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Gathering and Sending: Welcome, Greetings, Blessings Webinar 1

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Gathering and Sending: Welcome, Greetings, Blessings

WEBINAR I

Donald W. Sjoberg*

Acknowledgement[†] of Indigenous Neighbours and Territories¹

It is so good to be together!² Tonight Dr. Jensen joins from Treaty 6 Territory, the homeland of Western Region 2A Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, the Traditional Territory of more than 31 First Peoples.³

Bishop Sjoberg and our Tech Facilitator, Emma Berg, are joining in on Zoom from Treaty 6 Territory, Metis Nation of Alberta Region 4, the Traditional Territory of the Nêhiyaw Cree, Denesuline Chipewyan, Sauteaux Anishinaabe, Nakota Isga, Nakota Sioux, and Niitsitapi Blackfoot Peoples.⁴ Steve Larson is moderating, and I am facilitating, from the Haldimand Treaty Tract, the Traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Attawandaron Peoples.⁵ A Prayer:

Let us Acknowledge the blessings of the land
and offer together thanksgiving for the Peoples
and creatures of the land as we are able.

Gracious Creator God,
we give you thanks for the blessing of life granted to us and to all,
we give you thanks for the earth, air, waters and the blessing of fire.
We give you thanks for all those who have and continue to steward this land
on which we have lived, moved and continue to grow our being.

We Acknowledge,
that since the time when Rasmus Jensen and Jens Munk first arrived in 1619
that Lutherans have encountered many First Peoples
and diverse creature-kind who preceded us in calling this land home.
And we have failed to encounter these whom you love, O God,
perfectly or even sufficiently
and for this we are sorry and work towards reconciliation.

Help us, O loving God,
to become and to be the best of your grace manifest in the world. Amen⁶

* See the Foreword of this issue of *Consensus* for biographical information.

[†] Karen Kuhnert gave this Acknowledgement at the opening of Webinar I of the Webinar Series “For the Sake of the Gospel” hosted by the Remembering Today for the Church of Tomorrow Project in partnership with Martin Luther University College and Lutheran Theological Seminary. This Acknowledgement was given October 25, 2022.

Gathering: Welcome and Greetings

Well, thank you. Karen, those were beautiful words grounding us where we are with the Peoples of this nation, and in who we are and what we can become as God's people in the world today.

I am Don Sjoberg. Some of you may remember me; I go back a little ways, I realize. To those who may not remember me, I was the first national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and I served there for eight years. But there have been three national bishops since that time nearly 30 years ago.

When I decided not to stand for another term, the *Canada Lutheran* decided to recognize that with a picture of me standing beside the Legislative buildings of Manitoba, and the caption read two words: "He's History." It was a bit of a shock to some of my American friends who read it in a negative way, but I think the *Canada Lutheran* (and maybe for most people), they saw it differently, in terms of we're all part of this history regardless of what we've been elected to. We are members, and we share in this history which goes in back of us—to the past, and the realization that we're part of something greater. That's the way I understood it, and that's the way I've been privileged to be part of this group: Remembering Today for the Church of Tomorrow.

Our project started with my listening to the Campus Ministry celebration video of the first campus pastor in Canada at the University of Alberta.⁷ I was much moved by that, and I thought, How does it happen? Through a person? Through an organization? This is a great story and there are many others like it—how can we remember?

And I found Steve and Becki Larson and I talked to them. And they said, "We know someone who can really be a help to us because of her ties with the archives and her memory, and also she's a person of good cheer and would be wonderful for us to have her working with us. And that was Pastor Karen Kuhnert. So there we were, four Lutherans, and "four Lutherans need a fifth" so they say. And we thought of Pastor Gordon Jensen, professor at the seminary in Saskatoon. Gordon came on board and has been such a help. And so, it continues.

And we've been encouraged in many ways. One way of which was through the Lutheran Triune Education and Benevolent Society of Calgary that provided a grant for us—and the Alberta and Territory Synod are managing the grant for us. Thank you to both of them. And of course, we've been encouraged by the support of National Bishop Susan Johnson and the synodical bishops who understand what we are doing and are interested in it. Bishop Susan would be with us tonight except that she is traveling and so will be with us next webinar.

Tonight we have synodical bishop Jason Zinko from the Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod with us, and thank you, Bishop Jason, for being with us. And we have one of the retired bishops with us here tonight; I think there are now thirteen retired ELCIC bishops already, and they are involved in various ways. But tonight, I note that Bishop Allen Grundahl is here from Saskatchewan. He has already been doing something to remember by way of a plaque at the location of the former Luther Seminary in Saskatoon.⁸ So, we are remembering.

