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## Report of the Presiding Bishop

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*“Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”*

We gather for the eleventh Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) under the sign of Christ's death and resurrection and in the promise and power of the Holy Spirit. Bathed in God's baptismal grace and joined to Christ's body through God's living Word, we approach the work of the assembly with humility and hope.

We also gather in the midst of a significant economic recession. Consequences of the volatile economy are being felt in the lives of ELCA members, the ministries of congregations and the churchwide organization, and the work of partner agencies and institutions. Such challenging times call for:

- Evangelical missional imagination;
- Faithful and generous stewardship of God's bountiful gifts and of our interdependence; and
- Telling the story of what God is doing in and through this church.

This report seeks to build upon these three themes through the lens of “Faithful Yet Changing: The Plan For Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” (2003), looking at progress made, shared work strengthened, and challenges being addressed. I offer this report with profound gratitude for this church and for the lives of faith, witness, and service of each member.

### Mission Statement

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

### Five Strategic Directions

The five strategic directions of the Plan for Mission commit the churchwide expression to work with partners to undergird and sustain what we do to support congregations, grow in evangelical outreach, step forward as a public church, deepen relationships, and bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders.

### Four Commitments for Implementation

The Plan for Mission's four “commitments for implementation” state that the churchwide organization, in collaboration with its partners, will exchange resources and ideas throughout this church; deepen relationships with institutions and agencies of this church and with partners; confront the scandalous realities of barriers that often manifest themselves in exclusion, poverty, hunger, and violence; and pursue our

commitment to become more diverse, multicultural, and multi-generational in an ever-changing and increasingly pluralistic context.

### Guided by the Plan for Mission

Within the context of the Plan for Mission, the churchwide organization is focusing on priorities that will give greater clarity to its work and decisions regarding budget, staffing, and programs. They assist the churchwide organization, working collaboratively with congregations, synods, agencies and institutions, and other partners, to sharpen its focus and increase its impact in specific areas:

- Accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and
- Building capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.

### Strategic Direction: Supporting Congregations

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

### Congregations in the ELCA Today

The first critical priority for this church is to accompany congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission. The vision of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission (EOCM) unit captures the energy of this priority: Every person is a missionary, every pastor is a mission director, and every congregation is a mission center for the sake of the world.

Congregations, whatever their context, location, size, diversity, age, or style, are the bedrock of this church's mission and ministry. Thanks be to God for congregations, for those who lead them, and for their “faithful, welcoming, and generous” presence throughout this church.

- Some observations about congregations in the ELCA today:
- Through the “Book of Faith” initiative, the Holy Spirit is once again renewing this church. We are committed to becoming fluent in the first language of our faith, the language of Scripture. The initiative will take different forms in every context, but will include hearing the Word, praying and singing the Scriptures, and studying God's Word. Eagerly anticipated resources include the *Lutheran Study Bible*, the *Spark Bible* for children, and many Bible study guides. “Book of Faith” advocates in each synod are scheduling workshops for congregational leaders. It is my hope that every ELCA congregation will be a Book of Faith congregation, just as this Churchwide Assembly will be a Book of Faith Assembly.

- In response to a 2007 Churchwide Assembly action, the ELCA bureau for federal chaplaincy led a series of workshops on care for returning veterans. The workshops, now available on DVD, assist congregations in responding to the needs of those returning home from military service.
- In response to the report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding, the 2007 Churchwide Assembly called for “renewed commitment to vigorous mission-support efforts throughout the congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries of the ELCA.” Among the strategies were one-on-one conversations with synodical bishops and the ELCA Church Council “about their personal and corporate stewardship, including the importance of tithing.” The ELCA officers have completed these remarkably rich conversations and encourage the use of this model as we seek to hold each other accountable for our stewardship.

### Responding to Challenges

The churchwide organization has worked to strengthen its connections with congregations, recognizing that the synodical expression is the key link in this interdependent church. We have work still to do:

- As we seek to be about God’s mission in an ever-changing context, worship around the means of grace is central for the renewal of community within congregations. Data about worship life and giving, however, include some sobering trends:
  1. Many of the 25 percent of ELCA congregations with 50 or fewer people in worship each Sunday face the dual challenges of providing pastoral leadership while remaining focused on mission;
  2. Nearly two-thirds of ELCA congregations report a decrease in worship attendance of five percent or more from 2000–2007; nearly 20 percent report a comparable increase;
  3. In the last 20 years, approximately 300,000 fewer people worship in ELCA congregations each Sunday; and,
  4. In the last 20 years, undesignated giving to congregations, adjusted for inflation, is flat. Operating costs, however, have increased.
- Some of the challenges I have named in earlier reports continue to be challenges for us. These include:
  1. ELCA congregations are predominantly white in an increasingly diverse society. How can each congregation live out this church’s commitment to be a Pentecost people: multilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic?
  2. We need to talk more honestly and openly about how each of us responds to God’s call to be generous and faithful stewards of God’s money.

