

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

January 2010

Lutheran CORE moving forward on two fronts *Proposals are being drafted for continuation of Lutheran CORE as free synod and for a new Lutheran church body*

Leaders of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) are working on a two-pronged approach to the future.

Lutheran CORE leaders are working on a proposal for a new Lutheran church body for those who choose to leave the ELCA. They are also preparing a plan for the continuation of Lutheran CORE as a free-standing synod for all Lutherans regardless of their other church affiliations.

The proposals represent a response to the reality for many Lutherans in North America. Some congregations and individuals are choosing to end their ELCA affiliation because of the ELCA's continued movement away from traditional Christian teachings. Other congregations and individuals are choosing to remain in the ELCA but would like to work together with those who share their commitments to the teachings of Scripture.

The new church body proposal being drafted by Lutheran CORE leaders recognizes that many congregations and individuals have chosen or will choose to leave the ELCA. The church body proposal will offer an option for congregations that want an alternative church body affiliation that represents the theological center of Lutheranism in North America in a traditional denominational structure.

ELCA congregations must affiliate with another Lutheran church body in order to keep their property because of a constitutional provision required by the ELCA. The church body proposal recognizes this requirement.

Other individuals and congregations may choose to remain in the ELCA for a variety of reasons. However, they would like to be in fellowship with Lutherans who share a common commitment to the authority of Scripture in the life of the church. They are often uncomfortable providing unquestioning support for the ELCA churchwide organization and would like a way to work together with others who share their commitments to further the mission of Christ in the world.

Lutheran CORE will continue its ministry as a free-standing synod for all Lutherans to enable those who remain in the ELCA and those who choose other affiliations to work together in mission.

The votes by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in August to change ELCA teaching and policy to allow pastors to be in committed same-sex relationships have created a Biblical and theological crisis throughout the ELCA and have caused conflict in many local congregations. Many

congregations and individuals are considering the possibility of leaving the ELCA or have chosen to redirect giving away from the national church organization.

More than 1,200 Lutherans gathered in Fishers, Ind., Sept. 25-26 unanimously voted to authorize the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee "to initiate conversations among the congregations and reform movements in Lutheran CORE and other compatible churchly organizations leading toward a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism" and to bring a recommendation for action in 2010.

A special working group will draft the proposals for the new church body and for the continued ministry of Lutheran CORE as a free-standing synod. The working group will consult with the reform movements that comprise Lutheran CORE, with other Lutheran church bodies, and with Lutheran CORE's Advisory Council of respected scholars and church leaders.

The recommendations are to be released in February to allow interested individuals and congregations time to provide feedback. Final proposals will be brought for consideration at the Lutheran CORE Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio.

Renewal movement leaders meet with planning group

Lutheran CORE's Vision and Planning Working Group met with the leaders of 14 of 18 renewal groups affiliated with Lutheran CORE at a "partner consultation" Thursday and Friday, Jan. 7-8, in Indianapolis.

The meeting had a dual purpose. It was to enable the leaders of the various renewal groups to meet with each other. The meeting was also to help the working group as it begins to craft both a Vision Statement for Lutheran CORE, a Coalition for Renewal of the Lutheran churches in North America (a free-standing synod), and a possible new denomination that could receive congregations opposed to the ELCA's decisions and directions.

Thursday afternoon was devoted to the various renewal groups introducing themselves and their situations. The renewal groups ranged from the WordAlone Network, which formally organized in 2000 and has roughly 7,000 members, to Call to Faithfulness, which has played a leading role in the Northeastern Iowa Synod since 2004, to Northwoods Lutheran CORE, which has only just begun to organize in the Northern Great Lakes area.

Thursday evening was devoted to conversation on the mission of the Church according to the Great Commission — to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28).

The evening began with an observation. Earlier in the week the Barna Group reported that, according to a recent survey, only one third of Americans believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth. That reality

points to America as a huge mission field. What does it mean to be mission-minded given this reality? With this in mind, the Vision and Planning working group asked the partners present: "If Lutheran CORE could do one thing to signal that 'the mission is the mission,' what would we do?"

Friday morning was devoted to three one-hour discussions to help in crafting responses to the needs of three groups of Lutherans that Lutheran CORE has been hearing that it needs to serve: 1. those staying in the ELCA; 2. those leaving the ELCA; and 3. those faithful who are in the minority in their congregations and don't know what to do.

1. To serve the needs of those staying in the ELCA, Lutheran CORE will continue as a free-standing synod of Lutherans. This will provide fellowship and connections for those staying in the ELCA *and* create and maintain an organic connection between Lutherans inside and outside the ELCA.

2. They discussed what Lutheran CORE can do to help those who want to leave the ELCA. This concern has emerged since the Lutheran CORE Convocation in September with many requests coming to L-CORE leaders.

3. Ways Lutheran CORE can help orthodox "minorities" inside ELCA congregations were also discussed.

The members of the Vision and Planning Working Group expressed their appreciation for the input of their partners at this meeting and for their involvement in our common ministry.

Lutheran CORE partners that were represented at the conference:

- ✚ Call to Faithfulness, Northeastern Iowa Synod.
- ✚ Confessing Ministerium, Alberta, Canada.
- ✚ Evangelical Lutheran Confessing Fellowship (Northeastern United States).
- ✚ Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Texas.
- ✚ Illinois CORE.
- ✚ Indiana/Kentucky Renewal Network, Indiana-Kentucky Synod.
- ✚ Lutheran CORE North Carolina (formerly called Lasting Word).
- ✚ Lutherans Reform!, Lower Susquehanna Synod, Penn.
- ✚ Northwoods Lutheran CORE, Northern Great Lakes Synod.
- ✚ Truth in Love Lutherans, New Jersey Synod.
- ✚ Union of Oromo Evangelical Churches.
- ✚ West Penn Lutheran CORE Fellowship.
- ✚ Wisconsin Lutheran CORE.
- ✚ WordAlone Network.

Lutheran CORE partners who were unable to attend:

- ✚ Article 7 — Pacifica Synod (Southern California).
- ✚ Evangelical Mission Network, Southwestern California Synod.
- ✚ Seven Marks Society.
- ✚ Solid Ground, Canada.

Northeastern Iowa Synod is laboratory for ELCA crisis

The Northeastern Iowa Synod is becoming a laboratory for several issues resulting from the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Zion Lutheran Church in Clear Lake, Iowa, voted Dec. 13 to end its affiliation with the ELCA. The vote was exactly the required two-thirds majority 238-119.

However, the Rev. Dr. Steven L. Ullestad, bishop of the synod, wrote a letter to the congregation Jan. 6 challenging the vote because “a two-thirds majority of voting members present” — not those voting — is required. The bishop notes that there were voting members at the meeting who did not vote and thus the vote did not meet the required two-thirds majority. How this situation is resolved will be a test case for other ELCA congregations and synods.

This is not the only test case coming from Northeastern Iowa.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Council voted Nov. 14 to “repudiate the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in adopting the social statement ‘Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust’ and the four Resolutions on

Ministry Policies as violations of the Confession of Faith, Chapter 2 of the ELCA Constitution.”

Former Lutheran Church in America national Bishop James R. Crumley told a gathering of Lutherans in South Carolina Jan. 9 that he agrees that the 2009 Churchwide Assembly’s actions on sexuality violate the ELCA’s Confession of Faith:

“I conclude that there is no evidence based on the text of Scripture which permits or mandates the change as stated in the new policy adopted at the assembly. The action rather was unconstitutional and violated a part of the Confession of Faith. On that basis, the appropriate question is whether the ELCA is still without question a faithful and confessing church. I conclude that the ELCA has placed itself in a precarious position,” Crumley said.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod is also seeking to discern whether the ELCA will keep promises from the sexuality proposals that it will honor the “bound consciences” of synods. The Northeastern Iowa Synod Council approved a resolution Nov. 14 recognizing and stating the “bound conscience” of the

synod based on its previous synod assembly actions.

“Recognizing the past actions of the Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly as evidence of the Northeastern Iowa Synod’s strongly-held views with respect to the approving, calling, commissioning, consecrating, or ordaining of one in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship,” the Synod Council determined “that the standards for rostered ministry as outlined in the 1990 documents, ‘Vision and Expectations’ and ‘Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline’ shall remain in effect for the Northeastern Iowa Synod.”

ELCA Secretary David D. Swartling is quoted in a news release as saying that ELCA officials will likely challenge the synod’s actions. “The Churchwide Assembly establishes churchwide policy . . . Neither a synod council nor the Church Council can ‘repudiate’ an authorized action of the Churchwide Assembly,” he said.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod’s actions are likely to be considered by the ELCA Church Council at its next meeting April 9-11.

Lutheran CORE becoming independent charitable organization

Lutheran CORE has incorporated and is seeking recognition as a non-profit religious organization from the Internal Revenue Service as a part of its transition to an ongoing ministry as a free-standing synod for Lutherans opposed to the decisions and direction of the ELCA.

Until now, Lutheran CORE has existed legally and for tax purposes as

a unit of the WordAlone Network. Individuals previously had to make checks payable to the WordAlone Network and to designate them for Lutheran CORE’s ministry. The Word Alone Network is one of the renewal groups that comprise Lutheran CORE.

Lutheran CORE will continue to work closely with the WordAlone Network and to share staff and office space.

However, individual supporters will shortly be able to make checks payable to Lutheran CORE while continuing to deduct those gifts from their income tax. Lutheran CORE administrative personnel anticipate being able to process donation checks payable to Lutheran CORE by the end of January. Thank you for your ongoing financial support of the ministries of Lutheran CORE!

ELCA sexuality decisions among top news stories of 2009

The decisions by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly on sexuality were listed by news organizations as among the top news stories of 2009.

The Churchwide Assembly voted to change ELCA teaching and policy to affirm same-sex relationships similar to marriage and to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in those relationships, in spite of the teaching of the Bible and 2,000 years of Christian teaching on sexual ethics.

The Religion Newswriters Association named the ELCA sexuality decisions to its Top 10 stories of 2009. They also noted the efforts by Lutheran CORE and others to resist the assembly's actions.

The religion writers named President Barak Obama's June 4 address in Egypt, in which he promised an era of improved relations between America and the Muslim world, as the top religion story of 2009.

The *Christian Post* listed "struggles over homosexuality" as its top news story of 2009 and noted the ELCA sexuality decisions as an example of those struggles.

South Dakota Synod Bishop David Zellmer was named by the *Rapid City Journal* as one of the "10 people to watch in 2010" as he struggles to deal with the crisis in the synod caused by the sexuality decisions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

ELCA issues Christmas Eve news release on expelled congregation's celebration of ELCA sexuality decisions

The ELCA News Service issued a press release Christmas Eve highlighting an expelled congregation's celebration of changes in ELCA teaching and policy on homosexual behavior.

