



“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

– John 3:16

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

John 3:16, perhaps one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament, hangs on bed sheets in football stadiums; it is almost ubiquitous. It is also true. If God so loves the world, we should too. Lutherans show up – as Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and as The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

We are church for the sake of the world.

In our congregations we address hunger and poverty through food pantries and community gardens, in health care clinics and job training programs. We foster unity among the children of God in relationship with our ecumenical and inter-religious partners. Together, with our companions in Central America, we are working with unaccompanied minors and the conditions in their countries of origin that force these children to flee. Through LWF, we support Syrian refugees in Jordan who are living in Za’atari camp, provide education and child protection assistance to Sudanese refugees, and offer specialty care at the Augusta Victoria Hospital for Palestinians.

We have surpassed our fundraising commitment to eradicate malaria and bring about lasting change. *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* will emphasize ELCA World Hunger this year to support our comprehensive approach to solve challenges that perpetuate hunger and poverty. All of this good and hard, sometimes dangerous, work is the work we are able to do because we are church abiding in Christ – God’s beloved people gathered around word and sacrament.

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In preparation for the 500th anniversary observance of the Reformation, I encourage you to visit [ELCA500.org](http://ELCA500.org) for more information and resources. One of the featured events for the 500th anniversary is the Grace Gathering in conjunction with the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Come experience a churchwide assembly, be centered in God’s word, participate in experiential learning, hear Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, attend workshops to equip you in observing the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in your local ministry setting and much more! You can register today at [ELCA.org/GraceGathering](http://ELCA.org/GraceGathering).

On Sept. 11, our country will be remembering the lives lost and the lives forever changed by the tragic events 15 years ago. The events affected all of us, and it will be an important moment for us to be together as a church and with all people of faith. Part of our “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday on Sept. 11 is a chance for us to show up as Lutherans, freed and renewed in Christ, to serve and love our neighbor.

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As we gather in our assemblies, let us be a faithful witness to God's work in our local communities, across the country and around the world. I am hopeful that our time together in assembly will be an opportunity for us to get to know each other and come together as a church. This is a good time for us to talk about the priorities and future directions of the ELCA.

I will be leading a process endorsed by the ELCA Church Council and the Conference of Bishops to discern in faith the future of the ELCA. Through an initiative titled Called Forward Together in Christ, we'll be assessing where we are as God's people and working to understand what God has in store for us. I am inviting you to take part in a conversation about the future of this church. For more information or to get involved, visit [ELCA.org/future](http://ELCA.org/future).

Thank you for your continued prayers and encouragement. As I am out and about in my travels, I am reminded that no one of us does God's work alone, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a partner with you in that service. Thank you for your leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

God's blessings to you as you gather as the living body of Christ. May you be guided by the Spirit as you do God's will for God's people.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton".

Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America