### Strategic Direction: Growing in Evangelical Outreach

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

#### Evangelical Outreach in the ELCA Today

As a church, we are claiming our name—*evangelical* Lutheran—and becoming an evangelizing church in a Lutheran key. Our name is a constant reminder that the good news of Jesus Christ is at the center of our lives of faith, the ministry of congregations, and our proclamation to the ends of the earth. Some observations about evangelical outreach in the ELCA today:

- The Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission (EOCM) program unit has inspired a new vision for its work, the evangelizing congregations missional plan, with every bishop leading as a missionary bishop, and all leaders called to missional leadership for the plan’s vision: every person is a missionary, every pastor is a mission director, and every congregation is a mission station for the sake of the world. Synodical mission tables will provide leadership for powerful renewal that embraces the growing diversity in America. Central to the plan is a newly designed staff position in each synod, the director for evangelical mission (DEM).
- For congregations to be growing centers of evangelical mission, ELCA members must grow in their discipleship faith practices, including worship, biblical study, spiritual formation, communal discernment, discipleship, and prayer. Likewise, in every congregation, prayer and other faith practices must permeate every meeting, decision, and aspect of parish life.
- Evangelical missional imagination responds to a changing and diverse context with new forms of ministry and mission. Examples include:
  1. ***Imagine the power of interdependence.*** When Hurricane Ike left large portions of the Houston area without power, students from Lutheran Campus Ministry prepared food and served meals to their neighbors. When an ice storm blanketed western Kentucky, members at House of Prayer Lutheran Church in Elizabethtown opened their building for people to gather. When a plane crash shattered the evening silence west of Buffalo, New York, the folks at Zion Lutheran Church in Clarence Center held a special prayer service for their community. And when the potential for historic floods threatened the Red River Valley, residents of Fargo and Moorhead and students from as far away as Iowa spent long hours sandbagging. Thank you for your prayers, support, and service in times of disaster. Thank you for walking together with those in need. Thank you for being Lutheran Disaster Response.

2. **Imagine equipping multicultural missional leaders.** The Multicultural Ministries unit, in partnership with the Arkansas-Oklahoma, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana, Southwestern Texas, and Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast synods, held a multicultural event to engage and equip rostered and lay leaders in an intentional process of ministry among people of varying races, cultures, and ethnicities in their communities.
  3. **Imagine missional congregations.** Bridge of Peace is an urban congregation in Camden, N.J. Worship services are multi-racial and multilingual in Portuguese, Spanish, and English. Pr. Giselle Carvalho Coutinho says, “We are evangelists. There is so much hope here. There is always an opportunity to share the Gospel and help others.”
  4. **Imagine funding missional leaders.** The Mission Investment Fund, in response to conversations about seminary student debt, gave a \$1.5 million gift to the Fund for Leaders in Mission to launch a new matching gift program to provide \$4.5 million for seminary scholarships for future mission developers.
- Central to telling the story of what God is doing in and through this church is a fresh approach to the use of the ELCA's graphic identity, its “emblem,” with this church's name and tagline. Used together, these three elements make up the ELCA's landmark:



### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

This landmark brings the ELCA's whole identity to life and provides an opportunity for each of this church's three expressions to claim that identity and be part of the whole through customized use of the mark.

### **Responding to Challenges**

There are some challenges related to evangelical outreach in this church, which I have shared in earlier reports:

- Perhaps our expectations of the Holy Spirit are low. The book of Acts reminds us of the Spirit's power to create faith, inspire witness, and grow the church.
- Growing in evangelical outreach begins with us who are leaders. Let us invite and bring unchurched friends, colleagues, or family members with us to worship.
- When confronted with the loss of membership, let us imagine new possibilities for mission rather than focus on survival.
- Let us learn from our global companion churches how to tell the story of Jesus Christ and invite people to new life in Christ.

## **Strategic Direction: Stepping Forward as a Public Church**

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

### **The Public Church in the ELCA Today**

We are a public church when all the baptized live out their faith in their daily callings in home, school, neighborhoods, and the workplace. We are a public church when we gather around the means of grace in worship. We are a public church when we serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus. We are a public church when we strive for justice and peace in all the earth. We are a public church when we gather to wrestle with challenging questions.

