

# CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

Friday - August 21, 2009

## Lutheran CORE experiencing renewal at assembly *Voting members express appreciation for faithful witness*

Faithful Lutherans from throughout the ELCA are working together with Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) to bear witness to the authority of God's Word for the life of the church at the Churchwide Assembly.

The focus of much of Lutheran CORE's work at this year's assembly has been bearing witness to Biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality given the ELCA sexuality proposals.

"We're doing great. We have more people involved with us than at any previous Churchwide Assembly. We have a lot of people stopping by our room wanting to work with us," said Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE. "The issues at this Churchwide Assembly are resulting in a lot of people at the assembly and around the country seeking us out as they try to find people to work with who support the authority of Scripture."

Room 204AB is filled each morning with people and with the sound of

hymns sung a capella in four-part harmony during devotions sponsored by Lutheran CORE. Heartfelt prayers are offered for the life and witness of the Church and for the witness of those serving as voting members.

"In the midst of the challenges and controversies facing this Churchwide Assembly, a special blessing for voting members and others attending the assembly has been to gather together each morning for prayer, praise, song and worship," said the Rev. Rebecca Heber, a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee from Orlando, Fla.

Each night those working with Lutheran CORE to uphold biblical teaching gather to discuss the actions of the assembly and actions at upcoming assembly sessions.

Wednesday through Friday evenings feature educational events for those attending the assembly. These events have been well attended.

Lutheran CORE has a hospitality room on the second floor of the convention center where free coffee and many resources are provided for those attending the assembly.

"I have the highly responsible job of seeing that the coffee pots are refilled with the liquid gold. It's good, and it ought to be," said the Rev. Steve Shipman, a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee from Lock Haven, Pa., who is overseeing Lutheran CORE's hospitality room.

"It's great to interact with voting members, visitors, dignitaries, and old friends on both sides of the issues being debated. I've had a lot of pleasant conversations, and I see my job as to facilitate conversations. It's also fun and fascinating.

"I am happy that I have no floor responsibilities. I only hope we are helping voting members through our worship, resources, and sometimes pastoral care," Shipman added.

## Two Lutheran CORE leaders are finalists for vice president

Robert Benne and Ryan Schwarz — two leaders in Lutheran CORE — are among the eight finalists for Vice President of the ELCA.

Schwarz, an investment analyst from Washington, D.C., is a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

Benne is director of the Center for Religion and Society and professor at Roanoke College in Virginia. He is a member of the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council.

The eight finalists will answer questions for the assembly today.

"It's great that the assembly will have the opportunity to hear from these two men who would serve God and the church well as vice president," said the Rev. Paull Spring, Lutheran CORE chair. "It is good that they will have this opportunity to speak to the assembly."

# Ejection of Ethiopian symbolic of rejection of African churches

By Betsy Carlson

Isn't it ironic?

On Tuesday, an Ethiopian pastor and one-time national church president was kicked out of the Minneapolis Convention Center about the same time a person told the ELCA Churchwide Assembly the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch to show acceptance by the early Church of the ritually unclean — the Ethiopian eunuch.

“Isn't it ironic that at about the same time Ethiopian Pastor Francis Stephanos was being kicked out of the convention center, a social statement backer used that Biblical story against the opponents of the statement, proffering that the Ethiopian eunuch may never have experienced Jesus' grace and love if Philip had reacted the way we, who oppose ordaining partnered gays, supposedly would have,” said Jaynan Clark, president of the WordAlone Network. WordAlone is one of the reform movements that make up Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform).

“In many ways, this is symbolic of what has been happening at the assembly. While the ELCA is talking about the acceptance of same-sex sexual behavior, the ELCA is rejecting other Christians from around the world, especially those from Africa, who accept the Bible's teaching,” said Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE.

Stephanos is president emeritus of the of the Evangelical Church in Mekane Yesus (Abode of Jesus), the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia. He served as president of the Ethiopian national

church 1985-1993 during the reign of the Marxist government there and was the church's vice president 1978-1983.

The Ethiopian church is one of the fastest growing Christian churches on the globe, with 5.3 million members. Stephanos was a vice president of the Lutheran World Federation representing Africa in the early 1990s. He now resides in Minneapolis and has an Ethiopian ministry here.

Stephanos, a member of an ELCA church, said in that he and another African pastor were inside the convention talking to voting members.

Lutheran CORE learned of his ejection from other African immigrants who were walking around the outside the convention center praying for the assembly.

He said that he came around noontime and had been in the convention center — outside of the assembly hall — about two hours when a security guard walked around him.

“He looks at me closely and approaches me and tells me I'm not allowed to be in the convention center,” Stephanos said, “because I don't have a badge and therefore not allowed to be in here. I said, ‘Why not, I've got every right to be here and listen to people.’ He said, ‘You have no right to be here . . . so please leave here . . . you can stand outside the building but not in here.’”

Stephanos said 10-15 Ethiopians from various denominations are coming every day, to walk around outside the convention center covering the center in prayer like in the Biblical account of the Battle of Jericho.

He said that before he was told to leave he had been explaining to assembly members the Bible says that in the beginning God created man and woman and also gave Eve to Adam as a wife, so He knew what He was doing then. At several other places in the Bible it is clearly stated again that marriage is between man and woman, people of the opposite sex, not people in a same-sex relationship.

“God loves everybody and we also love gays and lesbians as God loves them It's not as if we are saying they should be kicked out of the church, they shouldn't; they should be loved and protected,” he said. “But when it comes to human sexuality, I strongly believe that marriage is still between a man and a woman as it is originally desired and created.

“Now I am talking and listening to delegates again doing it again, inside, but with an identity card,” he concluded.

## Lutheran CORE

### Friday

7:15 a.m. - Devotions - 204AB

7:00 p.m. - Panel Discussion on implications of Assembly - M101BC

Lutheran CORE supporters meet

### Saturday

7:15 a.m. - Devotions - 204AB

8:00 p.m. - Lutheran CORE supporters meet - 204AB

204AB is Lutheran CORE HQ on the second floor of Convention Center.

M101BC is on the mezzanine level.