



**Report of the Bishop
Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

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Living in God's Amazing Grace: Faithful and Bold

***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth." (Acts: 1:8)***

At this 21st annual assembly of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we will explore what it means to live in God's amazing grace as disciples of Jesus. We will, in Word and Sacrament, hear and receive what God has done for us in Jesus, the Christ. We will be challenged to be faithful and bold in our witness to the presence of Jesus in the world and in our calling to make Christ known.

We are at a time in the life of the church when God is calling us to move out into the world with new intensity and purpose by the power of the Spirit. It is both a scary and exciting time and God promises to work in us and through us for the sake of the world.

FAITHFUL

We have been called to be faithful. If there is one word I would use for us as a synod, it would be "faithful." We have responded to the faithfulness of God with our own efforts of faithfulness. We are nearly 80,000 baptized disciples, gathered in 225 congregations, five campus ministry sites, four outdoor ministry sites, and many agencies and institutions endeavoring to serve God and the world. As I visit congregations throughout the synod, through regular visits and the intentional visits of *Called2Connect*, I have been encouraged by the stories of love, compassion and care for the people of God. These acts of love take place in congregations and communities all across Kentucky and Indiana.

As a synod, we continue to be a leader in the ELCA in supporting Campus Ministries, Outdoor Ministries, candidates for ministry, Trinity Seminary, Outreach Ministries, World Hunger Appeal, Lutheran Disaster Relief, and Global Missions. In these areas, the Indiana-Kentucky Synod has always been ready to respond to new challenges and

opportunities to share the love of Christ. Our disciples give time, energy, enthusiasm and financial resources to empower, equip and encourage us to be faithful witnesses. I am grateful for those who give of themselves as synod staff, synod leaders and volunteers serving on committees and teams. Thank you all for your faithfulness.

FAITHFUL DECISIONS

A continuing challenge and opportunity before us is stewardship of our resources as a synod. For the first time in many years we finished the fiscal year in the “black.” To achieve this, we made painful decisions concerning support of synodical and institutional ministries. We made substantial cuts in the areas of Campus Ministries, Outreach Ministries, Outdoor Ministries and Trinity Seminary. The Indiana-Kentucky Synod staff accepted a salary freeze, and over the last few years, reduced the total staff by a one-third. Many people have made and continue to make sacrifices so that the budget can be balanced.

We also balanced the budget due to increased shared benevolence gifts from congregations. As of the writing of this report, reports show an increase by \$167,000 in 2007 in gifts from synod congregations to the synod and to the ELCA churchwide office. The increase is the result of many people working tirelessly to encourage biblical “first fruits” giving for individuals and congregations. As a synod, we also took that step at our last assembly and we increased what we sent to the churchwide office by one per cent for a total of 51%. These are all faithful decisions rooted in our trust of a God who is faithful.

The Lilly Foundation recently invited the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to participate in a pilot program to support rostered persons who struggle with financial issues, especially those caused by excessive educational debt load. A task force, led by Pastor Tom Weitzel, has been writing a proposal to develop a program that will address educational debt on a long-term basis. The leadership of the Lilly Foundation is convinced that debt is an issue that undercuts the effectiveness of the rostered leadership in the church. At this assembly, you will hear from the task force about our involvement in this new opportunity.

BOLD OPPORTUNITY

This year, the synod council and program staff will introduce you to **EPAM**, or **Every Person a Missionary**, a new and bold initiative. At our 2001 assembly, we adopted a vision that encouraged “every person to be a missionary” by “empowering, equipping and encouraging the people of God to make Christ known.” We have struggled to live into that vision.

A missionary is sent by God for a purpose in the world. As the baptized, we have been commissioned to “let our light so shine before others that they may see our good works and give glory to God.” *But how are we to do that? How are we to be empowered, equipped and encouraged to do that ministry?*

Over the next three years, we will encourage missionary activity at the grassroots level. I am scared and excited by this initiative because, as the pastor and leader of the synod, it will need to take place at **my** “grassroots” level. I cannot expect you to become involved if I am not willing to take the challenge also.

I will need to change in order to be a missionary. My ministry has been so focused on serving the church that I have neglected my personal witness to the world. I suspect that there are many of us faithful servants of the church who need to move in new directions for the sake of the world.

I hope that you will come to understand that this initiative is not to get new members in our church to fill the pews and pay the bills. The program is about each of us getting out in the world where Christ already is in order to witness to his presence and his love for the people of God. This is scary and exciting stuff! It is what the first-century Christians did as the Word of God spread throughout the world.

The Indiana-Kentucky Synod has engaged a consulting firm in this endeavor: **ARE, A Renewal Enterprise**. The individuals in this firm help synods and congregations discover what it means to be evangelizing Lutheran witnesses in the world today. At significant times in the ministry of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, we have consulted experts for guidance and encouragement, and developed initiatives to achieve our work. Some of these are Mission 2000, the development of our Mission/Vision/Core Values, and most recently, a financial consultant.

I realize that good consulting services cost money and that we must depend on gifts and donations to pay the bills for **A Renewal Enterprise**. My wife Kris and I have decided to support this endeavor with a substantial gift and to follow the words of Jesus, “*Where your treasure, there your heart will be.*” I want my heart to follow Christ into the world and **I invite you to join me.**

BOLD POWER

Recently, ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, was asked this question: “Bishop Hanson, what is your number one priority for the ELCA?” His answer was: “That we be an evangelizing church.”

Jesus’ desire for the first disciples was also for them to be evangelists. After his resurrection and before his ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you restore the kingdom to Israel?” Many of us ask similar questions today: When will the decline of the church be over? When will the previous glory of the church be restored? When will our pews and our Sunday school classrooms be full again?

Jesus’ response also speaks to us today: “*It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

This is an encouraging promise. We will receive power from God so that we may be bold witnesses... not in the synagogue or the temple... but in the cities and the communities and to the ends of the earth.

May we trust this promise as we continue to live in God's amazing grace being faithful and bold in our witness.

Your brother in Christ,
Bishop Jim Stuck