- After two years of planning, synodical bishops, their spouses, and bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) traveled to the Holy Land for the Academy for Bishops, an annual gathering for study and worship. The trip was planned as a witness to God's will for a just peace for all people and as an expression of accompaniment with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and ministries of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).
- The Conference of Bishops has engaged in training in the arts of public leadership. Many are involved in “ready benches” that are available to speak about critical advocacy issues: immigration, the environment, international matters, the Middle East, and farming. In addition, thousands of members have joined the ELCA e-Advocacy Network. As part of the network, members learn about, reflect upon, and advocate about issues based on their Christian values and informed by ELCA social statements.
- The development of this church's HIV and AIDS strategy began with a consultation that included global companion churches, partner agencies and institutions, and other organizations. Through personal stories, small-group discussion, and readings, participants identified critical issues to consider in the strategy. The strategy was approved by the Church Council in March 2009.
- We anticipate the launching of the Lutheran Malaria Initiative at this assembly under this compelling vision: “Working together, Lutheran World Relief, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and the ELCA will model a new and innovative partnership for the sake of Christ's mission in the world. Through collaboration, these partners will mobilize eight million Lutherans to amazing levels of generosity and action in the fight to contain malaria and other diseases of poverty.”
- Lutheran Disaster Response has been recognized as a leader in providing case management to disaster-affected households. This includes Lutheran Social Services of the South, which received over \$24 million in federal funding to support case managers as they advocate for the recovery needs of Hurricane Ike survivors.

- While immigration currently is not a “front and center” issue legislatively, I strongly believe that we are called to make it so. The ELCA works hand in hand with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) to advocate and provide assistance for refugees, migrants, and those seeking political asylum. This assembly will honor Pr. Ralston H. Deffenbaugh Jr., who has served as president of LIRS for 18 years.
- With more than 82 million Americans using the Internet for faith-related reasons, the ELCA seeks to be a public church that actively participates in the global online community. Social media are tools both for communication and invitation as we grow this church together. The ELCA continues to create opportunities for members to talk about their own faith stories by helping them tell others what it means to be Lutheran Christians in their contexts.

### **Responding to Challenges**

- We are a public church when we wrestle with challenging questions. Let us provide safe places for discernment and model ways to speak about difficult issues without the rancor associated with public debate.
- Let us seek ways to be leaders who convene people of varying perspectives so that we might discern together what God is calling us to do in the midst of our complex and conflicted world.
- Let us seek ways to join others as we advocate for particular public policies and seek to hold elected officials accountable.
- Let us partner as synod teams, churchwide staff, and congregational leaders toward living into our commitment to be a public church at the intersection of race and poverty.

### **Strategic Direction: Deepening and Extending Relationships**

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

#### **Relationships in the ELCA Today**

Just as the world is interrelated through the Internet and travel, the ELCA is interrelated through a rich variety of interdependent relationships. The once unimaginable interconnections with global partners are now reflected throughout this church. The commitment to accompaniment as defined by the Global Mission unit provides strong guidance for these relationships. Some observations about global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships in the ELCA today:

- At this assembly, voting members will consider joining with the United Methodist Church as our sixth full-communion partner. The basic agreement cites that “there are no church-dividing differences precluding full communion between the ELCA and the United Methodist Church.”
- In September 2008, I had the privilege of preaching in the Wittenberg Castle Church as the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) launched the “Luther Decade.” The next ten years will provide opportunity for us as Lutherans

in the United States to find ways to commemorate the ongoing Lutheran Reformation and celebrate its results. One concrete example will take place in October 2009 as a province of the Roman Catholic bishops joins with the ELCA Conference of Bishops to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.”

- Throughout this church, Lutherans engage locally in interfaith dialogue and cooperative responses to human needs, learn more about people of other faiths, and hold the government accountable through advocacy. For the churchwide organization, a priority focus for interfaith dialogue is peace with justice in the Middle East, particularly through the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI) and Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP).
- Even as we continue the important and challenging work of bilateral dialogues, the ecumenical movement is sustained by a grass-roots ecumenism in local communities. Christians praying together, studying Scripture, and engaging in acts of witness, service, and the pursuit of justice are strong testimonies to both our unity and our diversity as members of the body of Christ.

