

Good afternoon! I bring you greetings from Bishop Hanson and your brothers and sisters in Christ at our churchwide offices in Chicago. We think of you often and keep you in your prayers. We are so grateful for your ministry here in the Northeast Iowa Synod.

First and foremost, thank you. Thank you for your warm welcome and for your hospitality, thank you for the work you do on behalf of the church, thank you for the faithful ministry you do right here, in your congregations, on the streets of your synod, in living rooms, in homeless shelters and food pantries, in Sunday School rooms, in sanctuaries, on Sunday mornings and weekday evenings, every day of the year and thank you for your continued generosity in the midst of these challenging times.

I want to thank you for the 40% in mission support, over \$540,000, sent to the ELCA for the work of the larger church in 2011. And for your commitment to maintain that 40% in 2012 – Your commitment to maintain that percentage is truly a bold statement about who you are as church, who we are as partners together for the sake of the gospel. In the face of these economic times, we realize this is both a sacrifice and a commitment to the ministry of the church and we are so grateful!

At Churchwide ministries we have two strategic priorities that focus our work. We're supporting congregations in your mission to be growing centers for evangelical witness, and we're about calling you into the world together, working to end poverty, striving for peace and justice, to serve those in need in your neighborhoods and around the world.

.....in short, changing the world, changing lives for the sake of the gospel.

So, when I think about changing lives, I think about your theme of Strengthening Leaders. What better way to change lives than to release young people to use their gifts for leadership. Through our 26 ELCA colleges and universities, through our outdoor

camping ministry, we are touching lives and growing leaders. This aspect of our shared ministry is especially important to me because my son and daughter-in-law met while they were both working at Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Camp in Oregon, IL.

They both attended Luther College, right here in your part of the world, they got married, found jobs, found a church home, started to get active in their church and just about a week ago my son and daughter-in-law became parents! Ok, yes, I am the proud grandmother of little Leatrice Annette, who I will be visiting just as soon as this assembly is over! I have wondered more than once ...where would Matthew and Laura be without the ELCA? Look at the role the church has had in their lives! And, even more importantly, where would the ELCA be without Matthew and Laura and Leattie. So, let's take that a little bit further: Where would the ELCA be without all of you, the synods, the congregations, the members, the partners who are an essential part of the work we do...here in this synod, around the country and around the world.

Let's take a look at a few examples: Video

She is absolutely right, we are the ELCA. You are the ELCA, you part of First English in Columbus, Ohio, you are part of the Lutheran church in Liberia, you are part of the celebration at Santa Maria in Irving, Texas, and you are in each of the ministries right here in your synod. In 2011, this synod gave over 284,000 to ELCA world hunger and over \$135,000 for disaster response, incredible response to the work of the church around the world, to being the church around the world. Thirteen domestic hunger grants were awarded in Iowa totaling \$28,000.

As you saw on the video, last year we started 60 new congregations. So far this year we have approved 23 more new starts and one of them is right here in your synod, helping us

toward the goal of 70 new starts in 2012. There are a total of 26 ministries that have started out of congregations that disaffiliated from the ELCA – we call them New Wine ministries and they are a variety of models and shapes and sizes. There are 328 ministries under development across the country – thank you for being a part of that number. Our new congregations represent every ethnic group and many different styles and new ways of being church.

In addition to your new SAWC, there were four grants released to your synod for the purpose of renewing congregations. All of this becomes possible because you are committed to outreach, to mission. Gone are the days of “if we build it they will come.” Now we can sit in our church buildings and mourn that fact or we can open the doors, go out into the streets and find out who moved into the neighborhood when we weren’t looking!

What we find there is rich diversity, an abundance of gifts and, yes, even some needs that we can help meet but mostly we find new partners and new possibilities for being God’s hands and feet in the world in new and creative ways. There is no “one way” to do ministry anymore. In some places it means brew pubs and community co-ops and in other places it means liturgy, vestments and hymns.

All of these ministries need leaders and you helped support 53 International Leadership scholarships – the same scholarship that Leymah Gobece received in 2005 - and your support of the Fund for Leaders in Mission made it possible for 187 seminary students preparing for ministry to receive scholarships, thus reducing the critical problem of seminary related debt.

We are called to do God's work in the world and as the ELCA we've achieved things on a scale and scope that we could never do as individuals, as a single congregation or even a single synod. Standing together, we are known as the church that rolls up its sleeves and solves problems. Look at what you made possible with the big hay-lift that took place last year! It was Iowans who made it happen! Together you helped feed over 1000 cattle for over half a year.

You help lift up new leaders who will provide vision and energy for the future sending your young people to be part of the 33,000 youth attending the ELCA Youth Gathering in Atlanta this summer; that's 33,000 future leaders of the ELCA!

And you walk with your brothers and sisters in the international community supporting your mission partner synod as well as the malaria campaign, raising over \$105,000 so far toward your goal of \$250,000 over three years, helping end malaria one net at a time, one person at a time.

This is not the work of any one person or group of people. No one can do this work alone. We can only do this work because of you and your partnership. I ask that you continue to support the ELCA through your prayers, your mission support, your gifts to world hunger and other ministries. I encourage you to share the video you saw today in your congregations; you can find it on ELCA.org. Thank you for your ministry here in the Northeastern Iowa Synod and for your partnership. Amen.