



Report of the Presiding Bishop

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7).

Deeply Rooted, Always Being Made New

“Deeply rooted, always being made new” describes the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in the past 25 years. These words also describe the history that culminated in three church bodies—The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America—forming the ELCA at a constituting convention on April 30, 1987.

For more than three centuries immigrants to North America and the Caribbean brought a commitment to plant the gospel in the soil of a new land so that Christian faith would flourish. New migrants moving across the land were committed to a faith sustained through prayer and Scripture reading, to parents teaching children the catechism, and to communities being formed for worship. Sustaining the language and culture of their homeland in which their faith had been nurtured was also a contributing reason for joining together to form church bodies.

Yet rootedness in the traditions of their ancestors began to create tensions for those who believed that the good news of Jesus Christ should be proclaimed and the Scriptures taught in English. Yes, being deeply rooted and always being made new calls for relinquishment and adaptation, and it can lead to controversy.

As Lutherans put down roots in new soil, they also began to establish hospitals and orphanages, colleges and universities. Being rooted in Christ and built up through faith freed them to serve their neighbors, and not only neighbors nearby. Early on those young churches sent missionaries to share the good news of Jesus Christ in distant lands.

Often I am reminded of the strength and flexibility of the bond of faith that joined those Lutherans. It stretched from the homes where grandparents passed on the faith to their children and grandchildren to all the places throughout the world where Christian communities were taking root. Throughout the history of Lutherans in North America and the Caribbean, this bond of faith and the commitments that grew out of it joined people together for the sake of witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ.

This same deep rootedness and confidence that the Holy Spirit is always making us new in Christ led to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Three church bodies, none of them very old, were trying to imagine what God could do in creating a new church body out of their respective ministries, histories, strengths, and limitations. As they engaged each other in prayer, conversation, and negotiations, each church body came to believe that they could be better stewards and proclaimers of God’s saving gospel together than apart.

In this engagement with each other there was a willingness to relinquish what they had been for the sake of what was being made new in them. For the sake of the gospel and to participate more fully in God’s mission of reconciliation throughout the world they relinquished some of their attachment to the cultural identities of a particular people. They relinquished established patterns of familiar relationships and forms of decision-making.

Their relinquishment was not for the sake of creating a hierarchical church with even greater control. Nor did they engage each other only for the sake of increased efficiencies and savings (although greater effectiveness was a concern). They believed that when we are together worshipping, planting new congregations, sending missionaries, preparing leaders, serving our neighbors, coordinating ministries, and sharing decision-making we can be more fruitful in our witness and in our participation in God’s mission for the life of the world.

So, when governing documents for ELCA congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries were adopted, these common purposes were articulated clearly and consistently: to worship God; to proclaim God’s saving Gospel; to carry out Christ’s Great Commission; to nurture members in the Word of God; to serve in response to God’s love in meeting human needs; and to manifest the unity given to God’s people.

Moreover, this new Lutheran church committed to interdependent relationships. “This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in partnership relationship with the others” (*ELCA constitution 8.11*).

Now, 25 years later, we ask whether the assumptions of our founders still hold. Is this way of being church together, if not the only way, still our way? Are we still joined in the shared purpose that brought us together 25 years ago? How is the ELCA deeply rooted and always being made new today?

We Are Deeply Rooted in and Always Being Made New Through God’s Word

So often in the Scriptures we read that before God was about to do something radically new, God’s people rehearsed the story of God’s promises to them. Before God’s people entered the Promised Land they rehearsed the story of bondage in Egypt and God’s deliverance. “A wondering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien. . . . The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 26:5–11). When Mary heard from the angel Gabriel that she would bear the child Jesus, the son of the Most High, she shared Hannah’s song of praise, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1: 46–56).

After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he went to the synagogue in Nazareth and returned to the Scriptures where God’s promise was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Luke 4:16–21). When the Holy Spirit was poured out on those gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost, each heard and told the mighty deeds of God in their own language. This new thing was bewildering. Those who were present asked, “What can it mean?” Then Peter began to preach, rooting the Spirit’s “new thing” in the story of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection (Acts 2:14–36).

Yes, like our ancestors in the faith, we are a church deeply rooted in God’s Word and always being made new. When we describe being rooted in God’s Word, we are talking about Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God incarnate. We also are confessing the Word of God as God’s living address to us as both law and gospel. Moreover, we are declaring that the Word of God is recorded in the canonical scriptures. As stated in the ELCA’s Confession of Faith, “Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world” (*ELCA constitution 2.02.c*).

Six years ago we committed to being a Book of Faith church, because we cannot say that we are deeply rooted in the Word of God and not know the narrative of Scripture. At this Churchwide Assembly we will be asked to renew that commitment. As we live out that commitment, we can and we will have lively debates about the interpretation of Scripture, even while we share a commitment to reading and listening to the Scriptures for “what shows forth Christ.”

We Are Deeply Rooted in the Witness of the Lutheran Confessions

We are a church deeply rooted in the ongoing evangelical reforming movement in the church catholic named for Martin Luther. As heirs and participants in that movement, we have theological convictions that are inseparable from who we are. Yet, in a rapidly changing, diverse context, our language of faith can seem unintelligible and uninteresting. I believe one priority for us between now and the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017 is to make this tradition of faith more accessible, to develop a means of teaching the Christian faith so that it might be heard as the good news it is and understood and lived in its mystery and clarity. Together let us find ways to interpret what we mean when we say:

- “We are justified by God’s grace through faith on account of Christ”;
- “Word and Sacrament are the means of grace”;
- “We are at the same time saints and sinners”;
- “God rules through two Kingdoms”;
- “We proclaim a theology of the cross, not a theology of glory”; and
- “A Christian is both free and servant of all.”

We Are Deeply Rooted in the Ministry of All the Baptized

When the Commission on the New Lutheran Church discussed who would be the members who constituted the ELCA, they concluded, “the members of this church shall be baptized members of its congregations” (*ELCA constitution 6.01*). We are deeply rooted in the faith of all the baptized and the congregations where the gospel is proclaimed and faith is professed and renewed.

We are deeply rooted in the ministry of all the baptized as we live out God's baptismal promise in our daily lives—in family and friendships, as citizens, through daily work, as caregivers and stewards of God's creation, and by participating in the ministries of congregations and the church beyond the congregation.

Worship is where we are nurtured, freed, and formed for lives of discipleship. Through faith practices of worship, prayer, scripture study, stewardship, and service, we are both deeply rooted and always being made new.

The marks of the baptized life that are central to the ministry of congregations are articulated in the Affirmation of Baptism when the pastor asks, "Do you intend to live in the covenants God made with you in Holy Baptism?"

- To live among God's faithful people;
- To hear God's Word and share in Christ's Supper;
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed;
- To serve all people following the example of Jesus; and
- To strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

We Are Deeply Rooted in Congregations

As we enter the next chapter in the ELCA's life we are making a firm commitment to planting new ministries and renewing existing congregations. In Christ the whole creation is reconciled to God, and God now sends us as ambassadors for Christ entrusting the message and ministry of reconciliation to us.

Every ELCA congregation is in a context where people deserve to hear the good news that God is not in the sin accounting business, and we are a new creation in Christ. We are planting communities of faith in all kinds of ways—congregations starting congregations; pastor developers planting new ministries; leaders of new immigrant communities serving as spiritual leaders; young adults who share a passion for justice and love for Jesus connecting through online communities; and those trained in the art of community organizing bringing together people who share a commitment to stronger neighborhoods and a living faith.

Deeply rooted in a commitment to plant the church, we are now starting new ministries in multicultural communities, among those living in deep poverty, and in multilingual neighborhoods. New ministries are started as second sites of growing urban-suburban congregations. Yes, we are deeply rooted, always being renewed in congregations!

We Are Deeply Rooted in Relationships That Are Always Being Made New

At the center of our life together is God's gift of relationship in Jesus Christ. That relationship is God's doing, not ours. It is the good news of Jesus Christ through which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens us in the one, true faith.

Created in the image of the Triune God whose inner relationship brings life to the world, we are in relationship with God, with one another, and with God's creation. When we turn inward and assume we can live on our own for ourselves, the Spirit calls us to repentance. God turns toward us in mercy for Jesus' sake. Yes, we are baptized into the living community of Christ's body. Our relationship to God and to one another is God's gift in baptism, deeply rooted in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church and always being made new. Renewed through the means of grace, these relationships are ours to tend with commitment and compassion.

From the very beginning the ELCA has been deeply rooted in the commitment to ecumenical relationships. In the first years of its life, all the ELCA's energies could easily have gone into this new church's internal concerns, but that was not the case. Careful ecumenical work by leaders in predecessor churches culminated in "A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment," adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1991.

Since then the commitment has borne much fruit, and we now have six full communion partners—the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church, The Moravian Church, and The United Methodist Church. What a witness in a culture that often views churches as competing for market share of members and defining themselves over against others! We begin with our unity as God's gift in Christ and our unity in task.

Now we have the opportunity to be engaged in shared ministry with these ecumenical partners who strengthen our common witness. Together we are supporting military chaplains, engaging in campus ministry, advocating for peace and justice, and accompanying global companion churches.

Being rooted in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church and always being made new also led to the adoption of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" by the Catholic Church and The Lutheran World Federation in 1999. In 2006 the World Methodist Council affirmed this landmark declaration. The core teaching of the church that

became the occasion for the division of the Western Church in the sixteenth century now draws us together. We are always being made new in Christ!

As we continue to live into the new possibilities for ministry and mission that result from our ecumenical relationships, we give thanks to God for the ways ELCA members join with other Christians in prayer and Bible study, in serving those who are hungry, and in responding to natural disasters.

Deeply Rooted in Interreligious Relationships That Are Always Being Made New

When the ELCA began, few knew how significant interreligious relationships would be in this 25th anniversary year. As I travel through the ELCA, the question youth and young adults often ask is, “What does it mean to be a Christian in relationship to my roommate who is Buddhist, my neighbor who is Muslim, my sister who is married to a Jew, and my friends, many of whom claim no religious affiliation?”

Such a context calls for attentive listening to the religious beliefs and practices of others and a clear witness to our Christian faith. Such sustained dialogues will increase our understanding and respect for one another; they may lead to conversion. My hope is that out of our differences we will also discover anew our shared humanity and deepen our resolve to build a world of justice and peace. As Bishop Munib Younan, president of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, frequently reminds us, “It is up to us to be a different voice than those of religious extremists.”

At this Churchwide Assembly we will hear from Bishop Younan, and once again a rabbi, Steve Gutow, president and chief executive officer of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, will greet the assembly. For the first time a representative of the Sikh community will greet the assembly, as Sayyid Syeed from the Islamic Society of North America did in 2011.

Deeply Rooted in Commitments That Are Always Being Made New

We have made many commitments during the past 25 years. As we turn toward God’s promised future, we continue to deepen the commitments where we have strong relationships that are deeply rooted in Christ and always being made new.

Commitment to Accompaniment with a Global Church

One of the deeply rooted commitments that contributed to the formation of the ELCA was to a global church and the relationships we have in it. In these relationships we are living out our commitment to be a strong companion in accompaniment, a walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.

I wonder how many imagined in 1988 how those deeply rooted global relationships would be expressed in so many new ways in our brief 25-year history. When the ELCA began, the companion synod program did not exist. Now the ELCA’s 65 synods have a total of 120 global companions, and another 26 churches are waiting for an ELCA companion synod. In 1988, global mission was something the churchwide organization carried out on behalf of the whole church. Today the ELCA has 80 church-to-church relationships, and through the LWF we participate in a “communion of churches” with 141 other member churches.

We are now ready to join with Sudanese-American congregations in the ELCA, Sudanese commissioned leaders, and the Episcopal Church of South Sudan to plant a new Lutheran church in South Sudan. Partnering with the Lutheran Church in Malaysia, we have supported the birth of a new Lutheran Church in Myanmar.

In 25 years many ELCA congregations have established global companion relationships with a congregation somewhere else in the world. Countless ELCA members have been on global mission trips involving learning and service. Now we are bringing together our deep roots in global mission and local mission in the United States to train ELCA members through “Glocal Mission events,” where global and local mission are experienced in their increasing intersections.

So often it seems the most vocal religious voices are from those who seek to sort, categorize, divide, and exclude. Let us be a church that goes with arms wide open to meet our neighbors, whom we so often think of as “other.” For that is how God, in loving arms of mercy, welcomes and embraces you and the “other,” joining us in a common humanity and a shared creation.

Commitment To Leadership That Serves God's Mission

Some of the most pressing questions we are facing together concern leadership now and in the future. The commitment of the ELCA is to share leadership with differentiated roles and responsibilities, but in a church that is neither hierarchical nor congregationalist.

There are many ways to approach our shared commitment to leadership. The place to begin is with communal discernment of what is God's mission today that calls for leadership. What gospel are we called to serve? How will our commitment to identify, prepare, and support leaders include laity who serve God's mission in their varied daily callings and throughout the church? How will we continue to identify, prepare, and support rostered leaders who serve in the ELCA and with ecumenical partners? Lively conversations are taking place throughout the ELCA regarding the marks of missional leadership and how we will prepare evangelical leaders to serve the Gospel and God's mission in a rapidly changing, increasingly connected, and richly pluralistic context.

The Church Council has authorized the establishment of a Theological Education Advisory Council. It will consult with ELCA seminary presidents and board chairs, the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council, churchwide staff, and other leaders, both within the ELCA and beyond, and then bring recommendations to the Church Council at its November 2015 meeting. Those recommendations will deal with how the ELCA can address, in a holistic manner, our commitment to leadership development, theological education, candidacy, call, and lay rosters. The Advisory Council will also address the number and location of ELCA seminaries, as well as the emerging opportunities for developing lay leaders who can serve as evangelists in new and existing ministry settings.

I believe we should develop ways of identifying, mentoring, and praying for those who have gifts for leadership in this church and society. This process should begin in junior and senior high school. Let us be more intentional about naming those whose faith and service we witness at youth gatherings, in congregations, and in outdoor ministry settings. Let us develop ways to encourage them as they discern God's calling. I give thanks to God for the creative and passionate leadership being given by young adults. Those serving as Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM), in campus ministries, and through the churchwide organization exude a passion for justice, a love for Jesus, and a commitment to the dignity of all human beings and the care of God's creation. In so many ways they are leading this church now.

In a culture that often fosters distrust in leaders and institutions we must work to build trust in one another as we are called to share leadership in this church. There are encouraging signs of growing collaboration. The work of the Three Leadership Tables—the Church Council's Executive Committee, the Executive Committee of the Conference of Bishops, and the Administrative Team of the churchwide organization—is a hopeful sign that when leadership is shared, we can be a stronger church engaged in God's mission.

Through social media, we have marvelous opportunities to engage more of this church in conversation about how we together serve God's mission in local and global contexts. The recommendations of the Communal Discernment Task Force and the Addressing Social Concerns Review Task Force can enable us to have a culture of greater participation in decision-making.

A pressing question is how our systems for identifying and preparing leaders will reflect the diverse church we are committed to become. In other words, how do our current systems favor those who historically hold power and privilege in church and society by virtue of race and gender? What models exist or can we develop that enable us to be enriched by diverse gifts for leadership that come from many communities?

Leadership is not only exercised by individuals, but it is corporate. How shall we as the ELCA exercise leadership in the church catholic, in the North American and Caribbean contexts, and globally? How shall we be a public church engaged in serving the common good? How might the way we respectfully and thoughtfully engage in conversation about complex issues serve a society that often experiences religious communities as partisan and polarizing? How might our Lutheran understanding of God's reign make a helpful contribution to both the kingdom of the left and the kingdom of the right—to one for the sake of order and justice, to the other for the sake of faith and salvation?

Commitment to Being a Diverse, Inclusive Church

From the beginning, the ELCA's commitment to being a diverse, inclusive church that extends God's radical hospitality to all has been clear. Our governing documents state that "it shall be a goal of this church that within 10 years of its establishment its membership shall include at least 10 percent people of color and/or primary language other than English" (*ELCA constitution 5.01.A87*).

The goal has not been achieved, but the commitment remains. Why was this commitment not achieved? Why do we still have this commitment? Both of those questions call for sustained conversations and renewed commitment.

We are committed to becoming inclusive and diverse so that we might rise in Christ as a Pentecost church where each of us in our own language hears and tells the mighty deeds of God. Our history includes not only the witness and work of northern European immigrants, but also immigrants from other lands. They planted Christ's church not in the soil of transplanted European culture but, for example, in equally rich soil of African ancestral traditions and the crucible experience of slavery and discrimination in America. Absent the witness of these other traditions and experiences, we are diminished as the body of Christ.

If we are serious about this commitment, and I trust we are, then we who are white must ask what we must die to so that we might become a more inclusive and diverse church. When I am privileged by virtue of being white and male, I am not forced to stop and think about my privilege. Yet, when one is not in a position of privilege, the reality of being marginalized is constant. Therefore, our commitment calls for continuing work to create paths to leadership, decision-making, and participation in the ELCA that will reflect our becoming a Pentecost church— richly diverse, extending radical hospitality to all.

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly took concrete steps to make it possible for lesbian and gay members who are in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous relationships to serve in rostered ministry in the ELCA. At the same time the social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) acknowledged that ELCA members are not of one mind about these relationships. It identified four different positions regarding same-gender relationships that ELCA members with conscience-bound convictions hold with integrity, and the assembly committed to respect for bound consciences in the ELCA. Nonetheless, some member congregations and rostered leaders chose to leave. At the same time, these actions by the Churchwide Assembly contributed to growth in other ELCA congregations where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered leaders serve evangelical proclamation with faithful and creative imagination.

Becoming a more inclusive church is not without struggle and controversy. I give thanks to God for synod bishops and staff who have spent countless hours in meetings with congregations that are intensely conflicted. Bishops have been wise interpreters and reconcilers focusing on the faith that unites us. We thank God for this service and their passion for the gospel. It unites us and God's mission for the life of the world.

Our commitment to become a more inclusive and diverse church is reflected in our commitment to plant new congregations in multiracial and immigrant communities and communities of deep poverty. It is reflected in the diverse staff who serve this church through the churchwide organization.

We have a marvelous opportunity to be a church in which all are welcome for God has called you by name. Extending such radical hospitality will lead to reconciliation and transformation. Could it be that the Holy Spirit is writing a new chapter to the Book of Acts? What story will we tell of the Holy Spirit's work? To what signs of the presence of the risen Christ will we bear witness?

Commitment to Respond to Human Suffering and the Care of God's Creation

We are freed in Christ to serve our neighbors. Such serving is the vocation of all the baptized. Throughout the ELCA, individuals volunteer in their communities and congregations and become involved in feeding those who are hungry, resettling refugees, and engaging in community organizing that brings affordable housing, quality healthcare, and good education to all.

This year, on Sunday, September 8, we are inviting all ELCA members to join others in their congregations in witnessing to our faith in this 25th anniversary year by participating in an ELCA Day of Service. What a marvelous opportunity this is to join with ELCA social ministry organizations, colleges, and campus ministry students in saying publicly who we are. As we said at this assembly two years ago, we are "Freed in Christ to Serve." "God's work, our hands."

We have greater capacity when we respond to human suffering together. We have witnessed this truth over and over again as ELCA members give generously and volunteer time with Lutheran Disaster Response. When I visited ELCA congregations and neighborhoods severely damaged by Superstorm Sandy last year and by tornadoes in Oklahoma earlier this year, I witnessed people with compassion and resolve rebuilding their lives, communities, and congregations. Over and over again they expressed gratitude that Lutherans show up and stay until the work is done.

In our 25th anniversary year we give thanks to God for ELCA World Hunger. Long before the ELCA was formed, Lutherans became engaged in responding to hunger in local communities and throughout the world. Today ELCA World Hunger is a comprehensive and sustainable program that uses multiple strategies—relief, development, education, and advocacy—to address the root causes of hunger and poverty. Global companion churches are our partners in this commitment. For them, food security and feeding those who are hungry belongs to holistic mission. Therefore, responding to hunger includes sustainable economic and agricultural development. It is inseparable from advocating

for economic policies and priorities that support a sustainable livelihood for all. It begins when the Word is proclaimed, and God is praised.

One part of ELCA World Hunger is the ELCA Malaria Campaign. In March, members of the campaign's leadership team and other staff visited South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. We witnessed how churches are utilizing your gifts to the ELCA Malaria Campaign for education, prevention, and intervention. Thanks be to God for your generosity!

Our baptismal commitment to lives of service and the pursuit of justice and peace is inseparable from how we serve God's whole creation. I thank God for ELCA members, congregations, institutions, and agencies that have taken seriously the commitment to reduce consumption and take steps that reflect a responsible care of God's creation. While we debate global warming and responsible mineral extraction, let us be united in our commitment to be faithful, wise stewards of the one creation God entrusts to us. As the apostle Peter declares, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10).

Commitment to Support the ELCA's Ministries and Mission

One of the many great joys in serving as presiding bishop is the opportunity to travel throughout the ELCA and to witness what generous, faithful, wise stewards you are of the manifold grace of God and what amazingly diverse gifts the Spirit gives the people of this church.

I know that many ELCA congregations face challenges in sustaining ministry in the midst of changing communities and decreasing resources. Yet, what I experience over and over again in those contexts is people of faith and prayer with a desire that all know the love of God in Christ Jesus. Out of that commitment, new opportunities for ministry are imagined. Some of those call for letting go of what has been meaningful to so many.

Many of those same challenges and opportunities are facing ELCA synods, the churchwide organization, and ELCA institutions and agencies. In the most challenging times, it is tempting to turn inward, focusing on our own future and survival. Yet that future is not ours; it is God's promise and gift. So we receive God's future in confident hope, for our hope is in Christ. From the grace and mercy of God in which we have been deeply planted through our baptism into Christ, everything is being made new every morning.

God's faithfulness to God's promise frees us for lives of faithful stewardship and generosity. Stewardship is a faith practice that brings great joy in our giving. I thank God for your financial support of the ministries we share as the ELCA. The financial support given through your congregation to the mission of your synod and the churchwide organization is crucial to our maintaining our rootedness in mission and always being made new.

In the proposal for the ELCA's first comprehensive campaign being brought to the Churchwide Assembly, we have the opportunity to grow in the mission priorities that have united us the past 25 years. I believe these priorities belong to our being stewards of the manifold grace of God for the future:

- **Congregations**—existing ELCA congregations being renewed in their proclamation and service and starting new congregations;
- **Leadership**—supporting future leaders through the ELCA Fund for Leaders and the Young Adults in Global Mission program and providing scholarships for women in global companion churches;
- **Global Churches**—supporting new ministry projects with global churches, including planting a new Lutheran church in South Sudan, and expanding the Young Adults in Global Mission program; and
- **Relief and Development**—expanding work in at least 10 countries and working to move from food insecurity to sustainability in the United States and throughout the world; continuing the ELCA Malaria Campaign's significant impact through support of global churches in education, prevention, and treatment.

"Always being made new!" It is "God's work. Our hands."

For all with whom I am privileged to share in leadership I give thanks to God—the Church Council, Conference of Bishops, staff of the churchwide organization, and the Administrative Team, as well as all who lead ELCA congregations, institutions, and agencies.

What a marvelous time it is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, in whom we are deeply rooted and through whom we are always being made new!

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:16–17).

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