### **Responding to Challenges**

- This church has much to celebrate as we lift up our full-communion agreements with ecumenical partners. Let us not view these full-communion agreements as end points, but rather as the beginning of mission and ministry that can happen through them, including starting new ministries, collaborating on shared ministries, and finding other ways to be in mission together.
- The General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Christ (NCCC), Michael Kinnamon, wrote to the NCCC board, “In plentiful times, churches often equate being ecumenical with cooperation, doing some things together. Lean times may be an opportunity to go beyond cooperation to a generous sharing of resources, a sharing of life through an intentional deepening of relationships. It could be an opportunity to take seriously the famously ignored Lund Principle: ‘doing all things together except those which deep differences of conviction compel us to do separately.’”
- The Lutheran World Federation, a communion of churches, continues to grow in membership and mission. Together with 139 other member churches in 78 countries and 68 million baptized members, the ELCA is promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, responding to humanitarian suffering, engaging in ecumenical and interfaith cooperation, and confronting a growing ecological crisis. Let us continue this church’s strong support for LWF.
- Some of the challenges named in earlier reports continue to be challenges for us. They include:
  1. Our increasingly interconnected and globalized world has significant implications for how we are engaged in global mission. How do we affirm the growing network of companion relationships between congregations and

synods without becoming so fragmented that we lose the connection to strong church-to-church relationships? How do we respond to the financial needs of companion churches without creating relationships of dependency?

2. Let us not submit to the rhetoric of religious extremism. Rather, through dialogue and shared action in local communities, both nationally and internationally, let us build inter-religious relationships.

## **Strategic Direction: Bringing Forth and Supporting Leaders**

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

### **Leadership in the ELCA Today**

A key emphasis of this strategic direction is vocation, which means "calling." The vision of the Vocation and Education (VE) program unit captures the energy of this calling, which comes from the Gospel, works through the ELCA, and is for the world. As a church body, we seek to work through the goals of vocations claimed, networks nurtured, and leaders equipped. Some observations about leadership in the ELCA today:

- The cost of theological education is a challenge to both seminaries and seminarians. A consultation on seminarian student debt is collaborating to address the commitment to solve this challenge, which burdens both rostered leaders and their ministries. A proposal has been submitted to the Lilly Endowment, which has observed that, while most church bodies recognize this as a crucial issue, what makes the ELCA distinctive and promising is the way we are working to address it together.
- ELCA colleges and universities continue to strengthen their relationships to this church and to build upon the strong Lutheran themes of vocation, faith seeking understanding, and faith freeing us for engagement in the world. Students at our colleges and universities have a passion for being part of a church that is making a difference in the world. Let us seek opportunities to engage the gifts and energies of these young leaders.
- About 150 ELCA women of color in ministry gathered for the first of an anticipated three-event strategy to support this important group of leaders. The event focused on strengthening the individual and collective voices of rostered and lay women of color leaders to transform the congregations and ministry settings in which they serve.

### **Responding to Challenges**

- The seminaries of this church, increasingly interconnected, are vital to preparing and supporting leaders who bring biblical and theological wisdom necessary for a missional church. In the midst of current economic challenges and the growth of synodical lay leadership training programs, let us maintain the ELCA's strong sense of common mission in theological education.

- This church is committed to supporting healthy leaders through the "Healthy Leaders Enhance Lives" initiative, which focuses on interpersonal, intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual health centered in God's gift of grace. Let us challenge our leaders to make healthy living a daily discipline.
- The report and recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding gives high priority to stewardship education and leadership throughout this church. Key components will be our willingness to speak honestly and forthrightly about our stewardship of money.
- Even as we address the commitment to increase the number of young adults in this church, let us receive the wisdom and gifts of the young adults who are present and be transformed by their passion to make a difference in the world.

## **Keeping our commitments**

It is very important that this church continue to implement the four commitments that intersect the Plan for Mission. The commitments are:

- Encourage, welcome, and depend upon the lively and creative exchange of resources and ideas throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
- Recognize and encourage the vital contributions and deepening relationship with institutions and agencies of this church and with Lutheran, ecumenical, and interfaith partners;
- 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
- Pursue ardently the ELCA's commitment to become 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 commitments have informed much of the work I have described in this report. Permit me to share some additional reflections on the commitments:

- This church's vision of freedom and liberation from the vestiges of racism are spelled out in the ELCA constitution and the social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture." The constitution committed this church to a membership goal of 10 percent people of color by 1998, but we still fall far short of this commitment. Let us as leaders consider our role in moving this church closer to being an anti-racist and multicultural church.
- Four alliances based on the churchwide organization's commitments for implementation (young adult ministry, multicultural ministries, poverty and wealth, and justice for women) continue to assist the organization to express and deepen the commitments and to understand and, where necessary, change its culture in these matters.
- To support synodical anti-racism teams in their work, an event titled, "At the Intersection of Race and Poverty: An

ELCA Capacity-Building and Network Gathering” brought together more than 100 current and emerging ELCA synodical anti-racism leaders from 30 synods and nine regions, plus other leaders to inform the next stage of ELCA synodical anti-racism work.

