



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

James R. Stuck, Bishop

June 4 – 6, 2010

A TIME OF THANKSGIVING

*“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.
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.
It is right for me to think this way about all of you,
because you hold me in your heart,
for all of you share in God’s grace with me.”(Phil 1:3-7)*

As I finish my second six-year term as bishop these words from Paul’s letter to the Philippians express my thoughts and feelings. I continue to be thankful to God for the honor and privilege that I have had serving as your bishop these past 12 years. God has given us important work to do together. This is **God’s work** (sharing the gospel), and we know “that one who began a good work” in us and through us will use **our hands** to bring it to completion in Jesus Christ. We are **ordinary people** who have the privilege of sharing in this **extraordinary grace**.

For nearly twelve years in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod we have articulated this involvement 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 been your bishop as this vision has begun to unfold. I am hopeful for the future of the church as we continue to empower, equip and encourage each other to make Christ known in the world.

I give thanks to God for each of you as you have responded to this vision. I am grateful for rostered lay and clergy leaders and for leaders in congregations. At the conference

level, I am thankful for deans, ministerial colleagues and lay leaders who work to support the mission of each congregation. I give thanks for our synodical leaders who give of themselves for the sake of the mission of the synod. As you read the reports contained in the materials provided for this assembly, and as you experience through worship, keynote addresses, workshops, fellowship opportunities, ministry displays and plenary sessions, you will see God at work in our midst.

Especially, I wish to thank the members of our Synod Council and the synod's officers: Vice President **Liz Michael**, Secretary **Ted Miller** and Treasurer **Kate Knoerzer**, for their support, dedication and countless hours of work.

One of the difficult adjustments I face as I transition out of this call will be coming to terms with the modification of many relationships that I have come to cherish through the years. I will no longer have regular contact with many of you, especially the leaders of the synod. I will especially miss the people I have worked with in the office: **Karen Eppert, Sylvia Ore, April Lynch, Danielle Burrus, Carol Webb, Joe Skvarenina, Tom Weitzel, Susan Prenatt**, and my assistants **Bill Gafkjen, Rudy Mueller, Heather McCulloch, Mark Radloff**, and the Region 6 Coordinator, **Marilyn Smith**. As a synod, we have been very fortunate to have these talented and dedicated people leading us in mission and ministry.



A TIME OF DISCERNMENT

“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11)

With this assembly we move into a new chapter as a synod. We will elect a new bishop to be our shepherd for the next six years. Over the last few months we have been involved in a discernment process to identify the needs of the synod and the gifts needed in the office of bishop to address these needs. We have raised up the names of persons who have the gifts needed for this ministry. Now, led by the Spirit, we will discern together who God is calling to lead us. I am excited by what God is about to do in our midst.

There is a greater discernment process going on in our whole church, especially at the congregational level. As we have dealt with financial adjustments due to the economy and continued loss of membership in many congregations, some of which came about as a result of last year's decisions by the ELCA at the August assembly, there has been renewed energy around mission and purpose. At the Conference of Bishops meeting in March of this year, ELCA bishops began to imagine what the church will look like as we adjust to new realities. The Spirit is driving these discussions at every level and it is an exciting time for the church.

As part of this discernment, the Spirit has led us to go deeper into the Word. The ELCA has provided the Book of Faith Initiative as a tool for every person to get into Scripture and discover what it means to be a missionary. Lutherans have a unique way of

interpreting Scripture: It is the Spirit-inspired Word of God because it records the acts of God. In Scripture it is revealed that God has acted for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and that in him we have life. Scripture is the source and norm of our life together in Christ. Because of the witness of Scripture, we trust that God is still acting today in our world and that we can be involved in that action.

A TIME OF HUMILITY

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:1-5)

As we have dealt with the pain and division present in the church, I have asked for patience and humility, compassion and sympathy. We need to listen to one another and try to understand and accept each other’s “bound conscience.” We do this by staying open to what the other person has to share with us. We do this, as Paul says, by looking out for the interests of others. He says we can do that by being in Christ, by having the same mind, the same love that Christ offers. This is our opportunity to witness to the world about how a people of faith can disagree, yet stay together in community. We can do that by being “in Christ.”

What all of this has shown us is that no one has all the answers. We need each other to discover the truth towards which God is leading us. We need those on the right and the left or else the church becomes less than God intended. Paul’s image of the body of Christ speaks to that powerfully. We need each part of the body and we are diminished when we lose a member of the body. Paul says that when one part of the body hurts, we all hurt. Although it is painful, I believe that loss and pain are what is happening in this part of the body called the ELCA. Out of this suffering will come renewal for mission and ministry.

A TIME OF JOY AND HOPE

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:4-6)

As your bishop, I have been blessed by my visits with you in congregations and conferences and at synodical events. The stories of mission and ministry that I have heard indicate that the Spirit is present and working powerfully in the lives of disciples and ministries of our synod. I have also been able to share with leaders what we are doing

together in the wider church. We are accomplishing wonderful things through the synodical and churchwide ministries of the ELCA that reach out to the world locally and globally. There is great reason for joy and hope for the future.

Visiting with the congregational leadership has also given me an opportunity to talk about mission support. The work of the church is accomplished through the dedicated work of many who offer time, talent and treasure, often in a sacrificial way. I have encouraged our leaders to be transparent and inviting as they model their own 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.

In the area of stewardship, I am grateful for the faithful way that individuals and congregations have responded to the challenges we face as a church. At this assembly you will hear about the progress of the **Freed to Lead Fund** appeal. God has blessed us with gifted and dedicated rostered leaders; this fund is supporting them during these difficult times. 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.

As a synod, we have remained committed to growing in first fruits giving. We have increased the proportional share that we send to the churchwide organization from 50% to 51.5%. Adding to this the grants that we share with Outdoor Ministries, Campus Ministries, Outreach, Trinity Seminary and others, this total comes to over 75%. 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. There is reason for joy and hope.

Again, we listen to the Apostle Paul and his encouragement to the church at Philippi.

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen... and the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil 4:8-9)

Yes, it is God’s work and our hands.

We are ordinary people sharing extraordinary Grace.

May we trust that promise.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Jim Stuck