

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

April 2010

Lutheran CORE Convocation to move to larger facility

Such a significant number of people have expressed interest in attending Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation that leaders of Lutheran CORE have decided to move it to a larger facility.

The Convocation is set for Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio. Lutherans from throughout North America will gather to consider proposals for the creation of the North American Lutheran Church and for the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE as a Community of Confessing Lutherans.

The Convocation was to be held at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church's Mill Run campus. However, it will be difficult to accommodate more than 1,700 people at that location, and it would require some of those in attendance to be in a separate room.

Lutheran CORE leaders would like to have space for as many as 3,000 people given the historic significance of the event.

The Convocation will be preceded by a significant theological conference Aug. 24-26 under the theme, "Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism."

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 theological conference is still scheduled to be at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church.

The 2009 Convocation in Fishers, Ind., (suburban Indianapolis) had to be moved from Christ the Savior Lutheran Church to Holy Spirit Catholic Parish at Geist due to the large number of people who wanted to attend. Still, many people were turned away when registrations reached the 1,200-person capacity of the church.

Even though formal registration for the Convocation will not open until May, registrations for the theological conference and the high level of interest in the Convocation showed the need for larger space.

Information on the theological conference is available at Lutheran CORE's website. Registration information for the Convocation will be available online in May.

Ecumenical representatives to attend historic Convocation

Several church bodies have already announced that they are sending official representatives for Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation. Lutherans from throughout North America will gather in Columbus, Ohio, Aug. 26-27 to consider proposals for the creation of the North American Lutheran Church and for the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE as a Community of Confessing Lutherans.

The Rev. Francis Stephanos, President Emeritus of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and former Vice President of the Lutheran World

Federation, will address the Convocation on behalf of the 5.28 million Lutherans in Ethiopia.

The Rt. Rev. Ray R. Sutton of Dallas, Texas, will bring greetings from the Anglican Church in North America. Bishop Sutton is chair of the church's Ecumenical Relations Task Force.

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) will be formally represented by the Rev. Larry Lindstrom, of Farmersville, Ohio. Pastor Lindstrom is the chair of the LCMC Board of Trustees.

Many members of LCMC congregations also are expected to be present for the Convocation as LCMC and Lutheran CORE are committed to working closely with each other.

The Roman Catholic Church will be represented by the Rev. James Massa, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs. Father Massa is the lead staff for Lutheran-Catholic relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He also represented Roman Catholics at the 2009 ELCA Church-wide Assembly.

ELCA finalizes changes in standards to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships

The ELCA Church Council has adopted changes in ELCA standards and policies to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. The changes, approved April 10, finalize and implement changes in ELCA teaching and policy made by its 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

The ELCA hailed the changes as “historic and sweeping revisions to ministry policy documents” in an April 11 news release. The documents — called “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” — are available online at www.elca.org/ministry/policies.

ELCA Secretary David D. Swartling announced that the revised policies are effective immediately.

The Church Council also adopted revisions to the “ELCA Candidacy Manual,” used by synod committees in making decisions about candidates seeking to become pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA.

“Council members asked few questions and commented briefly on each proposed document before approving them. Only minor editorial changes were proposed and adopted by the council. Each revised document was adopted overwhelmingly,” the news release states.

No one on the council voted against the revised documents, but the Rev. Keith A. Hunsinger, a council member from Oak Harbor, Ohio, abstained from the votes on the documents. He believes the changes violate the clear teaching of the Bible.

“My conscience won’t allow me to vote for any of these documents, but as a member of the board of directors, I can’t vote against the will of the Churchwide Assembly,” Pastor Hunsinger told the ELCA News Service.

Pastor Hunsinger told the council that the final forms of the ELCA’s new policy documents were much better than earlier drafts of the documents in allowing space for those who disagree with the ELCA’s new teaching and policy. “Because those documents now said that, I feel my ideas and I are still welcome in the ELCA,” he said.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson celebrated the new policies. He “expressed his appreciation to many, including the council and the Conference of Bishops for leading the revision process over the past few months,” the news release says.

The Rev. Stanley N. Olson, director of the ELCA’s Vocation and Education unit, “thanked many others who have worked for changes in ministry policies through more than two decades of effort,” the release states.

“This is the work of many, hundreds, thousands of people who have reflected, thought and prayed. We are still a church that is tense over this, but we are Easter people, and I think we have done an Easter thing today,” Olson told the council.

ELCA officials are moving quickly to facilitate reception of LGBT pastors into the ELCA. These actions will make it more difficult for the 2011

ELCA Churchwide Assembly to consider requests for the ELCA to return to its previous teaching and policy on Christian sexual ethics.

The ELCA Church Council approved an expedited process to receive LGBT pastors removed from the ELCA for violating the ELCA’s previous teaching and policy.

The council also approved a liturgical rite to receive 17 persons who were ordained in recent years in controversial ordination services held in defiance of the ELCA’s standards for pastors and the ELCA constitution.

The Rev. Marshall Hahn of St. Olaf, Iowa, attended the Church Council meeting as a visitor for “Call to Faithfulness,” one of the reform groups that comprise Lutheran CORE. He compared the experience to his service as a voting member of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

“The experience brought back all of the feelings I had been through as a voting member at the Churchwide Assembly in August — particularly that of being a stranger in my own church. Only this time it was worse because of the lack of any competing or alternate voices raised during the meeting,” Pastor Hahn said.

“I was especially struck by the absence of questions surrounding the discussion of the ministry policies. This was credited at the meeting to the work of the drafting committee, suggesting that they had produced

Changes made to standards for ELCA pastors

Here are some of the changes to ELCA standards for pastors and other rostered leaders approved by the ELCA Church Council in April. The standards are articulated in two documents — called “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline.” The documents are available online at 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.”

Homosexual relationships no longer forbidden.

Same-gender partnerships are now alternative to marriage.

A sentence which read: “Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church” has been deleted from “Definition and Guidelines.” Instead, references to a pastor’s spouse now include the option of the pastor having a “same-gender partner.”

A sentence which read: “Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships” has been deleted from “Vision and Expectations.”

In its place is a sentence that reads: “An ordained minister who is in a publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship is expected to live in fidelity to

his or her partner, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a publicly accountable relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful.”

No *Christian* ideals of marriage?

A sentence in “Definitions and Guidelines” that asked pastors “to uphold *Christian* ideals of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life” has been changed to read “Ordained ministers of this church are expected to uphold *this church’s* ideals of marriage, family, and relationship in their public ministry as well as in private life.”

Given that the ELCA now recognizes committed same-sex relationships, this statement could be interpreted as requiring pastors to uphold ELCA “ideals” by recognizing same-sex unions similar to marriage and by officiating at same-sex union services.

Marriage vs. Same-gender relationships

“Vision and Expectations” makes a distinction between “marriage” — “between a man and a woman” — and “publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” The document includes the ELCA’s definition of a “publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationship.”

Required respect for different convictions on homosexual behavior

“Vision and Expectations” notes that the ELCA has committed itself to recognize and support same-sex relationships and to allow pastors to

be in those relationships. But it notes 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.”

“The ordained minister is expected to respect the people who hold these various convictions,” it states.

It is unknown how the ELCA will define “respect” for those who hold beliefs that many pastors believe are contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Required “respect” may mean attempts to silence any expressions of dissent regarding the ELCA’s new teaching and policies.

Required Support for Synod and Churchwide Organization

“The ordained minister supports not only the work of the congregation, but also the synodical and churchwide ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” “Vision and Expectations” states.

Some ELCA leaders have suggested using these words and constitutional requirements of support for the churchwide organization to require allegiance and financial support from pastors and congregations.