"St. Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco, will celebrate its first 'Feast of Hope' worship Dec. 27, in celebration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly decision directing changes in ministry policies," the Dec. 24 ELCA news release states.

"On Dec. 31, 1995, St. Francis was removed from the ELCA's roster of congregations for calling ministers in same-gender relationships, a violation of ELCA policy," the release says. The congregation has held a "Feast of the Expulsion" on the last Sunday of each year commemorating its expulsion from the ELCA.

"St. Francis members were among many others in the ELCA who worked

for years for changes in ELCA ministry policies," the release states.

"The congregation's leaders have changed the name of the Feast of the Expulsion to the Feast of Hope, reflecting momentous changes in the ELCA this last summer when it finally caught up to the San Francisco congregation. Looking for eventual reconciliation, the congregation is hopeful that the finalized details of that change will not be a hindrance in anyway to sexual minority rights," the congregation's web site explains.

Anita Hill, a lesbian woman who was ordained in a highly-publicized unauthorized ordination in 2001 was the guest preacher for the service, according to the release. Hill, a leader in efforts to change ELCA policy, is on the pastoral staff of St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in St. Paul, Minn.

"While members at St. Francis celebrate hope for the future, there are some congregations in the ELCA that

do not agree with the assembly's decisions. Many cite biblical authority as their reasons," the ELCA release notes.

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Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

Gifts to support the ministry
of Lutheran CORE are welcome.

Mark Chavez to become full-time director of Lutheran CORE

The Rev. Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE and Vice President of the WordAlone Network, will transition to working full-time for Lutheran CORE.

This decision was announced in December in this joint letter from the WordAlone Network Board of Directors and the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee:

Dear Friends in Christ:

Actions taken at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly have stirred up many orthodox Lutherans in North America. Lutheran CORE, the Word Alone Network and other member groups within the coalition have all expanded in the past few months.

This growth is very good news for our ministries and the future of our Lutheran witness. Many people and churches are opposing and rejecting the course chosen by the ELCA. They are looking to our organizations for leadership, resources, and an alternative to remaining in the ELCA. Their expectations and our plans for future growth mean that we need to add to our over-extended staffs.

Thus far Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE) has relied on an already overburdened WordAlone staff for support. Pastor Mark Chavez has served as WordAlone Vice President and Lutheran CORE Director. The office staff in our New Brighton, Minn., headquarters has served both ministries.

In light of the increased staffing needs for both organizations, Mark was directed by a joint WordAlone/Lutheran CORE task force in early November to submit a staffing plan for both our ministries. As a part of that plan, he concluded the time had come

to separate the roles of WordAlone Vice President and Lutheran CORE Director. Serving both organizations has long since been overwhelming for him.

With the support of both the WordAlone Board and Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, Mark will be transitioning to working full time for Lutheran CORE in 2010. Both organizations hope to best leverage Mark's experience with the start-up of WordAlone in 2000 and the launching of Lutheran CORE in 2005 to assist Lutheran CORE in its significant transitions and changes. WordAlone and Lutheran CORE also recognize the importance of using Mark's very strong relationships with many of the confessional leaders participating in Lutheran CORE.

This was not an easy decision for Mark. It has been a joy and a privilege for him to serve WordAlone. In making this shift he will remain a very active member of the WordAlone Network.

For the remainder of 2009 Mark will serve both organizations with his time divided evenly. On Jan. 1 he will shift to at least three quarters time for Lutheran CORE and then to full time no later than May 1.

WordAlone as a network has already taken steps forward not only in filling the position of Vice President but also in redirecting all staffing efforts in order to faithfully and efficiently answer our call to engage in primary evangelism. It is anticipated that Mark would be able to move to full time for Lutheran CORE before May 1.

During this time of transition, the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee would like to recognize the foundational work that has been accomplished by Mark Chavez, Jaynan Clark, and all of

the WordAlone supporters over the past ten years to prepare us for this historic moment in North American Lutheranism.

This groundwork has borne the very good fruit of Sola Publishing, Clergy Connect, the Network News, the Theological Advisory Board and the new Chaplaincy Corps, along with many ministries that have become self sufficient witnesses for the Good News of Jesus Christ — Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, ReClaim Resources and the Institute of Lutheran Theology just to name a few.

WordAlone's consistent proclamation of our Lord, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, has been an inspiration to all of us who have joined in this struggle for confessional Lutheranism in North America. The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee would also like to take this opportunity to commit themselves to the continued growth and expansion of WordAlone and to our joint vision for confessional Lutheranism in North America.

We ask for your continued prayers for our ministries and our staffs. We are very hopeful for the future of our organizations. Our ministries will continue to work together in every possible way, and Mark's experience with both organizations will be very helpful.

God has provided an incredible opportunity for all of us to work together with many Lutherans in North America to be more effective witnesses for Christ and His Word. We trust completely that God will provide both organizations with gifted people to serve on our staffs and for many others to serve as volunteers to move forward these ministries for the Church.

A look back at 2009 . . . and ahead in 2010

2009 will be remembered as one of the most significant years in the history of Lutheranism in North America. The actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in overturning 2,000 years of Christian teaching on sexual ethics certainly are historic.