We are also grateful this evening for the presence of President Bill Harrison of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon and Principal Dean Kristine Lund of Martin Luther University College, who are here.⁹ It is so wonderful to see you on my Zoom screen!

They are here to greet us all.

Sending: Blessings¹⁰

So to all of you, for your involvement in whatever way you are history, I read to you the words of Martin Marty who quoted William Faulkner's line, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."¹¹ Marty went on to say:

"We may use the past and the way which unfolds for us the future we want for us and for our children.

Conversely, we may be stuck in the past unable to face the new day.

Or we may be dismissive of this past, at the cost of losing our spiritual roots."

And I invite you to join me in the closing prayer:

Lord God. You've called your servants to ventures
of which we cannot see the ending,
right paths yet untrodden through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And now, May the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and keep you, and the peace of the Lord be with you,

Amen.

Endnotes

¹ Acknowledging Peoples and Territory is an *ancient* ritual of respect; as such, there are many ways and many forms of Acknowledging. Acknowledging is understood as a way to gather Peoples with dignity and in peace. Three approaches were modelled in the For the Sake of the Gospel Webinar Series. Karen Kuhnert prepared two forms, Hanne Kuhnert prepared one form. Readers may wish to compare the three forms of the Webinar Series in this Issue. That Lutherans have been taught about the power of the practice of Acknowledging—even before the 2014 TRC Process—is evidenced by this 1992 article in *Consensus* by Rev. Rebecca S. Voigts Larson in "Worship: Discovering How to Be Christ's Church in the World," *Consensus* 18, no. 1, Article 7, 1992, <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol18/iss1/7>. The Article is an abbreviation of an address by Voigts Larson to the ELCIC meeting in Convention in 1991 in Edmonton—Treaty 6 Territory, the homeland of Western Region 2A Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, the Traditional Territory of more than 31 First Peoples. The Convention was held in the same hall where National Bishop Susan Johnson delivered her words to those gathered at the TRC National Event in Edmonton in March of 2014. Bishop Johnson's Expression of Reconciliation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to Survivors of the Indian Residential Schools, family and descendants of Survivors, elders and youth, included these words of commitment:

During this [our Church] convention, we explored the meaning of treaties as sacred covenants. The adopting of this resolution was our way of making a covenant with each other in the presence of God to do our part in seeking the renewal of relationships. We now give you our word that our church is committed to an ongoing process of finding truth and reconciliation together. It is our hope that the sincerity of our covenant will be demonstrated in our actions and in our attitudes. We understand this to be both an urgent and a long-term commitment.

For the entire text of Bishop Johnson's address, and the additional documentation on the ELCIC Covenant and Actions, see "Gathering and Sending: Welcome, Greetings, Blessings Webinar II" by Rev. Dr. Bishop Donald W. Sjoberg and Rev. Dr. Bishop Susan C. Johnson, in this Issue.

² The practice of having Indigenous and "settler, immigrant" (meaning non-Indigenous) speakers "Acknowledge Peoples and Territory" as a justice praxis was modelled to the KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle (KIRC) by two