The crisis in many congregations caused by the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly have meant that many congregations have chosen to designate their benevolence giving beyond their congregations rather than send undesignated funds.

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Many disturbed by changes in ELCA policies

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documents which reflected the full range of views of the ELCA. I found this sentiment to be one of many disconnects with reality expressed over the weekend," he said.

"This was the first time I had been to the churchwide offices on Higgins Road. It was a glorious view of the skyline of Chicago in the distance. . . . I couldn't help but think that the actions of the council reflected a view of being above it all, removed from the fray and out of touch with the reality of what is going on down below. I am not saying that the people on the council are unaware of what is going on in the church, but I received the impression they did not know how to address it," Hahn said.

Pastors who maintain Biblical and traditional Christian teaching on sexual ethics are noting how the ELCA's actions change their standing within the ELCA from faithful adherents to Christian teaching to dissidents for whom the ELCA "has agreed to make provision."

"To think that a vote in a place far, far away from me in which I've had no direct say has now put me, a pastor of 11 years of faithful ordained experience . . . possibly up on disciplinary issues for maintaining fidelity to my vows of teaching and preaching according to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," said the Rev. David M. Klak, pastor of Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brenham, Texas.

"Nowhere in my vows was I asked to uphold *this* particular church's teachings — especially where they conflict with God's Word," he said.

"For me this becomes an integrity issue. The ELCA endorses and holds the position that there can be different understandings of marriage from a biblical and Christian perspective, but my conviction is that biblically-speaking the Christian perspective is that there is only one model for marriage and/or marital relationships — man and woman in marriage," Pastor Klak said. "Thus, how can I, an ELCA pastor, who does not admit or confess a variety of opinions and/or

positions, with integrity stand for, promote, teach, and lead in the name of an institution that has gone so far astray?

"While no one may go on a witch hunt after me, I'm faced now with a troubled conscience on a matter of my confessional and pastoral integrity. Not that I've impugned my integrity by standing on the truth, but because I cannot with integrity represent or serve in a denomination which I believe is wrong and heretical," he added.

The Rev. Donna Smith, pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Champaign, Ill., expressed the feelings of many upon hearing of the ELCA Church Council's actions.

"Isn't it odd. We all knew this was coming, and yet there is still a deep visceral response. I am so sad," she said. "And yet, I find it easier and easier to think about the future, and moving on to something else — a different and new church body. I know it won't be perfect, but I am thankful that God is providing for us all."

The forgotten expectation: Faithfulness to Scripture

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"Vision and Expectations" retains a section entitled "Faithfulness to the Church's Confession" without changes. Many people have called attention to the following statements as demanding that faithful pastors resist 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)."

The View from the Upper Room

By Erma Wolf

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee

The view out of the windows from the 11th floor of the Lutheran Center in Chicago is quite expansive.

From the corner of the Church Council meeting room where the visitors sit, one can look ahead and see out to the west, to and past O'Hare Airport to the far western suburbs. When I would turn my chair around and look out to the east, on a clear day one can see the Sears Tower and the skyline of downtown Chicago in the distance, and the blue haze of Lake Michigan beyond that.

One has a sense of being above it all: the crazy traffic on the tangle of toll-roads that snake around and through Chicago, the urban blight, the Gold Coast and the gated communities, the seminary complex in Hyde Park and the troubled public schools with their concrete playgrounds and metal detectors.

This is a view that I have become acquainted with, through my several times sitting there as the Lutheran CORE observer to the ELCA Church Council meetings.

And there were times during this past Church Council meeting when being able to turn and look out across the city was a relief, and a gift. One of those times came during the report of ELCA Secretary David Swartling.

Now, to be fair, Secretary Swartling is a lawyer, and I have heard that he is a very fine lawyer. He brings a lawyer's way of thinking to the office of Secretary, especially to the interpre-

tation of the various constitutions in the ELCA.

He loves to talk about the interdependency between the various levels of the ELCA, established in the constitutions. As he led the council on a tutorial of the model constitution for congregations, he stressed repeatedly the legal obligations for pastors, congregation councils, and congregation members to financially support the mission of the ELCA in its synodical and churchwide levels.

The stress on the legal binding of the constitution to not only send in offerings, but to increase the amount of offerings sent in, on pastors and church councils, could not be missed.

At some point that stress on the force of the law in the church for our financial stewardship caused me to stop taking notes, turn my chair around, and just stare out the window.

The purpose of the Law is to convict us of our sins, and to restrain us sinners from doing harm when nothing else will curb us. The Law drives us to our knees so that the Holy Spirit can flood us with the good news of grace and forgiveness through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the Law can never drive us to grow in stewardship in response to the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

If the ELCA is relying on the force of the law to drive pastors and congregations to responsible stewardship for the "mission" of this church, then we are in serious trouble indeed.

Of course, other things happened at the church council meeting:

✚ The revised policies for rostered ministry standards and discipline were adopted.

✚ The new rite of reception of the ELM pastors was adopted.

✚ The CEO of Augsburg Fortress reported on the decision regarding the termination of their defined benefit pension fund, and on the "fix" for the commentary side-note on Matthew 28 in the *Lutheran Study Bible*.

✚ The proposed social statement on genetics will be brought to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly according to schedule.

✚ The new candidacy manual for synods was approved.

Money is scarcer, and may prove to be in even shorter supply than currently anticipated as 2010 unfolds. Business is not as usual, even though much of the work at the churchwide level appears to be going forward as it has in the past.

But the view from the 11th floor conference room is still there.

Looking out over the city of Chicago, above it all, those who do the work of running the ELCA will at times have their sight obscured by the smog and haze. I can only pray that clearer vision might become possible, and that those in the Lutheran Center on Higgins Road see clearly what is being wrought in the ELCA by the decisions made in that upper room.

Pastor Erma Wolf of Brandon, S.D., serves on the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

ELCA threatening discipline against congregations

Some ELCA synodical and church-wide leaders are taking a hard line and threatening to discipline congregations that choose to affiliate with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) or the proposed North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

The Southwest California Synod is taking steps toward disciplining two congregations that have joined LCMC while remaining in the ELCA. The synod's actions could result in the congregations and their pastors being expelled from the ELCA.

The Southwest California Synod Council "voted to instruct Bishop Dean Nelson to call together the Synod Consultation Committee to address whether or not there is cause for disciplinary action against Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Torrance, and Christ Lutheran Church, Santa Clarita, and the clergy of both congregations," the synod announced in a press release on Maundy Thursday (April 1).

"The Synod Council took this action upon learning that both congregations had recently voted to affiliate with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), while retaining their membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)," the synod's release states.

Good Shepherd

The Rev. Bob Rognlien, pastor of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Torrance, Calif., one of the congregations under investigation by the synod, consulted with synod officials about their consideration of joining LCMC prior to their vote.

"We have always tried to work constructively with the synod to promote those aspects of the ELCA that reflect our missional values and priorities," Pastor Rognlien explained.

"I asked Bishop Nelson to send me the references to those parts of the ELCA Constitution that prohibited dual affiliation. After conferring with the ELCA, Bishop Nelson confirmed my assertion that there are no such prohibitions," he said. "The next communication I received from him was the letter informing me of the Synod Council's action."

"I know pastors in our synod whose congregations have been dual affiliated with the LCMC for years and the synod has never taken any action against them. They seem to have singled us and Christ Lutheran out to make an example of us in order to intimidate other congregations who are considering dual affiliation," Pastor Rognlien said.

"I think it is a fear-based reaction that, sadly, is going to backfire on them and have the opposite effect," he added.

"Although it is sad to see the ELCA moving in this direction and so many wonderful congregations torn apart, I am not worried or even upset about this action against us. We know that the life and mission of our congregation does not depend on human institutions or bureaucracies, but on the Word of God and the power of His Spirit. I want to encourage other pastors and church leaders not to be intimidated by the actions of the ELCA, but to follow your conscience as a certain German monk did 500 years ago," Pastor Rognlien said.

"Remember what Jesus promised us, that nothing can prevail against a church founded on the rock of faith in Jesus Christ," he added.

Instead of proceeding with the ELCA investigation, the congregation's council and pastors unanimously decided April 12 that the 900-member congregation should begin the process of leaving the ELCA. They have set a vote for May 2.

"It is with sad and heavy hearts that we must write to you regarding leaving the ELCA. Our Synod recently began investigating whether our Pastors and Congregation should be disciplined for following our conscience on the teaching of God's Word and dual affiliating with the LCMC. We believe this constitutes an attack on our integrity and a violation of the ELCA's own stated commitments to allow congregations and pastors to follow their consciences. We are also concerned this action will result in a time-consuming distraction from our mission that will needlessly divert precious resources away from what God has called us to do. Our Pastors and Council believe that continued affiliation with the ELCA will compromise our biblical values and our missional purpose: making disciples and extending God's Kingdom," they wrote in an April 14 letter to the congregation.

"My biggest disappointment in all of this is that the bishop and Synod Council did not follow Jesus' clear directive in Matthew 18 to talk directly to the person you feel has

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ELCA takes hard line as 180 churches join LCMC

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wronged you before you take public action against them. This would be so different if they had simply initiated a conversation about it with us first," Pastor Rognlien explained.

Christ Lutheran

The story at Christ Lutheran Church in Santa Clarita, Calif., is similar.

"Our congregation voted at our annual meeting in January to join LCMC while remaining a part of the ELCA," explained the Rev. Joe Campeau, pastor of the 1,300-member church.

"The bishop indicated at that time that David Swartling's memo said that being a dual-member congregation was unacceptable. When asked if any congregation had ever been disciplined for that decision, he indicated that it had never been the case.

"Our congregation voted by a 70 percent majority to join LCMC and also to withhold unrestricted benevolence to the synod while continuing to give restricted benevolence to ELCA-related ministries which we could in good conscience support," he explained.

"The bishop expressed a desire to assist the small minority of our congregation who were dissatisfied with our vote and wished to leave. (Some people who disagreed with our annual meeting vote have opted to remain in the congregation.) He has been instrumental in helping those who wished to leave in their attempts to establish a new congregation in our area," Pastor Campeau said.

"The leadership of our congregation is not intimidated by this action. While we do not intend to invest any significant amount of time in defending our actions, at the moment we will nominally cooperate with the process as a means of making our position clear and public, and as an encouragement to those congregations who may feel threatened by such actions. We stand confidently because we stand confident in our risen Lord and in his Word," he said.

ELCA's Hard Line

Since its 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA has been taking a hard line against congregations that seek to add an additional church body affiliation.

In a January memo to synod bishops and vice presidents, ELCA Secretary David Swartling announced that the ELCA will not allow congregations to be members of more than one church body. He said that bishops could choose to discipline a congregation for affiliating with another church body.

Swartling's announcement marked a change in the ELCA's posture toward congregations that have more than one church body membership.

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

More than 180 ELCA congregations have joined LCMC since the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The significant number of congregations joining LCMC may explain the

ELCA's tough stance against dual church body affiliations.

Some ELCA congregations have had dual affiliations with LCMC since 2001 with no conflict or threats of discipline from their synods. No congregation has yet been disciplined for having dual affiliations. But some bishops are now threatening to change that reality.

South Dakota Synod Bishop David Zellmer announced April 10 that he will seek to discipline any congregation that joins LCMC. Bishop Zellmer said that he made the decision based on conversations with other bishops at recent meetings of the ELCA Conference of Bishops.