Perhaps even more significant are the new beginnings marked by Lutherans in the United States who are weary of the ELCA's continued drift away from traditional Christian teachings and are finding new ways of working together.

Here is a look back at 2009 and a look at what is coming in 2010:

January 23-25, 2009

The Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality held its final meetings and prepared ELCA sexuality proposals.

February 19, 2009

The ELCA released proposed social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," and proposed changes in ministry policies to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

March 5-10, 2009

The ELCA Conference of Bishops met. The bishops voted 44-14 in favor of a two-thirds majority requirement for proposed changes in ministry policies on sexual behavior in a straw poll during their meetings.

March 12-13, 2009

Lutheran CORE Advisory Council, the theologians and church leaders who advise Lutheran CORE on significant issues, met to consider response to ELCA sexuality proposals and future directions for Lutheran CORE.

March 2009

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee sent a letter to supporters outlining goals for future ministry of Lutheran CORE and calling on supporters to gather Sept. 25-26 in Fishers, Ind., for Lutheran CORE's Convocation.

March 27-30, 2009

The ELCA Church Council met. The council rejected requests from 15 ELCA synods and the strong majority of ELCA bishops asking for a two-thirds majority vote on changes in ministry policies. The Church Council also voted to send the proposed social statement and ministry recommendations to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly for consideration.

March 28, 2009

Three members of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality released a document explaining their faithful dissent from the proposed social statement and ministry policies recommendations.

April 26-28, 2009

Lutheran CORE annual gathering met in conjunction with the WordAlone Network Convention. Lutheran CORE leaders outlined plans for efforts at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and for the confessional movement's future.

May 19, 2009

Prominent Lutheran theologians and church leaders released an Open Letter to the Voting Members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly asking them to affirm Biblical teaching on sexuality and to reject proposals to change ELCA teaching and policy regarding marriage and same-sex sexual behavior. (About 3,000 people added their names to the open letter.)

May 19, 2009

"Clergy Voices Survey" is released stating that 37 percent of ELCA pastors support gay marriage, 44 percent are in favor of some form of civil unions, and 19 percent say there should be no legal recognition for same-sex relationships. The survey also found that a slim majority of ELCA pastors support the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships.

April - June 2009

Synod assemblies met. Twenty-seven synod assemblies voted to ask the voting members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to support a two-thirds majority requirement for proposed changes to ELCA teaching and standards which would allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

Twelve synods called for rejection of ministry policy changes to permit pastors and other rostered leaders to be in committed same-sex relationships, but 34 synods supported them.

Five synods called for rejection of social statement changing ELCA teaching on sexuality, but 39 synods supported adopting the statement.

August 17-23, 2009

Lutherans from throughout the United States provided faithful witness at ELCA Churchwide Assembly. They gathered with Lutheran CORE to pray each morning and for presentations, encouragement and planning nightly.

Lutherans who have immigrated from Africa held a prayer vigil praying for the assembly and the ELCA throughout the week.

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2009 was historic year for Lutherans in North America

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Monday, August 17, 2009

ELCA Churchwide Assembly began. Assembly voted 584-436 (57 percent) to reject requests for a two-thirds majority requirement for changes in church teaching and policy to allow pastors to be in committed same-sex relationships.

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

Debate on proposed social statement on sexuality began.

Wednesday, August 19, 2009

Tornado hit Minneapolis Convention Center where the ELCA Churchwide Assembly was being held and overturned the cross on the steeple of Central Lutheran Church next to the convention center. ELCA leaders laughed off the possibility that God could be speaking through a tornado.

ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted social statement on human sexuality by a one-vote margin. The margin was exactly the required two-thirds majority — 66.67 percent, 676-338.

Supporters of changes in church teaching on homosexual behavior held a celebration worship service at the damaged Central Lutheran Church.

Thursday, August 20, 2009

Debate on ministry policy changes began. Voting for ELCA vice president also began. Robert Benne and Ryan Schwarz — two leaders in Lutheran CORE — were among the eight finalists for vice president.

Videotaped greeting from Roman Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory asked the ELCA assembly to “remain

open to the Holy Spirit who binds our consciences to truth, Biblical truth that echoes through the ages.”

Friday, August 21, 2009

Robert Benne and Ryan Schwarz provided faithful witness to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly during vice presidential election process.

Assembly voted to recognize same-sex relationships similar to marriage 619-402 (61 percent).

Assembly voted to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in committed same-sex relationships 559-451 (55 percent).

Assembly asked “that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another’s burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.”

Assembly adopted the resolution implementing the ministry policies changes 667-307 (68 percent).

Saturday, August 22, 2009

Ryan Schwarz of Lutheran CORE addressed the ELCA assembly before the final vote for vice president. He noted the Biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA. He finished second in the election to incumbent ELCA Vice President Carlos Peña.

Sunday, August 23, 2009

ELCA pastors throughout the country began trying to explain the actions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to scandalized church members. Leaders of congregations and synods started trying to control damage caused by the assembly’s actions.

September 2009

Location for the Lutheran CORE Convocation is moved from Christ the Savior Lutheran Church to Holy Spirit Catholic Parish at Geist due to overwhelming number of registrations.

September 3, 2009

Leaders and members of the African National Ministries of the ELCA issue position statement challenging ELCA Churchwide Assembly’s decisions as contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Similar statements are issued by Hispanic and Chinese ELCA pastors.

September 25, 2009

More than 1,200 Lutherans from throughout the United States and Canada gathered in Fishers, Ind., for Lutheran CORE Convocation. Bishop Kenneth Sauer and Ryan Schwarz addressed convocation. Bishop Paull Spring explained future directions for Lutheran CORE. Leaders of Hispanic and African immigrant communities also addressed the convocation.

September 26, 2009

Lutheran CORE Convocation voted unanimously to create “a free-standing synod” for all Lutherans and to work with “other compatible churchly organizations leading toward a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism.” Lutheran CORE’s name was changed from “Coalition for Reform” to “Coalition for Renewal” — noting a change in focus from reforming the ELCA to providing an alternative for church fellowship for Lutherans.

October 4-7, 2009

More than 700 people gathered for

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2010 will be a year of new beginnings for Lutherans

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Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) Annual Gathering in Fargo, N.D.

October 2009

Information became public about the Arcus Foundation, an organization dedicated to changing attitudes on homosexual behavior and bankrolled by a Michigan billionaire, providing \$250,000 to Lutherans Concerned for efforts to change ELCA teaching and policy on marriage and homosexual behavior.

October 10, 2009

ELCA churchwide organization released proposed rules for candidacy process stating that ELCA synods will not have the option of upholding traditional Christian teaching on marriage and homosexual behavior in their standards for pastors and other rostered leaders.

November 14, 2009

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Council approved a resolution recognizing the "bound conscience" of the synod. The Synod Council also voted to "repudiate the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly . . . as violations of the Confession of Faith, Chapter 2 of the ELCA Constitution."

November 17, 2009

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee votes to begin work on a proposal for a new Lutheran church body for those who choose to leave the ELCA. Lutheran CORE will continue as free-standing synod for both those who continue their affiliation with the ELCA and those who choose other affiliations.

December 5, 2009

A Lutheran CORE area gathering in Mansfield, Ohio, drew 545 people from more than 160 congregations. Similar gatherings have been taking place all around the United States since the Churchwide Assembly.

January 5-9, 2010

ELCA Conference of Bishops met.

January 2010

Lutheran CORE leaders meet with Lutheran church bodies and movements that are not a part of Lutheran CORE to discuss future ministry of Lutheran CORE and proposed new Lutheran church body.

February 2010

Lutheran CORE Vision and Planning Working Group prepares a draft proposal for the future ministry of Lutheran CORE and for proposed new Lutheran church body.

Proposal is reviewed by Lutheran CORE's Advisory Council, the theologians and church leaders who advise Lutheran CORE on significant issues.

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee reviews and authorizes publication of recommendations for future ministry of Lutheran CORE and for new Lutheran church body for review by L-CORE members and partners.

March 4-9, 2010

ELCA Conference of Bishops meets.

March 2010

Lutheran CORE Constitutional Working Group begins work on constitutional amendments required for implementation of the re-configuration designs.

April 9-11, 2010

ELCA Church Council meets.

April 25-26, 2010

WordAlone Network Annual Convention meets at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

April - June 2010

Synod Assemblies meet and respond to 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly actions. Voting members of the 2011 Churchwide Assembly are elected.

July 2010

Proposed amendments to Lutheran CORE constitution and proposed constitution for new Lutheran church are published for review by Lutheran CORE members and partners.

August 2010

ELCA publishes study guide for new social statement on human sexuality.

August 13-15, 2010

ELCA Church Council meets.

August 24-26, 2010

Lutheran CORE theological conference meets in Columbus, Ohio. Theme is "Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives."

August 26-27, 2010

Lutheran CORE Convocation meets in Columbus, Ohio, to consider proposed constitutional amendments, recommendations on reconfiguration, and proposal for a new Lutheran church.

October 3-6, 2010

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) Annual Gathering at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

Bishop Crumley: ELCA actions violate Confession of Faith

Following is an address by the Rev. Dr. James R. Crumley, Jr., former national Bishop of the Lutheran Church in America, to the Gathering of Orthodox Lutherans of South Carolina January 9 at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Lexington, S.C.

Confession

We meet here today because we have a common concern. A dilemma has arisen for each of our congregations and for each of us as individuals. That dilemma has been caused by an action of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the church to which we belong) taken at the Churchwide Assembly in August of 2009. I will describe that action and we will ponder together its consequences.

I appreciate your action and the proposal to form the Society of Orthodox Lutherans. Our conclusion about the assembly's action is that it is a confessional matter that goes to the very heart of our faith and of our faith as Lutheran Christians. I fear that many of our people fail to see the depth of the action taken at the assembly and discuss it only in terms of homosexuality. Both issues are important, but the matter of our confession has to take priority.

For me, the Lutheran Confessions were given priority in my catechetical instruction and other parts of my congregational life. Then, in seminary, we were taught that the Confessions define the very nature of the Church and of its ministry, correctly demanding our knowledge of them and our loyalty to them. I remember the wise admonition of a professor that the Lutheran Church is defined by its Confessions. Liturgy, style of buildings, congregational life and such matters may be similar to other

churches, but its confession will always mark it as Lutheran.

I consented to speak to this gathering out of my concern as a pastor of the ELCA. I am retired and I have no jurisdictional or administrative authority in the church. But we have to derive our conclusions through deliberate thought and discussion. We now have that responsibility as church members.

