

JESUS IS LORD

A Pastoral Letter from the President of Synod to all Congregations, Pastors and Deacons of Lutheran Church-Canada

Treasured brothers and sisters, one and all,

In one way or another, everyone throughout Synod's family is affected by the trauma arising from the insolvency of the Alberta-British Columbia District and its Church Extension Fund. This matter is now bound up in a process administered by the law courts, and not by the leadership of the church. Neither I nor anyone else can say with certainty how it will be resolved.

Because we are a close family despite great distances in our country, I know church members in the East and Central Districts feel sorrow in hearing of friends and loved ones losing large sums of money. Even members with no direct ties to those involved are distressed at the news of a congregation that may lose its church, another that cannot build as planned, or of seniors who trusted the church with their life savings in the hope of covering their simple, everyday needs. That is only a very abbreviated list of the people and situations affected. I am deeply grateful for the love of our members who sorrow and pray over this tragedy in other parts of the country. I implore you not to grow weary in those prayers, and to talk in your communities and with your pastors about concrete ways to help.

Our hearts go out most of all to local churches and members in Alberta and British Columbia. Those of us far away can scarcely imagine the fear, disappointment, and even anger many of you feel. It is true that Synod has no legal power to take control of the corporate side of things in your area. It is also true that Synod does not possess the funds to undo the crisis, since the Synod actually owns very little. At the same time, there is no barrier stopping the rest of the family from feeling your sorrows. Paul said it like this, *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep"* (Romans 12:15). Brothers and sisters in Alberta and British Columbia, we weep with you now.

"Jesus is Lord." That's how the first Christians confessed their faith. When neighbours tried to pressure them into saying, "Caesar is lord," the sons and daughters of God who trusted Christ answered, "No, Jesus is Lord." He is the One the Father sent to be our Rescuer. He died for our sins, and was raised again. He's the One listening in love to the cries of His children, holding a strong hand over their lives each day. That's why the believers confessed, "Jesus is Lord." They did not have the leisure of saying it only on sunny days when everything came easy. It was also their faith at a tough time when the authorities hunted them, when learned people called them fools, and when church members hurt and let each other down. Perhaps at those times most of all, the believers took refuge on this rock: "Jesus is Lord."

You do well to confess it with them at this painful time. "Jesus is Lord" must be the controlling factor for those in leadership as they explain their actions to fellow Christians. Justifying oneself or protecting an institution can never be the big goal, since Jesus is Lord. This confession gives direction and the right tone, on the other side, to anyone demanding clear answers. It is reasonable to do that, and yet could degenerate into self-destructive bitterness and insult if not carried out under Jesus, the Lord. People understandably afraid for their personal survival also confess, "Jesus is Lord," when they run to Him in their prayers and ask Him to guide them toward those who can help. You in faraway parts of our land, tempted

perhaps to shrug it off and think, "It's not my problem," are called upon to confess, "Jesus is Lord," and under Him to ask what you can do to carry your needy brothers and sisters in the west.

I do not exaggerate when I tell you that this tragedy is the single most disruptive thing to have taken place up to now in the 26-year history of our Synod. That's because it does not merely involve money. It is shaking up our longtime structures, shaking up a trust that has often been taken for granted, and shaking up the pride we frequently took in our own decision-making. Painful as this is, perhaps the day has come when we need such a shake-up. That is not only true for people in charge of a single district or one financial agency. It has also been true at times of local congregations, active church members, as well as deacons, pastors, and leaders at the highest level, including the Synod president.

I call upon you now, brothers and sisters, to confess again today, "Jesus is Lord," and to begin grappling with the current crisis trusting in that lordship of His. Whether you have wounded others, have been wounded yourself, or wonder what you might possibly do to stand by fellow believers in their trouble ... the way to healing must and can come through Jesus, the Lord, if indeed it is to come at all.

Pastor Robert Bugbee, President
Winnipeg, February 8, 2015