



---

---

## Report of the Communication Services Unit

---

---

### Statement of Purpose

The mission of the Communication Services (CO) unit is to “interpret the work of this church, provide for this church’s presence in the public media, and coordinate the communication activities of this church’s units.” The governing description for this service unit is defined in continuing resolution 17.21.A06., printed in Section X of this volume.

### Report of Work for 2007–2009 Web Redevelopment

After two years of tireless work under the direction of the Communication Services Web team, the redeveloped Web site of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) ([www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)) was launched in April 2008. The site boasts a new look and tone, a highly intuitive search function, multiple opportunities for interactivity, and a new content-management system. One blogger commented that the new site offers “a great new front porch” that welcomes visitors and those who aren’t familiar with the ELCA—a key audience for this undertaking.

Current statistics for the Web site confirm the value of a contemporary, user-friendly Web presence. More than 1 million visits were recorded in the first nine months of the redesign (almost half of which were unique visitors), and there were nearly 4 million page views. At least 60 percent of first-time visitors return for additional visits. In January 2009 the site registered more than 132,500 unique visitors. On the busiest day that month, almost 9,000 people visited.

The new design promotes deeper user engagement. Time spent by visitors viewing the home page tripled from an average of 23 seconds to an average of 59 seconds. Following behind various combinations of the keywords “ELCA,” “Lutheran,” and “church,” the most common search term visitors use to find the site is “prayer.” Of these visitors, 85 percent are first-time users, and 13 percent of visitors to the Prayer Center request that someone pray for them. Finally, an interesting statistic reveals that there are more visitors from India than from Norway, Sweden, and Finland combined.

### Branding and Advertising

In November 2008 the Communication Services staff rolled out the ELCA’s new tagline, “God’s work. Our hands.” Included in the rollout were “brandmark” templates (including stationery, business cards, and e-signatures) for use by congregations, institutions, and units of the ELCA, and the first installment of an ELCA Graphic Standards Manual. A

Web site with landmark resources for members and professional leaders is available at [www.elca.org/ourbrand](http://www.elca.org/ourbrand).

The Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services team led the effort to create and implement a pilot project for an ELCA ad initiative that was rolled out in the greater Denver area in September 2007. This project included print and outdoor advertising. The ads communicated the story of what God is doing in and through the ELCA for the sake of the world. The campaign’s goals are to help ELCA members claim their Lutheran identity in order to own and tell this church’s story and, through that telling, to be instrumental in helping the ELCA grow. The content of the ad material was based on the then-proposed tagline, “God’s work. Our hands.”

Research conducted before and during the pilot project helped to determine the target audience and to keep the campaign “on message.” Follow-up research showed that the primary goals of building Lutheran identity and strengthening witness had been accomplished. All research pointed to the need to create and include television-advertising spots in media buys.

In April 2008 two television spots were filmed to broaden the advertising media toolkit. A limited schedule of two spots was run on the Travel Channel in October 2008. The ads were run again in Spring 2009 on CNN/HLN, HGTV, DIY, and Fox News.

Also in the last biennium, the Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services team has incorporated publishing services functions (formerly with Augsburg Fortress, Publishers) in its staffing and work flow; developed strategic marketing plans for Church in Society, the Office of the Presiding Bishop (anti-racism), *Grace Matters*, and the documentary “Native Nations”; managed the Congregational Leadership Directory; worked collaboratively with Development Services to supply additional database support through Raiser’s Edge (software); and provided publishing services to other units in the churchwide organization. The team is currently coordinating a churchwide organization effort to update the ELCA Style Guide and the ELCA Graphic Standards Manual. In May 2008 *Seeds for the Parish* was completely redesigned. The new design provides an annual cost savings of approximately \$80,000 in postage.

### ELCA News Service

The ELCA News Service staff provided support before, during, and after the January 2009 Bishops’ Academy in the Holy Land. Prior to the trip, news staff helped synodical bishops develop communication plans so that the bishops could both keep their constituents informed and be well prepared for media interviews. During the trip, the News

Service arranged for local media coverage and provided daily news releases and Web postings about the group's experiences. Public Media staff worked with the News Service to provide video footage for the Web. Back in the States, the News Service followed up with media requests for additional information and interviews.

The News Service prepared for the release of the proposed social statement on human sexuality and the recommendations for ministry policies, and also covered The United Methodist Church's vote to adopt a full-communion proposal with the ELCA. Other events covered during the biennium included the Women of the ELCA gathering and convention in Salt Lake City and the ELCA Global Mission Event in La Crosse, Wis.

A news staff person traveled with Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson in his role as president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to report on his activities in Kenya, Tanzania, Mexico City (International AIDS Conference) and Lutherstadt in Wittenberg, Germany. News reporting is also provided to the LWF.

The news staff continues to respond to media inquiries directed to the churchwide organization and provides media assistance to congregations, synods, and other ELCA-related organizations dealing with crises. Staff has conducted workshops on media-related topics and continues to teach media relations to synod communicators through a media-mentoring initiative. The news staff has concentrated its recent work on developing and "pitching" more mission and ministry stories for use by mainstream news organizations and by church news organizations.

