



Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Spring 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 1: 6; 2:13).

I write this letter with profound gratitude for your leadership within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. You have a very important responsibility as voting members for the spring 2009 Synod Assembly. In the midst of deep concerns about the world's ongoing wars, a global economic crisis, struggles within communities and families, and pending Churchwide Assembly decisions, we gather in hope, confidence (literally meaning "with faith"), and joy that God is at work among us.

As I travel throughout this church, people often say, "I have such hope when I hear about the church you describe to us." What do I describe? A church whose mission and ministry inspired the ELCA's new tagline: "God's work, our hands." A church excited about becoming fluent in the "first language of faith," the language of Scripture. A church that takes its time to listen deeply before making difficult decisions. A church committed to ending two major diseases of poverty: malaria and HIV/AIDS. A church with congregations that are vibrant centers for evangelical mission. A church sought by young people because it "matters and makes a difference." A church known for its generosity and long-term commitment to people affected by disasters. A church that accompanies partners, both close to home and throughout the world. A church that is "marked with the cross of Christ forever [and] claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world."

You, your congregations, and your synod are part of God's work throughout this church. The Affirmation of Christian Vocation in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* asks, "Sisters and brothers, both your work and your rest are in God. Will you endeavor to pattern your life on the Lord Jesus Christ, in gratitude to God and in service to others, at morning and evening, at work and at play, all the days of your life?" The response is my prayer as we gather for the 2009 Synod Assemblies:

Almighty God, by the power of the Spirit you have knit these your servants into the one body of your Son, Jesus Christ. Look with favor upon them in their commitment to serve in Christ's name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 84).

God's blessings to you as you gather for your Synod Assembly. Listen for descriptions of this church as you worship, greet friends, pray for God's presence, and discuss and make decisions about matters that are important to this church. As you gather, recall Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

In God's grace,

Mark S. Hanson
 Presiding Bishop
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America