



FROM THE BISHOP



*From the Lobby of the Intercontinental Hotel, New Orleans*

Dear Friends,

By the time you read this, the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering, *Jesus, Justice, Jazz*, will be a memory—but *what* a memory! We are just finishing up a lovely week along with 37,000 other Lutherans from across the United States and from around the world. We were well represented from South Dakota, with more than 1,500 young people and adults from all across our fair state. Ours was the largest contingent of all 65 synods, and I could not be more proud of our folks and the rest of the crew that was down here.

New Orleans feels so different than it did twelve years ago when I was here for the previous National Youth Gathering. The most noticeable difference is the decrease in the number of people who live here. Overall, just over forty percent of the pre-Katrina population have returned to their city since the hurricane. Over three days of the Gathering almost all of the 37,000 attendees volunteered throughout the city in clean-up projects, painting, visiting, sharing a story. It was estimated by city planners that three years of volunteer work was done by our young people during their time here. We all experienced people rolling down their car windows and calling out to say thank you, or being stopped on the street by folks and being told how much they appreciated our coming down.

The National Youth Gathering was the largest group to have visited New Orleans since Katrina, and the city put on its best face and warmest hospitality. I was proud of our young people and the adults that brought them. Through their efforts, they made a real difference in the lives of those here in New Orleans. The press coverage, both in the paper and on TV, accurately reflected the impact and appreciation of our being here.

We had a little confusion with the scheduling of the bishops, so if you looked for me at one of the Bible studies, I am sorry I did not make it. I did so enjoy our large-group gathering on Thursday afternoon with as many of the South Dakotans who could make it. We did know that at least a third would be doing work projects that day. If you took a picture of the large group please send it to the synod office and we will post it on the website.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the congregations, pastors, lay leaders, and our young people for making this Gathering possible. Lots and lots of hard work goes into making a trip like this come together. I also want to thank the more than 400 college students and their coaches (like Susan Marone, AIM, Suzanne Hansen, AIM, and Pastor Dwight Stensgaard) who volunteered and gave up a week of work—and a lot of sleep—to help make the Gathering happen.

And as always, thank *you* for supporting our young people, and for your ongoing partnership in ministry!

Bishop Dave