presenters from the nearby United Church during the “Fall Meeting—2011,” November 7–9, 2011, in North Bay, Ontario. The ELCIC is a long-standing Member of KAIROS Canada / KAROS Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (KAIROS), and of predecessor ecumenical coalitions in Canada including Project North and the Aboriginal Rights Coalition. KIRC members in 2011 were of diverse backgrounds including Indigenous people affiliated with and/or representing Christian Churches, Indigenous people not affiliated with or representing Christian Churches, and Non-Indigenous people affiliated with and/or representing Christian Churches. The group included Residential School Survivors and representatives of Churches who were and were not involved in Residential Schools. At the North Bay gathering, the United Church presenters demonstrated their local practice and discussed the operational principles that their practice was built upon. The KIRC members, hailing from various First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and ecumenical partner community traditions from across Canada, discussed the practice at length. Upon carefully-considered reflection, the Indigenous Members of KIRC recognized the practice as being respectful, helpful, and consistent with long-established Indigenous Peoples’ protocols for respectful relationships. *It was also noted among the gathered, that such keeping of protocols is always best done from the place of real and respectful relationships rather than delivered performatively as rote ritual or removed forma.* There was discussion at the time of what respect does and does not look like in different communities. It was affirmed that respectful Acknowledging does not mean government or Church representatives who fly into communities for fifteen-minute meetings—as real relationships take time. As a consequence of this firm and clear direction from the KIRC Indigenous Elders, the ELCIC at the National and synodical levels has repeatedly taken the strategic direction to prioritize the building of real relationships with Indigenous neighbour communities before taking independent actions “for” or “on behalf of” Indigenous neighbours. The KAIROS “With NOT For” era is an extension of this firm and clear direction to the Ecumenical Coalition as an organizational agency and also the Ecumenical Participants thereof. Elder gkisedtanamoogk used the phrase “Indigenizing KAIROS” meaning decolonizing KAIROS and the Churches from early in 2011. When Acknowledging, the context for respect as well as the content of the acknowledgement are important. At the heart of the ritual is a Nation to Nation understanding in pursuit of peaceful encounters and relationships. The preference for the terms “settler” and/or “immigrant” was raised by a KIRC Elder following this 2011 meeting in North Bay. The Elder, in follow up conversation with other Elders, advanced the notion that framing reconciliation on the language of skin colour would not be consistent with how Indigenous communities would Acknowledge or promote respect. The language of “Settler” arose as an alternative vernacular to “White people” or “Europeans” or “Immigrants,” meaning all people who were not original to the Land context. The term “Settler” takes the Indigenous view of those who came and settled into what was already existing. This is distinct from the prairie peoples’ preference for the self-image of “pioneer” as one who cuts the trees and “breaks” the land. “Settler People” in contrast to “First Peoples” became a way of understanding the current context in Canada. The distinction between *people* and *peoples* is notable and important (it is about more than the plurality of individuals). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), unlike other UN declarations, “*addresses collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law,*” as asserted and supported by the Honorable Warren Allmand, former Solicitor-General of Canada and a KIRC Member from Montreal in this era. Teaching Canadian and world faith communities and governments about Collective Rights including Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was a significant effort by Allmand and Members of KIRC from 2010 to 2017. This was part of the agenda at North Bay from November 7–9, 2011. These teachings included KIRC Co-Chair Harley Eagle co-presenting on the Doctrine of Discovery to the World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th Assembly, October 30–November 8, 2013, in Busan Korea (see <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/minute-on-indigenous-peoples>). This effort in Busan was extended via an ad-hoc WCC working-group, toward efforts with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) May 12–14, 2014. KIRC Members and KAIROS staff also prepared materials for presentations to UN Special Rapporteur James Anaya (Autumn 2013) and these efforts are reflected in “NGO Shadow Report: Submission of Information by KAIROS to the Human Rights Committee [HRC] for the examination of Canada’s Sixth Report (During July 2015), <https://www.kairoscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/KAIROS-Shadow-Report.pdf>. Assistant to the ELCIC National Bishop, Paul Gehrs, was, and remains, a highly regarded KAIROS Board Member (and at times Board Chair) for KAIROS through much of this time period. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada also did its work during this time period and KAIROS and KIRC were valued partners in this work. Karen Kuhnert served as a KIRC Member from the ELCIC from Spring 2011 to Spring of 2017. See “A Challenging Gift,” *Canada Lutheran*, January/February, 2014.

³ This Acknowledgement was informed by the Acknowledgement of Lutheran Theological Seminary: where we are, <http://lutherantheological.ca>.

⁴ This Acknowledgement was informed by the Acknowledgement of the City of Edmonton: <http://cityplan.edmonton.ca>.

