

**Closing Remarks to the Eleventh Churchwide Assembly**  
**Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson**  
**Saturday, August 22, 2009**

Thank you for the way you have engaged one another in conversation. Thank you for the way that you have been consistently and faithfully attentive in prayer to the presence of the Spirit. Thank you that you have gathered consistently and faithfully each noon around the Means of Grace, to be nourished and fed by the Word of God that claims us, gathers us, frees us, and sends us.

Now, it is my commitment to you to continue to seek to lead this church as I have sought to lead this assembly. I will continue to seek to lead this church in days that will be challenging for some and joyful for others, by calling us -- as I called this church earlier this summer -- to be a church gathered by the Word of God, listening to it speak, and consistently in prayer.

I pledge to speak well of you, and I ask you to speak well of one another. One way I will speak well of you is not to use the word "fear" to describe those who oppose the actions that prevailed in many of our discussions. It is neither helpful for our life together nor is it respectful of deeply held convictions shaped by theology, Scripture, and faith.

I am committed to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continuing to be a church body where people feel safe to teach, preach, lead, and serve in ways that they believe are consistent with the vows taken in ordination and the promises made in the affirmation of Baptism.

Please know that this needs to be a church safe for the rich theological conversation, biblical inquiry, and faith expressions and explorations that have marked Lutherans for 500 years.

It will take time to put these actions into implementing form to bring to the Church Council. It also will take time to process our work. My prayer and my plea is that we take that time together, rather than separately.

When we began the process to develop the social statement on human sexuality, I said that one of my greatest fears was that we would spend more of our time and energy engaging people with whom we agree than those who have different perspectives. That is still my concern. Now -- perhaps more than ever -- we need to stay engaged with one another.

I ask those of you wondering about your place in this church to let us be a part of that discernment. Take time with your decision. Step back. Understand the magnitude of the decision if you choose to leave, because we will be diminished by your absence, and the capacity for us to do the work God has gifted us through the Spirit and freed us in Christ to do will also be diminished.

I pray that the story we tell of this assembly is always the story of God's love for us in Christ Jesus, reconciling the whole world to God, giving us the ministry and the message of reconciliation. That Good News is too good to squander with internal conflicts that will drain our energies and diminish our capacity to bring that Good News to the world so that all might know Jesus.

I said months ago in an article in *The Lutheran* that I came into this assembly with confident hope, because the word "confident" comes from the Latin *con fide*, "with faith." This is a hope born of faith in the risen Christ. A verse for me all summer has been 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

In that promise I have sought to faithfully lead you. The Churchwide Assembly has been a challenge -- and it has been a joy. But more than anything, it has been a way to serve as we together serve our Lord. In that promise of hope, I take up the work that we all now share: to be attentive to one another, to be open to the Spirit, to be proclaiming the Good News of Christ, and to be serving our neighbor.