



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Office of the
Presiding Bishop

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Draw your church together, O God, into one great company of disciples, together following our teacher Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving in Christ's mission to the world, and together witnessing to your love wherever you will send us; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 75)

Grace to you and peace as you gather for your 2008 Synod Assembly. "God's work. Our hands." The words of this year's theme describe what will happen as you gather in assembly. God will be doing God's work as you hear God's living word of promise proclaimed and read and as you share in Christ's supper. You will also be sharing stories of how God's grace frees this church—each of us, our congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries—to do God's work for the sake of the Gospel and for the life of the world.

The ELCA's Plan for Mission continues to shape churchwide ministries and guide God's work shared with congregations, synods, agencies and institutions, and global and ecumenical partners. Together we are supporting congregations, growing in evangelical outreach, stepping forward as a public church, deepening and extending global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships, and bringing forth and supporting faithful, wise, and courageous leaders.

As you gather, please consider these four ways of doing God's work with our hands:

- **Participating in the Book of Faith initiative.** As Lutheran Christians we confess that the Word of God is God's living speech incarnate in Jesus Christ, proclaimed to us as both Law and Gospel, and recorded in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We know the power of the Word of God to change lives, reform churches, and reconcile the world. We know from past experience in this church and predecessor church bodies the renewal that comes from regularly hearing and reading God's Word. As the Book of Faith initiative grows and our engagement with Scripture spreads and deepens, please join me in participating as a Book of Faith member, as a Book of Faith congregation, and as a Book of Faith synod. (<http://www.elca.org/bookoffaith>)
- **Responding to the first draft of the social statement on human sexuality.** Between now and November 1, 2008, we have the opportunity to study, discuss, and comment on the first draft of a proposed social statement on human sexuality. This is an important time in the life of this church as we engage in thoughtful and prayerful discernment about the wide range of questions related to this topic and respond to the draft statement. Your voice is important in helping the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality prepare the final draft, which will be considered by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, following action by the ELCA Church Council. (<http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney>)
- **Growing in biblical stewardship.** Let us wholeheartedly endorse and implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding so that we might all grow in our understanding of and commitment to biblical stewardship. This church has a remarkable capacity to support God's mission for the sake of the Gospel and the life of the world.
- **Sharing leadership as synods and the churchwide organization.** As a church body, we are living into significant changes in leadership with 25 new synodical bishops in 2007 and 2008, a new secretary, David Swartling, and several other new churchwide leaders. Pray for these new leaders, consider your own call to leadership, and rejoice in the richness of our shared leadership, which is spiritual, evangelical, missional, deeply relational, and contextual.

Thank you for your commitment to the mission and ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the time and resources you share with your congregation, synod, and churchwide ministries. God's work. Our hands. Thanks be to God!

In God's grace,

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop