

Consensus

Volume 45
Issue 2 *Festschrift in honour of the Rev. Dr.
Gordon Jensen*

Article 11

7-25-2024

ELCIC Lutheranism in the International Arena

Susan C. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Susan C. (2024) "ELCIC Lutheranism in the International Arena," *Consensus*: Vol. 45: Iss. 2, Article 11.

DOI: 10.51644/BCRF6197

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol45/iss2/11>

This Studies and Observations is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

ELCIC Lutheranism in the International Arena

Susan Johnson¹

There are two sayings that are heard frequently in Lutheran World Federation circles. The first is “to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical,” and the second is “to be Lutheran is to be diaconal.” These two sayings undergird what it means for the ELCIC to be involved in the international arena.

In John 17, Jesus prays that all will be one. This is the root of our call to be ecumenical, that we would be one as Jesus and God are one. Internationally we live this out through a variety of relationships. In the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) we are one, at least in terms of altar and pulpit fellowship with 75.5 million Lutherans in 150 member churches within 99 countries.

We participate in the LWF in a variety of ways. We send delegates, stewards, visitors, and even presenters to LWF assemblies, its highest legislative authority. We have a member on the LWF council that governs in between assemblies. Currently that member is Rev. Katherine Gohm, who also serves as the Regional Vice president for North America. We are frequently asked to send members to various trainings and committees. We work with Lutheran World Service through the work of Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR)—but more about that later.

It is impossible for us to be in close relationship with all 150 member churches, so both the national church and the synods have Global Companion relationships with individual member churches, to walk together in accompaniment sharing joys and sorrows, and, as practical, to share resources with one another—which starts to move into the diaconal realm as well.²

The ELCIC is also a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of 352 churches from more than 120 countries, representing over 580 million Christians worldwide. In the WCC, the ELCIC participates in assemblies, the highest legislative authority of the WCC. We sometimes have representatives on the Central Committee and the Executive Committee. Currently I serve on the Central Committee and the Executive Committee as well as several other committees and subcommittees. We have also had people serving on different program committees.

The WCC puts us in closer relationship with denominations beyond those represented in Canada. The WCC and LWF work hard not to overlap their programming but rather to complement each other along with the work of other church-wide communions. The Canadian Council of Churches, of which we are a member, also has ties to the WCC, which helps us to strengthen both relationships.

That is a little about the ways that the ELCIC cooperates internationally in the ecumenical realm. Now let us turn to the diaconal realm. The main way the ELCIC functions diaconally internationally is through CLWR. CLWR is the international diaconal arm of our church, even though it has its own separate identity and governance structure. CLWR’s mission is this:

¹ Susan Johnson is the ELCIC National Bishop of Canada.

² For more information, see <https://elcic.ca/global-mission/companion-relationships>

Inspired by God's love for the world, CLWR challenges and responds to the injustice which causes human suffering and poverty. We are committed to working alongside our partners to build resilience through a continual shared learning approach. As an international relief and development agency of the Lutheran communities, CLWR provides opportunities for Canadians to respond to national and international needs.³

CLWR works through partners to program their diaconal work in humanitarian response, food security and livelihoods, education and skills, and refugee resettlement. They primarily work through LWF World Service, but also work with ACT Alliance partners.

The other way the ELCIC works diaconally internationally is through its companion relationships. Depending on the needs and resources of the partners, the national church and synods create partnership agreements to help in the training of pastors and lay people, support specific ministries, build schools, and so on.

We may be a small church with diminishing resources, yet we are known internationally as a reliable partner that "punches above our weight." A former general secretary of the LWF once said that there is no church too big that it cannot receive a gift from a smaller church, and there is no church too small that it cannot share a gift with a larger church. Through its international work, both ecumenically and diaconally, the ELCIC strives to share its gifts with others.

³ Canadian Lutheran World Relief. *Mission, Vision, and Values*. <https://www.clwr.org/who/mission-vision-values>