



Report of the Communication Services Unit

Statement of Purpose

The mission for the Communication Services unit is to “interpret the work of this church, provide for this church’s presence in the public media, and coordinate the communication activities of this church’s units.” The governing description for this service unit is defined in continuing resolution 17.21.A06, printed in Section X of this volume.

Report of Work for 2005-2007

During this biennium several significant changes occurred in Communication Services: The Rev. Eric C. Shafer concluded more than thirteen years of service as director of the Department for Communication; the unit was reorganized as a service unit and renamed Communication Services, a result of the church-wide organization’s restructuring; and Ms. Kristi S. Bangert became the executive director of the unit in February 2006.

At the time of this writing, the Communication Services unit is comprised of four work teams. This report is organized accordingly.

ELCA News Service

The ELCA News Service gathers and disseminates news to the news media, staff, and members of this church. It also responds to inquiries from the media about this church and its decisions, programs, and policies. The news team includes three staff members based in Chicago and a part-time staff member based in Washington, D.C. In most years, a college student joins the staff in the summer as an intern.

News Releases: During this biennium news staff members posted ELCA news releases electronically at www.elca.org/news/ on the Web, on Worldwide Faith News at www.wfn.org and on LutherLink. The news staff posts news releases and feature stories of interest to the media on ELCA News Releases, and posts shorter stories of interest to the ELCA audience on ELCA News Blog, a service initiated in December 2005. News releases are available free by e-mail subscription. About 5,100 e-mail addresses receive releases via the ELCA News Listserv and nearly 400 addresses are subscribed to receive ELCA News Blog stories. News staff members continue to use Web-based and electronic news services to bring breaking news to significant secular and religion news outlets. In a typical year, the news staff writes and issues about 200 news releases and 180 short stories for the News Blog.

Radio News: Radio news directors can access audio comments that accompany news stories or complete radio news packages on the ELCA Web site. Audio pieces feature church leaders and members. Audio stories are posted at www.elca.org/audio on the Web, and e-mail links are sent to 499 radio news directors.

Video News: The ELCA News Service periodically produces video news stories that are posted on the Web. Normally, these are associated with significant events in the Church. Video news stories are at www.elca.org/news/video.html on the ELCA Web site.

Media Placement: The ELCA News Service provides the media with qualified ELCA representatives to discuss current issues and topics in society and in the church. It places spokespersons in news interviews and responds to regular inquiries from news organizations. Requests come from radio, television, and newspaper reporters in cities across the United States and Caribbean. Contacts with religion editors of significant national newspapers, and radio and television networks (including *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, National Public Radio, and *The NewsHour*) continue to result in feature stories in these and other national media. The ELCA continues to benefit from an annual grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans to provide intensive media interview training for bishops and churchwide leaders.

Significant Events: News staff members continued to provide on-site coverage of significant ELCA events during this biennium. Newsroom services were provided at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly in Orlando, and the staff worked with more than 50 news reporters who reported on-site at the assembly. The news staff reported on and provided newsroom services at the 2006 ELCA Youth Gathering as well as Global Mission Events in 2006 and 2007. News staff also provided news support for the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) council meeting in Jerusalem in 2005; the 2007 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod convention in St. Louis; and Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson’s LWF visits to Brazil, Canada, Chile, Hungary, India, Indonesia, and Romania.

Some major news stories reported by the ELCA News Service staff during this biennium included coverage of Hurricane Katrina and Lutheran Disaster Response; follow-up reporting on the 2005 tsunami in the Indian Ocean; an ELCA delegation to Turkey and Italy, including meetings with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, world Orthodox leader, and Pope Benedict XVI; significant social concerns such as fairness in the federal budget and immigration reform; “What A Relief!,” a spring-break volunteer work program in the U.S. Gulf Coast region for college students; the life and death of Caribbean Synod Bishop Margarita Martinez; and the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech.

In addition, the ELCA News Service consults with and provides assistance to the presiding bishop and to synodical and congregational leaders in situations in which they must provide public comment on significant issues or disciplinary matters.

Awards: The ELCA News Service staff was recognized with several awards during this biennium. From the Associated

Church Press: a second-place award for in-depth coverage; honorable mention for news service, Web site, and theme issue. From the Religion Communicators Council: first place awards for graphic design, art, and photography, and for feature story and Internet communication; second place awards for news story, Internet communication, and radio news story.

Public Media

The Public Media team is responsible for all ELCA radio and television program production as well as for coordinating churchwide organization video and audio production, and for providing video and production support for major churchwide events.

Television Production: During this biennium, the staff produced *Joy to the World*, a one-hour ABC television special that aired on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2005. According to the Nielsen ratings, the program attracted 2.6 million viewers.

Spring of 2006 saw the broadcast of *Introducing Jesus of Nazareth* on ABC television. The production, hosted by the Rev. Peter W. Marty, was filmed on location in the Holy Land. According to ratings reports, the program brought Jesus into the homes of 2.5 million people across the country.

