



Advent 2009

Sisters and brothers in Christ of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

I greet you with the words of the apostle Paul 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](#)).

Where does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) stand today? We stand together in God's grace, but we are not standing still. We proclaim Jesus Christ and are fully engaged in this mission by actively caring for the world that God loves. God's mission is serious work that calls for serious commitment. We bring all that we are -- especially our rich diversity, our shared tradition and even our disagreements -- in service of God's mission.

We go forward in this mission trusting that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). Evidence abounds of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon us and through us:

- [Emmanuel Lutheran Church](#), Naples, Fla., recently purchased land for new ministry center. They also convened ELCA partners, seminaries, synods, and churchwide staff to envision together a vibrant, evangelical and multicultural Lutheran presence in southwestern Florida.
- Our new directors of evangelical mission, based in synods, are trained and ready to serve ELCA congregations that they might continue to grow as [evangelical centers for mission](#).
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi told Global Mission colleagues [traveling in the region](#) that they are ready to deepen their relationship with the ELCA so that together we can more generously and faithfully respond to [malaria, HIV and AIDS](#). Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl, ELCA coordinator for the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, writes, "The ELCA, especially through the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, will be part of a movement that changes the world. It's certainly going to change Malawi."
- In summer 2009, 37,000 youth, young adults and adult leaders attended the [ELCA Youth Gathering](#) in New Orleans. They spread throughout the city, wearing orange t-shirts in a witness of service that touched the hearts of residents and has them talking still.
- [ELCA chaplains](#) Michael Lembke, Richard Brunk and Paul Dirksmeyer bore witness to God's mercy at Fort Hood, Texas. They ministered to families, friends and an entire nation grieving the tragic shootings at the nation's largest military base.

These are just a few examples. Think of the signs of the Holy Spirit being poured out in your life and in your congregation! Thanks be to God for this continued outpouring of the Spirit among us.

When the ELCA Church Council faced the reality of reduced financial resources for mission, it made a difficult but necessary 10 percent [budget reduction](#). The decision, however, does not diminish our resolve and commitment to engage together in God's mission for the life of the world.

We will engage Christ's mission with everyone who stands together in God's grace, using the rich gifts that the Holy Spirit has poured into our lives:

- Together we will proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord in worship spaces and workplaces, in [online conversations](#) and around kitchen tables.
- Together we will develop new ministries in every synod in multicultural communities and among people [living in deep poverty](#).
- Together we will raise up and welcome faithful, wise and courageous leaders by sustaining vital and creative [seminaries](#) and [campus ministries](#).
- Together we will send [missionaries](#) to accompany new and growing Lutheran churches throughout the world.

I invite you to deepen this conversation with me in an online town hall forum on Sunday, December 6, at 4:30 p.m. (CST); check [www.elca.org](#) for more details.

The apostle Paul wrote that where the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us, hope abounds and hope does not disappoint us (Romans 5:4-5). What a wonderful promise this is as we now enter the season of Advent! With our hope in Christ, we face the future together as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, serving the world that God so loves.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America