

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

February 2010

Lutheran CORE task force releases proposal for reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America

Proposal recommends new Lutheran church and continuation of Lutheran CORE

Leaders of Lutheran CORE released a proposal for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America on Thursday, Feb. 18.

The proposal calls for the continuation of Lutheran CORE as “a community of confessing Lutherans” and for the formation of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), a new Lutheran church body.

Lutheran CORE’s national Convocation Sept. 25-26, 2009, in Fishers, Ind., asked that a proposal for the “reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism” be prepared and brought to Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio. The proposal released Feb. 18 is a response to that request. It was released now so that Lutheran CORE members can provide input to aid in drafting the proposals that will be considered by the 2010 Convocation.

“We are committed to maintaining the unity of as many faithful Lutherans in North America as possible,” said Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., who chaired the Vision and Planning Working Group that created the proposal.

Many individuals and congregations are considering whether or not to remain affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America because

of what they see as the ELCA’s continued drift from the teachings of the Bible and traditional Christianity.

“These proposals are a way for those who uphold traditional Christian teaching — both those who are leaving the ELCA to join the NALC or another body, and those who will remain in the ELCA — to work together,” Schwarz explained.

“There are deep divisions in the ELCA as a result of the Churchwide Assembly’s recent actions,” he added.

The actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August to affirm same-sex sexual relationships and to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in those relationships in spite of the teaching of the Bible have been seen by many ELCA members as evidence that the Bible no longer functions as the ultimate norm for the faith and life of the ELCA. Similar concerns are being expressed about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

“We are living in an exciting time for confessing Lutherans in North America! Pastors and laypeople increasingly are engaged in the life of the Church beyond their congregations. Many are returning with new zeal to the true mission of the Church, the sharing of the Good

News of Christ Jesus. Many are eager for new fellowships, new structures, and new ways of doing common ministry,” the proposal states.

“These proposals are a way for Lutherans to move forward in carrying out the true mission of the Christian Church — which is sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ — while leaving behind past struggles to reform the ELCA,” Schwarz explained.

Lutheran CORE

“Lutheran CORE affirms that both staying in and leaving the ELCA and ELCIC can be faithful courses for confessing Lutherans. We envision a reconfiguration that maintains the highest degree of ongoing unity and cooperation possible among those who leave and those who stay,” the document states. “A primary vehicle for this unity will be the continuing ministry of Lutheran CORE, reconfigured as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies.”

“Lutheran CORE intends to be a community of Lutherans who acknowledge that Scripture is the only and final authority in matters of faith and life, and who accept the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful and trustworthy witness to the Word of God.

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Lutheran CORE to continue as confessing movement for all Lutherans regardless of church affiliation

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It will be composed of individuals, congregations, partner renewal movements and church bodies, including the NALC, who agree with and adhere to its constitution,” the proposal states.

At its August 2010 convocation, Lutheran CORE, which previously has been called a “free-standing synod,” will amend its constitution as necessary to engage in mission as:

✚ A confessional and confessing movement unifying all Lutherans who identify with the purposes of Lutheran CORE.

✚ A churchly community, grounded in Word and Sacrament, and rooted in the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions.

✚ An association, providing a sense of Christian community and Lutheran identity and making available resources for mission, theological and lay education, and the call process.

✚ A coalition of congregations, individual laypersons and pastors, reform movements, and church bodies.

“Lutheran CORE is not becoming the NALC. It is aiding in the formation of this new church body,” explained the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of Lutheran CORE’s Steering Committee and a member of the working group that prepared the proposal.

“Lutheran CORE will continue as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies.

Lutheran CORE will serve those in the ELCA, those in the NALC, and hopefully those in other Lutheran church bodies such as LCMC who share a commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions,” explained Spring, the retired bishop of the ELCA’s Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. “The NALC will provide a church body for those who choose to leave the ELCA.”

North American Lutheran Church “Confessing Lutherans have raised their voices over the past several months, asking for a church body which is faithful in its preaching and practice to the Holy Bible and to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheran CORE has heard these requests and, in response, now proposes to form the North American Lutheran Church (NALC),” the proposal explains.

“The NALC is being established in response to those members and friends of Lutheran CORE who have expressed a preference for completely withdrawing from the ELCA or ELCIC. They are looking for a new Lutheran church body which stands in the tradition of the Church, is denominationally structured for leadership, oversight and accountability, enhances representative governance by congregations and affirms and supports ministry and mission at the congregational level.”

