



# **Recommendations—Strategic Planning: Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

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A strategic planning process has been under way throughout the past biennium in the churchwide organization. Widespread involvement in this process has occurred throughout this church, especially in responses received in synodical assemblies and other settings. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America devoted extensive time to overseeing the process and making crucial decisions that already have yielded significant results.

## **Background Information**

At the April 4-6, 2003, meeting of the Church Council, the following resolution was adopted (CC03.04.17):

1. To receive the report, “Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” on the strategic planning process that was undertaken by the churchwide organization on behalf of this church, and that provides a statement of mission, a statement of vision, and a description of strategic directions for the churchwide organization for the years 2003–2012;
2. To adopt the mission statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:  
**Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.**
3. To adopt the vision statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:  
**Claimed by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we are a new creation through God’s living Word by the power of the Holy Spirit;  
Gathered by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we will live among God’s faithful people, hear God’s Word, and share Christ’s supper;  
Sent by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we will proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the world.**
4. To request that the Planning and Evaluation Committee, in consultation with the Cabinet of Executives, continue discussion of a statement of values for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
5. To adopt the strategic directions for the churchwide organization for the years 2003–2012:
  - a. **Support congregations in their call to be faithful, welcoming, and generous, sharing the mind of Christ;**
  - b. **Assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach;**
  - c. **Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God’s love for all that God has created;**
  - d. **Deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God’s mission; and**
  - e. **Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God’s mission in a pluralistic world.**
6. To affirm the evangelism strategy, in the form adopted by the 2003 or future Churchwide Assembly, as a core strategy of the strategic plan; and
7. To recognize the vital roles of individual members, congregations, synods, and related agencies and institutions in bringing to life this strategic plan throughout this church.

The Church Council also affirmed commitments for implementation of the strategic directions. The churchwide organization must and will:

1. Encourage, welcome, and depend upon the lively and creative exchange of resources and ideas throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
2. Recognize and encourage the vital contributions and deepening relationship with institutions and agencies of this church and with Lutheran, ecumenical, and interfaith partners;
3. Confront the scandalous realities of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual, physical, personal, and class barriers that often manifest themselves in exclusion, poverty, hunger, and violence; and
4. Pursue ardently the ELCA’s commitment to becoming more diverse, multicultural, and multi-generational in an ever-changing and increasingly pluralistic context, with special focus on full inclusion in this church of youth, young adults, and people of color and people whose primary language is other than English.

## Plan in Detail

### **Section I. Our Theological and Biblical Foundations for Planning for Mission**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is called and privileged to participate in God's mission to the world. We offer God's salvation to the world through a ministry of Word and Sacrament. Worshiping in the Spirit, we baptize people in the name of the Triune God, proclaim the Word of God as Law and Gospel, and nourish the baptized with Christ's own body and blood partaken in Holy Communion. Repenting and confessing our sin, we receive God's forgiveness. Thus, we live in the world as justified sinners who have been reconciled to God through Christ and who witness to the Gospel of Christ through word and deed.

God calls and empowers us for mission through baptism. As people baptized into Christ, we share in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). We are made into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and born into a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). When we witness to this new life, we boast not of our own accomplishments, but proclaim Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). Our lives as individuals and as a community are marked by the cross of Christ, who died for us (Romans 5:8) and lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

As a community of believers justified by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), we do not describe mission in terms of our own work, but with reference to the healing, salvation, and restoration that God accomplishes through Christ. We identify all our activities as loving responses to the love that Christ has first shown us (1 John 4:19). As members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27), we become the people through whom the risen Lord Jesus continues to work in this world. Like branches on a vine, we allow the fruit of Christ's mission to be borne in us and through us (John 15:5).