Especially do we need to be clear about our understanding of the assembly's action as of confessional gravity. Through the years we have experienced some actions of the church with which we disagreed but with which we could still live faithfully and loyally. This one goes deeper. It denies what we have confessed and adopted as the guiding principles of the church's constitution. The ELCA is simply not the same church as it was before the assembly.

When the assembly adopted the proposal permitting the certification and/or ordination of persons in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship, it changed directly the policy which had been in effect through the whole life of the ELCA and the predecessor churches. Not only so, but it changed what had been a part of the "great tradition" of the whole Christian Church since its beginning. The question then becomes, "On what basis did the church make such a decision? Where in Scripture is there permission or mandate for such a change? How will the action affect the life of the ELCA and its communion with other churches?"

The assembly also adopted a new social statement, "Human Sexuality; Gift and Trust," which provides a

groundwork for the action on same-gender relationships. While marriage is still defined as a covenant between one man and one woman, the same-gender relationship is also defined as normal and acceptable. That new understanding is based primarily on social and psychological norms rather than on a careful study and analysis of Scripture.

At this point we must turn to the place of Scripture in such decisions as defined in the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Underlying the constitutions of the churchwide, synodical and congregational units there is a carefully written Confession of Faith.

There are seven paragraphs in that confession and each not only states the position of the ELCA but a truth that is also church-defining. For example, the first paragraph confesses the Triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A group cannot deny that article and be a church. The same applies to the next paragraph which speaks of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A group denying that statement could not be a Christian church.

Then a subparagraph says: "The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ."

Then paragraph three is crucial to our concern here: "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm for its proclamation, faith and life."

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Bishop Crumley

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Now our question becomes even clearer: “Was the action of the assembly mandating the certification and/or ordination of same-gender relationships based on the careful study of the Scriptures as recorded in the Bible?”

I conclude that there is no evidence based on the text of Scripture which permits or mandates the change as stated in the new policy adopted at the assembly. The action rather was unconstitutional and violated a part of the Confession of Faith. On that basis, the appropriate question is whether the ELCA is still without question a faithful and confessing church. I conclude that the ELCA has placed itself in a precarious position. Can I recognize my membership as authentic and God-serving in the fullest and truest sense?

As I make such a personal judgment I understand that many faithful and committed people arrive at a different conclusion. I know quite well that there are many different interpretations of Scripture. There is one approach from those who are deep into historical criticism with which I disagree: the supposition that homosexuality in the Scriptures speaks of a totally different situation from our modern one and thus such passages may be dismissed as not applicable to our modern discourse. Bishop Mark Hanson stated the view recently: “The understanding we have of homosexuality does not seem to be reflected at all in the context of Biblical writers.” To dismiss the passages of the Bible concerning homosexuality as irrelevant is beyond my understanding and appears to me to negate the authority of the Scriptures.

A careful examination of all the documents from the assembly would undoubtedly provide additional critical insights. However, we must now ask the question that we would like to avoid. We have few answers to it. “What do we do? Where do we go? What are our options?”

My own conclusion is that options are few, but each person must act as faith and conscience demands. With one another we need to discuss the process and help each to make his/her own personal decision.

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Possibilities:

(Suggestions from various sources)

1. Remain in the ELCA and as a member of the congregation to which I belong. After all, we love our church and have given our lives to it.
2. To withdraw my membership and go to another church. Which one? Can my confidence in the Lutheran confession assist me in making the choice?

3. Work to change the ELCA. My own personal opinion is that it will take much energy and patience to change the churchwide structure.

4. Redirect my contributions to the ELCA. For what reason? Do I want to cancel all of the creative mission projects at which the ELCA is quite successful?

You will add some other options but it will be difficult, I think, to find one with which you can be totally comfortable.

My comments about our church are quite negative. That is painful for me, for I have always been an advocate and a positive representative for it. I am deeply disappointed and distressed as I know many of you are.

When in our lives we come to an impossible situation, what do we do? It is important first that we be realistic about the problem. To gloss over it or just expect it to go away does not help. But then we give attention not just to what we have lost, but we concentrate on what we have.

We know that by God’s gift we belong to the mystical body of Christ, the one, catholic, apostolic Church, in which our sins are forgiven and our salvation assured. Thus we will remain faithful and do what we are called to do. We must give even more time to the reading and study of the Scriptures and to fervent prayer.

I do not know, I cannot see at this point what God has in mind for our churches in South Carolina. I am confident that He has a will and a plan for us, and if He uses us to work out that plan or if He goes ahead without us, His name will be praised. In Him and by Him there is a future for His people. We will continue to trust and serve as He guides and directs us.

Why There Must Be New Beginnings

*By Dr. Robert Benne
Lutheran CORE Advisory Council*

As Lutheran CORE organizes an association for renewal for dissenting congregations, groups, and individuals who are both within and outside the ELCA, and as it develops a new ecclesial body for those congregations departing the ELCA, it is important to give reasons why there must be new beginnings for Lutheranism in North America.

Such an accounting not only gives a fuller understanding of the grievances of orthodox Lutheran congregations and individuals, but it sketches important lines of direction for the future. This accounting is particularly important in order to indicate that our movement is not obsessed about one or two issues, but rather is a holistic response to a systemic problem. There are simply too many bumbles and distortions to remain as if nothing serious has happened. We must make new beginnings.

Further, there is ample evidence from the trajectory of The Episcopal Church in America that the current course of the ELCA will not be reversed. As has been the case in that church, the revisionists will consolidate their power, the policies of the ELCA will become more coercive, and those pressing the tendencies listed below will become even bolder.

While great respect is owed those congregations and individuals who decide to stay in the ELCA by necessity or for purpose of witness, resistance, and reform, there are compelling reasons for new beginnings. Those reasons must be

stated first of all in a negative fashion — the distortions that we must leave behind.

The following ten points describe what must be left behind as we make new beginnings. These ten criticisms also provide clues about the contours of those new ventures. A more fully-orbed vision for new beginnings will be articulated in the Lutheran CORE conferences of August 2010.

1 The first thing that must be left behind is the heterodox arrogance by which the leadership of the ELCA has ignored the clear meaning of Scripture, the testimony of the whole Christian moral tradition, the wisdom of its predecessor bodies, and the voice of the ecumenical church in the world today with regard to the issue of homosexual conduct.

For better or worse, that issue is the one that has been pressed upon all mainstream Protestant churches. The acceptance of homosexual conduct has become the “line in the sand” separating revisionist from orthodox Christianity. The ELCA became the first American confessional church to cross that line by passing statements and policies that depart from Christian orthodox teaching and practice.

Not only does the church now accept homosexual conduct among its members and pastors, its statements on other issues of sexual morality are equally as disturbing. The ELCA could not bring itself to endorse: the God-given paradigm of the nuclear family; procreation as a central purpose of marriage; the wrongness of pre-marital sex and co-habitation; and

the continuing Christian ideal of marriage itself. It endorsed marriage as a historical “construct” but stopped short of holding it up as a divinely-ordained institution for our time.

Lutheran CORE’s new ventures must rejoin the consensus of the Great Tradition on these matters. They must honor more authoritative voices than their own.

2 If sexuality issues provided the flashpoint, the flash illuminated many more grave problems. Perhaps the foremost among them is the distortion of the Gospel that has taken place in the working theology of the ELCA.

The ELCA has replaced the “Gospel of redemption” with the “gospel of inclusion.” The former is Trinitarian in structure and holds to God’s Law as both the standard for moral guidance and repentance, to God’s forgiveness and affirmation of the repentant sinner through his grace in Christ, and to the work of the Holy Spirit in amendment of life according to God’s commandments.

The “gospel of inclusion,” which now is in ascendance in the ELCA, emphasizes a grace that accepts everyone just as they are and includes them without repentance and amendment of life into God’s kingdom. Its dominance in the ELCA recalls H. Richard Niebuhr’s famous indictment of liberal Protestantism. “A God without wrath brings men (sic) without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

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New Beginnings

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Lutheran CORE's efforts at renewal have to reclaim the authentic Gospel which is spelled out clearly in the constitution of the ELCA. They must honor what the ELCA has left in the church.

Further, as a corrective to theological wanderings, the new ventures must provide for genuine theological reflection and guidance. This has to be done in an ongoing, coordinated way that incorporates our most trustworthy and competent Biblical and theological scholars into the process.

What never was realized in the ELCA — a genuine convocation of teaching theologians — must come to fruition. Moreover, bishops will need to recover one of their primary duties — guardians of the faith. Bishops and theologians together must articulate, defend, and proclaim the “faith once delivered to the saints.”

3 Closely related to these issues, Lutheran CORE's future ecclesial body must leave behind a flawed polity (organizational structure) that has prevented this aforementioned Biblical and theological guidance from being exercised in the ELCA.

From the beginning its structure has distanced bishops from that necessary guidance (and reduced them to crisis interventionists, “facilitators,” and administrators), has never convened an ongoing council of biblical scholars and theologians to aid the bishops (but rather reduced theologians to one more interest group), and allowed a lay-dominated bi-annual assembly to

vote on Christian doctrine. The ELCA has employed a quota system to bend the church in a revisionist direction while diminishing the influence of the learned and experienced.

A new expression of the church must find a way for genuine authoritative Biblical and confessional authority to be exercised in the church. Lutherans have wagered that a solidly confessional interpretation of the Scripture can serve as their version of a magisterium (teaching authority). A new church must make that wager good.

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4 A fourth item to jettison is the ELCA's dishonoring of the word “evangelical” in its very name by its weakness in evangelism both at home and abroad.

Like the rest of mainline Protestantism, it has replaced evangelism with social ministry (a worthy goal) and thereby diminished Gospel ministry. This reflects in part a universalism (everyone will be saved) among some clergy and theologians. It is no secret that the ELCA has begun a pitiful number of new congregations at home and has dramatically reduced its missionaries abroad. Indeed, a particularly painful decision has been its refusal to do “pioneer” missionary work — proclaiming the Gospel to those who have never heard it.

Lutheran CORE's new beginnings must put evangelism front and center; their budgets should reflect that it is the highest priority of both its association and new church.

5 We should leave behind a theological education system that is not only ponderous and expensive, but is more reflective of the liberal Protestantism of most of the non-denominational divinity schools that train our seminary faculties than of the orthodox Lutheran intellectual and practical tradition that we cherish.

Lutheran CORE must find a way to educate and form pastors and lay leaders in a more reliable manner than has been case.

6 Lutheran CORE's efforts at renewal must leave behind the suffocating and insufferable political correctness that has plagued the ELCA from its very beginning.

There have been many kinds of political correctness — feminist, multiculturalist, gay and lesbian liberationist, environmentalist — that have mostly been borrowed from secular elite culture.