The NALC and Lutheran CORE will function cooperatively in shared ministry and mission. To express and build unity amongst their respective members, most ministries of the two bodies will be carried out jointly:

domestic and global evangelism, theological education, and human service.

The new church body intends to encompass congregations in Canada, the United States, Mexico and the Caribbean. It will stand as a partner with confessing church bodies throughout the world. Congregations of the NALC may also be members of other Lutheran church bodies.

At its 2010 Convocation, Lutheran CORE will present a provisional constitution for the NALC, and will nominate a slate of officers for election to one-year terms. At the 2011 initial Convocation of the NALC, delegates from congregations that have joined the new church will review the constitution and elect officers to full terms.

Four Key Attributes

The proposal outlines four “key attributes” of both Lutheran CORE and the NALC:

✚ **Christ-Centered:** “We confess the apostolic faith in Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. We affirm the authority of the canonical Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of our faith and life. We accept the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses to the Word of God.”

✚ **Mission-Driven:** “We believe that making disciples for Christ is the core priority of the Church, that congregation planting is often best done through local congregations, and that both external and internal

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Four key attributes focus of reconfigured Lutheranism

Christ-Centered - Mission-Driven - Traditionally-Grounded - Congregationally-Focused

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evangelization must be a priority of the Church in the present age.”

✚ **Traditionally-Grounded:** “We affirm the ecumenical creeds and the faithful witness of the Church across time and space. We endorse the form and practices of the universal Church that are consistent with Scripture, particularly the office of the ministry and the tradition of worship under Word and Sacrament. We seek dialogue and fellowship with other Lutheran churches and with faithful Christians of other confessions.

✚ **Congregationally-Focused:** “We envision a new church body and confessing community that are organized to facilitate the ministries of local congregations in a posture of servanthood and a spirit of partnership, through the provision of resources, connections and information.”

“The vision statement’s commitment to prioritize making disciples of Christ in congregations, communities and in all nations is key. That’s the ‘main thing’ and if Christian churches don’t do it, no one else will,” said the Rev. Mark Chavez of Landisville, Pa., director of Lutheran CORE.

“The people who drafted the proposals for Lutheran CORE and the NALC come from several different backgrounds and traditions in North American Lutheranism. They are united in a common confession of the Christian faith and commitment to submit to the authority of God’s Word over all matters of faith and life. That’s hopeful and exciting,” Chavez said.

The proposal — available online at www.lutherancore.org — was drafted by an eight-member working group. It was reviewed and approved by Lutheran CORE’s Steering Committee and its Advisory Council of theologians and church leaders.

Members of the Vision and Planning Task Force are two lay people: Schwarz and Carolyn Nestingen, Dallas, Ore.; four ELCA pastors: the Revs. Cathi Braasch, Smithfield, Neb.; Dan Selbo, San Jose, Calif.; David Glesne, Fridley, Minn.; and Mike Tavella, Abington, Pa.; and two retired ELCA bishops: Spring and the Rev. Ronald Warren, Grove City, Ohio, former bishop of the ELCA’s Southeastern Synod.

“It is fitting that these proposals are being announced on the day that the Lutheran church remembers the great reformer Martin Luther. Luther brought new life and renewal to the church of his day. We pray that God will use these proposals to bring new life and renewal to the church of our day,” Spring said.

Feb. 18 is the date on church calendars for the commemoration of Martin Luther as a renewer of the Christian Church. Luther died Feb. 18, 1546.

Congregations leaving ELCA

Congregations around the country are already taking votes on whether to leave the ELCA. ELCA Secretary David Swartling reported that, as of Feb. 3, 220 congregations in 49 of the ELCA’s 65 synods have taken votes to leave the ELCA.

Two votes at least 90 days apart — each receiving a two-thirds majority

— are required for a congregation to end its affiliation with the ELCA. Swartling reported that 156 congregations attained the required two-thirds majority on their first vote. Twenty-eight congregations already have taken their second vote. All of those votes attained the two-thirds majority for the congregation to leave the ELCA.

Several congregations have had a significant majority vote to leave the ELCA but failed to reach the two-thirds majority, increasing the crisis and division in those congregations.

Many ELCA congregations are facing divisions among their members and financial difficulties as a result of the ELCA assembly’s actions. Revenues to the ELCA churchwide organization and to many synods have decreased as congregations have chosen to redirect their benevolence giving to ministries other than the ELCA.

