



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

James R. Stuck, Bishop

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God's Work – Our Hands: Every Person a Missionary

*“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;
that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...*

*So we are ambassadors for Christ,
since God is making his appeal through us.”*

(2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

I continue to be thankful to God for the honor and privilege that I have had to be serving as your bishop in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. We have this important work that we do together that God has given us. The Apostle Paul refers to it as the “ministry of reconciliation” in which God is sending us out into the world as ambassadors for Christ. We know that this is **God's work** (reconciling the world to himself in Christ) and that God is calling for **our hands** to join this mission in the world by being ambassadors for Christ.

For nearly ten years in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod we have articulated this involvement by us in God's work in the world through our vision statement:

**Every Person a Missionary
Every Pastoral Leader a Mission Director
Every Congregation, Conference and Ministry a Mission Center**

It has been a privilege for me to have visited most of the synod congregations and to have witnessed the living out of this vision in powerful ways. I am very hopeful for the future of the church as we continue to empower, equip and encourage each other to make Christ known.

As a synod in 2008 we worked in many ways to live out this vision. As you read the annual reports contained in the materials provided for this assembly you will witness the manifestation of that vision. These next few days here, you will experience God at work in our midst through worship, keynote addresses, workshops, fellowship opportunities, ministry displays and plenary sessions. Here are just a few highlights:

EPAM

EPAM is shorthand for **Every Person a Missionary**. We are committed to helping each other find new ways of living out our calling to be ambassadors for Christ. In baptism we were reconciled to God and called to the ministry of reconciliation through Christ for the sake of the world. As we have been reminded through the words of Jesus, we are to “let our light so shine before others that they may see our good works and give glory to Father in heaven.”

When we take this calling seriously it is transformational. As we study scripture and talk about ways in which we see God at work in the world, and as we intentionally join God, we become and are able to do more than we ever thought possible. At this assembly we will center on this calling and identify how we will empower, equip and encourage one another for this transformational ministry in this coming year.

BOOK OF FAITH

The Book of Faith Initiative of the ELCA can become an important tool for every person who is mission-centered. Lutherans interpret scripture as the Spirit-inspired Word of God because it records the acts of God. God has given us scripture so that we know that he has acted for us in Christ. It is the source and norm of our life together in Christ. If we believe that God is still acting today in our world, then the scriptures give us powerful hints of how we might be involved in that action.

The hope that I have for the Book of Faith Initiative is that everyone might be drawn to the Bible once again and that we all might be transformed by a fresh reading of scripture through the power of the Spirit. I hope that every congregation will take steps to involve all people in this study of scripture.

FREED TO LEAD

We have already begun to address an issue that undercuts the missionary work of our church. For many years now the cost of education for candidates preparing for service in the church has been increasing. This has caused an escalation of debt load for many of our newly rostered leaders. Lilly Endowment invited us to apply for a grant for the funds to start addressing this issue. Over this last year, a team developed a grant proposal and Lilly Endowment approved it. We have now been able to bring on to our staff Joseph Skvarenina, who has already begun his work among us. Mr. Skvarenina is doing this work in cooperation with the ELCA Fund for Leaders which is helping to support the presence of a development person in our synod.

At this assembly you will hear of the progress we are making in developing the Freed to Lead Fund. I hope that we will be able to report how much has already been distributed to those rostered leaders applying for funds. This is a four-year endeavor that will have significant ramifications for the leaders of our church and for our congregations.

CALLED 2 CONNECT

I have been blessed by my visits with congregational leaders. The mission stories of ministry that I have heard indicate that the Spirit is present and working powerfully in the life and ministries of our congregations. I have also been able to share with leaders what we are doing together in the wider church. We are accomplishing wonderful things together through the synodical and churchwide ministries of the ELCA which reach out to the world locally and globally.

