



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

August 2010

Dear friend in Christ,

I believe we all want to do things in our lives that 'count', that make a difference, that speak our faith in various circumstances.

But there's another, simpler understanding of 'counting', and that's where my letter to you about the HIV and AIDS pandemic in our world today begins. Towards the end of my letter, I'll come back to the other meaning of 'counting' and invite you to join me in some specific, countable actions. But first, count with me:

- **9 ½ - Every *nine and a half* minutes, someone in the United States is infected with HIV.**
- **25,000,000 - *Twenty-five million* people have died from AIDS-related conditions.**
- **33,000,000 - More than *thirty-three million* people are living with HIV or AIDS in our world today.**
- **1 - We are all *one* in the body of Christ.**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Strategy on HIV and AIDS affirms the claim made and shared by the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation: the body of Christ has AIDS. Those living with HIV and dying of AIDS include members of this church and brothers and sisters around the world. When one member of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer.

The ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS (find it online at [www.elca.org/aids](http://www.elca.org/aids)) makes the bold claim that a world is possible where new cases of HIV are prevented and all individuals living with HIV or AIDS are able to live with dignity.

**The strategy names the following goals:**

- **Halt the spread of HIV through effective prevention, treatment and care.**
- **Eliminate the stigma and discrimination experienced by those who are HIV-positive.**
- **Reduce the conditions of poverty and marginalization that contribute to the spread of HIV.**

To achieve the goals of the strategy **we need to meet a challenging fundraising goal** so that we can increase our support for life-saving ministries of prevention, treatment and care. **We also need a groundswell of grassroots action** in our own congregations—awareness and education about the pandemic, theological reflection, and building relationships with and welcome for those living with HIV and AIDS and with their loved ones.

Can I count on you?

I started this letter talking about two kinds of ‘counting’. One involves counting up the loss of lives, and the rising risks, around HIV and AIDS in our country and our world. That count leads me to the second kind of counting: the way we make our voices, our resources, our actions “count” as people of faith and fellow members of the body of Christ, in the world today.

Will you help us reach these goals?

**Please join me in making a difference in HIV and AIDS work throughout the world.** Join me in **making a donation** to the HIV and AIDS Strategy and its work on behalf of our church. (Give online at [www.elca.org/aids/donate](http://www.elca.org/aids/donate).) Join me in being counted by sharing our resources, and our prayers, to make a difference in this deadly pandemic’s effect on our world.

Please visit [www.elca.org/aids](http://www.elca.org/aids) to review the ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS. Explore the Website—it is full of ideas for how to donate, advocate, learn, serve and pray in ways that will bring this church’s HIV and AIDS strategy to life. **Please prayerfully consider how you will lead people in your congregation and community to take action.**

I invite you to contact me with your questions, ideas and ministry stories at [andrea.degroot-nesdahl@elca.org](mailto:andrea.degroot-nesdahl@elca.org). I look forward to hearing from you.

In Christ,



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P.S. Please help us spread the word. Show our ten minute video in your congregation and distribute the handouts posted on the video page: <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Poverty-Ministries/HIV-and-AIDS/Learn/Video.aspx>