



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

8765 West Higgins Road • Chicago, Illinois 60631-4101 • Internet: bishop@elca.org
Telephone 773.380.2600 or 800.638.3522 • Telefax 773.380.2977

Office of the
Presiding Bishop

Spring 2007

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This is an anniversary year for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We celebrate our 20th year under an appropriate theme: “Living in God’s amazing grace: Thanks be to God!” We rejoice, echoing the greeting of the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi, “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3-5).

With joy we thank God for the faithful witness of our predecessor church bodies; for our new book of worship, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*; the significant anniversaries this year of two Lutheran partners: Lutheran World Federation (60 years) and Lutheran Campus Ministry (100 years); for the mission support provided by congregations, which is crucial for this church’s mission; and for you and the ministry of the congregation and synod to which you belong.

Living in God’s amazing grace, you will gather this spring in synod assemblies with other leaders of this church. With this church, I hold in prayer the many synods that will be electing new synodical bishops and other leaders. I join you in expressing gratitude for the faithful and effective service of those completing their terms, and pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to lift up leaders with passion for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a vision for the mission to which God calls us in the rich diversity of this church.

Living in God’s amazing grace, we anticipate the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and the decisions that will unfold there. The assembly will consider a new social statement on education; elect the presiding bishop and secretary of this church; and receive recommendations about the “Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible” initiative and the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding; and many more items, including consideration of memorials from synod assemblies. The assembly will also have an opportunity to give thanks to God for Secretary Lowell G. Almen’s servant leadership, interpreting our governing documents and maintaining archives and rosters. For 20 years Secretary Almen has called this church to embrace the rich heritage of a vast “cloud of witnesses.” He has challenged us to become more interdependent in this church body and in the Church catholic.

Living in God’s amazing grace, we encounter *intriguing questions*:


- What does it mean to be Christians in a world of many faiths?
- What are the signs of God’s activity in our lives and in the world to which we are called to witness?
- What is the ongoing place of synods and the churchwide organization in the vast and varied networks that connect us with each other and the world?
- How can we unleash the deep resources of this church to tell the story of God’s amazing grace in Christ Jesus?
- How will we as a church respond to the call to engage more deeply in the Holy Scriptures?
- How will we continue to address issues of human sexuality as we anticipate a social statement in 2009?
- How can we generate even more resources to undergird and grow the mission and ministry of this church?
- In the midst of the complex questions and conflicts of our day, how can we be communities of moral deliberation?

Living in God’s amazing grace

Living in God's amazing grace, *the possibilities for God to make a difference* are limitless. We commit ourselves to pray for spiritual renewal and to study Scripture; deepen our relationships with global companion churches and ecumenical partners; imagine new ways to invite our neighbors to "come and see Jesus"; give generously and joyfully to make a difference for the sake of the Gospel and the healing of the world; and confront the scandalous realities that divide us. As we do, we cling to the promise that the apostle Paul proclaimed to the Philippian church, "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" (Philippians 1:6).

Thank you for your part as a leader in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Thank you for your gifts and your ministry. Together we live by faith in God's amazing grace. Thanks be to God!

In God's grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "M".

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop