

# CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

March 2010

## Reconfiguration proposal receiving positive responses

*Proposal recommends new Lutheran church and continuation of Lutheran CORE*

A proposal for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America is receiving very positive reviews from Lutherans throughout the United States and Canada.

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

Lutheran CORE released the proposal on Feb. 18. Interested individuals and congregations are encouraged to read the proposal and to submit responses and suggestions for improvement so that revisions can be made and constitutional amendments and documents can be drafted.

Lutheran CORE’s 2009 Convocation asked that a proposal for the “reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism” be prepared and brought to the 2010 Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio, for consideration.

“We are very encouraged by the responses we are receiving from people around the country,” said the Rev. Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE. “People are very excited about the future for Lutheran CORE and for the NALC.”

### A Way Forward Together

“We are committed to maintaining the unity of as many faithful Lutherans in

North America as possible,” said Ryan Schwarz, who chaired the Vision and Planning Working Group that created the proposal.

“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.

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.

### 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 says.

“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.”

### Lutheran CORE

“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 the Rev. Paull Spring, chair of Lutheran CORE’s Steering Committee and a member of the working group that prepared the proposal. “The NALC will provide a church body for those who choose to leave the ELCA.”

“Lutheran CORE is not becoming the NALC. It is aiding in the formation of this new church body,” explained Spring, the retired bishop of the ELCA’s Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. “We pray that God will use these proposals to bring new life and renewal to the church.”

“Lutheran CORE affirms that both staying in and leaving the ELCA and ELCIC can be faithful courses for

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# Synod won't let Florida congregation leave ELCA

*In spite of two unanimous votes to leave ELCA, Synod Council refuses to let them go*

The members of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Fort Pierce, Fla., voted unanimously in two required votes to end their affiliation with the ELCA. But their synod won't let them go.

The Florida-Bahamas Synod Council decided during its Feb. 26-27 meeting that it will not allow the 105-member congregation to leave the ELCA. St. Peter received notification of the decision on March 11.

The synod is exercising its authority under a provision in ELCA constitutions that requires congregations which were affiliated with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) prior to the ELCA's formation "to receive

synodical approval before terminating their membership" in the ELCA.

This is believed to be the first time that a synod has refused to allow a congregation that has followed the required procedures and attained the necessary votes to leave the ELCA.

The Rev. Ted Rice, pastor of St. Peter, said he thinks the actions of the synod council show the desperation of ELCA leaders in responding to congregations that are leaving the ELCA. "I think the synod and the national are saying, 'We better try something,'" he said. "If the ELCA wants to keep us on the rolls, let them keep us on the rolls. It won't affect us."

St. Peter has already joined another church body, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC).

ELCA Secretary David Swartling has announced that the ELCA will not allow congregations to be members of more than one church body. It is not known how St. Peter's dual affiliation will be handled by ELCA officials.

The Rev. Edward R. Benoway, bishop of the Florida-Bahamas Synod, said that the Synod Council's decision was made for reasons of mission, given the potential for mission in the area where the church is located. "We're hoping to build a relationship. It's going to be a difficult road, no doubt," he said.

## Lutheran CORE to continue as confessing movement

*Continued from Page 1*

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 proposal 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. It will be composed of individuals, congregations, partner renewal move-

ments and church bodies, including the NALC, who agree with and adhere to its constitution.

The proposal outlines four "key attributes" of both Lutheran CORE and the NALC: Christ-Centered; Mission-Driven; Traditionally-Grounded; and Congregationally-Focused.

"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 Chavez.

"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 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.

"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.

# Charitable Behavior

*By Pastor Mark C. Chavez*  
*Lutheran CORE Director*

The four dioceses that have withdrawn from The Episcopal Church and are now in the new Anglican province in North America are to be commended for how they handled the parishes within their dioceses that wanted to remain with The Episcopal Church.

The Anglican leaders promised that the parishes would be able to keep all of their property and assets if they decided to leave the diocese in order to remain with The Episcopal Church.

In stark contrast, the leadership of The Episcopal Church has behaved in exactly the opposite manner toward the dioceses and parishes leaving for the new province. Episcopal leaders are determined to file lawsuits in every case to attempt to prevent orthodox Anglicans from leaving with their property and assets.

When the bishop in Virginia was inclined to allow parishes to leave his diocese with their property and assets, the Episcopal leaders and lawyers in the New York headquarters insisted that the Virginia diocese fight for all of the property and assets in the courts.

The aggressive legal maneuvers of the Episcopal hierarchy will cost both sides millions of dollars. It is a windfall for lawyers across the country, but it is a disaster for the advancement of the Church's mission for both Episcopalians and Anglicans.

How refreshing it would be if ELCA synodical and churchwide leaders were to follow the example of the four

Anglican dioceses and work in the most charitable and helpful way with congregations seeking to leave the ELCA.

I've heard one ELCA bishop make assurances that his synod will not stand in the way of congregations that vote to leave the ELCA, and I have heard there may be more bishops who have chosen this gracious position.

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I hope there are many more. I hope the recent decision of the Florida-Bahamas Synod Council — to refuse to allow a congregation that has followed the required procedures and attained the necessary votes to leave the ELCA — is the exception that proves the norm. I hope that ELCA leaders will be as charitable and helpful as the orthodox Anglican leaders have been.

If there is integrity in the ELCA's new teaching and policy on the bound

conscience, ELCA leaders will graciously help congregations leave with prayers and blessings, not threats of discipline and legal battles.

If there is integrity in the bound conscience policy, ELCA leaders will respect the consciences of ELCA members and congregations who, because of their adherence to Chapter 2 of the ELCA Constitution — the Confession of Faith, can no longer support financially the ELCA churchwide general budget.

Chapter 2 is supposed to have priority over the rest of the constitution. Sadly, other constitutional sections are being given greater weight than the ELCA's Confession of Faith.

The ELCA Secretary and some bishops are citing other constitutional sections, insisting that pastors and congregations are bound to support the churchwide organization's general budget and threatening discipline if they don't.

There isn't much respect for the bound conscience if pastors and congregations are, in effect, told by ELCA leaders that allegiance to human regulations and institutions trumps allegiance to God's Word.

The priority that some ELCA leaders are giving to financial support along with threats of discipline appears all too much like the litigious and un-charitable behavior of The Episcopal Church.

Let us pray that ELCA leaders will be known for their graciousness in working with congregations as they discern God's will for their future.

# ‘Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism’ is the theme of Lutheran CORE theological conference

“Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism: Biblical, Theological, and Churchly Perspectives” is the theme of a theological conference Aug. 24-26 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio. The conference will precede Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation.

Presenters for the conference — which is sponsored by Lutheran CORE — include some of the most significant Lutheran scholars in America. Some of them serve on Lutheran CORE’s Advisory Council, a group of theologians and church leaders that advise Lutheran CORE.

“The decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on human sexuality and ministry policies that contradict what the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church has confessed down through the centuries and across all cultures highlight the theological crisis in Lutheranism in North America. However, the fact that the ELCA is willing to allow pastors to be in same-sex relationships is only the tip of the iceberg. There is a deep and pervasive underlying problem: a culture-conforming theology alien to the classical Christian tradition that has invaded major sectors of the ELCA,” the conference brochure says.

This theological conference will reaffirm the original aim of Lutheranism to be a reforming movement within the whole Church, that is both evangelical in preaching and orthodox in doctrine. Each of the presenters will focus on a particular article of faith at risk in Lutheranism today and spell out what we confess

on the basis of Holy Scripture, the ancient Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions, organizers explained.

All Lutherans in North America are invited to come together to reclaim the great tradition that witnesses faithfully to Jesus Christ, builds his Church on earth, and proclaims the Gospel of salvation to the nations.

The registration fee is \$95 per person. A Wednesday night banquet featuring the Rev. Dr. James A. Nestingen is an additional \$40 to cover the cost of the meal. Registration information is available at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).

Presentations at the conference include:

***Lutheranism at the Crossroads:  
Theological Imperatives  
for the Future***

The Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten

***The Unresolved Problem  
of Authority Between the Times***

The Rev. Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky

***The Authority and Interpretation  
of the Bible in the Church***

The Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Hultgren

***Renewing the Moral Vision  
for Lutheranism***

Dr. Robert Benne

***Speaking To, Of, and For  
the Triune God***

The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Jenson

***You Cannot Be the Church of  
Christ without Christ***

The Rev. Dr. Steven D. Paulson

***Mission Renewal:  
Gospel Roots with Global Reach***  
The Rev. Dr. Paul V. Martinson

***What Does All This Mean  
for Our Future?***

Audience Response  
Led by Ryan Schwarz

Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation follows the theological conference. The Aug. 26-27 Convocation will consider proposals for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism including revisions to Lutheran CORE’s constitution to articulate its mission as “a community of confessing Lutherans” and a proposal for the formation of the North American Lutheran Church.

Information about registration for the convocation will be available in April.

## CORE Connection

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Please copy and share  
this newsletter widely.

# I Think I Finally Get It

## *Reconfiguration of Lutheranism is Reconfiguration of Lutheran CORE*

**By Pastor Erma Wolf**

*Lutheran CORE Steering Committee*

I think I understand what Lutheran CORE is trying to do and become. In other words, I think I have finally got it. (Thank you, Henry Higgins, for those words.)

Wait a minute, you might be thinking. She's on the Steering Committee for Lutheran CORE. What does she mean by saying that she thinks she understands? What didn't she get before now?

Well, here it is: What I truly didn't understand was that the biggest part of Lutheran CORE's goal of a "reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism" was the reconfiguration of Lutheran CORE itself.

In other words, I was confusing the work of the task force working on a vision for a new, different Lutheran denomination with what Lutheran CORE is now about.

I think I have a lot of company. I think most people — including ELCA bishops, congregations, pastors and laypeople, and even those of us inside Lutheran CORE — got confused. Which shouldn't surprise any of us, since the last six to eight months have been so traumatic, even at times chaotic. It takes a while for order to start to emerge. But let me start to explain.

What we all need to realize is that Lutheran CORE, as a Coalition for Reform of the ELCA, died on the floor of the Churchwide Assembly in August of 2009. I think for me it died

on Friday afternoon, with the passage of the fourth ministry recommendation. For others the death might have come earlier in the week, perhaps on Wednesday with the passage of the social statement, or even on Monday evening after the first plenary. But definitely by Friday it was indeed most really and sincerely dead. In fact, I think our gathering that night with other supporters was our form of a wake.

However, after death comes resurrection, God willing. And that is what is happening with Lutheran CORE. No longer about reform, but about renewal. No longer focused on the political workings of the ELCA, but on the mission and ministry of upholding a traditionalist, confessional, Biblical Lutheran identity in the one Church catholic.

Lutheran CORE is emerging as a "community of confessing Lutherans" that is pan-Lutheran. It is not attempting to become a "non-geographical synod" within the ELCA. We don't want that, and, even if we tried, it wouldn't get approved. It is not a denomination (yes, the task force is proposing a new denomination, but that is a different matter). And most critically, it is not a split-off from the ELCA or from any other Lutheran denomination for that matter.

Lutheran CORE, now about renewal not reform, no longer sees its reason for existing as reforming the ELCA. Reform may very well happen in the ELCA, and maybe even the kind of reform that Lutheran CORE had worked for in the past. (With God, nothing is impossible.) If it does, I,

for one, will rejoice. But that is not why Lutheran CORE exists.

A pan-Lutheran association that is independent of any denomination but that works with individuals, groups, congregations (hopefully) in any of them, and maybe, someday, in all of them, is something we have not seen before. It will be a way for all those who are struggling to maintain and give voice to traditional, confessional, Biblical Lutheran identity to find connections with one another, without asking for or requiring anyone to leave their individual Lutheran denominations in order to work with one another.

This is an idea that we should be willing to at least entertain. And it is an idea that I am really getting excited about. Doing this does not require any particular Lutheran denomination to rise or fall. Even the task force's vision and proposal for the North American Lutheran Church can succeed or fail on its own. Lutheran CORE can and may encourage such a development for those that say they need and want such a new body; but Lutheran CORE does not need a new denomination in order for Lutheran CORE to exist, and indeed to flourish.