## Networks and Resource Information

Communication Services' Interactive Media and Networks team led the way on redeveloping LutherLink (the online community of the ELCA) in partnership with Lightworks New Media. This partnership affords new features and more stability for the Ecunet platform. The team also worked with the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin to launch the ELCA presence on [elca.feauter.org](http://elca.feauter.org), a Web site started as a result of a World Council of Churches consultation on "open-source religious resources." The site features almost 650 locally produced resources from congregations across the ELCA that are being shared in the context of this global, ecumenical effort. Resources available for free download range from acolyte training manuals to discipleship skits and ideas for celebrating a church anniversary.

The ELCA Resource Information Service (1-800-638-3522) continues to be a valued service to our members. In 2008 staff assisted callers with more than \$202,500 in credit card donations, mailed over 2,000 free resources, answered some 85,000 calls on the 800-line and registered more than 700 new ELCA congregation Web sites in the congregational database.

## Public Media

"In God's Name," a prime-time CBS television special, aired in December 2007 and featured Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson and 11 other prominent religious leaders from around the world. More than 3.96 million viewers nationwide saw the program. The Public Media Team of the Communication Services unit coordinated local production efforts in cooperation with the international film crew. The program is available on DVD. To order a copy, go to [www.elca.org/ingodsname](http://www.elca.org/ingodsname). On the same site is a study guide developed by the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section, the Global Mission unit, and Communication Services to download for use with the DVD.

Working in collaboration with the Multicultural Ministries unit, the Public Media team completed a one-hour documentary, "Native Nations: Standing Together for Civil Rights," hosted by veteran actor Peter Coyote. The program began airing in October 2008 on ABC Television affiliates across the country. More information about the program and its production, as well as DVD-ordering information, is available at [www.elca.org/nativenations](http://www.elca.org/nativenations).

Earlier, the Public Media team had completed filming the one-hour documentary, "Uganda: Ready to Forgive." The program, which began airing in November 2008, provides insight into the plight of the Ugandan people and their incredible ability to forgive their enemies after 20 years of war, pain, and torture. For information or to view the program, visit [www.elca.org/readytoforgive](http://www.elca.org/readytoforgive).

Public Media staff traveled with the Lutheran Disaster Response team to Iowa and Wisconsin after the flooding in spring 2008, and produced two videos, "After the Floods" and "Disaster Preparedness." Staff also produced videos for the *Lutheran Woman Today* Bible study series, the Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering and convention, a local ELCA youth event for World Hunger ("Bowling for Jesus") in Denver, the Global Mission event, the ELCA Communicators' Conference, and a short, lighthearted video for the internal rollout of the ELCA brandmark.

In February ELCA Communication Services announced that *Grace Matters*, the radio ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), would no longer be produced. This decision was based on Communication Services' and the churchwide organization's current strategic priorities and taken in response to economic challenges. The radio ministry's first program aired in 1947 with the name *Lutheran Vespers*. For the next 58 years *Lutheran Vespers* aired each week on radio stations in the United States and other parts of the world. In 2005 the name was changed to *Grace Matters*. This church remains thankful for this wonderful ministry that has touched so many lives over the years, for the donors and volunteers whose efforts kept *Grace Matters* (and before that *Lutheran Vespers*) on the air, and for the faithful, talented staff whose sense of mission and vocation helped shape *Grace Matters* into more than just a program. The last broadcast of *Grace Matters* aired on Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009.

## Communicators' Conference

The 2008 ELCA Communicators' Conference, "Network Power," was the best ever, according to participant evaluations. Approximately 175 synodical, institutional, and organizational communication staff attended the biennial continuing education event. Keynote speakers were Rick Klau, Google, Inc.; Clarence Page, *Chicago Tribune*; Jamila Paksima, public television producer; and Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson. There were 18 workshops on subjects including ELCA identity and branding, marketing, crisis communication, video production, photography, media mentoring, and newsletter design.

## Staffing Changes

In the 2007–2009 biennium, Mr. John R. Brooks was named associate executive director for Communication Services (while continuing to serve as ELCA News Director); Ms. Wendy E. Blanck was promoted to executive administrative assistant; Mr. Benjamin T. McDonald continued as associate director for the Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services team but with the newly developed portfolio of managing editor for the Web; Ms. Connie M. Sletto and Ms. Colleen C. Dorner moved from the Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, staff to Communication Services to continue their work in publishing services; and Mr. Richard Millett moved from the Resource Information Service to administrative assistant for the Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services team.

Staff vacancies were filled by Mr. Brett J. Nelson, audio/video producer and production manager (March 2008); Mr. Scott J. Hendrickson, director for Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services (September 2008); Ms. Jodi Deike, director for grassroots advocacy and communication in

the Washington, D.C., office (October 2008); Ms. Marianne Griebler, associate director for Marketing, Public Relations, and Creative Services (whose position of storyteller/writer was recommended by the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding and Interpretation, November 2008); and Ms. Susan Hogan, associate director for the ELCA News Service (storyteller/features writer, December 2008).

## Major Directions for 2009–2011

The priorities for the Communication Services unit for 2009–2011 include:

- Expanding brandmark and tagline use throughout this church;
- Telling the story of what God is doing in and through the ELCA for the sake of the world;
- Increasing the use of social media to maximize communication reach;
- Building out [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) to its full capacity (e.g., short videos, surveys, alerts, feedback);
- Using all available media to tell the ELCA story internally and externally;
- Fostering communication networks and nurturing relationships with congregations and synods;
- Developing workflow and account services processes; and,
- Tracking outcomes using research-based evaluation of the unit's work.

Ms. Kristi S. Bangert, *executive director*

*This page intentionally left blank.*