

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE AND OUR WORK TOGETHER

Whether we are gathered in our faith community or sent into our daily lives, we remember that we are a new creation through God's living word by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we are to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed. As we live into God's word and deed, we are also reminded to be faithful stewards of God's creation and gifts. Faithful stewardship is about holding to God's purpose and ensuring the responsibilities and resources that God has entrusted to us are used with great care and with accountability to God, to each other and those served by the church.

With the adoption of Strategic Directions 2025 in 2017, the goals and priority areas for the ELCA as a whole church are identified. These goals and priorities are based on a shared trust and hope that the future is in God's hands. As stewards of God's grace, we are responsible for the time, talents and resources that will make these goals and priorities attainable in the many expressions of the church. As you consider your goals, priorities and resources for the years ahead, please consider how the following strategic directions are connected to your ministry.

1

### A thriving church spreading the gospel and deepening faith for all people

(Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 1:16)

2

### A church equipping people for their baptismal vocations in the world and the church

(Philippians 2:4-11, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Romans 6:3-4, Mark 10:13-16)

3

### An inviting and welcoming church that reflects and embraces the diversity of our communities and the gifts and opportunities that diversity brings

(1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 2:14-20, Acts 10, Galatians 3:26-28)

4

### A visible church deeply committed to working ecumenically and with other people of faith for justice, peace and reconciliation in communities and around the world

(2 Corinthians 5:14-21, John 13:12-15, Isaiah 58:1-11)

5

### A well-governed, connected and sustainable church

(1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, Micah 6:8, 2 Corinthians 9)

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

## A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In 2017, Lutherans around the world observed the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are called to foster unity within the church and to live into God's calling together in the years ahead. Through our more than 3.7 million members and friends, we will continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the life of the world.

We are church together, united by a common vision.

A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ makes for all people and creation.

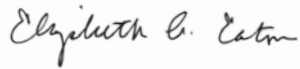
We are church for the sake of the world, united by a common purpose.

Together in Jesus Christ, we are freed by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly and serve joyfully.

As we strive to live into this vision and purpose, we face many challenges. In a radically individualistic society, we seek to create and sustain life-giving relationships and communities that connect us to God and one another. In a society that is becoming increasingly secular while facing many tensions, we seek to proclaim the gospel and share the story of Jesus as a source of hope, inclusion, peace and reconciliation. And, in a world that misuses power and authority while struggling with growing inequality, we seek to follow Jesus who spoke publicly for those who were oppressed and marginalized.

As your church family gathers to make decisions about using the gifts God has entrusted to you, may you remember that by the tender love of God, by the ceaseless pursuit of the Spirit, we are members of the body of Christ. We are family. We share our lives. We love each other. By the reconciling expression of God's grace, we can live confidently and generously in this community of faith and in service of others because we are joined in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Living together in community with Christ,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

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ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING OPENING LITURGY

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

God has joined us to one another, in congregations, in our denomination, and with Christians around the world. As church together, we faithfully strive to participate in God's reconciling work, near and far.  
**Together, we are partners in ministry.**

We plant new congregations and renew existing ones; we work with ethnic ministries to reach all God's people; we develop and share resources for God's work when we gather.  
**Together, we are partners in ministry.**

We support The Lutheran World Federation's global communion of churches and send more than 200 missionaries to more than 40 countries; we facilitate dialogue and common action among communities of other faiths that God's love may spread far and wide.  
**Together, we are partners in ministry.**

We equip current and future leaders through our colleges, universities, seminaries and lay ministry schools; we engage in hopeful conversation about current economic, environmental, political, public and social issues.  
**Together, we are partners in ministry.**

Christ has freed us *from* sin and death, even from ourselves, so that we can live with and for our neighbors; in worship we cry out to be forgiven, fed and equipped that our faith may be aligned with our lives and our lives with God's good purposes.  
**Scattered into the world, we do God's work.**

Sent into the world – in every relationship, in every daily task, in every corner of life – we provide daily bread for our neighbors, nurture hope and faith, and work for a healed, reconciled and just world.  
**Scattered into the world, we do God's work.**

On the highway and in the skies, in jails and in offices, in the unemployment line and at the mechanic's shop, in kitchens and in classrooms, shopping for toys or hoping to find our next meal, in nursing homes and in the voting booth, God is at work, providing for our needs and for our neighbors' needs.  
**Scattered into the world, we do God's work.**

Gracious God, you call us together, and you send us out. Give us strength to be your people, both when we gather and when we scatter. Deliver us from service of ourselves alone, and deliver us from service to the welfare of our congregations that we may do the work you are calling us to do, alone and together. Whether in our daily lives or in and through our congregation, may we always seek common good. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

### Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ



1 Let us tal - ents and tongues em - ploy, reach - ing out with a shout of joy:  
2 Christ is a - ble to make us one, at the ta - ble he sets the tone,  
3 Je - sus calls us in, sends us out bear - ing fruit in a world of doubt,



bread is bro - ken, the wine is poured, Christ is spo - ken and seen and heard.  
teach - ing peo - ple to live to bless, love in word and in deed ex - press.  
gives us love to tell, bread to share: God (Im - man - u - el) ev - 'ry - where!



Je - sus lives a - gain, earth can breathe a - gain, pass the Word a - round: loaves a - bound!

Text: Fred Kaan  
Music: LINSTEAD, Jamaican folk tune; adapt. Doreen Potter  
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