It feels good to finally start to see and understand the big picture for Lutheran CORE. This "community of confessing Lutherans" thing is finally starting to make sense.

*Pastor Erma Wolf lives in Brandon, S.D. Her perspective is reprinted from an entry on Lutheran CORE's internet blog. You can access the blog from [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).*

# LCMC, WordAlone Network to host events in April

“It’s a New Day” is the theme of the WordAlone Network’s Annual Convention April 18-19 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley (suburban Minneapolis), Minn.

Keynote speakers are the Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, a native of Ethiopia who serves as director of African national ministries in the ELCA, and the Rev. Dr. Bruce Wilder, senior pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, N.M.

The WordAlone Convention will bring together key leaders from the Biblical and confessional groups that are attracting Lutherans today

including Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC); Lutheran CORE; the North American Lutheran Church; and the Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations.

## LCMC Leadership Conference

“Mapping Our DNA” is the focus of the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) Leadership Conference April 25-27 at Lutheran Church of the Master in Omaha, Neb.

“Each year the LCMC Ministry Board sponsors a conference for pastors and congregational leaders that

encourages, informs, and raises issues that help leaders move forward as God’s servants. This year the theme focuses on the DNA of our association and what makes us who we are,” the LCMC website explains.

LCMC leaders and interested persons are invited to discuss and learn from one another what it means to be:

- ✚ Free in Christ.
- ✚ Accountable to One Another.
- ✚ Rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.
- ✚ Working Together to Fulfill Christ’s Great Commission.

# ELCA churchwide funding reaches ‘historic low’

Giving to the ELCA churchwide organization from congregations and synods has reached a “historic low.” All but one of the ELCA’s 65 synods reduced their support to the churchwide organization in 2009.

ELCA treasurer Christina Jackson-Skelton reported that in 2009 “mission support” income was reduced by 64 synods — 53 with decreases of greater than 5 percent, and 19 of those with decreases exceeding 10 percent. The figures were reported by the ELCA in a March 8 news release.

“A key reason for the reduced income was a decrease in mission support to the churchwide organization to \$59.7 million, a historic low. Mission support funds are shared by congregations with synods, which commit a percentage of their funds for churchwide ministries,” the release states.

Current operating income to the churchwide organization in 2009 was \$76.5 million, down nearly \$7 million from the previous year. Current operating funds expenses were \$72.6 million, down by \$7.6 million from the previous year. Because of prior budget cuts, the ELCA’s 2009 fiscal year ended Jan. 31 with a net income of \$3.9 million.

Contributions to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal in 2009 were \$19.6 million, exceeding budgeted expectations by nearly \$850,000.

“The past 15 months have been challenging for all expressions of this church because of the economic downturn,” Jackson-Skelton told the ELCA News Service. “This has been compounded by disagreements within congregations related to the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. It was important for us to stay on top of

this to close the year with a small positive variance.”

The Rev. Craig A. Settlage, director for mission support, ELCA Synodical Relations reported that synods shared an average of 49.5 percent of their funds with the churchwide organization in 2009 — the first time the average for mission support was below 50 percent in the ELCA, the release stated. “These have not been easy days for us,” Settlage said.

Many ELCA congregations are facing divisions among their members and financial difficulties as a result of the changes in ELCA teaching and policy made by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Many congregations have chosen to redirect their benevolence giving to ministries other than the ELCA churchwide organization. The increase in World Hunger Appeal income may reflect that reality.

# Conference asks that Lutheran CORE members be prohibited from holding offices in NE Iowa Synod

An ELCA conference assembly has approved a resolution asking that members of Lutheran CORE be prohibited from holding offices in the Northeastern Iowa Synod. The resolution will be considered by the synod's assembly in June.

The resolution, approved Feb. 14 by the Upper Iowa River Conference Assembly, asks "that: 1) all rostered and lay leaders who are members of Lutheran CORE and are currently serving in elected positions in the Northeastern Iowa Synod be required to resign from those positions, and that 2) all rostered and lay individuals currently holding membership in Lutheran CORE be disqualified from election to positions of leadership within the Northeastern Iowa Synod."

"Call to Faithfulness," one of the reform groups that comprise Lutheran CORE, has been working in the Northeastern Iowa Synod for several years. "Call to Faithfulness is committed to Biblical and confessional Lutheran orthodoxy within the ELCA. Call to Faithfulness is a voluntary association within the ELCA, working to uphold our constitutional commitment to Biblical truth and confessional principles," its website explains.

The Rev. Marshall Hahn, a leader in Call to Faithfulness, is the synod's elected Secretary. Other members of Call to Faithfulness serve on the Synod Council.

Call to Faithfulness leaders have been among the members of Lutheran CORE most committed to remaining in the ELCA, to continuing work for

reform of the ELCA, and to calling the churchwide organization to repentance and to faithfulness to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Lutherans Concerned/North America, the organization that has led efforts to change ELCA teaching on same-sex sexual behavior, denounced the resolution. "This resolution is completely antithetical to what Lutherans Concerned stands for, and advocates for, in our efforts for full inclusion," Phil Soucy, LC/NA Communications Director, wrote on the organization's blog. "Nothing in what we say, have said, or envision as a fully inclusive church involves excluding anyone for disagreeing with us."

The Northeastern Iowa Synod has been the focus of much attention since the Churchwide Assembly.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod Council approved two resolutions Nov. 14 responding to the assembly's votes on sexuality. One resolution recognized the "bound conscience" of the synod on sexuality based on its previous synod assembly actions. The synod council also voted 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."

The Synod Council voted to rescind its Nov. 14 actions on Jan. 30.

Call to Faithfulness will meet on Saturday, April 17, at Nazareth

Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, to make preparations for the Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly. More information on Call to Faithfulness is available at its website, [calltofaithfulness.wordpress.com](http://calltofaithfulness.wordpress.com).

## Conflict not unique to Iowa

Conflict resulting from the Churchwide Assembly's actions is not unique to Iowa. Many ELCA congregations are facing divisions among their members and financial difficulties as a result of the assembly's actions.

Stories have come from throughout the country of individuals and congregations that have faced opposition and ridicule because they uphold Biblical teaching on same-sex sexual behavior and oppose the ELCA's new teaching and policies.

Congregations that have tried to express their "bound consciences" through changes in their governing documents or church affiliations have faced opposition from some synod officials and neighboring pastors. Congregations have been told by ELCA officials that they may not place anything in their constitution or bylaws indicating the congregation's "bound conscience" regarding the changes in ELCA teaching and policy on same-sex sexual relationships.

Even though the ELCA has committed itself to "respect the bound consciences of all," it is proving difficult to affirm the validity of contradictory positions on same-sex sexual behavior while making changes in official teaching and policy.

# ELCA releases draft of revised standards for pastors

The ELCA has released proposed drafts of its revised standards for pastors and other rostered leaders. The drafts amend the ELCA's standards to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in committed same-sex sexual relationships, implementing the changes in ELCA teaching and policy made by the ELCA's 2009 Church-wide Assembly.

The changes to the documents — called "Vision and Expectations" and "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline" — are expected to be approved by the ELCA Church Council at its April 9-12 meeting. The drafts were reviewed by the ELCA bishops at their March 5-9 meeting. The documents are available online at [www.elca.org/ministry/policies](http://www.elca.org/ministry/policies).

## **Marriage no longer normative setting for sexual relations**

A sentence which stated that "the biblical understanding which this church affirms is that the normative setting for sexual intercourse is marriage" has been deleted from "Definition and Guidelines." Also deleted was a sentence which read: "Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church."

## **No *Christian* ideals of marriage?**

A sentence in "Definitions and Guidelines" that asked pastors to uphold "*Christian* ideals of marriage" has been changed to read "*this church's* ideals of marriage, family and relationship." This may be an acknowledgment of divisions in the ELCA about what constitute "Christian ideals of marriage."

