

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

May 2008

Lutheran CORE and LC3 are coming together

Lutheran Congregations of the Common Confession (LC3) and Lutheran CORE have decided to combine their efforts. A proposal for LC3 to become a part of Lutheran CORE was approved April 14 at the annual gatherings of both groups in Golden Valley, Minn.

LC3 and Lutheran CORE were formed at the same time for somewhat different tasks and to serve different constituencies. Over time, LC3 leadership realized that the separate existence of the two groups created confusion and was probably unnecessary.

The LC3 leaders approached Lutheran CORE with the suggestion that the goal of congregational networking and renewal could better be accomplished if LC3 operated under the Lutheran CORE umbrella.

Pastor Mark Braaten from Texas, who had been on the LC3 steering committee, was added as a non-voting member of the Lutheran CORE steering committee. Pastor Eric Swensson from LC3 is a member of the Lutheran CORE advisory board.

Lutheran CORE also adopted a new goal (to be numbered as its second) of

“Making Disciples for Christ: To reassert Christ’s Great Commission to make disciples of all nations as a priority in the life of the ELCA, through emphases on congregational renewal, church plants and global missions.” We will highlight this goal in next month’s newsletter.

Many specific details remain to be worked out, and the LC3 leadership will be communicating with the congregations that have accepted the Common Confession. LC3, perhaps under a different name, will continue as a list of such congregations, as a part of Lutheran CORE.

ELCA acknowledges relationship with Lutheran CORE

The ELCA Church Council voted to recognize Lutheran CORE as an independent Lutheran organization that relates to the ELCA through its Vocation and Education Program Unit at its April 11-13 meeting.

Lutheran CORE applied for the acknowledgment, and the Rev. Dr. Stanley N. Olson, executive director, ELCA Vocation and Education, recommended the relationship be established.

Since our goal as Lutheran CORE is the reform and renewal of the ELCA, we thank Pastor Olson for his recommendation and the church council for its acknowledgment. We look forward to sharing our story and mission at various ELCA-sponsored

events as we work together to create a stronger witness to the Gospel throughout this church.

We remain convinced that we are the “Core” of the ELCA and not a fringe group, and that we represent the vast center who, while very diverse in many matters, agree on the basics of the faith “once delivered to the saints” and the Confession of Faith upon which this church was founded.

Lutherans Concerned, one of the organizations advocating for the acceptance of pastors in same-sex sexual relationships and the blessing of same-sex relationships, was recognized as an independent Lutheran organization that relates to the ELCA several years ago.

Lutheran CORE is one of several independent Lutheran organizations to receive this designation from the ELCA. Some of the other organizations include Global Health Ministries, Lutheran Peace Fellowship, World Mission Prayer League, and the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians.

The ELCA Church Council approved the relationship with Lutheran CORE by a vote of 18-13. The ELCA News Service reported that “some council members raised specific concerns about the proposal, noting that the WordAlone Network, which has been critical of the ELCA churchwide organization and its leaders, is a member organization of Lutheran CORE.”

CORE facilitates open forums in Michigan and Colorado

Lutheran CORE sponsored an open forum on Sunday, April 13, at St. Michael's Lutheran Church, Canton, Mich. Interested persons in the greater Detroit area were invited. About 50 persons were in attendance.

Professor Marc Kolden of Luther Seminary spoke on the Lutheran interpretation of the Bible. Pastor Paul Spring, Lutheran CORE chair, addressed the work of Lutheran CORE and the current sexuality discussion within the church.

Following the presentations, there was formal and informal discussion about next steps in support of the cause of orthodoxy in the ELCA.

In February, more than 60 people from the Denver area gathered at Lord of the Hills Lutheran Church, in Centennial, Colo. (suburban Denver).

Pastor Paul Spring, Lutheran CORE chair, was the keynote speaker for this gathering. He spoke about the Bible and the ELCA and the need for people to remain within the ELCA and work for the church's renewal. A lively question and answer session followed Spring's presentation.