We are called to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31). Thus, our mission is internal and external: we are gathered by God to worship (Psalm 107:2-3) and sent by Christ to serve (John 20:21). We embrace Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20) and to extend gifts of healing and life to a broken world (Matthew 10:7-8). We pray for God's kingdom to come and we celebrate its presence wherever there is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17); we pray for God's will to be done and we celebrate its attainment whenever there is justice and mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

God's mission is carried out through a priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5) as God inspires, empowers, and blesses the work of the Church in its many manifestations, both organizationally and individually. Such mission is ultimately global in vision and impact, for Jesus calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). We further acknowledge that our mission constitutes but one part of God's saving activity in the world. We affirm the work of God

wherever it is found, trusting that God is active in and through other churches and, indeed, in and through everyone and everything that God has made.

Finally, we recognize that God's mission is directed by the Holy Spirit, whose work cannot be controlled or even predicted by human agencies (John 3:8). We seek the guidance of the Spirit in our planning, while expecting surprising developments and unanticipated opportunities to be granted by a God whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). We are certain only of God's promises and of the confident hope that all God's loving purposes will be fulfilled when our risen Lord Jesus Christ returns (1 John 3:2).

### **Section II. Our Mission**

#### **Mission Statement**

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

#### **Signature Phrase**

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

#### **Statement of Purpose**

1. What is the Church of Jesus Christ?

The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.<sup>1</sup>

2. What is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be one church. This church recognizes that all power and authority in the Church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, its head. Therefore, all actions of this church by congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization shall be carried out under his rule and authority...<sup>2</sup>

The name, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as used herein, refers, in general references, to this whole church, including its three primary expressions—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. The name, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is also the name of the corporation of the churchwide organization to which specific references are made herein.<sup>3</sup>

3. What are the chief purposes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

The primary purposes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are expressed in the constitutions of congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization as follows:

1. To proclaim God's saving Gospel;

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<sup>1</sup> Provision 4.01. in *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

<sup>2</sup> Provision 5.01.

<sup>3</sup> Bylaw 1.01.01.

2. To carry out Christ's Great Commission;
3. To serve in response to God's love to meet human needs;
4. To worship God;
5. To nurture members in the Word of God; and
6. To manifest the unity given to the people of God.

This church seeks to participate in God's mission in the world through the practice of these purposes, which are stated in churchwide constitutional provision 4.02. [†S6.02. in the *Constitution for Synods* and \*C4.02. in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*] as follows:

1. Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
2. Carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
3. Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
4. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
5. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.
6. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.<sup>4</sup>

### **Section III. Our Vision**

#### **Statement of Vision**

**Claimed** by God's grace for the sake of the world, we are a new creation through God's living Word by the power of the Holy Spirit;

**Gathered** by God's grace for the sake of the world, we will live among God's faithful people, hear God's Word, and share Christ's supper;

**Sent** by God's grace for the sake of the world, we will proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following

the example of our Lord Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the world.

### **Section IV. Our Operational Values**

#### **Principles of Organization**

What primary principles of organization guide the operation of this church? The primary principles of organization are:

1. Commitment to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose;
2. Interdependence;
3. Servant leadership;
4. Effective stewardship of resources;
5. Inclusive representation in assemblies, councils, boards, and committees;
6. Ongoing review of functions; and
7. Nurturing of unity.

These principles of organization are enumerated in churchwide constitutional provision 5.01.

### **Section V. Strategic Directions for the Churchwide Organization**

These strategic directions are offered with profound gratitude for the outpouring of gifts the Holy Spirit gives to members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In the course of implementing each of these strategic directions, the churchwide organization must and will:

1. Encourage, welcome, and depend upon the lively and creative exchange of resources and ideas throughout the ELCA;
2. Recognize and encourage the vital contributions and deepening relationship with institutions and agencies of this church and with Lutheran, ecumenical, and interfaith partners;
3. Confront the scandalous realities of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual, physical, personal, and class barriers that often manifest themselves in exclusion, poverty, hunger, and violence; and
4. Pursue ardently the ELCA's commitment to becoming more diverse, multicultural, and multi-generational in an ever-changing and increasingly pluralistic context, with special focus on full inclusion in this church of youth, young adults, and people of color and people whose primary language is other than English.

These five strategic directions are the priorities for the work of the churchwide organization for 2003–2012:

- ⊗ **Support congregations in their call to be faithful, welcoming, and generous, sharing the mind of Christ.**
- ⊗ **Assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach.**
- ⊗ **Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created.**

<sup>4</sup>Provision 4.02.

