



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Global Mission

October 19, 2009

Dear Companions and Partners in Germany,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who joins us to God's mission.

I am writing today to share information regarding the ELCA Wittenberg Center and the future shape of ELCA presence in Lutherstadt Wittenberg. As you are already aware, our church has found it necessary to make difficult decisions regarding our presence in Germany.

We are extremely grateful for the strong and impressive relationships that have been built between you and Rev. Stephen and Dr. Jean Godsall-Myers, as well as all ELCA missionaries who served with you during the Center's ten years of operation. We greatly appreciate the relationships that have been built not only with church companions but also with partners in local government and business as well. We deeply value these relationships and hope that, although the configuration of our church's presence in Wittenberg is changing, we can rely on the shared capacity and strength of these relationships to help us reshape our work together, especially in this Reformation Decade.

As you know, a convergence of financial complexities has made it necessary for the ELCA to reshape its work in many regions of the world. Harsh budget realities have been the catalyst for our most recent decision to withdraw from Steve's and Jean's service as directors of the ELCA Wittenberg Center. Even with the creative ideas for new financial partnership that have been shared in recent weeks, it is clear that the ELCA will not have the resources to place full-time staff in Wittenberg in the future.

Given the budget realities that the ELCA is facing, we have needed to move far more quickly than we would have desired to restructure our engagement in Wittenberg. Thus, I want to share with you that the Godsall-Myers will conclude their service as directors of the center on 30 November 2009. They will likely remain in or near Wittenberg for the remainder of the calendar year, but their duties and responsibilities as directors will conclude by the end of November. We have agreed on the terms of the Godsall-Myers's reintegration period in the United States, and Stephen has already been in contact with his bishop in Pennsylvania regarding a new call to parish ministry. We thank them for their ministry and wish them Godspeed in their unfolding future.

At this point, our church is unable to make substantial commitments to plans in the immediate future. As you are aware, the ELCA operates on a different funding system than most European churches. We are required to budget from year to year and although we seek to make multi-year commitments, we are unable to set aside funds for guaranteed multi-year operations. This structure, paired with increasingly difficult budgetary trends, makes it

impossible for us to make a financial commitment to ministry in Wittenberg for the next fiscal year. We hope to reach some clarity regarding our budget situation by mid-November and will be able to speak to you with more specificity after that time. We thank you for your understanding regarding our circumstances.

Throughout our process, we have tried to work toward maintaining a presence in Wittenberg. Given our anticipated budget realities, we are not at this point able to discern what that presence will look like, even in the near future. We remain committed to working with you to determine the best ways for configuring our future presence, including how we might best use what resources remain available to us for this purpose. We are also committed to seeking the best possible outcome for Frau Renate Skirl, whose service to the ELCA Wittenberg Center we also recognize and appreciate.

In the meantime, I welcome conversation with you. Our Regional Representative for Europe, Rev. Dr. Arden Haug (Arden.Haug@elca.org), will be available as well for further clarification and collaboration for the future. Finally, I ask you to please keep both our church, Frau Skirl and the Godsall-Myers in your prayers through this difficult time of transition.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert O. Smith".

Rev. Robert O. Smith

cc: Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
Rev. Rafael Malpica-Padilla  
Rev. Arden Haug  
Rev. Stephen and Dr. Jean Godsall-Myers