- The ELCA Church Council is committed to continuing anti-sexism and anti-racism training. During the biennium, the council also participated in a racial justice monitoring pilot to provide observations on the process of deliberations within the council. In addition, the council’s July 2008 retreat focused on “transforming scandalous realities,” specifically racism and sexism.
- In 2008, churchwide employees participated in mandated anti-racism education and training that focused on White power and privilege. In addition, Dr. Allan Johnson met with the Cabinet of Executives to discuss the challenges raised in his book, *The Gender Knot*.
- Synods are seeking processes to ensure that Synod Assemblies, Synod Councils, and other committees are more inclusive, including persons of color or those whose primary language is other than English, youth, and young adults.
- The 2008 film, “Native Nations: Standing Together for Civil Rights,” captures an important piece of this church’s history. Hosted by actor Peter Coyote, the film chronicles a relationship between the American Indian community and the Lutheran church during the 1970s and 1980s, when the National Indian Lutheran Board (NILB) was formed to address the issues of social justice, sovereignty, and the self-determination of Native people. A team of American Indian producers led the project.
- In response to a resolution from the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly, a “communal discernment task force” was convened by the Church Council in 2008 to “examine models of communal discernment and report on recommendations about how we might work together in a way that fosters trust and deepens our spiritual discernment of challenging dilemmas and issues in our future.” The Church Council approved the initial report in November 2008 and authorized continuing work through the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.
- More than 150 leaders from across this church attended the “Transformative Lutheran Theologies” conference, which highlighted Lutheran theological scholarship as a means to engender justice for women in church and society.

## With a grateful heart

It is a privilege to serve in this call and to give thanks to God for individuals growing in the faith; congregations alive in Christ; synods engaged in mission; and seminaries, colleges and universities, schools, campus, outdoor, and social ministries deepening their relationship to this church. I am encouraged by the resiliency, evangelical passion for the Gospel, and perseverance in pursuing justice and peace in our global companions and by the growth in our ecumenical relationships.

One of the many strengths of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is that this church is an “ecology” of interdependent ecosystems. This image not only captures Paul’s

description of the church as the body of Christ with many members, but also describes the deep commitment to interdependence, not only between congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, but also seminaries, colleges and universities, schools, social ministry organizations, camps and outdoor ministries, men’s ministries, Women of the ELCA, and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers. This ecology is part of a larger ecology that includes global companions, ecumenical partners, and shared ministries with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod: Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran Disaster Response, and many chaplaincy ministries.

It is very clear that the work of the churchwide organization highlighted in this report is possible only because of the exceptionally gifted colleagues with whom I am privileged to serve. My thanks to my colleagues on the churchwide staff; to my fellow officers, Vice President Carlos Peña, Secretary David Swartling, and Treasurer Christina Jackson-Skelton; to the members of the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council for their faithful leadership; and to Executive for Administration M. Wyvetta Bullock for her exceptional leadership of the churchwide organization.

During the past biennium, we have welcomed ten new bishops to the Conference of Bishops. Please join me in expressing deep gratitude to the bishops who have completed their terms during this biennium: Bp. Duane C. Danielson; Bp. David A. Donges; Bp. Richard J. Foss; Bp. Philip L. Hougen; Bp. April Ulring Larson; Bp. David G. Mullen; Bp. David R. Strobel; and Bp. Peter Strommen.

We continue to grieve with the Southeast Michigan Synod the death of Bp. John H. Schreiber and to express gratitude to former Bp. Kenneth R. Olsen, who has served the Southeast Michigan Synod as interim bishop, and to Bishop-Elect Stephen G. Marsh, who began serving July 1, 2009.

We also acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the exemplary leadership and service of the Church Council’s “Class of 2009,” who complete their terms on this council at this assembly: Ms. Judith Anne Bunker; Ms. Norma J. Hirsch; Pr. David E. Jensen; Mr. William R. Lloyd Jr.; Pr. J. Paul Rajashekar; Pr. John C. Richter; Pr. Noreen A. Smith; Mr. Richard L. Wahl; Ms. Phyllis L. Wallace; and Mr. Gary L. Wipperman.

In closing, I give thanks to God for all of you, for your commitment and dedication as elected leaders of this church, and for the faithful ways in which you lead, serve, and bear witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus for the whole world.

As I prayerfully prepare for the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, I do so with a sense of confident hope. I am hopeful because our hope is in God, who by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel creates and sustains the Church.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).*

+ The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, *presiding bishop*