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

Summary of 'Vision and Plan' document

We are living in an exciting time for confessing Lutherans in North America! Pastors and laypeople increasingly are engaged in the life of the Church beyond their congregations. Many are returning with new zeal to the true mission of the Church, the sharing of the Good News of Christ Jesus. Many are eager for new fellowships, new structures, and new ways of doing common ministry. And all this is happening in a society that has become once more a mission field, a culture desperately in need of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior.

In September 2009, Lutheran CORE's national convocation, meeting in Fishers, Ind., committed us to pursue the "reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism," by providing for the needs both of those who plan to leave and those who plan to remain within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) in this season of challenge and opportunity. This document summarizes our vision and plan for pursuing these goals.

Lutheran CORE affirms the faithful call of confessing Lutherans, some of whom will remain in the ELCA and ELCIC and some of whom are now called to different affiliations. We envision a reconfiguration that maintains the highest degree of ongoing unity and cooperation possible among those who leave and those who stay. A primary vehicle for this unity will be the continuing ministry of Lutheran CORE, reconfigured as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies. However, after hearing the hopes and requests of many of those who plan to leave their current church bodies, we are now also proposing the formation of a new denominational body for confessing Lutherans: the **North American Lutheran Church (NALC)**.

The NALC will be a faithful and innovative Lutheran church body that spans national borders. It will hold at its heart the Great Commission of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations." It will

utilize networked ministries of local congregations and parachurch organizations, rather than the large bureaucracy of a denominational body. It will be governed by a convocation of representative delegates from its congregations, and it will submit major decisions to congregational ratification. It will stand in continuity with the 2,000 year history of "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church," marrying the classical form of the church catholic with flexible structures appropriate for its ministry emphases. It will be ecumenically engaged and confessionally grounded.

It will also be a church body bigger than itself, for it will work in close partnership and cooperation with the community of **Lutheran CORE**. For confessing Lutherans who will remain within the ELCA and ELCIC, Lutheran CORE will offer an alternate ecclesial family, where they can connect with each other and with confessing Lutherans in the NALC and other church bodies. Some will choose to coordinate witness initiatives within the ELCA or ELCIC through this community. Many will choose to organize collaborative ministry initiatives with their partners in Lutheran CORE. Mindful of the objective of ongoing unity, the NALC will conduct many of its ministry initiatives with and through its partners in the Lutheran CORE community. And Lutheran CORE will organize its capabilities to provide resources, advice and assistance to its members in carrying out their local ministries.

Both the NALC and Lutheran CORE will be centered on four key attributes: Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded and Congregationally-Focused:

- **Christ-Centered:** We confess the apostolic faith in Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. We affirm the authority of the canonical Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of our faith and life. We accept the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses to the Word of God.

- **Mission-Driven:** We believe that making disciples for Christ is the core priority of the Church, that congregation planting is often best done through local congregations, and that both external and internal evangelization must be a priority of the Church in the present age.

- **Traditionally-Grounded:** We affirm the ecumenical creeds and the faithful witness of the Church across time and space. We endorse the form and practices of the universal Church that are consistent with Scripture, particularly the office of the ministry and the tradition of worship under Word and Sacrament. We seek dialogue and fellowship with other Lutheran churches and with faithful Christians of other confessions.

- **Congregationally-Focused:** We envision a new church body and confessing community that are organized to facilitate the ministries of local congregations in a posture of servanthood and a spirit of partnership, through the provision of resources, connections and information.

Finally, both Lutheran CORE and the NALC will seek to foster further reconfiguration and unity among confessing Lutherans by seeking out partnership opportunities with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) and with WordAlone and other orthodox Lutheran churchly groups and ministries. While respecting our different roles and church structures, we all share a common confession of faith and a common commitment to the authority of the Word of God and the centrality of the Great Commission in the life of the Church. May God grant us ever-increasing opportunities to serve Him collaboratively.

In the hope that God will use these efforts to His purposes, we offer this plan for review and comment by all confessing Lutherans in North America.

The Lutheran CORE Vision and Planning Working Group
The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee
The Lutheran CORE Advisory Council

Leaders of Lutheran CORE, LCMC, WordAlone Network meet, pledge cooperation and support

By Betsy Carlson

WordAlone Network Editor

Leaders of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, Lutheran CORE, and the WordAlone Network met jointly in a Minneapolis suburb in mid-January to discuss and coordinate their ministry to individuals and churches seeking biblical, confessional, Lutheran teaching and practice.

