



Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Spring 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In Advent, I invited you to dwell in words from Paul's letter to the Romans:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. Romans 5:1–2a

This spring, as we gather for the 2010 synod assemblies, we are standing together in God's grace, but we are not standing still. Through God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is fully engaged in the mission of proclaiming Christ and caring for the world that God so deeply loves.

This journey together in Christ does not lead us away from difficulties: neither the earthshaking tragedy in Haiti, nor the discernment, disagreements and decisions of congregations and individuals, nor economic hardship in a global recession, nor any of the other challenges we encounter in communities and households.

Instead, in the midst of it all, God meets us in a renewing word:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17–18

This word, read during the Lenten season, renews both our identity and our calling. God has given us the grace to stand and to serve in a place filled with promise and opportunity. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, God's Holy Spirit is being poured out so that hope abounds and love fills our hearts (Romans 5:4–5).

Trusting that God's new creation is made evident in and through us, we rejoice that:

- Directors for evangelical mission are prepared, based in synods and ready to serve so that all ELCA congregations are growing as evangelical centers for mission.
- Synod-based partners in evangelical worship are being identified to assist congregations as we seek to be an evangelizing church centered in the means of grace.
- The ELCA's priority for developing new congregations continues. In 2009, 32 new congregations were planted, many in ethnic-specific or multicultural communities, among people living in poverty, and in urban areas. Camino de Vida, a new congregation under development in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a joint new start with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Mission Developer Jaime Guillermo Yela welcomed more than 400 people for the first worship service in December 2009.
- Leadership is the focus for young adults of African Descent who, in response to "Elisha's Call," are identifying at least 100 new young adult leaders within their communities.
- Creativity abounds through the Book of Faith Initiative as congregations and colleges gather around Scripture in coffee shops and pubs, in homes and in dorm rooms. In one congregation, confirmation students receive Bibles in which their parents, mentors, sponsors and pastors have already marked their favorite passages.
- Social media is playing a vital new role in connecting people to this church. The ELCA News Service transmits releases in real-time via Twitter (twitter.com/elcanews). More than 13,000 fans on the ELCA Facebook page (facebook.com/Lutherans) share stories, encouragement and prayers online.

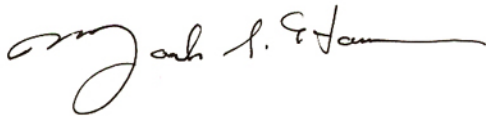
The Book of Faith site (www.bookoffaith.ning.com) has welcomed more than 3,300 participants into a conversation about the first language of faith.

- Generosity marks the ELCA's response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti. In the first five weeks, ELCA members gave nearly \$5.3 million dollars, and more contributions continue to flow in. Lutheran Disaster Response works with our partners, The Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief, to meet urgent needs, including shelter, medicine, drinking water, food, sanitation and psychosocial assistance, in a commitment that will continue for years to come. Mission support, the portion of a member's financial offering that a congregation shares with its synod and the churchwide organization, provides the infrastructure that makes it possible for this church to apply 100 percent of every designated gift to disaster response.

Living in the hope of the risen Christ who is making all things new, we are moving forward in mission and are supported and encouraged by your synod's fervent prayers, generous financial support and evangelical missional imagination.

I give thanks to God for your service in the mission and ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and for the time and resources you share with your congregation, synod and churchwide ministries. As we stand together in God's grace, it is my prayer that God's work will be served with our hands.

In God's grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop