

## Reasons for staying in the ELCA

Bishop Duane Pederson has asked the Conference of Bishops to develop a comprehensive list of reasons that might give a congregation pause as it considers leaving the ELCA. This document contains my thoughts, which are intended to be “yeast” to start a conversation on the topic.

The foundational principles are that leaving fractures further the body of Christ, ignoring Jesus’ prayer concerning his disciples that “they may be one” (John 17:11) as he and the Father are one and weakens the witness of Lutherans in the world by elevating individualism and separation over service and love: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

**Staying** keeps a congregation connected to a church body that

- started 52 new congregations in 2007 and has over 200 congregations under development;
- sponsors 260 missionaries in 49 countries;
- supports ministry and projects in over 90 countries with an average of \$29 million each year;
- through its social ministry organizations provides service to 6 million people in 3,000 communities, 1 out of 50 people in the U.S. and the Caribbean every year;
- raises \$18 million per year for World Hunger;
- through Lutheran Disaster Relief responds to natural disasters around the world, raising, for example, \$27 million for survivors of Hurricane Katrina and providing 18,500 volunteers for relief work;
- consists of a vibrant network of congregations, synods, colleges, universities, schools, seminaries, social ministry organizations, outdoor ministries, chaplaincies, special interest conferences and ethnic associations;
- partners with church bodies in the U.S. and around the world for mission, relief, and development.

### **Leaving**

- overturns the work of our ancestors, who, for the sake of mission, worked throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to bring Lutherans together in one church body;
- weakens the ability of an individual congregation and the church body to assist in God’s mission in the world and serve the neighbor. Separately, congregations cannot achieve what they can united as one church body;
- prevents the church body from benefitting from the voice and gifts of the departing congregation;

- cuts off an individual congregation from the resources that the church body provides;
- prevents a congregation from being served by ELCA rostered leaders;
- may jeopardize a congregation's property rights, if it a) votes to become independent or to become related to a non-Lutheran church body or b) fails to follow the procedures for termination of relationship with the ELCA as outlined in constitutional provision 9.62.