The three groups were founded over the past 15 years because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been moving away from accepting the Bible as its final source of authority in decision making.

Confessional Lutherans believe this trend away from the Bible's authority was seen most recently in the ELCA's August 2009 assembly votes to accept committed homosexual relationships and to allow practicing homosexuals to serve as ordained and professional lay ministers.

Confessional Lutherans accept the Bible as the sole, divine source and norm for all Christian teaching and endorse the Lutheran Confessions found in the 1580 *Book of Concord* as accurate interpretations of Holy Scripture. The Bible repeatedly condemns sexual relationships outside of a marriage between one man and one woman.

Some ELCA members and churches are leaving the denomination because of this drift from the authority of the Bible. Others are

staying in the ELCA but are protesting the assembly votes, some by redirecting financial giving.

William Drew, chair of the WordAlone Network Board of Directors, Spokane, Wash., noted that the three confessional groups discussed a cohesive approach to address the needs of Lutherans seeking faithful ways to move forward in a reconfigured North American Lutheranism.

The WordAlone Network is changing its direction from having worked to renew the ELCA for almost 15 years to serving confessional Lutheran individuals and churches — whether they stay in or leave the ELCA — by providing educational resources, pastoral care, fellowship opportunities and teaching by confessional theologians.

“The LCMC Board of Trustees very much appreciated the opportunity to sit down with the board of WordAlone and with the working group from Lutheran CORE,” said the Rev. William Sullivan, LCMC Service Coordinator, Canton, Mich. “What emerged from the meeting was a strong consensus that we all share the same goal of a Word-centered, mission-driven Lutheran presence in North America. All agreed that each group has a particular niche to fill in the years ahead.”

LCMC, constituted in March of 2001, is an association of 339 Lutheran congregations in eight

countries and 38 states, working together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. LCMC's ranks have swelled by 117 congregations departing the ELCA since the ELCA assembly in August.

Ryan Schwarz, the chair of Lutheran CORE's Vision and Planning Working Group, Washington, D.C., said, “We were particularly pleased to find consensus that Lutheran CORE and LCMC are ‘fraternal twins’ traveling on ‘parallel tracks,’ with both benefitting greatly from the contributions of WordAlone. We look forward to the prospect of substantial cooperation in mission and ministry with LCMC, and continued collaboration with WordAlone, as we move forward.”

“WordAlone was instrumental in the founding of both LCMC and Lutheran CORE, and its varied ministries are critical to Lutheran CORE's efforts to catalyze a reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism,” he added.

At its Convocation Aug. 26-27 Lutheran CORE intends to constitute a new Lutheran church body and to reorganize the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE as an independent federation of confessional centrist Lutherans both within and outside of the ELCA, Schwarz said.

The recent meeting included the first formal discussions between leadership of LCMC and Lutheran CORE.

ELCA Secretary says congregations may not have dual church affiliations in spite of 22 years of allowing it

ELCA churchwide leaders are trying to discourage congregations from affiliating with other Lutheran church bodies while maintaining their ELCA affiliation.

“Dual Rostering’ of ordained ministers and congregations is impermissible under the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” ELCA Secretary David D. Swartling said in a Jan. 19 memo to synod bishops and vice presidents.

The ELCA Secretary’s pronouncement fails to note that there have been ELCA congregations with more than one church body affiliation for nearly all of the ELCA’s history.

Several ELCA congregations held dual membership in the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod from the ELCA’s founding until 1998 when the LCMS asked those congregations to choose one church body affiliation. Some ELCA congregations still maintain dual affiliation with the LCMS. For example, Lutheran Church of Arcata in Arcata, Calif., and Palisades Lutheran Church in Pacific Palisades, Calif., continue to have dual ELCA-LCMS affiliation.

The Lutheran Church of Guam, a congregation in Hagatna, Guam, maintained a dual LCMS-ELCA affiliation until 2009 when it voted to end its ELCA affiliation following the actions of the 2009 ELCA Church-wide Assembly. The congregation is now affiliated with the LCMS and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC).

Several ELCA congregations have been members of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ since 2001. LCMC lists more than 30 ELCA congregations as members of LCMC.

