



Leadership Development for Public Life

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Delivered by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson, February 22, 2002 in Daytona Beach, Florida. [Bishop Mark S. Hanson](#) is the Presiding Bishop of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#) and President of the [Lutheran World Federation](#).

A great privilege to be with you. When I was called to serve as presiding bishop, there was one commitment already on my calendar that I said I must keep - and that was to be at this summit.

There are so many in this room whom I would like to publicly thank (but I know someone will stand up and call time, so I will acknowledge just these):

- Terry Boggs and the leadership team
- Gaylord Thomas
- Ralph Baumgartner & Susan Tjornhoj from the Saint Paul Area Synod who has shaped me as a public leader and deepened my commitment to congregation based organizing.
- Heidi Neumark - preaching at my installation, and whose leadership in a richly diverse congregation is a sign of hope and a symbol of what this church is becoming.

I have been asked to give a keynote. I am not exactly sure what that is. But I am still a preacher so I need a text.

2 Corinthians 6: 1-2. As we work together with Christ, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For God says: "At an acceptable time, I have listened to you and on a day of salvation I have helped you. See now is the acceptable time. See now is the day of Salvation...."

I am absolutely convinced now is the time for those of us in this room together to LEAD this church. No, don't get me wrong. I know this is Christ's church not ours, but I also know God calls, equips, empowers leaders for Christ's church and YOU and I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO LEAD.

The ELCA is facing 4 critical issues:

1. Defining the mission to which God is calling us.
2. Preparing public leaders for a church in mission.
3. Expanding our ecumenical and global relationships so essential to God's mission.
4. Addressing the place of persons who are gay and lesbian as members and leaders in this church.

Which of these issues do not have to do with congregation based organizing? We have begun a very intensive strategic planning process as a churchwide organization, asking what can God do when 5.1 million Lutherans in 11,000 congregations, 65 synods are joined together in mission. You will be invited into these discerning - strategic conversations. Culminating in a strategic plan which will be brought to the 2003 Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee.

It is time the ELCA claims its place and power in the public square as the 5th largest denomination in the United States. Yes, now is the acceptable time for us to LEAD. Now is the acceptable time now is the time to DECLARE there can be no charity for the poor apart from our resolve to be in solidarity with the poor to bringing an end to poverty.

That is not a new word for this group yet we need your leadership so that our shared commitment to ending poverty will sink deep into the consciousness of this church.

Yes - we give thanks for high school and college groups going on servant trips; Yes - we rejoice that 41% of mainline Protestant Congregations report some connection to Habitat for Humanity; Yes - we are grateful for every church that opens its doors to provide emergency shelter and for each volunteer at a food pantry. Yet, may these acts of servanthood be but a beginning in our unceasing resolve to address the root causes of poverty and to eradicate poverty.

Oh, Amos, where is your voice today?

You who had the audacity to suggest that it will not be the eloquence of our preaching or the melodies of our songs or the beauty of our sanctuaries that impress God. God will look at the condition of the poor to determine the vitality of the faith of God's people.

Oh, Amos, could you possibly be right?

Now is the time to DECLARE that we will not look kindly to Wall Street indicators or listen to Federal Reserve Board Members to measure the health of our economy. Rather, we will turn to the poor to know where we stand and how far we have to go.

Now is THE TIME.

Now is the time to CONFESS that too many in this church have bought the myth of a privatized spirituality. You know the rule - "don't bother me with what you believe and I will not agitate you. We will just find something about which we agree then we will be downright neighborly."

I guess someone forgot to remind Jesus of that rule before he engaged in public conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well about matters so personal! A conversation that crossed major religious, cultural, and gender barriers.

An amazing thing occurred in the Saint Paul Area Synod when with the assistance of organizers we began to train hundreds of people in one to one visits for inreach to congregations and outreach to neighborhoods. People began to share self interests that were clearly personal, yet, they came to the realization that these interests could not remain private. Not for the sake of breaking confidence but for building community.

It is time for us to do throughout this church what I know is already happening in many of our congregations, and that is to have core teams sit with evangelism committees offering to train congregation members in one to one visits.

It will give confidence and skills and move evangelism committees from too often offering only hopefully to those who have courage to come through our doors, to being fully engaged in outreach. Inviting people to hear the story of Jesus and the Good News that now is the day of salvation.

NOW IS THE TIME. Now is the time to EXERT public leadership as a public church in public communities. That will not occur until we recognize that when the presiding minister proclaims the word, lifts the chalice, breaks the bread, the assembly is engaged in a public act of worship and witness. We will not become a public church until we

create ways to be engaged in public conversation and moral deliberation and action in a way that does not result in the polling of private opinions, by lifting green cards and red cards to determine winners and losers.

These are signs of hope that we are moving toward preparing public leaders for a public church.

A sign of hope? This summit - your public leaders in seminaries, your congregations, synods, and committees.

A sign of hope? Under the leadership of an exceptional group of Presidents, our 8 seminaries are becoming centers for mission, recasting how we do theological education - preparing leaders for an apostolic church in mission.

A sign of hope? The proposals reshape clinical, pastoral education which despite its strengths, often gives us a chaplaincy model for ministry and pathology as our lens for viewing life into contextual pastoral education, student - congregation - faculty, community, joined together as context for preparing public leaders for a public church.

A sign of hope? Integrating week long training into first call theological education.

A sign of hope? Congregations calling forth and training leaders - forming core teams. The church council at Christ Lutheran in St. Paul identified people in the congregation with gifts for leadership, called those gifts further by inviting those people to a Saturday retreat. People who had never thought of themselves as leaders began to be trained, emerging as leaders, helping to transform the congregation with a renewed sense of mission.

A sign of hope? Our experience throughout this church that congregation based organizing strengthens neighborhoods, and revitalizes congregations. Certainly that was our experience in St. Paul as we saw:

- growth in membership
- dynamic word and sacrament worship
- partnership in confirmation ministry
- mutual accountability between pastors
- new leaders emerging.
- congregations - urban and suburban joining to form a metropolitan ecumenical organization to find metropolitan solutions for metropolitan disparities.

It is time we silence critics who say we are only interested in revitalizing neighborhoods and building community organizations but not in strengthening and transforming congregations.

NOW IS THE TIME. Now is the time for us to be CLEAR. The turf issues of organizing networks are getting in our way, in the way of our being the Body of Christ, working together to address national and global issues as well as local.

One of my great concerns is that congregation based organizing keeps us grounded only in our local contexts. Yes, self interest begins where I live, work and worship, but with our first article understanding of the interrelatedness of humanity and our confession that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

We must be clear that my self interest and yours are inextricably tied to the quality of life of sisters and brothers in Sudan and South Bronx, in rural Cambodia and urban Bogota and the West Bank, with the plight of migrant workers in Florida and 4th generation farmers in South Dakota and with the health of the environment with all its creatures. Could it be that this church that has 5 full communion partners, a joint declaration or justification with Roman Catholics, expanding companion synod and companion congregation global partnerships can and should provide leadership in bridging network boundaries to that we might more effectively address national and global issues as well as local and metropolitan?

NOW IS THE TIME. Now is the time to CONVENE a conversation with those engaged in public policy advocacy, those with social ministry organizations and those involved in congregation based organizing need candid and open

dialogue, claiming our respective strengths, clarifying purpose, challenging and measuring our effectiveness, learning from one another, holding one another accountable. Let us add to that conversation others engaged in developing and evaluating public leaders, the Albin Institute and Gospel-Church Network, those who support faith based legislation, groups which seem to give too little attention to congregation based organizing. Listening to religious leaders the past two days who have easy access to the White House, I believe we need to become much more vocal about our concerns that some legislation on faith based initiatives is primarily to provide cover for the federal government to significantly diminish its commitment to the poor.

NOW IS THE TIME. Now is the time **TO RECOGNIZE** that we are not here because we bow down and worship the methodologies of Alinsky, but because we take seriously the vocation of the baptized. "Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism?" we ask confirmands, "to live among God's faithful people, to hear God's word and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?"

We begin not with what Alinsky did, but with what God is doing. If we are going to bear witness to what God is doing in our lives and in the world, we will have to learn the stories of scripture while developing the skills of organizing. If we do not do our biblical, theological and liturgical work, there is danger we might begin to believe that our turn out strategies issue actions, one to ones, and organization, will bring the Kingdom of God on earth, rather than being signs pointing to the inbreaking of God's reign. To use a variation on Krister Stendahl's theme, we need to do our congregation based organizing in a Lutheran Key.

