



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Working Principles
Upstate New York Synod, ELCA
October 2015

Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world.

This statement from the ELCA reminds us who and whose we are and who we are called to become. It is a statement of identity and mission. It is the lens through which we evaluate the work we are doing. It has implications for our shared life - our practices and our priorities. It grounds us in our Baptismal promises and sends us out in the world to be the light we are called to be, living in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are People who are grounded in the Resurrection of Christ

God's saving grace through Jesus is the basis of our hope for the world and for the church. Jesus' death and resurrection is central. We begin with a theology of the cross, but we recognize that Jesus was raised from the dead and the Holy Spirit is Jesus' resurrection spirit actively at work in the church and in the world making all things new. God desires that we live as disciples and that we carry the good news beyond the church into the world as apostles. Sometimes we understand the way God works and sometimes God's purposes are hidden from view, but we trust in the promise of God's grace and in God's power to redeem, renew, and reform.

We are People of Prayer

We recognize that we are not in charge and seek ways to align ourselves with God's intention for us and for the world. We therefore commit ourselves to regular worship, reception of Word and Sacrament, prayer and the study of Scripture as practices that give life and strength to Christians by connecting them to the source of life. We seek to deepen our relationship with God so that we might more fully reflect God's character in the world. As individuals and as a body, we take responsibility to nurture our spiritual, as well as our physical, emotional and psychological health. We encourage others to do the same.

As a synodical staff we pray regularly for all rostered leaders, congregations, ministries, and agencies, as well as Churchwide, global, ecumenical and interfaith partners in ministry. We also pray for public leaders and for justice and peace throughout the earth.

Grounded, Growing, Giving, Graced

We understand that God's "Kairos" time is not the same as the world's "chronos" and God's ways are not our ways. The church on earth is a human institution and works as a system resistant to change. As we look for God's guidance into the future, we invite partners in ministry into discernment so that we might together listen for God's voice over time.

We don't understand prayer as something that we do to affect God's will for us in a direction that is pleasing to us, rather we believe that prayer is a way of life and living as we seek to understand more clearly God's will in our lives, the world and this church. Prayer stands at the center of who we are and what we do on an ongoing basis.

We are People who are Church Together

We are a community of faith held together by the death and resurrection of Christ and our baptism into that once for all time atoning act. We matter to each other because people matter to God. Our relationships with one another bear witness to God's relationship with us. We see each other as gifts and treat one another with respect. We care about and offer care to the whole body, not just our favorite parts of it. We seek the safety and up-building of the whole. In a society focused mostly on individual accomplishment it takes courage to think and act communally. Yet we trust that thinking, planning, dreaming and working together as Christ's body, we can accomplish more than we can as separate entities.

We are one part of a larger body – the ELCA and the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm the interdependent expressions of the ELCA – congregation, synod, Churchwide – each one integral to the life of the whole church, but having its own particular function. No expression is above or below or better than another. We do not take unilateral actions or make proclamations that affect other parts of the body, without consultation.

We nurture connections because we need each other to be the whole body. We encourage connections among rostered and lay leaders and congregations. We serve as a connecting link to the larger church, ecumenical and interfaith, Churchwide and global partnerships.

We acknowledge and celebrate diversity and the stewardship of individual gifts. We may have very different ways of expressing the one faith and growing individual ministries. We honor our different histories. We don't expect everyone to agree, especially on difficult issues that can be divisive. We trust God to assist us in engaging in civil discourse in the midst of our differences. We envision a church that is a safe place for dialogue and conversation across many divides.



Being the Church with folks is not the same as fixing their problems or having all the answers. There are limits of time, resources and function.

We speak well of one another and are accountable to one another. Given the public nature of the offices of Bishop, Dean, Staff member, Rostered Leader and Synod Council member, etc. we recognize that we never speak solely for ourselves. We represent Jesus Christ, the church, the synod or the bishop. It is important therefore that we speak well of one another, of the Bishop, the Bishop's office, and of the ELCA. That doesn't mean we agree on everything, but it does mean that we put the best construction on things, that we check out rumors rather than spread them and that we commit ourselves to model healthy leadership when there is disagreement.

The church is both God's chosen people and a human institution. We strive for perfection, but we know that we fall short – a manifestation of sinfulness. We speak honestly to one another yet we temper honesty with love and compassion and we are gentle with each other in asking for and offering forgiveness.

We are a People who are called to make a difference in the world

We proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the world through our words and actions. The movement is outward beyond the walls of church buildings into neighborhoods and beyond the local community to the wider church, society and the global community. We are called to engage with others and explore new contexts open to us by the power of the Spirit and God's transforming love.

We are a public church that has a responsibility to speak in the public and political arena on behalf of those who have little or no voice or power. We also have a responsibility to reach out to those in need and support efforts to care for the poor and the marginalized.

We have historical ties to a variety of ministries on our territory that change lives by offering opportunities to learn, to engage in community, and to offer care for those in need. These include but are not limited to outdoor, campus and social ministries. We seek to strengthen our support for and partnership with these agencies and ministries.

In partnership with others in the church, we develop, nurture, examine and equip church leaders whose lives have been changed by God and who are willing to share God's good news in the world.

While change can produce fear, we look to the future in hope because we live in the promises of God who brought life from death in Jesus Christ.