ELCA News Service Director John Brooks downplayed the significance of the Southwest California Synod's actions. "I think it's important to note that this story from the Southwest California Synod is not an announcement about discipline. It's an announcement which says the bishop was asked to convene some people to consider whether there should be some kind of discipline involving two congregations. That's all it is," Brooks said.

Dual affiliations OK in Florida

St. Peter Lutheran Church in Fort Pierce, Fla., has dual ELCA-LCMC affiliations, but they don't want to remain affiliated with the ELCA. The Florida-Bahamas Synod Council decided in February that it will not allow the congregation to leave the ELCA even though the congregation voted unanimously in two required votes to end their ELCA affiliation.

Lutherans in Africa are ‘extremely disturbed’ by ELCA, Swedish actions on homosexual behavior

Leaders of Lutheran churches in Africa are expressing opposition to the actions of the ELCA in affirming same-sex sexual relationships.

The leaders of the 18.5 million Lutherans in Africa state that recent decisions by the 2009 ELCA Church-wide Assembly and by the Lutheran Church of Sweden have damaged relationships between churches in the Lutheran World Federation.

The church leaders met March 24-28 in Abuja, Nigeria, to prepare their message for the July 20-27 Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

“We are extremely disturbed and deeply regret the recent developments taking place in some member churches of the communion who have taken unilateral decision on same-sex marriages, disregarding the strong sentiments expressed by other members of the communion. This unilateral action has negatively impacted our life together as a communion, something which could have been avoided,” the message says.

“We strongly affirm our decision taken in Lund (Sweden) in 2007 that ‘marriage is holy, ordained by God and is a relationship between a man and woman.’ Therefore, the majority of African member churches say ‘NO’ to homosexual acts and regard it to be sinful.”

“We pray for the Spirit of discernment and for the grace of God to abound as we seek to resolve these issues,” the African church leaders state.

The leaders of the two largest national churches in Africa — representing more than half of the continent’s Lutherans

— also made public statements in April about their disagreement with the ELCA’s new teaching and policy.

The presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) noted his church’s opposition to the actions of the ELCA in his Easter sermon.

“ELCT has refused to recognize the decision to allow same-sex marriages because it is against the Holy Bible. It is in direct contravention of God’s Word, which has not changed,” Bishop Alex G. Malasusa told worshipers at the Azania Front Church in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He said that the ELCA and the Church of Sweden have strayed from the Scriptures, and it was up to African Lutherans to bring them back to Christian teaching.

The bishop’s comments were reported by *The Citizen*, a Tanzanian newspaper. The newspaper reported that Bishop Malasusa said that Tanzania and Africa had taken a common stand on the issue and would not waver.

“It’s time Africa preached to the rest of the world and remind them of God’s Word because it seems they have forgotten what the Bible says,” he said. The newspaper reported that worshipers responded to his words with cheers.

“We should be independent so that they don’t use their money and wealth to threaten us . . . we should leave them with their money and stick to the Word of God,” Bishop Malasusa said.

The president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) reaffirmed the position of Lutherans in Ethiopia that the

acceptance of same-sex marriage “is a clear disobedience to the Holy Scripture and the God ordained marriage.”

The Rev. Dr. Rev. Wakseyoum Idosa told the church’s Executive Board, which met April 7-10, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that the decisions passed by the ELCA and the Church of Sweden have “a serious adverse effect on the unity of Lutheran communion” and that “the EECMY is deeply saddened by the decision that these churches have made in connection with same-sex (sexual behavior), which is against the inspired Word of God,” the church announced in an April 14 news release.

President Idosa said that “the issue of same-sex marriage is under serious study, in order to explore the next action that the church shall take with regard to the relationship between her and the member churches of the Lutheran communion that have already legalized same-sex marriage,” the EECMY release states.

With 5.3 million members, the ELCT in Tanzania is the second largest Lutheran church in the Lutheran World Federation and the largest Lutheran church in Africa. The EECMY in Ethiopia is the third largest Lutheran Church in the world with more than 5.28 million members.

The national Church of Sweden is the largest church body in the LWF with 6.75 million members. The ELCA is the fourth largest with 4.6 million members.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson said that the ELCA does “not use financial resources to coerce global companions,” according to an April 7 ELCA news release.

Groups shaping NALC, Lutheran CORE

Seven working groups are shaping the life and ministry of the proposed North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE as a Community of Confessing Lutherans.

The working groups are the result of decisions by Lutheran CORE's 2009 Convocation asking that a recommendation for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America" be brought to Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation Aug. 26-27 in suburban Columbus, Ohio.

The Vision and Planning Working Group, chaired by Ryan Schwarz, is taking the lead in developing the reconfiguration proposal.

In February, they released "A Vision and Plan for the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE

as a Community of Confessing Lutherans." The proposal has been receiving very positive responses from Lutherans throughout North America and around the world. It is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Working groups are also addressing the areas of:

- ✦ Theological Education.
- ✦ Synodical Consultation.
- ✦ Organization.
- ✦ Mission and Benevolence.
- ✦ Congregational Life and Pastoral Support.
- ✦ Ecumenical, Lutheran and International relationships.

Tonya Rike is new Lutheran CORE staff

Lutheran CORE welcomes Tonya Rike as the new part-time assistant to the Rev. Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE.

Tonya is helping respond to the heavy volume of correspondence from congregations, pastors and individuals asking for help and information. She also will be assisting with meeting arrangements for the Steering Committee, working groups and the Convocation.

Tonya has earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, Pa., and a master's degree in religion from The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Tonya had previously served as an Associate in Ministry in the area of Christian Education at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale, Pa., and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pa.

She is married to the Rev. David Rike, pastor of Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Rothsville, Pa. She resigned her AIM position to raise their two daughters.

Tonya served for almost 10 years on the Candidacy Committee in the Lower Susquehanna Synod, but she recently resigned from the position because she cannot support the ELCA's new standards for rostered leaders.

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Theological Conference

August 24-26

Lutheran CORE Convocation

August 26-27

Columbus, Ohio



Gravity of situation created by ELCA sexuality votes

Do the ELCA sexuality decisions rise to the level of error or heresy or apostasy?

Following are excerpts from a paper reflecting on the significance of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly votes changing ELCA teaching and practice on same-sex sexual behavior.

It was prepared by the Rev. Dr. J. Larry Yoder of Lenoir-Rhyne University for the Word Alone Network's Theological Advisory Board. The entire paper is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

By J. Larry Yoder
Lenoir-Rhyne University

The content of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly votes has been measured in different levels of gravity by various quarters in the church, from celebration in Goodsoil to affirmation and embrace at Higgins Road (ELCA churchwide offices).

Among those who reject the hegemony of autonomous man the yield is reckoned from “error” as least severe to “apostasy” as the most severe.

Error

To judge the yield of the votes as “error” is to argue that the recognition of committed, long-term public gay or lesbian unions, though contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures and the Church is, at that least level of severity, a circumstance that can be endured in other persons or parishes even if one does not embrace it locally, as person or congregation.

On this reading, the ELCA is at that point in error, in its embrace of heterodox teaching and practice. A

congregation, or a pastor, or a layperson can continue in fellowship and roster, and simply agree to disagree.

This view of the ELCA assembly’s vote as “in error” does not require a radically “congregational” ecclesiology — at least no more radically congregational than the ELCA rubric that allows congregations to declare their willingness or unwillingness to accept the sort of clergy couple referenced in the vote.

In fact, at that level, one can argue that the ELCA vote has empowered congregations vis-à-vis synods, if not vis-à-vis Higgins Road.

That is, Higgins Road holds the policy cards, and will see to it that the “implementing resolutions” permeate the entire church structure. And congregations have the power to reject the vote locally, as to the clergy they will accept — as well as to the degree they remain tied to the ELCA in terms of offerings, curricula, bulletins, programs, beneficiaries . . . the option to accept or reject gay or lesbian clergy at the congregational level has empowered congregations, in principle, in multiples of other dimensions. And, to that degree, synods (and bishops) become much less relevant.