In October 2006, the staff worked with a film crew from the Discovery Channel to shoot footage of Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson for a documentary to air early in 2008. The documentary, being produced by Jules and Gedeon Naudet and Virgine Luck from the Paris office of the Discovery Channel, will feature major religious leaders from around the world. The Naudet brothers are the producers of the 9-11 documentary that aired on CBS on September 11, 2006.

Also in October 2006, an ELCA video production crew was in northern Uganda to record footage for a new broadcast documentary called *Ready to Forgive: An African Story of Grace*. The documentary will air on NBC network affiliate stations during December 2007 and January 2008, and on Hallmark Channel in early 2008 after the NBC contract expires. The National Council of Churches (NCC) obtained the air-time for this special production and awarded that time to the ELCA.

Faith & Values Media has run our award-winning feature, *Glory to God Alone: the Life of J. S. Bach* on Hallmark Channel twice each year in this biennium and has contracted to continue to do so at least four more times over the next two years.

Since spring 2006, ELCA videos, documentaries, and other broadcast programming are finding new audiences on www.video.google.com and www.youtube.com. On Google alone we have registered over 205,000 page views and more than 7,000 downloads since June 2006.

Grace Matters Radio Ministry: *Grace Matters* continues to be broadcast on 186 radio stations in the U.S., including Guam and Puerto Rico, as well as in Tanzania, Denmark, and Australia. This radio ministry, a powerful evangelism tool for the ELCA, reaches more people on a weekly basis than any other medium. In fact, research has shown that *Grace Matters* has 131,000 listeners each week, making it the largest ELCA "congregation" in the history of this church.

In this biennium, 18 new stations were added to the list of *Grace Matters* broadcast markets. Even more listeners have been added through *Grace Matters* podcasts and Web streaming.

Since 2005, podcasts of the program number 234,339, while 28,582 people have listened to the program online. Generous listeners continue to fund nearly 60 percent of the production and broadcast costs of this radio ministry.

In this biennium, the staff bid farewell to Ms. Brenda Engelby who retired from her position as associate director and newsletter editor, and welcomed the Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey as associate producer of *Grace Matters*.

Mosaic Television: *Mosaic Television*, the ELCA's documentary video series, focuses on issue-oriented and thematic stories. Programs in this biennium have included "Prayer," "Understanding the Old Testament," "Introducing Jesus of Nazareth," "Understanding the Roman Catholic Church," "Mission Support: Where Your Money Goes," "Holy Communion," and "Lutheran Basics," a collection of ten videos on two DVDs. Some of these programs were developed into hour-long documentaries that have aired on network and cable television.

Additional projects from *Mosaic Television* in this biennium were a new promotional video for the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and 2006 and 2007 synod assembly videos.

Mr. Timothy Frakes, the producer of *Mosaic Television* for the last 13 years, resigned in February 2007 to pursue a career-long dream of becoming a freelance producer. Mr. Frakes left behind a treasure trove of video footage and many friends.

Marketing, Public Relations and Planning

Marketing staff members consult with churchwide units and ELCA synods and congregations to assist in development and implementation of communication and marketing plans. This includes marketing plans for the *Grace Matters* radio ministry and *Mosaic Television*. The primary focus of the marketing team this biennium has been the development of a comprehensive communication plan for the ELCA churchwide organization.

Coordination and Planning: Staff members produce and manage guidelines for use of the ELCA emblem and this church's name in all media. The style guide and art work for the emblem, logotype, and the ELCA tag line, "Living in God's amazing grace," are available as downloadable Web files at www.elca.org/emblem.

The staff also helps other churchwide units with communication planning and production, provides leadership for special projects and initiatives, and works with the Office of the Presiding Bishop to edit and deliver communications from the presiding bishop to congregations and synods.

Print: *Seeds for the Parish*, the most widely used print resource produced by the department, is an award-winning bi-monthly resource paper distributed to over 200,000 congregation leaders. In this biennium, we welcomed Ms. Janice Rizzo as editor, and the resource paper was redesigned for the first time in its 20-year history.

The *Action Packet*, a distribution system for sample resources to ELCA leaders and congregations, was discontinued. The decision to do so was based on research that showed fewer than 11 percent of the recipients of the *Action Packet* used the material only some of the time. Most resources are now available as downloadable Web files.

Many churchwide interpretative print pieces, including *Prayer Ventures*, a cooperative effort of the Communication

Services, Global Mission, and Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission units, are designed to be reproduced by congregations for use in Sunday bulletins and church newsletters. Most of these materials are available in print and electronically.

In 2006, we ceased printing *Pericope Partners*. This resource, which provides churchwide leaders' reflections on lectionary texts, is now available as a downloadable file.

In 2006 we curtailed our marketing efforts for *Davey and Goliath* due to lack of funding and declining market interest. We do not anticipate launching any new initiatives with this property in the immediate future. The fully restored *Davey and Goliath* videos remain available through retail outlets.

Several staff changes have occurred within this team since 2005. Ms. Wendy McCredie, associate director for marketing, public relations and planning resigned in order to return to academia. Mr. Benjamin McDonald-Coltvet joined the staff as associate director, and Mr. John Kho joined the staff as team director.

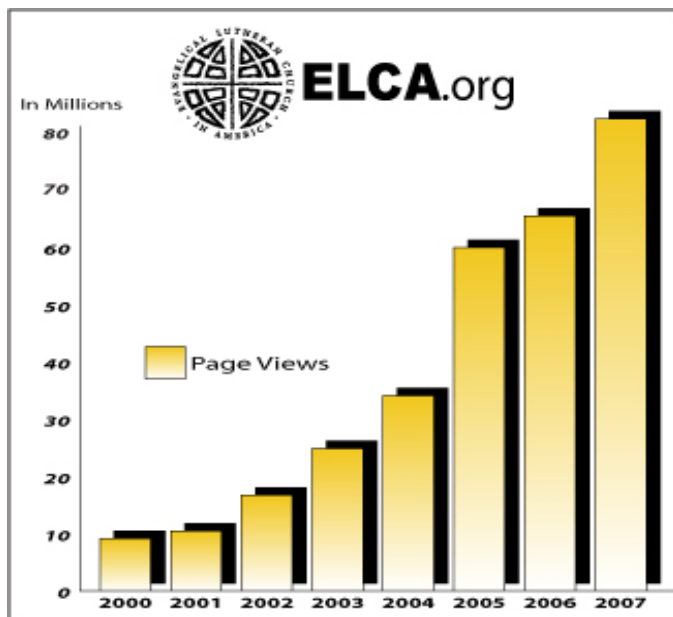
Interactive Media and Networks

The Interactive Media and Networks staff serves ELCA members and the general public by providing electronic and human connections to resources and people throughout this church.

ELCA.org: The Web site for the churchwide organization, *ELCA.org*, has seen a 900 percent increase in page views since 1999. In 2000 nearly 10 million page views were logged; in 2007 the current trend averages out to over five million page views each month. If this trend continues, well over 80 million page views are expected this year.

This steady increase in traffic and the proliferation of content and different graphic designs on *ELCA.org* warrants major improvements to the Web site (See Major Directions for 2007-2009 below for further details).

Web staff changes in this biennium included hiring Ms. Tracie Watkins as a Web developer, and Ms. Kristin Koskinen as ELCA Web manager.



Networks: Interactive Media and Networks staff members continue to support the network of synodical and regional resource centers that provide direct access to pastors and members of congregations looking for help with program materials. The resource centers' professional organization, the Association of Lutheran Resource Centers, meets biennially in Chicago, and in alternate years ELCA resource center directors meet with the larger Ecumenical Resource Center Gathering, whose last meeting was in Dallas in 2006. ELCA resource centers continue to provide leadership in the ecumenical scene, model churchwide cooperation through their LutherLink working meeting, and assist Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, with development and assessment of educational materials. At the same time they are developing new ways to minister to congregations' needs with fewer physical resources at hand.

Resource Information Service (RIS): Toll-free access (800-638-3522) to the Lutheran Center has been in place since 1988. The four staff members who answer these lines maintain the Resource Finder database, answer all manner of questions, transfer and refer callers to churchwide staff and other contacts as appropriate, and mail single copies of free resources to callers.

In April 2006 Mr. Richard Millett joined the RIS staff as a resource specialist and as the primary database administrator for the Congregational Leadership Directory (a.k.a. Form B). This directory contains contact information for almost 200,000 lay leaders (e.g. congregation council members, committee chairs, etc.). This is the mailing list for *Seeds for the Parish*. The list is also available to synod staff for their use. Churchwide staff has, through a Communication Services committee, begun using selected portions of the list for targeted communication efforts.

Major Directions for 2007-2009

Early in 2007, the Communication Services unit developed a comprehensive communication plan for the ELCA churchwide organization. This plan calls for: 1) an initiative to develop a consistent ELCA message, a lasting brand, and a clear identity; 2) a different model for implementing and orchestrating the churchwide organization's communication function; and 3) redesign and restructuring of the ELCA Web site from top to bottom.

A goal for the message and branding initiative is that every ELCA member will *know and tell* this church's story, the story of what God is doing in us and through us for the sake of the world. The message-brand-identity materials were tested in spring 2007. A pilot of the initiative will be launched in the greater Denver area in fall 2007. We look forward to beginning a nation-wide roll out in 2008. While we are planning to develop television, radio, outdoor and Internet-based advertising materials, lack of available funding will limit our current media buys to print.

Churchwide organization communication functions will be orchestrated by the Communication Services unit in order to meet the communication needs of other units and to align our communication work and resources with the priorities of this church. This includes establishing a staff of storytellers (writers) to get congregation, synod, and churchwide stories into the public arena, assigning communication staff to work directly with

each unit to help meet the unit's specific communication needs, and developing a budget that will support this transformational work.

The Web site of the churchwide organization, *ELCA.org*, will change visually and structurally. In addition to visual changes, we will be implementing a content management system (CMS) to improve search capabilities, enable cross-referencing content, and provide our visitors with the ability to customize their ELCA Web experience. The CMS will also simplify the Web editing process, resulting in more current and timely content for *ELCA.org*. We look forward to launching the new *ELCA.org* early in 2008.

Kristi S. Bangert, *executive director*