



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Office of the
Presiding Bishop

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. — Romans 1:8

In 1995, former Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson wrote *A Good Time to Be the Church*. In 2005, ten years later, it may be an even better time to be the church. In 1995, who would have predicted that millions—believers and non-believers alike—would flock to theaters to watch *The Passion of the Christ*? Who would have dreamed that a network television show would feature a high-school girl who talks to God? Who would have believed that both *Time* and *Newsweek* would feature Jesus' birth and the Christian faith as their cover stories—in the same week?

We live and serve in a time when people are more than curious about Jesus. They wonder, just as believers do, about what the future holds, and, like believers, they long to live meaningful lives, lives that matter. People of faith wonder, "What does it mean to be Christian in a multi-faith world?" Other people ask, "Where is God in the midst of our suffering?" The ELCA can make a difference in the lives of these curious and longing, wondering and worrying people because, when the Holy Spirit moves among us and acts through us, we are a church that matters.

As we gather in synod assemblies to worship, to deepen relationships, and to make decisions about the future of this church that matters, we gather during a time of renewed attention to faith and in the midst of our longing, wondering, and worrying. Deep and thoughtful conversations have preceded your gathering and will continue as we prepare together for the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, in Orlando, Florida. That assembly will make decisions about recommendations related to the ELCA Studies on Sexuality and Renewing Worship, and decisions about two ethnic ministry strategies. It will consider interim Eucharistic sharing with the United Methodist Church and the proposals for governance and restructuring of the churchwide organization. The extensive and prayerful processes of discernment, lively conversation, and thoughtful involvement leading up to these decisions make it clear that we want to be a church that matters.

What Matters for the ELCA?

- FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST MATTERS in our lives and in the lives of others.
- THE WORD OF GOD MATTERS as it is incarnate in Jesus Christ, recorded in Scripture, and proclaimed in the gospel.
- WORSHIP MATTERS. There the Holy Spirit is at work through the means of grace.
- CONGREGATIONS MATTER. Congregational ministries are central to the life and future of this church.
- BEING LUTHERAN MATTERS. We embrace and are defined by the great themes of the ongoing Lutheran reformation, even as we grow in global and ecumenical relationships.
- COMMITMENTS MATTER. We will grow in evangelical outreach, become a more multicultural church, work for justice, partner with educational and social ministry organizations, and bring forth faithful, wise, and courageous leaders.
- INTERDEPENDENCE MATTERS as we seek to function as a people of God through congregations, synods, institutions, agencies, and the churchwide organization.



We are a church that matters because God is making a difference through us:

- Whenever nearly 11,000 congregations gather for worship;
- Whenever young people encounter Christ at a Lutheran outdoor ministry site;
- Whenever a Lutheran military chaplain is present for our sons and daughters in combat zones;
- Whenever aging loved ones receive skilled and loving care in a Lutheran assisted living center;
- Whenever vocational discernment and faith development encourage sons and daughters at Lutheran colleges and campus ministry sites;
- Whenever you are present through Lutheran Disaster Response; and,
- Whenever global mission means not only what happens in a distant land, but also what gifts are shared through a lively relationship with a companion synod.

Thank you for the many and varied ways you show that the Holy Spirit is at work in and through you. Thank you for making the ELCA a church that matters. Thank God for the difference we make together.

Marked with the cross of Christ forever,
we are claimed, gathered, and sent
for the sake of the world.¹

Living in God's amazing grace,



Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop

¹ Mission Statement of the ELCA

