



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Spring 2015

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be; let that grace now like a fetter bind my wand'ring heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.” – Evangelical Lutheran Worship 807, verse 3

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are church. As members in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we are found by and abiding in Christ; we are God's beloved people gathered around word and sacrament. Every week you gather in your congregations to hear God's word and to share in the Lord's Supper, to know Christ crucified and Christ risen. My hope and prayer is that through our spiritual practices and our worship we are drawn closer to and are more aware of the love of God shown through Jesus' death and resurrection.

As we gather in Christ's name at our synod assemblies, I invite you to pray, with me, for one another and the work we do together across this church. Remembering the words of the apostle Paul: “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

In my international travels earlier this year, it became clear to me that the ELCA is part of the body of Christ that spans the globe and the centuries. When we consider issues such as the ecclesiology of a global church, or a unified Word and Service roster, or ministry to and with same-gender families, it is never, nor can it ever be, a conversation just among us.

This past fall, we entered the season of celebrating five years of our full communion partnership with the United Methodist Church. In late May, we join our Catholic sisters and brothers in Washington, D.C., to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the U.S. Lutheran Catholic Dialogue, which over the years has produced 11 substantial reports. We continue our work in strengthening all of our ecumenical and inter-religious partnerships.

We also are accompanying our brothers and sisters globally. We have visited with unaccompanied migrant children and families fleeing their homes in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America. Companions in the region have shared about their struggles, root causes of this migration and avenues for ELCA response. ELCA members, synod bishops and churchwide staff have borne witness to and talked about ELCA plans for strategic engagement.

Through The Lutheran World Federation, we work with refugees and internally displaced people in Syria, Cameroon, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Kenya, Jordan, Ukraine, Iraq and many other places. We have made significant progress in controlling malaria and treating Ebola. We are developing a social statement on the social issue of women and justice. These are just a few of the ways that we are church for the sake of the world. This summer brings two wonderful events. Both the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit and the Worship Jubilee in Atlanta will give us an opportunity to ask: How is God calling the church today, and what does God's work mean for our service to our community and the world? These events will be a time for rich conversation, faith formation and renewal of worship for the sake of the gospel and for the life of the world.

Good progress continues to be made on the ELCA's observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Two communication platforms recently debuted: www.ELCA500.org and the “ELCA Reformation 500” Facebook page. The theme for the 500th anniversary observance is “Freed and Renewed in Christ,” with the

tagline, “500 Years of God’s Grace in Action.” This will also be the theme for the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. You are invited to come to the “Grace Gathering” in New Orleans, which will be held concurrently with the Churchwide Assembly on its last four days, Aug. 10-13, 2016. The goals of the Grace Gathering are for personal renewal in faith, to be equipped for meaningful observances of the 500th anniversary, and to increase the number of ELCA members who will take part in service learning activities in New Orleans as part of the Churchwide Assembly. Please come!

Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA is off to a good start with more than \$48.4 million in generous gifts and commitments toward the campaign priorities. This year we are seeking support for new and renewed congregations in The Campaign for the ELCA. The impact of the campaign will go far beyond the nearly \$200 million goal. It will establish a strong culture of stewardship in which this church will be well-positioned to do God’s work in Jesus’ name throughout the world for decades to come. Thank you for your support and prayers for this good work.

This coming Sept. 13, we will continue our tradition of a dedicated day of service. “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

God’s blessings to you as you meet, discern, pray, vote, worship and sing together. This is a wonderful church, and I am honored to serve in it with you. Thank you for your faithful witness to the gospel.

God’s peace,



Elizabeth A. Eaton Presiding Bishop Evangelical Lutheran Church in America