- ⊗ **Deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God's mission.**
- ⊗ **Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world.**

These directions are intended to advance this church's understanding of God's call to mission. These directions guide this church's vision for bringing alive the mission to which God calls us in this time and place. These directions are urgent work of this church. Each direction relies on partnership among this church's congregations, synods, agencies and institutions, and churchwide organization.

It is our conviction that an alive, awake organization is continually reforming itself. This reformation necessarily entails asking why the organization exists, where it is headed, and how it plans to get there. The journey toward the destination always requires discernment and choices. These five strategic directions reflect this church's effort to reform itself by making choices and focusing on the contribution of the churchwide organization in five key areas of our life together.

Contextual research included listening to voices of voting members and guests at the 2002 synodical assemblies and a host of focus groups throughout this church. In addition, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson presented his vision for the ELCA at a synodical-churchwide consultation in October 2002. The ELCA Church Council devoted a retreat and several plenary sessions to reviewing and developing the strategic planning content and process. The counsel of various teaching theologians throughout this church was sought, a number of them contributed papers to the endeavor. The ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation provided a significant number of research pieces.

The following case statements and outcome materials accompanying each of the strategic directions are works in progress. The case statements will be strengthened. The outcome statements will be made measurable. The present narrative is merely illustrative of initial thinking about the content of the strategic directions.

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*Claimed, gathered, and sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will:*

**Strategic Direction**

**Support congregations in their call to be faithful, welcoming, and generous, sharing the mind of Christ.**

**Case**

Healthy congregations are foundational for a healthy church body. Congregational life begins in worship

through Word and Sacrament. There we are welcomed as Christ welcomes us. Inspired and equipped by the Holy Spirit, our congregations are formative communities in which we deepen our faith; study Scripture, the confessions, creeds, and theology; and receive support for our witness in the world.

Contextual research named Bible study, prayer, discipleship and Lutheran identity borne from theology and the confessions as dimensions of this church's life to which we must pay much greater attention.

**Outcome**

We will be a church known in its congregations for:

1. changing lives and changing communities;
2. reflecting the demographics of their communities;
3. dynamic worship;
4. prayerful lives of faith and discipleship;
5. hospitality;
6. bold engagement in the world through witness and service;
7. generous stewardship;
8. support of members' varied vocations.

**Churchwide Organization's Strategies and Role**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

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*Claimed, gathered, and sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will:*

**Strategic Direction**

**Assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach.**

**Case**

A central aspect of our life together in the Church is inviting others into the faith. Proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ is the vocation of all the baptized.

We do not do the ministry of evangelical outreach consistently well throughout this church. We especially fall short in reaching youth, young adults, people of color, and people whose primary language is other than English.

Contextual research identified evangelical outreach as a high priority for the future. Additionally, our research lifted up multicultural and diversity ministries as well as youth and young adult ministries as among the greatest contextual challenges we face as a church.

**Outcome**

We will be a church known for:

1. equipping individual members to share the faith in daily life;
2. inviting others to hear the story of Jesus;

3. becoming a more diverse church body in age and ethnicity;
4. initiating a variety and growing number of Word and Sacrament ministries;
5. expanding youth and young adult ministries.

**Churchwide Organization's Strategies and Role**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

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*Claimed, gathered, and sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will:*

**Strategic Direction**

**Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created.**

**Case**

The Church is called to a public witness in and for the sake of the world. A public church witnesses globally and locally, in and for the sake of the world. Poverty, hunger, and violence are scandals to God's good creation.

Contextual research named the effects of secularization as well as social, economic, and globalization issues as among the greatest challenges facing this church in its mission. Attention to our Lutheran identity was underscored as one of the essential dimensions of this church's work in the future. Theological emphases on grace, justice, and peace are gifts to share with the world. The collective voice of the Church can be strong in working for the healing of creation.