## **Marriage vs. Same-gender relationships?**

The "Vision and Expectations" draft tries to make a distinction between "marriage" — "between one man and one woman" — and "publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships." The draft includes the proposed definition of a "publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship."

## **Clear changes in ELCA practice but "provision" for dissenters**

The "Vision and Expectations" draft illustrates the difficult situation facing the ELCA as a result of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly actions: The document enacts changes in official teaching and practice but includes an acknowledgment that the ELCA "also has committed itself to make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in such relationships."

## **Required political positions and pastors care?**

The "Vision and Expectations" draft also includes this paragraph that may prove difficult for pastors who uphold traditional Biblical teaching on homosexual behavior because it is open to wide interpretation and may be interpreted as requiring pastors to take certain political stances or to exercise pastoral care in ways that may violate their "bound consciences:"

"This church is committed to opposing all forms of harassment and assault based on sexual orientation and gender identity and supports legislation and

policies to protect civil rights and to prohibit discrimination. An ordained minister is expected to welcome and provide pastoral care for all, including same gender couples and their families."

## **Faithfulness to Scripture, Lutheran Confessions and Christian tradition?**

The proposed draft retains the wording of the current "Vision and Expectations" entitled "Faithfulness to the Church's Confession" without changes. Some have called attention to the following statement as challenging the ELCA's new teaching and practice regarding same-sex sexual behavior:

"Ordained ministers of this church are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures 'as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life' (ELCA Constitution, 2.03). The ecumenical creeds are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this church. The Lutheran Confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

"In identifying specific documents as normative for preaching and teaching, this church expects its ordained ministers to understand that the faith of the church is corporate, not individualistic; catholic, not sectarian; orthodox, not heretical. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expects that its ordained ministers teach nothing 'that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic Church' (Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession)."

# Bishops moving quickly to receive persons in same-sex relationships ordained in defiance of ELCA standards

*Synod has already approved prominent proponent of changing ELCA teaching*

ELCA bishops are moving quickly to receive 17 people who were ordained in controversial ordinations in defiance of the ELCA's standards for pastors and the ELCA constitution.

"The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) reached a consensus March 8 on a draft proposal for a rite that would bring onto the church's official clergy roster those pastors who were ordained and are on the clergy roster of 'Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM),' " the ELCA announced in a March 9 news release.

ELM's website says the organization "credentials and rosters qualified candidates of all sexual orientations and gender identities for ministry."

ELM and its predecessors have "authorized" and conducted 18 ordinations as acts of "ecclesiastical civil disobedience" — 15 in the last 10 years. They also worked with allied organizations to change ELCA teaching and policy on homosexual behavior. ELM's website lists 41 pastors, two people approved for call, and three seminarians on its roster.

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly approved changes in ELCA teaching and policy to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. The ELCA Church Council is expected to approve changes to the documents which list ELCA standards for pastors when it meets April 9-10. The council will also need to approve any new liturgical rite for the reception of the ELM-ordained persons.

In November, the ELCA Church Council adopted an expedited process for the reinstatement of persons who were removed from the church's official rosters because they were in same-sex sexual relationships.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson recommended the proposed rite for the reception of those ordained by ELM to the bishops. "He explained that the draft proposal needed to meet specific criteria. One was a desire for reconciliation with ELM pastors 'who long to be fully recognized as ordained ministers of the ELCA.' Another was that the draft proposal needed to be recognized by the Lutheran World Federation 'as consistent with our understanding of ministry as we have understood it in the Lutheran confessions and history.' Third, he said it was important that the draft proposal honor the ELCA's six full communion agreements," the news release explains.

## **St. Paul Area Synod ready to receive Anita Hill as ELCA pastor**

A woman whose controversial and widely-publicized unauthorized ordination was a significant event in the battle to change ELCA teaching on homosexual behavior has been told that she will be received as an ELCA pastor once the ELCA's standards for pastors are changed to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

The St. Paul Area Synod's Candidacy Committee decided that "Anita Hill be received onto the roster of the ELCA for ordained pastors pending the

implementation of the Vision and Expectations policy changes approved at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2009," according to a letter to Hill released online.