Visiting with the congregational leadership also includes talking about mission support. The dedicated work of many individuals who offer time, talent and treasure, accomplish the work of the church. I encourage our leaders to be transparent and inviting as they model for their own households' faithful stewardship, especially by practicing the biblical standard of first fruits giving. We are blessed with all that we need to accomplish the mission that God has called to do. Now we just need to respond with generous, trusting and believing hearts.

MISSION SUPPORT

In this area, I am grateful for the faithful way in which our congregations have responded to the challenges we face as a church. At all levels in the church, we are being challenged to do more with less. At the synodical and churchwide levels, we have made faithful use of the resources available and will continue to plan for and carry out the mission God has given us. In this synod these last few years we have had a strong finance committee, now lead by current treasurer, Kate Knoerzer and our former treasurer, Kevin Bardonner. They work hard to keep us informed and headed in the right direction.

As a synod, we have committed to grow in our first fruits giving: we have increased the proportional share that we send to the ELCA churchwide office from 50% to 51.5% of the benevolence money that we receive. Add the grant money that we share with Outdoor Ministries, Campus Ministries, Outreach, Trinity Seminary and others, this total comes to over 75% of gifts and grants. The synod uses about 25% of what it receives from congregations to operate the ministry of the synod. We have a dedicated staff that graciously handles increased work loads in ever more efficient ways.

MANY AMBASSADORS

We have many people who continue to offer themselves as missionaries. I could never begin to name and number these folks and their contribution to the ministry of the synod. At this assembly and in the information and reports supplied for the assembly you can begin to see the many and varied ways we are serving the world.

I am especially grateful to my colleagues on the synod staff: **Bill Gafkjen, Heather McCulloch, Karen Eppert, Sylvia Ore, Danielle Burrus, April Lynch, Tom Weitzel, Mark Radloff, Joe Skvarenina, Carol Webb and Rudy Mueller.** We are also privileged to have present in the office, **Marilyn Smith**, who is the Coordinator for Region 6 of the ELCA.

I can continue with the deans of the 10 conferences and all the people who work at the conference level to empower, equip and encourage mission and ministry in our

congregations. I am grateful for the work of committee and teams of the synod who selflessly offer themselves, especially the Synod Council and its officers, **Ted Miller**, secretary, **Kate Knoerzer**, treasurer and **Judy Rehmel**, vice-president.

JUDY REHMEL

Speaking of Judy Rehmel, it is at this assembly we give thanks to God for the ministry and leadership of Judy. She will not seek re-election to a fifth term as our vice-president. She has served continuously in synodical ministries for 32 years, with nearly 17 years as the vice-president, the highest elected lay position in the synod. In that capacity she has offered stability, patience, support, leadership and dedication to the church. She has been a leader on the Region 6 Steering Team serving as its chairperson and in the churchwide ministries as a leader among the vice-presidents of the ELCA. There is no one that knows more about churchwide assembly and how they operate than Judy. She has missed one assembly since the new church was formed in 1987. As a gifted fiber artist, she has produced liturgical vestments for many of our pastors and created spiritual wall hangings for our camps. She has shown me great support and has been a faithful partner in leading the synod in mission and ministry. I will greatly miss her presence, leadership and partnership.

ELECTIONS

At this assembly we will elect a new vice-president. This is a crucial election for the life of this synod because these next couple of years will be a time of transition. As I have announced in many other settings and forums, I will not be available to serve another term as your bishop. I am often asked if our synod has term limits (some synods allow their officers to serve only two terms). I normally respond, “The synod doesn’t, but I do.” I will be ready for the next chapter in my life.

I have made my intentions known to you early because we have an involved discernment process for electing a new bishop. At this assembly you will hear about and will be invited to be a part of that process. Most importantly, you will be asked to pray for the synod and for the ordained leaders who will be identified as potential candidates. We all need to be open to the movement of the Spirit in our midst so that we might faithfully discern God’s will.

Most importantly, what we need to keep in mind is that this is God’s work. Yes, God uses our hands, but *“all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”* May we trust that promise in the days ahead.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Jim Stuck