

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

May 2009

Lutheran CORE leaders plan for assembly and beyond

Leaders of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Reform) outlined plans for their work at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and for the confessional movement's future during Lutheran CORE's annual gathering April 27.

The annual gathering took place at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn., in conjunction with the annual convention of the WordAlone Network, one of the renewal organizations that are a part of Lutheran CORE. The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee met April 27-28.

Lutheran CORE is a coalition of individuals, congregations, and

reform movements in the ELCA representing the vast middle of American Lutheranism. Lutheran CORE seeks to be a voice for the solid, faithful core that is the majority of ELCA members, pastors, and congregations.

The Rev. Ken Kimball of Waterville, Iowa, reported the significant progress that has been made toward the goals Lutheran CORE set following the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

The Rev. Erma Wolf of Brandon, S.D., reported on the work of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. The 10-member Steering Committee

provides leadership for Lutheran CORE.

Lutheran CORE is focusing on defeating the proposed ELCA social statement on human sexuality and the recommendations to change ELCA teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships.

"The good news about the task force report is that it has woken some people up," said the Rev. Mark Chavez of Landisville, Pa., director of Lutheran CORE.

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Synod Assemblies responding to sexuality proposals

Synod Assemblies are meeting to consider their responses to a proposed ELCA social statement and to recommendations on changes in ELCA teaching and standards to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships.

About half of the ELCA's 65 synods will meet in May and another half in June. Four synods met in April.

Resolutions at Synod Assemblies are the way for ELCA members to respond to the sexuality proposals. Lutheran CORE has prepared three model resolutions to help synod assemblies address the proposals.

One resolution asks Voting Members of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to

support a rule of procedure that would require a two-thirds majority vote to change church teaching and policy to allow ministers to be in same-sex relationships.

The second resolution calls for the rejection of the proposed social statement. Instead, it asks that the ELCA continue to rely on its current teaching documents on sexuality.

The third resolution asks the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly "to reaffirm the ELCA's current standards for pastors and other rostered leaders" and to reject the proposed changes in ELCA teaching and standards which would permit pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships.

All three resolutions are available online at www.lutherancore.org. Resolutions must be proposed locally.

"We are strongly encouraging all synods to support the two-thirds majority requirement to change ministry standards," said the Rev. Paull Spring, chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. "Even those who may disagree with us on the social statement and ministry standards should be able to agree that it would be tragic for the ELCA if such controversial proposals were approved by only a few votes more than 50 percent."

"We are also encouraging synods to

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Lutheran CORE to organize as confessional movement

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Chavez reported that both Lutheran CORE and WordAlone Network leaders have been receiving many contacts from ELCA members in response to the proposals from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality to change church teaching and policy regarding marriage and homosexual behavior.

Lutheran CORE will have a significant presence at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly Aug. 17-23 in Minneapolis. Daily gatherings for voting members are planned. Three evening events are also planned during the Churchwide Assembly for voting members and others attending the assembly.

Lutheran CORE is seeking volunteers to assist with efforts at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Each ELCA congregation is able to send a congregational observer to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Individuals may also register as visitors.

Lutheran CORE has prepared three model resolutions for synod assemblies. One resolution asks Voting Members of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to support a rule of procedure that would require a two-thirds majority vote to change standards for pastors and other rostered leaders. The other resolutions call for the rejection of the sexuality proposals and the affirmation of current teaching and policy.

The Rev. Mark Braaten of Tyler, Texas, reported that Lutheran CORE will have tables at about 40 synod assemblies thanks to local volunteers.

The Rev. Paull Spring of State

College, Pa., chair of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, reported that a group of Lutheran theologians will be gathering April 29 in Phoenix to draft a formal response to the ELCA sexuality proposals.

Treasurer Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., reported the strong financial support Lutheran CORE has been receiving from individuals and congregations. Sixty percent of donations come from ELCA congregations, the remainder from individuals. The state providing the most support is California.

Schwarz also reported that there will be a need for significant financial support to help with Lutheran CORE's plans for the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and beyond.

Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, also outlined ways that Lutheran CORE will be different following the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. "We will have selective participation in the ELCA, less emphasis on reform. We will be more organized with staff and individual members and member congregations," he said.

Spring explained that Lutheran CORE "plans to organize as an 'awakening movement' within the ELCA — helping congregations to live out the ELCA's Confession of Faith."

Lutheran CORE plans to be a confessional movement within the ELCA, to provide an alternative for churchly fellowship for ELCA members and congregations, taking on functions similar to that of an ELCA synod.

Spring noted that some of the

partner reform movements that comprise Lutheran CORE would like to leave the ELCA, but Lutheran CORE hopes to be able to continue within the ELCA and to help others to find a way to stay in the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE will hold a Convocation Sept. 25-26 in Fishers, Ind. The Convocation will respond to the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, celebrate a future shared ministry and mission, and adopt a constitution for Lutheran CORE.

Interested pastors and lay people are encouraged to attend the Lutheran CORE Convocation. Registration information is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

ELCA bishops support two-thirds majority rule for sexuality proposals

ELCA synod bishops overwhelmingly support a two-thirds vote for proposed changes to ELCA teaching and standards which would allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships.

The bishops voted 44-14 in support of a two-thirds majority in a straw poll during their March 5-10 Conference of Bishops meeting.

The bishops' vote was made public at the March 27-30 ELCA Church Council meeting after the bishops' "strong majority" vote was reported to the Church Council. Because the bishops' vote was during a closed session, the ELCA had not previously released the information.

Lutheran Forum offers resources on sexuality proposals

The theological journal *Lutheran Forum* is offering a collection of commentaries on the ELCA sexuality proposals at www.lutheranforum.org.

Major Lutheran scholars, Dr. Robert Benne, the Rev. Dr. Carl Braaten, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Hinlicky, have reviews of the proposed social statement and ministry policy recommendations posted at *Lutheran Forum Online*.

The statement of the three members of the ELCA sexuality task force who

dissented from the sexuality proposals was first posted at *Lutheran Forum*.

The Rev. Dr. Sarah Wilson, *Lutheran Forum* editor, has written several essays on the proposals including: "Repentance is Part of the Gospel;" "Hoisted on the Trust Petard;" "Spiritual Gifts and Hard Choices;" "The Law, the Neighbor, and the Self;" "The Elephant in the Room: Divorce;" "How This is Not like the Ordination of Women," "The Flaws in the Celibacy Argument," and "The Enthusiasm Clause."

The Rev. Paul Sauer, associate editor, has written "The 'Church Problem' of the Sexuality Statement."

The Rev. Amy C. Schiffrin has written "Delight, Design and Destiny: Toward a Doxological Ethics of Sexuality."

The most recent post to the site is a response by Hinlicky to a statement by ELCA "teaching theologians" who support the proposal to change ELCA standards for pastors and other rostered leaders.

Synod Assembly actions are online

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stand firm on biblical and traditional standards on marriage and homosexual behavior," said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod. "The ELCA currently has good statements on sexuality through the 1996 *Message on Sexuality* and the social statements

of the LCA and ALC. Replacing those good statements with one that is poorly written and very controversial would be a terrible mistake." The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Lutheran Church in America (LCA) were two of the church bodies that merged to form the ELCA.

"The proposals for changes in ministry standards depart from the clear teaching of Scripture. They must be defeated," Spring said.

Lutheran CORE has arranged to have information tables at about 40 synod assemblies. Resources on the ELCA sexuality proposals and information about Lutheran CORE will be available at the tables.

Lutheran CORE has also updated its Question and Answer resource to directly address the proposals which will be considered by the Churchwide Assembly. It is available online.

You can follow the actions of the 2009 ELCA synod assemblies online at www.lutherancore.org.

Please support Lutheran CORE

Lutheran CORE is planning extensive ministry leading up to and during the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and beyond.

We are counting on those who remain committed to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of the Church's proclamation, faith, and life to continue to support Lutheran CORE as ELCA members must respond to those who are asking the church to change its teaching and policy on marriage and human sexuality.

You may give online at www.lutherancore.org or send gifts to:

Lutheran CORE
2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Please make checks payable to the WordAlone Network and indicate that your gift is for Lutheran CORE on the memo line.

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Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE -
Coalition for Reform

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

www.lutherancore.org

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Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

An outsider's perspective on the ELCA sexuality statement

“Traveling in a Strange Land” is the title of a fascinating review of the proposed ELCA social statement on human sexuality by the Rev. Peter Speckhard, associate editor of *Forum Letter*.

The article by Speckhard, a pastor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, was published in the April issue of *Forum Letter*. It is reprinted online at www.alpb.org/forum under “Selected Re-Prints.”

Following are some excerpts:

- “An outsider’s perspective might well prove valuable to any discussion, but an outsider’s attitude likely will not. . . . The editor asked me to write this piece on the proposed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social statement on sexuality with the idea that a view from the outside might be more helpful than yet another argument from the inside. As a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I disagree with aspects of the ELCA statement, of course, but my purpose here is not to rehash familiar arguments. I hope that my admittedly severe criticism and debatably good humor will be received as one LCMS perspective offered on request, not attitude injected merely to be troublesome.”

- “The first thing I noticed reading the 33-page document called *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* was just how much of an outsider I really am to this discussion. For me, exploring this ELCA document was less like visiting Canada than it was like visiting India. For all we have in common, the LCMS and ELCA have grown apart so fast and furiously that my expedition into this study did not cover the familiar-with-a-twist

ground I expected; I found it almost entirely foreign territory (which is a shame).”

- “If beauty is truth and truth beauty, then surely it is not without doctrinal consequence that these 33 pages of prose are an aesthetic abomination. A student at Valparaiso University who turned this paper in for Christ College freshman seminar would receive it back the next day with a polite but firm, ‘Whatever this is, it will not do.’ (Trust me on this. I know.)”

- “The statement reads as though the committee had been assigned to write a 35-page paper but realized the night before it was due that they only had about eight pages of material. Most of it is filler—long sentences that ought to be short, useless paragraphs inserted seemingly out of nowhere, background information that goes without saying . . . and all manner of irrelevance and redundancy. The stylistic obesity exacerbates the general incoherence of the paper.”

- “The bloated prose serves the obvious revisionist agenda of the writers. It offers a sort of soothing rhetorical mood lighting, giving the appearance of reasonableness to statements that wouldn’t stand up to scrutiny in decent light.”

- “‘In Trust We Trust’ would not be an entirely unfair title for the statement. My nagging sense of foreignness became clear when I realized that everything was upside down. For the task force, trust is an end and not a means. Trust does not serve to build up our relationships with God and neighbor; those relationships exist to build up trust. Trust, not human sexuality, is the all-consuming subject of the statement.”

- “Trust is the act of willingly depending on something. You can’t willingly depend on trust. The practical upshot is that in this statement, marriage is not something defined by God that requires trust to function in a God-pleasing way. Rather, trust is required and given by God, and marriage is one socially constructed way of safeguarding it. It follows that we can define marriage or any other relationship however we want as long as we’re safeguarding trust.”

- “The whole paper also adopts a curious point of view. . . . It doesn’t sound like Lutherans discussing sexuality; it sounds like sociologists discussing Lutherans.”

- “The task force seems to have a vested interest in advocating for complexity, ambiguity, and general messiness. . . . Complexity is everywhere in this paper.”

- “They offer no concrete answers to any relevant questions. In all the situations and scenarios related to sexual behavior in which genuine guidance about right and wrong might be helpful, the task force only offers the general rule that trust is good and hurting people is bad.”

- “The 2009 Churchwide Assembly ought seriously to consider handing this paper back with a polite but firm, ‘Try again.’ Or not. In truth, the statement is simply too poorly done to be easily fixed. It would need to be drastically shorter, clearer, and less obviously on one side of the central issue if it were to be of any use at all in assisting the church to discern anything about sexuality or about itself. Maybe just voting it down, then thanking and dissolving the task force is the best solution.”

Assembly has no authority to change teaching on sexuality

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly does not have the authority to change biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality, the WordAlone Network said in a resolution approved at its annual convention.

The resolution was approved unanimously by those attending the convention April 26-27 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn. The WordAlone Network is one of the reform movements that are a part of Lutheran CORE.

The resolution expresses the Word-Alone Network's "grave concern that the Churchwide Assembly is being led to vote on matters over which it has no legitimate authority and calls for the assembly to refrain from voting on the task force documents."

The WordAlone Network Convention also voted to endorse a proposal from four prominent Lutheran theologians declaring that biblical teaching on marriage and family are a matter of *Status Confessionis* and to send the proposal to Lutheran CORE for consideration.

The proposal, presented to the convention by the Rev. Dr. James Nestingen, states that if the ELCA sexuality proposals are approved, ELCA leaders must be resisted and cannot be supported financially.

The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee will meet with the leaders of the WordAlone Network in July to discuss the proposal.

More information on the WordAlone Network Annual Convention is online at www.wordalone.org.

Following is the text of the resolution:

Usurped Authority

Whereas, God alone is the creator of all that exists, including the gifts of marriage and sexuality; and

Whereas, sinful human beings and institutions, including churches, have no authority to redefine that which God has made; and

Whereas, the Scriptures teach that marriage is a life-long bond of faithfulness between one man and one woman and the context for which sexual intercourse is reserved (1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:16-19); and

Whereas, Christian churches are called to submit to the authority of God's Word over all matters of faith and life; and

Whereas, Christian churches have no authority to vote on matters governed by Divine Law so as to encourage and teach sinful human beings "to do what is right in their own eyes;" and

Whereas, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and "Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies," the documents from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality that the ELCA Church Council have sent to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly for consideration, explicitly reject the Scriptures' clear, consistent witness concerning marriage and sexuality; and

Whereas, the task force documents define "bound conscience" to mean something other than captive to the Word of God, and therefore ultimately to mean that Christians may do what is right in their own eyes, which has grave implications

for all matters of morality; and

Whereas, the task force documents propose a redefinition of sexual relationships that approves of sexual relationships outside the life-long marriage of one man and one woman; therefore

Be it resolved that the WordAlone Network, captive to the Word of God, express its grave concern that the Churchwide Assembly is being led to vote on matters over which it has no legitimate authority and calls for the assembly to refrain from voting on the task force documents; and

Be it further resolved that if the Churchwide Assembly insists on voting on the documents, the Word-Alone Network calls for the defeat of both documents and the affirmation of the Scriptures' clear, consistent norms for marriage and sexuality.

Carl Braaten to speak in Colorado

"Sex, Love, Marriage and Family: Swimming Against the Stream in Mainline Protestantism" is the title of a presentation by the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten set for 6:30 p.m. Sunday, May 17, at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Braaten is one of the most prominent Lutheran theologians in the United States. He is professor emeritus at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and co-founder of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology.

The lecture is free and open to the public. An offering will be received. For information call 719-5984397.

Presbyterians uphold traditional standards for ministers

Members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have voted to overrule a 2008 decision by its General Assembly to remove standards requiring its pastors and other ministers to abstain from sexual relationships other than the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman.

This is the third time in 12 years that local presbyteries — similar to ELCA synods — have rejected attempts to remove traditional standards for the sexual behavior of ministers from the denomination's constitution.

"It is time to accept the Church's decision. Since the 1970s the PC(USA) has heard, considered and responded to appeals to change her standard of sexual morality. Those who wish to change the Biblically-rooted standard have continually pressed the matter and required repeated votes that have had the same outcome each time," said Terry Schlossberg, who coordinated the Presbyterian Coalition efforts to retain the traditional standards.

"It is well past time to acknowledge that the Church today, as throughout her history, knows her mind on this matter, and that it is the mind of Christ. It is time to call for forbearance from those who constantly disturb the peace and unity of the church," Schlossberg added.

Advocates of same-sex relationships have been working to remove the church's rules prohibiting same-sex relationships for pastors. The 2008 proposal would have allowed each local governing body to determine behavior standards for its ministers.

Presbyteries also rejected attempts to change ministrystandards127-46 (73

percent) in 2001-2002 and by a two-thirds majority 114-57 in 1997-1998.

Voting on the 2008 proposal is still ongoing, but a majority of the PC(USA)'s 173 presbyteries have already voted to reject the change. A majority of presbyteries must ratify amendments to the denomination's constitution approved by the General Assembly — a body similar to an ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The General Assembly had voted June 27, 2008, to remove the clause from the denomination's constitution that states: "Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."

The vote by the local presbyteries overrules the General Assembly and keeps the constitutional standards.

Schlossberg invoked the words of Martin Luther in urging Presbyterians to remain steadfast in support of biblical standards for sexuality.

"A faithful witness and ministry in the areas of sexual morality is a distinct part of the Church's calling in our day. We urge the churches of the PC(USA), in looking to the future, to recall these words of Reformer Martin Luther:

"If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that one point."

"The PC(USA) has just taken its stand with the message of Scripture where it is most fiercely contested today: in its call to repentance and newness of life in the areas of sexuality and marriage," she said.

Methodist pastors may not preside at same-sex unions

United Methodist pastors may not perform same-sex marriages, even in states where such unions are legal or where the ceremonies are endorsed by a regional church body, the church's Judicial Council ruled April 27.

"An annual conference may not legally negate, ignore or violate provisions of the (Book of) Discipline with which they disagree, even when the disagreements are based on conscientious objections to the provisions," the council ruled. An annual conference is similar to an ELCA synod.

"Church law can only be made by the General Conference and cannot be achieved through piecemeal resolutions adopted in an annual conference session" the council said.

It's Not About Homosexuality — Not Really

By **Paul R. Hinlicky**

*Tice Professor in Lutheran Studies
Roanoke College - Salem, Virginia*

It is not only, or perhaps even primarily, about homosexuality. My whimsical lament “I Think I Want a Divorce” got quite an echo in “this church.” Apparently, the bone-deep disenchantment articulated in the piece has been building up among theologically serious Christians in the ELCA for many reasons for a long time. Slowly we are waking up to reality. The truth is that Luther is being overshadowed by Zwingli, so to say; plainly put, homosexuality is being used as a wedge issue by the religious Left. This wedge works for several reasons.

First, homosexuals form a vulnerable sexual minority that has suffered from ignorance and the soft persecution of social stigmatization. If we have a shred of human decency, not to say Christian love, our hearts go out to these underdogs.

Second, pastors especially have learned in the confessional of the struggles, the loneliness, and the pain of homosexual persons, and their hearts ache for them.

Third, Christians who are gay or lesbian ask for the same rite of marriage as offered to heterosexuals, recognizing their attempt to live in a relation of lifelong mutual commitment, and holding them publicly accountable to it. What decent soul would refuse? Only ignorance, it seems, which thinks that this disorder is a matter of choice, or bigotry, which has not worked through a crude emotional revulsion at a sexual attraction opposite one's own, would say No.

So it seems. For just such reasons I freely confess how uncomfortable it makes me to have to take a stand here. I am being wedged right where it hurts.

And if you too, dear fellow pastor, think in this way I have just described, I've got news for you. You are being bamboozled. This issue, constructed this way, has been forced upon us by the religious Left. They, not homosexual persons, are our opponents in this controversy. And what seems to be the case is not really the case. In fact, we are being asked

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transformation.”*

by them to act in a profoundly divisive and unpastoral way on what is essentially a burning question of pastoral care — that is, on a matter that pastors ought to be deliberating and deciding — had not the ELCA at its formation abolished the ministerium and turned theology over to selectively appointed commissions, sure to do the bidding of those who appoint them.

Now the chickens come home to roost. If the ELCA does what the present recommendations suggest in August, it signals the theological end of “this church” and therewith the very possibility of meaningful pastoral practice and care, if by “pastoral” we mean applying the wisdom from the Bible to the life of

sheep for whom the Shepherd died by those called to co-shepherd with and under Him as pastors.

Now let's take a closer look and see. Chapters 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America contain its confession of faith and a further statement on the nature of the church. You can download the text from the ELCA website and read it for yourself. I quote from this text in italics and then compare and contrast, item by item.

