



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

April 27, 2009

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Grace to you and peace in the name of our crucified and risen Christ. Alleluia!

Recently I spent a day in Bible study and prayer with the pastors who will preach in worship each day at the Churchwide Assembly in August. The richness of the conversation reminded me how much I have missed the weekly text groups that have been so formative in my ministry. There is great strength, encouragement, and wisdom when we gather as colleagues to be engaged by God's Word and to pray for this church, the world, our respective places of ministry, and our personal lives.

Beginning Monday, June 29, and for the 50 days leading up to the Churchwide Assembly, I invite the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to become such a "text group" of focused prayer and scriptural study. As we journey toward the assembly, I encourage you as congregations, groups, and individuals to study and pray for -- and along with -- the assembly by using prayers, Scripture, and song drawn from the daily worship. Resources to guide individuals and groups in this time of prayer and reflection on the Word may be found at <http://www.elca.org/50days>

This call to study and prayer comes not simply from my own experience or from your requests, but from the church's most fundamental and enduring practices of faith. The ELCA has placed these practices at the center of its life. The 2003 Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly adopted an evangelism strategy that called this church to pray for renewal grounded in the Word. The strategy describes the renewal we pray for as an evangelical church "so that every member, congregation, synod, churchwide unit, and institution might bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ."

Four years later, the 2007 Churchwide Assembly strongly endorsed the Book of Faith Initiative that called this church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. This invitation to 50 Days of Prayer and Scripture study builds upon these commitments as we prepare for the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

I invite you to join me in prayer that Churchwide Assembly voting members, through their proclamation, conversations, and decisions, will give account of the source of the hope within us. I Peter 1:3 points to God, the source of our hope: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ..."

Even when we are not of one mind about all the matters to be decided by the assembly, we have a marvelous opportunity as a church body to witness to the common source of our hope. In fact, an appropriate prayer may be that God use the diversity of our opinions to witness to one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism.



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I continue to spend time with the Book of Acts, pondering the power of the Holy Spirit calling a diverse people and then sending them into the world to bear witness to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Although tensions came with increasing diversity, our proclamation of Christ 2000 years later is testimony to the continued power and presence of the Holy Spirit calling us to faith and sending us in mission for the life of the world.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to renew us in faith and mission. Pray that every ELCA congregation will grow in evangelical mission. Pray that we will grow in evangelical witness and service in the world. Pray for strength as we work to alleviate poverty and strive for justice and peace throughout the world.

I look with confident hope toward the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. The source of my confidence is twofold: God's faithfulness to God's promises and the Holy Spirit's power. This church has an opportunity to give public witness that we are a church united in evangelical mission for the sake of the world. I invite your prayers for the sake of that mission and the work of the Churchwide Assembly.

In God's grace,

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop