

# A call to everyone in the ELCA

Become more fluent in the language of Scripture



**Our common vision is this: That the whole church becomes more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the word.**

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The Spirit is stirring up something across our church. It began some years ago at Philadelphia Evangelical Lutheran in Dallas, N.C., when that congregation called on its synod, which in turn called on the whole of the ELCA, to consider more deeply how Lutherans might read the Bible. Their resolution eventually spawned Book of Faith, an initiative adopted by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly ([www.bookoffaith.org](http://www.bookoffaith.org)).

Book of Faith calls on all of us throughout the church, from kids to adults, to deepen our engagement with the Bible and to explore our Lutheran heritage for the many fruitful ways our tradition helps us in this engagement. Our common vision is this: "That the whole church becomes more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the word."

The "Our faith" column this year and part of next will be dedicated to helping us further this vision, building on the initial and future Book of Faith resources from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers to explore both helpful insights from our Lutheran heritage and helpful ways of reading and studying the Bible.

One is to begin with a threefold understanding of the word of God. The word of God comes to us first and foremost as the incarnate Word in Christ. We hear the word as Jesus. It next comes to us as the proclaimed word, both in sermons we hear and in the words of God's demand and promise, law and gospel, that we speak to one another. We hear and receive the word from one another. And the word of God comes to us as well as the written word of Scripture. We hear and receive the word through our opening and being opened by God through the written word. As our vision says, we are renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the word—incarnate, proclaimed and written.



**book of faith**  
Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

These days many examples of the Bible acting in just such a way are ringing in my ears. One example will have to serve. Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, preached at the Southeastern Iowa Synod assembly. Before us was the familiar text from Matthew 25:31-46 in which the glorified Jesus says to the righteous: "I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous asks him, "Lord, when did we see you thus?" And he answers, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me."

So often we hear these words and we hear the law, and we know ourselves to be sinners who don't care for others as God commanded us to do. But on this day, a new word came to many of us. We heard Jesus' response not only as law but also as promise. We heard Jesus say, "Whenever you see one who is hungry or thirsty or a stranger in need, through them I am with you."

Whenever we truly see the neighbor in need, we see Christ. The very presence of the needy is the gift of Christ's presence. Christ isn't dead; Christ is in our midst; Christ is with us. The effect of that spoken word on us through the text, delivering Christ to us right there in our midst, was astonishing.

Such is just one example of the power of the word to call us, to shape us, to capture our hearts and imaginations, to feed our souls and to send us forth into God's world. In this case, the word came to us through preaching. In other cases, we experience the power as we join together in common study or as we read and discuss Bible stories.

Something is stirring indeed. Let us invite one another to take up the vision, to explore ways of adopting the initiative in our own contexts, and to open Scripture together and join the conversation. □