s churches with complete hospitality; welcome persons ordained in any of our churches to the office of presbyter/priest/pastor to serve, by invitation of the local ordinary; work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry; invite one another’s bishops to attend and participate as appropriate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church, and invite the members and clergy of one another’s churches to attend and participate as appropriate in the ordination services of each church; consult with one another regarding developments in our understanding of the ministry of all the baptized; encourage as appropriate consultation and collaboration among members of our churches at all levels and to facilitate learning and exchange of ideas and information on theological, pastoral, and mission matters; establish a Trilateral Commission, with appropriate Lutheran, Anglican, Moravian and Indigenous membership, to nurture our growth in communion, to coordinate the implementation of this Declaration, and to report to the decision-making bodies of each of our churches; and, continue to work together for the full visible unity of the whole Church of God.