Yes, we believe we are saved by God's grace through faith alone for Jesus' sake. Yet, faith is never finally alone as Eberhard Jungel reminds us, "For believers know that since God has done enough for our salvation, we can never do enough for the good of the world. So we are justified by faith alone but faith never stays alone; it strives to, it has to, become active in love; faith is never alone. There is no more liberating basis for ethics than the doctrine of justification of sinners by faith alone!" (Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith)

Our talk of power cannot be separated from the power of the Holy Spirit. This I have heard all morning. The Holy Spirit working through the gospel, bringing us to faith, knitting us into one body, setting us free for lives of service and doing justice, gifting each one for that common calling.

If we believe that each person has been given gifts for the sake of the common good then we need to join with those trained in asset mapping and asset based organizing to strengthen congregations and communities. Let us be clear that the biblical image of servant leader is not a person devoid of power. The command to witness is inseparable from the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit.

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

We here at the ends of the earth need to learn what that means from our colleague Munib Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (and Palestine) who in the midst of war leads and organizes a church committed to keeping open five schools, building 70 homes for young families on the Mt. of Olives, working for a peace that guarantees Palestinian autonomy and Israeli security.

"We are the church of the martyria." "Do not forsake us, sisters and brothers in the ELCA", he pleaded. "Call upon your country to a more active role in achieving Middle East peace...." Keep talking with Moslem and Jewish neighbors, he urges, forging a new way to build interfaith communities of reconciliation and peace. Bishop Younan recognizes that organizing begins but does not end with commitment. Commitment must lead to action. Are we surprised by Professor Nancy Ammerman's research showing commitment is not enough. In fact, in her studies, congregations which were unable to adapt to changing neighborhoods had the highest commitment in worship attendance and giving by members.

"Members of declining congregations are, on average, the most committed", Ammerman concluded. Commitment is a beginning place as we move to gaining skills, transforming congregations, building coalitions, and claiming power.

Yet, organizing in a Lutheran Key also knows that every call to action is inseparable from our proclamation of the cross which is foolishness to those who are perishing but to those being saved it is the power of God. Organizing in a Lutheran Key remembers that jubilation over organizing victories won is tempered by our confession that we are both saints and sinners.

Organizing in a Lutheran Key knows that week long training will never replace the transformation which occurs when every week we gather in Christ before the throne of God's grace on behalf of the whole creation, making confession, crying out for mercy, hearing God's word, offering intercessions, receiving the bread and wine of Christ's presence, sharing our gifts, singing our praises, sent forth in peace to serve the Lord.

Now is the time for a people who renounce the forces of evil, the devil, and the devil's empty promises to make that renunciation concrete by confronting again and again the demon of racism and together building intentionally anti-racist institutions, communities and churches.

Organizing in a Lutheran Key means building in healthy tension life in community in Christ and lives of costly discipleship. So helpful here is Tim Lull's paper challenging us as Lutherans to think differently than the church growth folks who too easily accommodate the culture, and Hauerwas and Willimon who in the image of the resident alien too easily flee the world.

Dr. Lull calls us to Bonhoeffer whose theology taken as a whole, contains a double thrust in deepening discipleship (Cost of Discipleship Life Together) and at the same time, radical engagement with the world in the structures and risks of daily life. (Letters and Papers from Prison).

Now is the time but are we ready?

Are we ready to be a Pentecost church, each one hearing and speaking in our native language God's deeds of power. A Pentecost people as is occurring in Metro New York Synod where the Gospel is being proclaimed in 18 languages.

Now is the time but are we ready? Are we ready to create a churchwide Jubilee Fund to reduce the dept of congregations in low income neighborhoods? Are we ready to make permanent an ELCA staff position in congregation based organizing?

Now is the time but are we ready - ready to make a covenant with one another, declaring that to be a congregation of the ELCA is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, announcing God's salvation, administer the sacraments, make disciples, AND to work for affordable housing, living wage jobs, available health care, accessible public transportation, an end to gun violence, and racism?

Now is the time! but are we ready to confront the individualism that permeates this church and culture? If God organized Godself into a community, why shouldn't we?

Now is the time!

Are we ready?

Now is the acceptable time.

Now is the day of salvation.

Are we ready to agitate and celebrate, to unite and ignite this church? Now is the time!

Are we ready?