A certain hypersensitive feminism has led to the relentless effort to purge masculine language and images from all printed materials of the ELCA, including its worship materials. Some of its revisions are merely irritating, but others have serious theological consequences, including efforts to change or avoid the proper name of God. Feminist resistance has also prevented the ELCA from supporting any pro-life causes and policies either within its own body or with regard to public policy.

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Multiculturalism has cultivated a quota-driven spoils system for minority groups combined with a near-hysterical revulsion against our mostly white, middle-class, Euro-American composition.

The gay and lesbian movement has exerted enough pressure in the ELCA to lead it out of the Christian consensus on sexual morality.

Environmentalism has led to more dogmatic tenets on its behalf than are claimed for the ELCA's theology.

These "isms" taken together have been so absorbed by our Lutheran publishing house that it is scarcely recognizable as a Lutheran venture. These movements have borne some elements of truth and have occasioned important gains, but the more strident forms have led to a self-righteous and coercive atmosphere that has stifled free expression and debate.

Lutheran CORE's new ventures must continue to learn from these movements without being shackled by their legalism.

7 Let's give a long-deserved rest to the words "diversity" and "inclusivity" while we aim for genuine "catholicity." This will entail real evangelism among all sorts and conditions of people. When that is done leadership and representation from new members will flow naturally.

8 Let's leave behind the ELCA's flawed notion of "the public church" in which clergy —

especially the presiding bishop — and our advocacy centers presumptuously attempt to speak from and for the ELCA and its members on matters of public policy. In doing so they have spoken on so many issues with so little compelling rationale that they have dissipated whatever moral authority the ELCA possessed. They are viewed as one more political interest group.

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A new ministry to the public sector must choose wisely the few issues to which it wishes to speak, and then do so compellingly from its own moral teachings. Most of its ministry should take place as a ministry to its own public servants.

9 Given the coming realignment of Protestantism in America, a church of the future should diminish its ecumenical interest in declining, sectarian liberal Protestant

bodies and increase it among orthodox bodies — Roman Catholic, Missouri Synod Lutheran, Reformed, evangelical denominations, as well as orthodox movements within Protestant bodies riven by conflicts similar to those we have experienced.

10 Let's leave behind pretentious buildings such as the ELCA headquarters building in Chicago and the ELCA's unnecessary programs, many spawned by the political correctness we mentioned above.

Lutheran CORE's new ventures should have modest habitats and lean staffs that should pursue only programs that must be done by a churchwide organization. It should practice the principle of subsidiarity by devolving most functions to the regional and local levels.

Can there be a more compelling embodiment of Lutheranism in North America than what has thus far been enacted? Lutheran CORE is wagering that there can, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

From our distinctively human point of view, there are at least ten failures that have to be left behind as we move into the future, and there are at least ten challenges that must be addressed before that future can become real. Those challenges will be addressed in the Lutheran CORE gatherings of August 2010, which — God willing — will in due time augur a new beginning for and a reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America.

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Preface to ‘Why There Must Be New Beginnings’

*By Dr. Robert Benne
Lutheran CORE Advisory Council*

Participating in Lutheran CORE’s new association and/or church will mean “departing” from the ELCA, though that “departing” will mean different things for different people and congregations. While respect is due those who decide to stay fully in the ELCA to persevere and resist, there are many compelling reasons to “depart” and to shift loyalties and support to Lutheran CORE’s independent association for renewal and/or a new Lutheran church.

In addition to the points I have elaborated in the main body of the essay, I would like to list three objective facts that are pushing Lutheran CORE to establish both an association for all Lutherans who want to envision and model Lutheranism at its best as well as a new church for those congregations who decide they must leave.

1. Many churches — we don’t know how many — are leaving the ELCA and they need a churchly body to join. A goodly number are not eager to join Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ because it is more an association of congregations than a church. Lutheran CORE is being compelled to respond to this need. What early on seemed to be a debatable choice has become an inescapable necessity.

2. When the decisions were made in August in Minneapolis there was a palpable departure of the spirit and will among Lutheran CORE members to continue efforts at reforming the ELCA. Few had any desire to continue

that objective. During the preceding six years we had spent huge amounts of time, energy, money, and determination to stop the juggernaut. We didn’t and we won’t. Moreover, we also sensed that the monetary resources gladly devoted to our efforts up to August of 2009 would very quickly diminish.

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The WordAlone Network has also forsworn any further efforts to reform the ELCA churchwide organization. The foci of Lutheran CORE are now on renewal and new beginning. It is unlikely that any new churchwide group will organize to resist and reform, but, if it does, more power to it. Perhaps the ELCA is shaken enough by the fallout of its decisions that it will respond to a new reform movement. If so, great.

3. This has not been a brief struggle. It started before the beginning of the ELCA. The tendencies pushing the ELCA to liberal Protestantism were already identified in the “Call to Faithfulness” conferences of the early 1990s, and sexuality issues were hardly mentioned, if at all. With each passing year those tendencies have

gained more traction. We have been in the loyal opposition for a long time. Our only “victory” is that we have slowed the process down. But it is now complete at the churchwide level, and it is unlikely to be reversed.

In the great upheaval following the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly decisions, there have been a wide variety of responses by congregations and individuals. For the time being it is important to respect most of these responses. As one of two intensive churchwide efforts to reform the ELCA, Lutheran CORE has earned a modicum of respect for its intention to begin an association for renewal and a new church.

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