Heresy

There is about the vote and the policy a reckoning more severe: that the ELCA is, at that point, in heresy, though some disagree. Witness this view, from Pastor Richard Johnson, editor of *Forum Letter*: “Some (have

gone) so far as to accuse the ELCA of heresy — a bit over the top, seems to me. Heresy generally involves a specific and overt repudiation of some key doctrine of Christian faith. What the ELCA has done is serious error, to be sure, but I don’t think it rises to the status of heresy.”

But what has occurred is an overt challenge to — and alteration of — the content of the Sixth Commandment.

Presupposed in the sixth is that “marriage is an holy estate, ordained of God and to be held in honor by those who enter therein.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said, ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife. And they twain shall become one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.’ What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Both the “ordained of God” and the “male and female” are normative as to marriage.

Adultery consists in sundry violations — actions, thoughts, imaginings, arrangements — of the normative conditions for the exercise of human sexuality: Violations apart from marriage (i.e., by those not married). Against marriage (overt adultery). Other than marriage (something not male and female).

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God made us male and female, and ordained marriage for the purpose of bringing forth and nurturing children, for love and companionship, and for lifelong fidelity.

Thus what precisely occurred in the Minneapolis vote is a direct challenge to both the content and authority of the Sixth Commandment.

Apostasy

But more than that, the vote, in challenging the content and authority of the Sixth Commandment, challenges also, and more significantly, the First Commandment. That is, it challenges the authority of God to make any commandments whatsoever. I argue that such a challenge is an “overt repudiation of . . . (a) key doctrine of the Christian faith.” To challenge the authority of God gets at the source of the matter.

There is more. The Minneapolis vote regarding gay and lesbian clergy assaults all three articles of the Apostles Creed.

It challenges what constitutes — and belongs in — God’s good creation. At no point do the Holy Scriptures acknowledge (much less assert) that homosexual relations reside in Genesis chapters 1 & 2. The debate is precisely that fundamental: that homosexual behavior or relations are part and parcel of Genesis 3 and beyond. In the Minneapolis vote, the first article of the creed is challenged by expansion . . . as to what constitutes God’s good creation.

And likewise the second article vis-à-vis the redemption resident in the life, death and resurrection of our

Lord Jesus Christ. If homosexual relationships are part and parcel of life in Christ, then no repentance is needed for the relationship, per se . . . only for sins otherwise committed in it, or during it, or before it, or after it.

The Minneapolis vote challenges specifically the content of the Sixth Commandment and, moreover, the First Commandment — the authority of God to command in such fashion whatsoever — as well as all three articles of the creed as to creation, redemption, and sanctification.

What the church has previously taught, based on the teaching of the Holy Scripture, is that the church does not bless, or accept, that kind of relationship. One does not need to repent of marriage . . . only for sins he or she commits within the marriage, or apart from the marriage. For marriage is an holy estate, ordained of God.

The Minneapolis move incorporates into the “God blessed” category a relationship not acceptable to Holy Scripture — and introduces a relationship that does not immediately, in itself, require repentance and amendment of life.

And again the third article, like unto the second: how one lives his or her life in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is now expanded to include a category of intimate human relationship universally scorned by Holy Scripture in all its manifestations.

So on this read, the Minneapolis vote challenges specifically the content of the Sixth Commandment and, moreover, the First Commandment — the authority of God to command in such fashion whatsoever . . . as well as all three articles of the creed as to creation, redemption, and sanctification.

That’s not simply heresy (specific and overt repudiation of some key doctrine).

The cumulative rejection of Creed and Commandments amounts to apostasy . . . an overt repudiation of the faith, while still claiming allegiance to the faith, believing that the innovation is itself consistent with the received faith. Such is the gravitas of the situation.

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