At the conclusion of the gathering, a small planning group was formed into a leadership team. This team will follow up the gathering and develop strategies for electing voting members

from the Rocky Mountain Synod to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Earlier that day Pastor Spring preached the sermon at the worship services of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, and led a discussion for the congregation during the Sunday School hour.

We encourage local groups to schedule informational gatherings and events to discuss the concerns Lutheran CORE is raising. We will try to help you enlist speakers. Members of the steering committee are happy to attend. Contact information is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Unauthorized ordination held in Minneapolis

Three former ELCA bishops presided over the unauthorized ordination of a woman in a same-sex relationship Jan. 19 in Minneapolis.

According to the March 2008 edition of *Metro Lutheran* newspaper, Salem English Lutheran Church ordained Jennifer Nagel, who lives in a committed same-sex relationship.

Three retired bishops who remain on the ELCA clergy roster — the Revs. Darold Beekmann, Lowell Erdahl, and L. David Brown — presided over the ordination. The Rev. Hans Lee of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis presided at the liturgy.

More than 90 vested clergy attended the unauthorized ordination. Nagel was presented with a stole worn at each of the 13 unauthorized ordinations since 1990, according to the news report.

Nagel was not approved for ordination in accordance with the standards and process outlined in the ELCA constitution (C7.31.13).

The ELCA constitution states that "Ordained ministers shall be subject to discipline for . . . willfully disregarding the provisions of the constitution or bylaws of this church" (C20.21.01).

The participants in this liturgy have acted in ways that violate the ELCA constitution. We are not aware of any official disciplinary action taken against the participants in the unauthorized ordination. The "restraint" resolution passed by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly does not apply to participants in unauthorized ordinations.

Even a statement from someone in authority in the ELCA or from the

synod condemning the action would be refreshing to us who have been asked to "journey together faithfully" in the ELCA.

As long as unauthorized ordinations continue with no serious objection from those in authority in the ELCA, it is inaccurate to speak of the ELCA as having one clergy roster or one set of ordination standards. It will also be increasingly difficult to encourage the core of faithful ELCA members to support ELCA programs and emphases.

Nagel's ordination was the fifth unauthorized ordination of a gay or lesbian person since 2006.

On April 27, Grace Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas, voted to call Lura N. Groen, a candidate not approved by the ELCA. An unauthorized ordination is scheduled for July.

Disturbing news from Arizona sexuality hearing

While we believe that most of the ELCA leadership is sincere in its desire to have open, honest discussion around the "Draft Social Statement on Human Sexuality," we were disturbed at a report from Jim Lindberg, our CORE contact in the Grand Canyon Synod, of a recent hearing held in Tempe, Ariz.

Jim wrote to his bishop saying, "This one hour 'hearing' quickly degenerated into an attack on those members of the ELCA who hold traditional Christian understandings of human sexuality."

Jim described what he witnessed: "Although there was a moderator and a person recording the comments on her computer, the so-called hearing was more like a kangaroo court complete with emotional witnesses. It appeared to be a well-planned gripe session where people were encouraged by the moderator to air their personal grievances, tell sob stories, and make the unmitigated charges that those people who disagreed with them were being judgmental.

"The moderator even called on two people whom he identified as members of the Roman Catholic Church and had not even seen the draft statement. One testified that the ELCA needed to change its policy on same-sex marriage and the ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians because the Catholic Church wasn't about to change its position.

"In his closing instructions to the court, the moderator made an impassioned statement which exposed his real bias. He said that, 'since there are only a few passages in the Bible that talk about homosexuality, we have to do the right thing as Christians and we can't exclude them.' He then asked the question, 'Would Jesus exclude people and their gifts?' He then answered his own question by reminding those present that, 'we need to go forward and let the spirit work.'"

We commend Jim for communicating with his bishop. If there are other such violations of good faith in the process of considering this statement, we urge you to contact your bishop,

ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson, and Lutheran CORE with the information.

The 2005 report of the ELCA Task Force for Sexuality Studies showed that a significant majority (57 percent) of ELCA members who responded to the study on homosexuality opposed change to accepted Christian teaching on homosexual behavior to allow for the blessing of same-sex unions or the ordination of persons in committed same-sex relationships.