**Outcome**

We will be a church known for:

1. vigorous, impatient engagement of every part of the ELCA in responding to poverty, hunger, health-care issues, and violence through ministries of service and justice;
2. a public identity and voice that addresses political, environmental, and other secular issues;
3. diversity and inclusivity;
4. every individual understanding her or his calling to take part in the healing of creation;
5. developing and exercising the arts of public leadership and engagement.

**Churchwide Organization's Strategies and Role**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

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*Claimed, gathered, and sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will:*

**Strategic Direction**

**Deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God's mission.**

**Case**

We bear witness to God's reconciling love in Christ Jesus and make visible our unity in Christ by learning from and sharing with global and ecumenical partners for the sake of God's mission.

Contextual research identified globalization as one of the chief factors having an impact on this church's mission and ministry today. Research also disclosed a high commitment to ecumenical and interfaith partnerships as a vital medium for ministry in this time and place.

**Outcome**

We will be a church known for:

1. heightened work for justice, peace, and care for creation;
2. deepened understanding of one another's gifts and histories;
3. expanded visibility of our unity in Christ through additional full communion partnerships;
4. increased understanding among people of different faiths through increased interfaith dialogue.

**Strategies and Churchwide Role**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

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*Claimed, gathered, and sent by God's grace for the sake of the world, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in and through its churchwide expression will:*

**Strategic Direction**

**Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world.**

**Case**

Significant attention to leadership was identified by contextual research as one of the five most essential components of this church's future mission. The vision for mission and the other strategic directions in this strategic plan depend on people who will share their diverse gifts of leadership for the sake of God's mission. A strong system of theological and higher education must be sustained. A growing system of support of laity for their leadership roles in the church must be nurtured.

### **Outcome**

We will be a church that:

1. steadfastly encourages the ministry of all the baptized;
2. increasingly recruits, calls, and places leaders who reflect this church's commitment to become a more diverse church body;
3. raises up leaders who passionately proclaim Christ, courageously live out a vision of God's mission locally and globally, and faithfully are grounded in Scripture and the Confessions;
4. supports partnership among congregations in the development of learning and training opportunities for laity;
5. assists the people of this church to articulate their understanding and sense of vocation.

### **Strategies and Churchwide Role**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

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There are certain aspects of the churchwide organization's work that are essential, strategic resources for the fulfillment of the strategic directions. Without these resources, the strategic plan is significantly weakened. These resources, for which fresh strategies are required, are:

1. growing **financial resources** through mission-support contributions, designated gifts, donations in wills, bequests, and trusts, and receipts from other sources (a comprehensive strategy is under development);
2. refined and improved use of **communication media and technologies** (a completed communication audit of the churchwide organization is the foundation for a strategy);
3. **research** that increases our knowledge of the context in which our ministries occur;
4. ongoing **evaluation** of the quality and effectiveness of all churchwide ministries pertinent to the strategic directions.

### **Measurement Indicators for Strategic Directions**

To be determined and reported to the ELCA Church Council in August and November 2003

### **Recommendation for Assembly Action**

1. To acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of the Church Council and the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in overseeing a strategic planning process with widespread participation from throughout the synods of this church as well as churchwide boards, various groups, the Cabinet of Executives, the Conference of Bishops, and others in the development of the report, "Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America";
2. To direct that the Office of the Presiding Bishop oversee and coordinate the implementation of this strategic plan, and bring to the November 2003 meeting of the Church Council a report and recommendations, including proposals to bring the strategic plan to operational life by:
  - a. Aligning the churchwide budget within the parameters adopted by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly, organizing staffing, and providing structure in keeping with the mission, vision, and directions of the strategic plan;
  - b. Identifying an initial set of strategies in consultation with all churchwide units;
  - c. Consulting with leaders of synods, agencies, and institutions on further development of the plan; and
  - d. Preparing possible constitutional and bylaw amendments for consideration by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly to provide alignment of the churchwide organization with the strategic plan;
3. To invite the synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to review their planning processes in relation to the primary purposes of this church and the report, "Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"; and
4. To encourage all congregations to reflect on the ways in which the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is summoned to faithful and diligent service together for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.