⁵ This Acknowledgement was informed by ongoing relationships with the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the New Credit beginning in 2006. Readers may be interested in some dates, places, and names of those involved in advancing respectful practices like Acknowledging in the Eastern Synod. In 2009, Karen Kuhnert travelled to the Woodland Research Centre and Woodland Cultural Centre on the site of the former Mohawk Indian Residential School. In 2009, independent of Kuhnert's trips, Eastern Synod Bishop Michael Pryse had the LutherHostel planning team from Martin Luther University College (then Waterloo Lutheran Seminary) arrange for participants to go on a learning trip to the Six Nations Reserve to rekindle relationships. Bishop Pryse's family had decades of personal relationships with the people of Six Nations at Ohsweken. The relationship growth of the Eastern Synod with Traditional Indigenous Faith-keepers and Indigenous Christian people and clergy across the Synod was further energized by the attendance of Bishop Michael Pryse, Karen Kuhnert, and Assistant to the Bishop, Phil Heinze, at the March 27–30, 2014 Edmonton National Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Following this, Pryse, Heinze, and Kuhnert worked on the creation of the terms for the Biennium Reconciliation Initiative and the adaptation of the 2014 Eastern Synod Assembly themes and plans. The tobacco gifted from the Eastern Synod Assembly participants to the Indigenous participants sharing their knowledge was first gifted by the Passamaquoddy to enable the tobacco to meet its responsibilities—"the tobacco knows its responsibilities." This gifting was first given November 22, 2012, with the intention of helping the Passamaquoddy to receive recognition as a Nation by both the American and Canadian Governments who had been able to deny their existence, their Nationhood, from the time of the creation of the border between Canada and the United States at the locations now known as Maine and New Brunswick. To be addressed in a later Article. The work for the Biennium Reconciliation Initiative resulted in an Ad Hoc group being formed that became in later years the Eastern Synod Circle for Reconciliation and Justice. Phil Heinze was one of the first leaders in the Eastern Synod to make public expressions of respectfulness like smudging. As a Prison Chaplain, part of Phil Heinze's professional practice was to offer to reconnect inmates of diverse heritages to the resources of faith—*as might be helpful to them*. This included, for some Indigenous inmates, reconnection to smudging and sweat lodges. At this time Heinze did his own Lutheran Systematic assessment of what practices he would participate in, asking Luther's key question of: What does this mean? Heinze, a former Missouri Synod Lutheran, did careful and prayerful discernment. As a result, in the early 2000s with the "Challenge for Change" events with local Kitchener-Waterloo KAIROS group, Phil Heinze was enabling Ecumenical attendees—including Lutherans—to break barriers around smudging and listening to Elders as part of respectful gathering. Prior to this, and also notable, when Karen Kuhnert first went to the Woodland Research Centre in the Mohawk Institute (the former Residential School,) the Woodland Archivist already knew well of the relationship between the local Six Nations and Lutherans in both contemporary and historical eras. A significant quantity of material on Lutherans and the six separate Nations of the Haudenosaunee had been deposited by Seminary Professor Ed Riegert. Riegert had team-taught a cross-cultural inter-religious course on Lutherans and the Haudenosaunee between Wilfrid Laurier University and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary beginning in the 1970s. Riegert's course work included site visits and then archaeological digs with Six Nations Knowledge-keepers. This organic and long-standing connection through the cross-cultural exchanges with the archaeological dig and learning had enabled the university to keep some dig fragments which were prominently on display in the main floor display cabinets in the Wilfrid Laurier University Regina Street Offices. This is, in part, why Wilfrid Laurier University has taken an Archeological approach to their Land Acknowledgment and modelled in their Land Acknowledgement with the use of the term "Neutral" People (coined by French Explorers and used in History and Archaeology Departments) rather than the People's name for themselves, the Attawandaron. Already in the early 2000s Attawandaron descendants living on the Six Nations Reserve at Ohsweken were telling people that they were not extinct and were still living in the Neighbourhood. Because of the textbook-based Western Academic tradition, and persistent Canadian History tropes, teachers were continuing on campus to insist that the "Neutrals" had been wiped out by the Haudenosaunee. The subject of living differently together after the TRC Final Report was taken up at the 2015 "Six Nations Retreat" in November 12–14, 2015. This gathering to look at the TRC Calls to Action Retreat launched the Haldimand Tract Ecumenical Partnership with the Six Nations Polytechnic. Already by this time Lutherans in the Eastern Synod were gaining awareness to Acknowledging Territory: Atlantic Ministry Area gathering in June 2015 with Elder Billy Lewis, Montreal Ministry Area gatherings through Matthew Anderson ... At

the 2015 National Convention, all Eastern Synod Ministry Areas were given access to Data sets on how to meet and Acknowledge their local Indigenous Neighbours. In 2016, every congregation in the Eastern Synod was given specific data sets for their congregation and Ministry Area to begin to meet and Acknowledge Indigenous Neighbours and Territories if this had not already been happening.

⁶ See also “A Decolonial Vision of God: Relationships Between Indigenous Peoples and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada by Danika Jorgensen-Skakum with Introduction by Gordon A. Jensen” in this Issue.

⁷ For more on Rev. Don Voigts, the first Campus Chaplain in Canada, and the 65th Anniversary Celebration video for Lutheran Campus Ministry—Edmonton, see “Remembering Lutheran Campus Ministry” in this Issue of *Consensus*. See also the original video at <https://youtu.be/k3czG-FqzIE?t=1>.

⁸ For more on the commemoration of the founding of Luther Seminary in Saskatoon, see <https://lutherantheological.ca/lts-news/historical-marker-project-concludes>.

⁹ For the words of President Harrison and Principal Dean Lund see “Insights from LTS and MLUC” and also “Insights from MLUC and LTS” in this Issue.

¹⁰ Lutheran worship follows a pattern called the Ordo which features four general movements: Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending as witnessed in the worship book *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Meetings begin and end, as Bishop Sjoberg reminds, with a protocol of respectful recognition and thanks to God our Creator.

¹¹ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto & Windus), 1953.