Only 22 percent of those responding to the study favored change in church teaching to allow for the blessing of same-sex unions or the ordination of persons in committed same-sex relationships.

These percentages are admittedly unscientific results. They probably understate the number of ELCA members with traditional beliefs.

Folks like Jim represent the center of the ELCA and deserve better treatment than he and those who agree with him received in Tempe.

Generous financial support enables program increase

Ryan Schwarz, who leads Lutheran CORE's fund-raising efforts, was able to report with gratitude many generous donors among individuals, congregations, and partner reform movements at Lutheran CORE's annual gathering April 14.

In response to the generous support, Lutheran CORE's budget proposal was amended to add \$50,000 to support additional staff to coordinate our efforts.

We continue to solicit your gifts in support of our work. You may donate online at www.lutherancore.org or send your gifts to:

Lutheran CORE
c/o WordAlone Network
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

Please make checks payable to the WordAlone Network and write Lutheran CORE on the memo line.

Contributions to Lutheran CORE are tax deductible as permitted by law.

Our relationship with the WordAlone Network allows us to avoid many distractions from our mission of reform. While we still hope to secure our own 501(c)(3) non-profit status in the future, for now we operate administratively within WordAlone.

We thank all those who have supported our work together.

Essay explains Lutheran CORE position on sexuality questions

Lutheran CORE has prepared an essay to help ELCA members to understand why we believe, along with most Christian churches in the world, that the biblical norms for sexuality should be upheld.

“After careful and prayerful consideration, the members of Lutheran CORE have concluded that those seeking changes in the Church’s understanding of human sexuality have not met, and almost certainly cannot meet, their burden of showing that those changes are consistent with the foundational tenets of the Christian faith,” the document states.

The essay offers four key points:

- “The Church discerns its teachings from Scripture.”

- “As even advocates of a new sexual ethic admit, Scripture does not approve same-sex sexual relationships.”

- “Because Scripture prohibits same-sex sexual relationships, advocates for the blessing of such relationships contend that it is not binding.”

- “The advocates of the new sexual ethic urge the ELCA to replace the Christian Gospel with a new and very different religion.”

“Keeping Faith,” was written by a Lutheran CORE writing team led by James Gale of Washington, D.C., Pastor David Baer of Whitewood, S.D., and Pastor Russell Saltzman of Kansas City, Mo.

In March Lutheran CORE released a Question and Answer resource that is designed to help members of ELCA congregations to participate in the process leading to an ELCA Social Statement on Sexuality and to enable them to better understand some of the questions on human sexuality that will be considered at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The Q & A document, written by this same writing team, addresses basic questions about the process and about current ELCA policy. It also responds to some of the arguments made for changing teaching on homosexual behavior. Questions are addressed in a basic way that is easy to understand.

Both resources are available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Check out Lutheran CORE online

Lutheran CORE’s website — www.lutherancore.org — is the place to find the latest information on our work together as Lutheran CORE.

New resources are posted to the website on a regular basis, and most Lutheran CORE statements and resources are available at the website.

One of the features of our web site is Lutheran CORE’s blog. Interesting comments and articles continue to be posted on the blog. One of April’s blog highlights is an article entitled “This Is Our Opportunity” by Pastor Russell Lackey of Westminster, Calif. We urge those questioning their future in the ELCA to consider what he has to say.

What is Lutheran CORE?

Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) is a coalition of individuals, congregations and reform movements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that speaks for the historic center of Lutheranism.

We seek to preserve within the ELCA the authority of Scripture according to the Lutheran Confessions.

Lutheran CORE’s members and participants represent the vast middle of American Lutheranism, spanning geographical regions, vocations, and political and theological viewpoints. We are united by our common commitment to the authority of Scripture in the life of the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE seeks to be a voice

for the solid, faithful core that is the majority of ELCA members, pastors and congregations.

We are a way for those who care about the ELCA to work together for the good of the church and for the sake of its future.



www.lutherancore.org

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