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Lutheran CORE leaders announce that a new Lutheran church body will be formed for those leaving the ELCA

NEW BRIGHTON, Minn. — Leaders of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) have voted to begin work on a proposal for a new Lutheran church body for those who choose to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, they announced Wednesday, Nov. 18.

The votes by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August to allow pastors to be in committed same-sex relationships have created a biblical and theological crisis throughout the ELCA and have generated conflict in 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.

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. The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee decided Tuesday that a new church body likely will be necessary and directed that work begin on a church body proposal.

“Many ELCA members and congregations have said that they want to sever ties with the ELCA because of the ELCA’s continued movement away from traditional Christian teachings. The vote on sexuality opened the eyes of many to how far the ELCA has moved from Biblical teaching,” said the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., Lutheran CORE Chair.

“Along with the WordAlone Network and our other renewal movement partners, Lutheran CORE will aid in the formation of a Lutheran church body for those congregations and individuals that choose to end their affiliation with the ELCA. This church body will stand where Lutherans have always stood and will center its life on the mission of the church to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northern Pennsylvania Synod.

A special working group will draft the church body proposal in consultation with the WordAlone Network and the other reform movement partners of Lutheran CORE. The recommendations are to be released in February to allow interested individuals and congregations time for feedback. Final proposals will be brought to the Lutheran CORE Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio.

The working group will also bring recommendations for the continuation of Lutheran CORE as a free-standing synod that will serve both Lutherans in the ELCA and those in other church bodies. This working group will be in conversation with other Lutheran church bodies about ways to work together. Lutheran CORE has been in conversation with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, an association of Lutheran congregations which many ELCA congregations have joined, and

will continue to work closely with LCMC. The proposed new church body is intended to provide a place for congregations that desire a more traditional denominational structure.

“We have not made any firm decisions about what this church body will be or how it will be structured. That reality will come into focus as the working group meets with the members of Lutheran CORE who are looking for a new church body and with other Lutheran church bodies and reform movements in North America,” explained Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, who chairs the working group.

Lutheran CORE to continue as free-standing synod

Lutheran CORE will continue to exist as a free-standing synod. Both those within the ELCA and in this new church body will be able to continue in fellowship through Lutheran CORE.

“Lutheran CORE is committed to be a church fellowship for Lutherans who are committed to the teaching of Scripture — both those who choose to remain affiliated with the ELCA and those who choose to end their affiliation with the ELCA,” Spring said.

“It is important that those who want to uphold Biblical teaching work together. We need each other. To be an effective witness, Lutherans — both those who remain affiliated with the ELCA and those who end that affiliation — need to work together. Lutheran CORE hopes to continue to provide that church fellowship and serve that common mission,” he added.

“This new church body and the Lutheran CORE free-standing synod will make it possible for faithful congregations to work together in mission and to relate to other Lutherans worldwide,” Schwarz said. “Lutherans around the world have been scandalized by the ELCA’s actions. Lutheran CORE will work closely with Lutherans around the world who share our commitment to Scripture as it has been understood by generations of Christians.”

“We are not leaving the ELCA. The ELCA has left us. Lutheran CORE is continuing in the Christian faith as it has been passed down to us by generations of Christians. The ELCA is the one that has departed from the teaching of the Bible as understood by Christians for 2,000 years,” Spring said. “The division in the ELCA is not only really sex. It is about the authority of Scripture in the life of the church. The crisis in the ELCA is a direct result of the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.”

“We grieve that it has become necessary for so many to leave the ELCA and for so many others to alter their relationship with the ELCA, but we are heartened by the clear sense of mission and ministry that is motivating these changes,” the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee said in a letter to members of Lutheran CORE announcing the decision.

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