



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

November 9, 2017

To Sisters and Brothers in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and the Evangelical Church in Germany and their President Bishops Ulrich and Bedford-Strohm, greetings in the name of Christ Jesus by whom we are made new in the gospel!

In recent days and over the past year, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – across this church, and with our Lutheran family around the globe – met to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This centennial has provided a welcome occasion to learn more about Martin Luther and the Reformation, while strengthening our understanding and commitment to our ministries. It has given us an opportunity to look back on the history of our tradition, and to discern how we are being called forward together in Christ.

One global dimension to ELCA's commemoration was the invitation for ELCA's Glocal ("global and local") Musicians to offer workshops and for me to present a Bible Study at the 2017 Kirchentag. ELCA Churchwide staff and I were warmly received by German companions and in turn we were amazed and enriched by the breadth and depth of participation by people from across Europe and around the world.

As the first centennial of the Reformation to take place in the context of our church's deep ecumenical and inter-religious partnerships, this anniversary is unfolding in a spirit of reconciliation. In the ELCA and in the global church together with our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, and other ecumenical companions, we have taken significant steps on the way to unity, justice, and peace. With our inter-religious neighbors, we also have deepened mutual understanding across religious lines and collaborated for the common good. Our church's national gathering on October 31 was held in the presence of many partners and friends as a sign of our shared commitments to reconciliation.

Over the course of this commemoration year, in initiatives and events across this church and the Lutheran World Federation, we have been inspired by the ways in which Lutherans continue to share boldly the gifts of our tradition. One of these is Martin Luther's insistence that the unconditional promise of God's love in Jesus Christ frees us to love and serve our neighbors. This counter-cultural message is as fit for us today as it was for Christians 500 years ago.

And our Reformation commemoration is not ended. In the coming years we will continue to appreciate the treasures of our Lutheran tradition. Specifically, congregations and members of the ELCA have been challenged to take up Luther's Small Catechism once again as our common language with which to talk about faith, engage Scripture and make sense of our world. The Catechism is not for youth only. This is most certainly true!

In this Reformation year and into God's future, we are called to be a public witness to how God is continually at work, in and through us, re-forming the body of Christ in a world broken by sin. Thanks be to God for our participation in God's mission.

May God bless your gathering this week and our companionship in the gospel,

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