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# “Historical” Preaching in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada It

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## **Introduction: “Historical” Preaching in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

It so happened that the year 1986, in which the two seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) took over this journal, coincided with the birth of this same Church. And because we at once began a Sermon Section in the journal, the preaching of the ELCIC has been represented in its pages from this Church's beginning.

It therefore occurred to me that, from a historical point of view, it would be important to record some of the sermons of the leaders of the ELCIC, and, if possible, also sermons as were preached by them on “historic” occasions in the life of this Church. Of course, this is a somewhat iffy project. Not all preachers create their sermons in “full manuscript” style, and even preachers who would prefer to prepare sermons in this way more often than not preach from notes. So I am grateful to the bishops who have not only responded positively to this invitation, but have, in many cases, worked hard to reconstruct sermons dating to the early years of their leadership.

The ELCIC is a very recent entity. Perhaps a bit of Lutheran Church history in North America would be in order. As Lutheran immigrants from Europe came to this continent they tended to settle in ethnic clusters. Consequently the initial Lutheran Church bodies were “children” of European Churches, reflecting in their language, liturgies, and piety their German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Baltic, etc. ancestries. Canadian Lutheran groups allied themselves with their respective counterparts in the United States (though some retained direct ties to Europe). By the 1960s a series of mergers had gathered the majority of North American Lutherans into three major Church bodies: the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS).

In Canada merger momentum also fuelled the move toward autonomy. In 1963 the three Canadian Synods of the LCA formed the Lutheran Church in America - Canada Section (LCA-CS) as a vehicle for united voice and action in Canadian concerns. In 1967 the Western District of the ALC became the first autonomous Canadian Lutheran Church, under the name The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC). And in 1985 these two bodies, the LCA-CS and

the ELCC, merged into the ELCIC, and the new Church began its official life on 1 January 1986. The first National Bishop of the new Church was the Rev. Donald W. Sjoberg. He had been Bishop of the Western Canada Synod of the LCA from 1970 to 1985; he served as National Bishop of the ELCIC from 1986 to 1993.

(For the sake of historical accuracy I should note that up until 1980 North American Lutheran Churches used the title of “President” for both its national and synodical leaders [“synod” is the name given to jurisdictional units, comparable to “diocese”]. In 1980 one of the ELCIC’s predecessor bodies, the LCA, approved the title and status of “bishop.” The ELCIC followed suit for its synodical leaders, but not until 1989 was the title “National Bishop” approved for its national leader. However, for the sake of convenience I will use only the title of Bishop.)

It seems appropriate, then to begin our “historical series” with National Bishop Sjoberg’s sermon at the opening service of the first convention of the ELCIC, 1987, in Ottawa, Ontario. Having become an autonomous Lutheran Church in Canada, it was appropriate to gather in the nation’s capital. Even more fitting for a Church beginning to take its place alongside the other Canadian Churches, was his firm “call to mission.”

The second sermon in the series is a sterling example of the Church, through its leaders, taking seriously its mission in and to the public life of the nation. It was preached at the special Divine Service preceding the opening of Her Majesty’s Courts in Ontario, 4 January 1994, by the Rev. William D. Huras, D.D., who was Bishop of the Eastern Canada Synod of the Lutheran Church in America from 1978 to 1985, and upon the formation of the ELCIC he was Bishop of its Eastern Synod from 1986 to 1998.

The third sermon in the series is a powerful example of the Bishop as leader, counsellor, and prophet. The Rev. Gottlieb (Lee) W. Luetkehoelter, D.D., was Bishop of the Central Canada Synod of the Lutheran Church in America from 1975 to 1985, then Bishop of the Manitoba / Northwestern Ontario Synod of the ELCIC from 1986 to 1994. The sermon was preached in the year 2000 at the Graduation Ceremony of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, at which the Doctor of Divinity degree was awarded him.

Further sermons in this series will continue in future Numbers of this journal.

Of course, we will also continue to present worthy sermons by pastors of the Lutheran and other denominations. Included here are sermons by Monika Wiesner and Kevin Powell.

**Eduard R. Riegert**  
*Homiletical Editor*