

# ANNUAL REPORT 2015



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

PHOTO BY  
FRANKLIN ISHIDA

## A message from the presiding bishop



PHOTO BY MICHAEL WATSON

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a church with a particular way of understanding the Jesus story. It is not a movement from unbridled freedom to submission, but a story of God redeeming us from sin, death and the devil. This redemption sets us free from our bondage to sin so that, liberated and alive, we may serve God by serving our neighbor. This service is not about our effort or goodness or hard work. It is about God's gracious will to be merciful.

As you review the work you have done this past year and make decisions for the year ahead, remember that we who were dead to sin have now been made alive to who we are: God's people. We engage in dialogue, discernment and action declaring God's work and bringing a clear voice to the public square. We respond to God's deep abiding love by making faithful choices about how to use the generous gifts of time, talent and financial resources entrusted to us.

Whenever you and your leaders engage in planning and decision-making, we are challenged to discern and model a different story from the one culture tells us. It is this much-needed story of love and faithfulness, forgiveness and joy, humility and resolve that shapes the ELCA's role in your community and the world.

Serving together in Christ's name,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Annual congregational meeting opening liturgy

### LITANY

The love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

Brothers and sisters, God calls each of us by name.

**We are a church that belongs to Christ.**

Recognizing the diversity among us, we are grounded in God's love and forgiveness to live and serve here and now.

**We are a church whose unity is in Christ.**

Young and old together, our life in Christ compels and empowers us to be open and accessible within any community, within any context.

**We are a church that believes Jesus is God's "YES" to us.**

Recognizing each of us has unique gifts and a unique story, we are part of a larger body and a larger story. Together, we achieve things we could not do alone.

**We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world – together.**

Skilled and unskilled, we do God's work together, restoring and reconciling communities. We pursue justice and seek peace no matter how long the journey or wide the chasm.

**We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work.**

Recognizing the differences of perspectives, personalities and practice, we commit to being a force for connecting people, faiths and organizations. We respect the perspectives and strengths of others and share a common vision to uphold human dignity.

**We are a church that is a catalyst, convener and bridge builder.**

Outspoken and soft-spoken, we continually strive for a deeper understanding of what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means in the world while being in the thick of life.

**We are a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life.**

Recognizing our roots are in Scripture, tradition and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as the vibrant communities and rich history of our congregation, we are a church guided by the Holy Spirit that is both resilient and always being reformed.

**We are a church that is deeply rooted in the gospel – and always being made new.**

Let us pray: As we live into the church that we proclaim to be, fill us with hope as we engage in the work of serving you. Guide us that we may honor our missional heritage while opening our eyes to new ways of serving others. Steer our thoughts and words away from distraction and toward your will. In our deliberations keep us close to you and fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we may serve you in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

# What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine

## *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*



1 What a fel - low-ship, what a joy di - vine, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms;  
 2 Oh, how sweet to walk in this pil-grim way, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms;  
 3 What have I to dread, what have I to fear, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms?



what a bless-ed-ness, what a peace is mine, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms.  
 oh, how bright the path grows from day to day, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms.  
 I have bless-ed peace with my Lord so near, lean-ing on the ev-er-last-ing arms.



### *Refrain*



Lean - ing, lean - ing, safe and se-cure from all a - larms;



Lean - ing on Je - sus, lean - ing on Je - sus,



lean - ing, lean - ing, lean-ing on the ev - er - last-ing arms.



lean - ing on Je - sus, lean - ing on Je - sus,

Text: Elisha A. Hoffman, 1839–1919  
 Music: SHOWALTER, Anthony J. Showalter, 1858–1924

Do not be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:2-5



## Why participation in the ELCA makes a difference

- We believe we are among God's chosen people – called to make disciples and do God's work. Through this calling we find lives of meaning and purpose. As part of the body of Christ, we discover there are many ways we do this work better together than alone.
- We understand ourselves to have first received from God, and then respond to God. The practice of responding freely is based on recognizing God's grace and our freedom to participate in God's generosity to others.
- We share a living daring confidence in God's grace. We believe our faith comes through the good news of Jesus Christ and gives us the freedom and the courage to wonder, discover and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world.
- We embrace the development of people who are faithful, wise and courageous. Understanding the perspectives of abundance, grace, gratitude and generosity, we express our support for God's work through the sharing of the time, talents and resources entrusted to us.

## How our missional partnership makes a difference

- We grow the ELCA in the United States – 350+ new starts in progress.
- We grow the Lutheran church around the world – 220+ missionaries in more than 40 countries.
- We develop current and future leaders – eight seminaries plus 26 colleges and universities.
- We coordinate and support synod and churchwide ministries – strive to connect and collaborate with 3.7 million people within the ELCA.
- We strengthen our Lutheran identity – publications and communications within and beyond our church.
- We provide leadership – organize and coordinate 10,000+ leaders across the church.
- We work for justice – support social ministry organizations reaching 1 in 50 Americans.
- We grow financial resources – promote stewardship education, financial literacy and mission interpretation in 10,000+ locations.
- We engage in research and strategic planning – analyze trends and monitor innovative ministries in a changing world.
- We sustain ecumenical and interfaith relationships – seek unity in faith and life with all Lutherans and six full communion partners.