While serving as Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, the Rev. H. George Anderson was quoted by *The Lutheran* magazine, an ELCA publication, as stating that “dual congregations don’t pose a problem for the ELCA.”

The ELCA Constitution (9.31) states that “Congregations of this church shall have authority in all matters that are not assigned by the constitution and bylaws of this church to synods and the churchwide organization.”

Neither the ELCA churchwide nor synodical constitutions prohibit a congregation being affiliated with two different church bodies. Congregations have the constitutional authority to make decisions regarding their own affiliations based on the reservation of authority provision in the ELCA constitution.

Swartling’s memo notes that “although an express prohibition does not exist, the governing documents of this church do not authorize congregations to join an additional church body.”

Swartling builds his case that a congregation cannot hold more than one church body affiliation on the statement that ELCA congregations “agree to support the life and work of this church.” He determines that a congregation with more than one affiliation cannot fully support the ELCA.

“Evaluating what constitutes ‘support for the life and work of this church’ on the part of a congregation requires an assessment of both these and other provisions in the governing documents, and also an analysis of the actual practices of the congregation. If a congregation chooses to be on the roster of another church body, it implicitly is repudiating the interdependent relationship that exists among expressions of the ELCA. If it fails to live up to the commitments contained in the governing documents of this church, the congregation necessarily breaches the partnership relationships that are foundational in this church. It thus jeopardizes its standing on the roster of ELCA congregations,” Swartling states.

“The judgment on whether a congregation has breached its commitment to support the life and work of this church is made by the synod in whose territory the congregation is located,” the memo states. “A congregation that repudiates its constitutional commitments to this church is subject to discipline.”

Some congregations may choose to express their “bound conscience” and to accept discipline as a way to leave the ELCA rather than to vote on ending their ELCA affiliation.

That approach would eliminate any concerns about church property. The ELCA Constitution states that “Title to the property of a congregation that is no longer recognized by this church as a result of discipline shall continue to reside in the congregation” (9.71.d).

ELCA taking hard line against those who dissent from actions on sexuality or redirect benevolence giving

Some ELCA synodical and church-wide leaders are taking a hard line and threatening disciplinary action in dealing with pastors and congregations expressing opposition to the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly changing ELCA teaching and practice on sexual ethics to affirm same-sex sexual relationships and to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in committed same-sex relationships.

Many ELCA congregations have chosen to redirect their benevolence giving away from the ELCA churchwide organization because they believe the actions of the assembly violate the clear teaching of the Bible and the ELCA Constitution which states that the Bible is “the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of (the church’s) proclamation, faith, and life.” The changes in benevolence giving have resulted in some cuts in churchwide and synodical budgets.

The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly committed the ELCA to “respect the bound consciences of all.” But some ELCA leaders have had difficulty respecting those whose “bound consciences” have chosen other ways of supporting the mission of Christ in the world than undesignated giving to the churchwide organization.

A Jan. 19 memo from ELCA Secretary David Swartling to synod bishops and vice presidents suggests that congregations could be disciplined and removed from the ELCA if they do not fully and financially support the churchwide organization.

“If it fails to live up to the commitments contained in the governing documents of this church, the congregation necessarily breaches the partnership relationships that are foundational in this church. It thus jeopardizes its standing on the roster of ELCA congregations,” Swartling states. “A congregation that repudiates its constitutional commitments to this church is subject to discipline.”

Some ELCA officials have said that congregations that choose the recipients of their giving beyond their congregation and have redirected some of their benevolence giving to ministries other than the ELCA churchwide organization are “withholding” financial support that the ELCA is entitled to receive. Congregations determine their budgets and the amounts to be sent for ministry beyond their congregation.

A January “Q & A” being used by several synods says, “Is it permissible for congregations to withhold mission support? No. Withholding mission support is unconstitutional and violates the governing documents of the church.”

The “Q & A” document also insists that a synod bishop is entitled to determine all aspects of a required consultation period between a congregation considering ending its ELCA affiliation and its synod bishop. “The bishop leads and is responsible for all aspects of the consultation. . . . The bishop determines how the consultation will be conducted, who participates, how many meetings or forums are necessary, whether

mailings are sent, etc.” It also states that the bishop will involve ELCA lawyers in the process “to ensure legality and good order.”

Some bishops have required extensive consultation processes with congregations considering changing their church affiliation. They have approached the process in an adversarial fashion rather than in a pastoral and consultative manner seeking to help a congregation make the best decision given its realities.