"Recognizing the intentional, prayerful, parallel process of the Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries candidacy process, as well as your ministry partnership within the life of our synod, the Saint Paul Area Synod Candidacy Committee celebrates with you as you anticipate being received onto the roster," the letter said.

Hill was "approved for ordination" by the "Extraordinary Candidacy Project." "ECP credentialed openly gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender seminarians, candidates, ordained and commissioned ministers who are preparing for professional vocations in independent Lutheran parishes and congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," the website of its successor organization, ELM, explains.

Hill's 2001 ordination was featured in a video sent to voting members of the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The Rev. Paul Egertson, then an ELCA bishop in California, participated in the ordination. He later resigned as bishop, in part, because of his participation in the service.

Previously ELCA officials insisted that these ordinations and those who participated in them violated the ELCA Constitution because the individuals were not approved for ordination by the ELCA.

# ELCA Board of Pensions approves benefits for same-sex couples; ELCA council to act in April

Trustees of the ELCA's Board of Pensions approved amendments to the ELCA's pension and insurance plans to recognize committed same-sex relationships at a Feb. 26-28 meeting.

The action resulted from decisions by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to change church teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in "committed, lifelong, monogamous and publicly accountable same-gender relationships."

The 2009 Churchwide Assembly also adopted a social statement on human sexuality. One of the statement's 15 implementing resolutions (#7) called for "the ELCA to amend the eligibility provisions of the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program, consistent with the policies of this church."

The Board of Pensions' action must be approved by the ELCA Church Council which meets April 9-12. The council is expected to approve the changes along with a series of revisions to ELCA policies to implement the assembly's decisions.

"We are committed to doing what has been mandated by the Churchwide Assembly," said the Rev. Robert D. Berg, assistant to the president for church relations, ELCA Board of Pensions.

The trustees acted as a result of a commitment on the part of the Board of Pensions to enroll eligible same-gender partners within one month of the Church Council's possible approval of new ELCA policies, Berg told the ELCA News Service.

"Our guiding principle as we implement resolution #7 is to treat an eligible same-gender partner the same as we treat a spouse to the extent possible under each plan," Robert H. Rydland, the Board of Pensions' vice president and general counsel, wrote in a Feb. 10 memo to the trustees.

"The Board of Pensions is not expanding the Pension and Other Benefits Program to offer benefits to those in opposite gender (heterosexual) partnerships. Because heterosexual partners can get married, extending benefits to them is not being considered at this time," Rydland explained in the memo.

Texts of the proposed plan changes and other related documents are online at [www.elca.org/ministry/policies](http://www.elca.org/ministry/policies).

## ELCA-LCMS congregations do not have dual affiliations

Two California congregations were incorrectly identified as holding dual affiliation with the ELCA and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the February *CORE Connection*.

Palisades Lutheran Church in Pacific Palisades and Lutheran Church of Arcata in Arcata worship and do business as a single congregation with a unified identity and name, but each consists officially of two congregations — one ELCA and one LCMS — in fellowship with each other.

"Each of us is a fellowship situation in which two congregations wrote a set of bylaws for the purpose of working so closely together that we would look

from the outside like one congregation," explained the Rev. Walter H. Mees, Jr., pastor of Palisades Lutheran Church. "Here in Pacific Palisades we are Holy Cross Lutheran Church (LCMS) and Lutheran Church of the Palisades (ELCA). I am an ELCA pastor serving both congregations."

"The Lutheran Church of Arcata is testimony to a unique expression of Christian unity, for the congregation brought together members of two different Synods — not to mention different ethnic and cultural backgrounds," its website states.

The Lutheran Church of Arcata is composed of members of Faith

Lutheran Church (ELCA) and Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church (LCMS). The Rev. Dr. Don Schatz, an LCMS pastor, serves as pastor of the congregations.

The internet sites of both the LCMS and ELCA identify both congregations by their operating names rather than by their official names.

Whether a congregation may affiliate with more than one church body has been the focus of much discussion throughout the ELCA since ELCA Secretary David Swartling issued a memo in January stating that ELCA congregations may not be members of more than one church body.