



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

June 2, 2011

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our hearts have been breaking for weeks as we have watched incessant storms devastate many parts of the United States. From the plains of North Dakota to the bayous of Louisiana, floodwaters and torrential rain have washed out communities and cropland. Destructive tornado strikes leveled homes for miles in cities and towns including Joplin, Mo., and Cullman, Ala. Two ELCA church buildings -- one in each state -- were destroyed.

The winds destroyed the building of Peace Lutheran Church in Joplin, but not the faith of its members. Last Sunday they gathered in the parking lot in the midst of debris and shattered hopes to worship in the strong name of the risen Christ.

In the aftermath of storms that seem relentless, we may feel overwhelmed and anxious, but not powerless. For God's promise is clear: nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Trusting in God's promise and the power of the Holy Spirit, we respond by joining together in God's work of restoring community. The liberating power of the gospel frees us to repair roofs in Cullman and fill sandbags in Fargo, on behalf of people we don't know and may never meet.

These are our commitments as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- **We will pray.** Pray with me that those affected may have the strength and courage they need to face these difficult days.
- **We will stand together,** roll up our sleeves and work with partners to rebuild lives and restore hope. In Alabama, we are already at work with the Mennonites and the Christian Reformed Church in a rapid rebuilding project. Elsewhere, partnerships are unfolding with the United Methodist Church and others to coordinate volunteers to repair and rebuild homes and lives in the months and years to come. Working together we can achieve more on a scale and scope than we could ever achieve alone.
- **We will give generously.** We are already organizing volunteer opportunities in response to the unmet needs of these communities. To support our efforts, please give now to [ELCA Disaster Response](#). Your gift designated to Severe Spring Storms will be used in full -- 100 percent -- for the people and communities deeply affected by these storms.
- **We will stay until the work is done.** One of our strengths as Lutherans is our practice of sustained response after a natural disaster, built on local networks of congregations and social ministries. Central States Synod Bishop Gerald Mansholt compared our work to long-distance running. [ELCA Disaster Response](#) was one of the first to arrive in Missouri and Alabama, and they will be the last to leave. Even as we begin this journey, our work continues on the Gulf Coast and in Haiti.
- **We will witness to our living faith** in Christ Jesus as we join together to do God's work with our hands.

In all these things, I give thanks for each of you. May we be about God's healing and restoration in a time of despair. May we bring God's message of hope in the wake of spring storms.

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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