In a Dec. 19 story, *The Washington Times* described what it called “bullying” by ELCA officials against pastors and congregations that do not support the ELCA’s new teaching and policy regarding same-sex sexual relationships. The article highlighted situations in two Illinois synods. Similar stories have come from other parts of the country.

The adversarial approach has not been shared by all ELCA bishops. Some synod bishops have been gracious and understanding in working with congregations that have “bound consciences” that make it difficult for them to provide unquestioning financial support for the ELCA churchwide organization. Some synods have found ways for congregations to give designated gifts to their synod and to some ELCA ministries through the synod.

Some bishops have also been gracious and served in a truly consulting role in working with congregations that are considering the possibility of ending their affiliation with the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE Questions & Answers

What is Lutheran CORE?

Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) is a community of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies. We are an association of individuals, congregations, and reform movements.

Lutheran CORE's members represent the vast theological middle of Lutheranism in North America — spanning geographical regions, church bodies, vocations, and political viewpoints. We are united by our common commitment to the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the church.

Is Lutheran CORE becoming a new Lutheran church body?

No. Lutheran CORE will continue as an association for all Lutherans regardless of their church affiliation. Lutheran CORE is assisting in the formation of a new Lutheran church body. Congregations may belong to both Lutheran CORE and the new church body or to just one of them.

Why is Lutheran CORE remaining as a confessing movement for all Lutherans and continuing to work with ELCA congregations?

Some faithful Lutheran congregations will choose to remain in the ELCA for a variety of reasons. Lutheran CORE is committed to offering ways for those congregations to connect with other faithful Lutherans and to find ways to work together. Lutheran CORE will also assist congregations in finding ELCA pastors who uphold the authority of Scripture.

Why is Lutheran CORE forming a new church body?

Lutheran CORE is committed to serving those congregations that have determined they are no longer able to remain in the ELCA. Many ELCA members see the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly as evidence that the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions no longer function as ultimate norms for the ELCA.

Such a church body is necessary so that those congregations can work together in mission and ministry and because ELCA rules require a congregation to affiliate with another Lutheran church body in order to keep its property. Lutheran CORE will assist those who desire to affiliate with this new church body by doing the work necessary for it to be constituted in August 2010.

Why is Lutheran CORE not just encouraging congregations to join Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) rather than assisting in the formation of a new church body?

For congregations that are looking for a Lutheran church body with a congregational polity and very little national structure, LCMC is a good mission-minded church body. Other congregations that are leaving the ELCA have said they want a Lutheran church body with a little more national structure that would assist in the call process and in mission work beyond the local congregation. Lutheran CORE is working to help provide a church body for those congregations. Lutheran CORE and LCMC are committed to close cooperation.

Can we join Lutheran CORE whether or not we remain in the ELCA?

Yes. Lutheran CORE is committed to serve both those congregations and individuals who choose to remain affiliated with the ELCA and those who choose to affiliate with other church bodies.

How can my congregation join Lutheran CORE?

A congregation needs to take official action to join Lutheran CORE including the adoption of the "Common Confession." Notification of that action should be sent to Lutheran CORE.

Will an ELCA pastor lose pension and medical insurance benefits if they leave the ELCA?

No. Pastors may choose to continue in the ELCA pension and medical program or to transfer their pension funds to another retirement plan. The plan descriptions of the ELCA Board of Pensions state: "Former ELCA congregations that sponsored at least one eligible employee on or after Jan. 1, 2005 may sponsor any or all eligible employees."

How can I support the work of Lutheran CORE financially?

Gifts may be sent to:

Lutheran CORE
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

Going with the Flow

By Pastor Marshall Hahn

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

— **Romans 12:1-2**

“What shall be our witness this week?” With this question, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson of the ELCA began both his opening sermon for the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and his Report of the Presiding Bishop to the assembly. His answer: “Let this be our witness: We are a church going with the flow.”

This challenge to the church was the heart of his report. “No, I am not suggesting we go with the flow of whatever seems to be the current wave; rather, let our witness be that we are going with the flow of God’s Spirit being poured out,” Bishop Hanson explained. It was a bold rhetorical gambit. “We are a church going with the flow.”

This had been the criticism of those who opposed the proposals which were to come before the assembly to allow for the rostering of people in homosexual relationships in the church. The critics said the ELCA was abandoning the commitment to Scripture and the orthodox Christian tradition to go with the flow of the prevailing culture.

Bishop Hanson sought to blunt that criticism by transforming the phrase from a criticism to be avoided into a goal to be embraced.

It was a bold rhetorical gambit. And it failed. I was astounded when I heard him use it during his speech, and my 24 years of experience in reading the reactions of congregations to “bold rhetorical gambits” told me it fell flat as a pancake. I believe Bishop Hanson must have felt it, too. I listened for this phrase throughout the rest of the assembly — “We are a church going with the flow” — and I never heard it again.

*Is the ELCA a church
going with the flow
of the current culture
or a church
going with the flow
of God’s Spirit?*

What had been stated as a central image for the church was never once mentioned again. Yet it is, in fact, a good barometer of how one understands what occurred at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Is the ELCA a church going with the flow of the current culture — or a church going with the flow of God’s Spirit? How one answers that question will largely determine how

one views the events of this August at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

From the first night of the assembly, when the attempt to require a two-thirds majority for the passage of the Recommendation on Ministry Policies was defeated, it became evident that the assembly could very well pass all of the proposals concerning human sexuality.

As a voting member who was working actively with Lutheran CORE to defeat these proposals, I could sense the disappointment from the Lutheran CORE supporters and the optimism from those in favor of the changes. And, of course, this was to become the assembly that adopted the changes which had long been sought by the advocates for changing the church’s teaching and practice concerning homosexual behavior.

But even for many of those who advocated these changes, the results were more troubling than triumphant.

The critical vote came on Wednesday, August 19, a day which will, no doubt, be remembered as the most significant date in the ELCA’s history. For me, it will always be remembered as a surreal experience.

My seat was only three tables from the front, so I had a good view of the podium. I first sensed something out of kilter when I noticed that Bishop Hanson had gone behind the curtain during the Bible Study. He soon returned to inform us that a tornado had touched down just south of the

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Going with the Flow

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convention center and that everyone was to remain in the assembly hall with the doors closed for safety as we began the debate on the Social Statement.

During the debate we could hear the sirens outside and the winds above the convention roof. We were soon informed that a tornado had damaged the convention center roof, and the steeple of Central Lutheran Church next door.

During the debate, it also became evident that there was a fair amount of concern among those in favor of the proposal that they might not get the two-thirds required. In fact, there was an attempt at one point to change the agenda to consider the Recommendation on Ministry Policies first, but it was ruled out of order. The concern was that if the Social Statement did not pass, it would be more difficult to pass the changes on ministry policies.

When the vote was finally taken, the tension in the room was palpable. Which way would the ELCA “flow?”

When Bishop Hanson viewed the results on his podium, his hesitation only added to the tension of the moment. When the numbers were posted on the assembly screens, there was a silent, stunned reaction as 1,014 voting members mentally calculated the results — 676 yes, 338 no — exactly two-thirds . . . exactly 66.67 percent.

Upon Bishop Hanson’s ruling that the Social Statement had been adopted, there was a spontaneous burst of applause, immediately belying any respect for the “bound conscience” of

the 338 voting members sitting next to them.

Yet the sense of triumph was short-lived for many. When Ryan Schwarz took the election of the Vice-President to the fourth ballot, giving both himself and Robert Benne an opportunity to address the assembly, it was evidence that the opposition to the assembly’s decisions was deep, principled, and unswerving.



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By the time the Recommendations on Ministry Policies were debated, several of the speeches in favor were almost apologetic. Others said that, while personally in favor of the proposals, they did not believe the church would be well-served by them at this time. But the advocates for change would not be denied.

Yet, just as I have not sensed any movement to embrace “ELCA — a church going with the flow” as a rallying cry for the ELCA, so, too, I have not heard from any of the reports of the reception of the assembly’s actions any note of an accomplishment to be celebrated. Indeed, as I left the convention center on Sunday, I spoke with a number of the most ardent supporters of the assembly’s decisions. They told me they were surprised, themselves, at the mixed feelings they had about the outcome. Their joy was far more muted and subdued than they anticipated it would be.

What I am left with from the assembly is the image of the dangling cross on Central Lutheran’s steeple. For some, it may be a sign of the resiliency of the ELCA in the face of the storms that confront it. But for me, it is a sign of a church falling to the winds of an alien creed — “going with the flow” until “the flow” threatens to overwhelm it.

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