2.01. This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the church in which I was ordained, in the church in which I will worship after August, this bold confession and public praise of the Triune God is the free, joyful, and unanimous act of those assembled by the gospel. But in “this church,” confessing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has already become an increasingly begrudged option. With the adoption of the new hymnal — a project that was never subjected to doctrinal review — unconscionable and unjustified revisions in the language of the creeds, the Psalms, and hymn texts were made. You can bet that, given the ELCA's inclusiveness policies, that if the Social Statement, including Position Number Four, is adopted, it will be open season on the gospel's name of God. Why?

The Fourth Position recognizes as legitimate the teaching that homosexuality is a good creation of God, that such relationships ought to be blessed with the blessing of God, and that persons in such relationships should be admitted to official

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ministries. If we permit that teaching and still read the Bible with a straight face, or claim to be trinitarians in claiming that the Scriptures speak in this way of God, then we are also saying that anything in the Bible can be reread and rewritten to say whatever anyone wants it to say — and then solemnly pronounced a legitimate option. Chief among the things the religious Left wants to say is that we construct names for God out of our own experience. That “enthusiasm” is the deeper reason why the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions have to be robbed of their formative power in theology and neutralized in the life of “this church.” Homosexuality represents a perfect opportunity.

2.02.b. The proclamation of God’s message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The church which bears the name of Luther bears it truthfully when it teaches, as Luther taught, that “the true people of God are those who bring to bear the judgment of the cross on themselves.” One would never know from the Social Statement that the Bible contains a sharp word of judgment based upon God’s revealed Law protecting marriage and the family against any and all sins in the arena of sexuality, chiefly heterosexual sins like fornication, adultery, and divorce, but also homosexual relations. Far from pastoral care speaking God’s Word of judgment and mercy, the Social Statement offers nothing but a so-called “ethics of responsibility” in

which consenting adults can do as they please so long as they don’t hurt anyone else. That’s understandable, perhaps, as a very minimal standard in secular, liberal society, but it is a cataclysmic fall from New Testament exhortation, the preaching of the prophets and the law of Moses, which our Lord does not slacken but rather radicalizes. You can bet that the progression towards antinomianism in the ELCA will proceed apace with the adoption of this Social Statement, just as the religious Left wants a church in which the Ten Commandments, let

“The Social Statement does not shrink from attacking canonical Scripture and Luther’s belief that God speaks through the plain sense of the canonical text.”

alone Luther’s exposition of them, disappears so that there is no ethical tension at all between being a good secular liberal and being a true Christian. Once again, homosexuality presents the perfect occasion for a much grander transformation.

2.02.c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God’s Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God’s revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

The Social Statement does not shrink from attacking canonical Scripture and Luther’s belief that God speaks through the plain sense of the canonical text. It disowns this “sola scriptura” teaching, just as the religious Left regularly attacks as “fundamentalism” any position serious about the Bible’s teaching as binding doctrine normative for the life of the church. But the new enthusiasts think that when the ELCA is gathered in assembly, God’s Spirit speaks to them to create and sustain a new Christianity that overrules the written Word of God.

2.03. This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

But the Social Statement does not take the notable texts of Genesis 1:26-28 and our Lord’s invocation of this text in Mark 10:2-12 as the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life in the arena of sex, marriage and family life; it rather ignores their weight and force entirely. The reason is obvious: homosexuality would not be able to serve as the pretext for a brand new “Christianity,” if we took up such weighty texts. I ask: as a matter of integrity, for heaven’s sake, what does the name “Lutheran” mean theologically if not that we want to belong to a church that is pleased and delighted to receive the Scriptures, for which theology is the work of making their teaching alive and instructive for us today — not doing intellectual somersaults to avoid the plain sense meaning of Scripture and replace it with something manifestly the opposite of what it teaches? If this Social Statement is adopted as it

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stands the next resolution I intend to submit is that the ELCA delete the words “evangelical” and “Lutheran” from its name.

2.05. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

But the Social Statement utterly ignores the Reformation-era controversies regarding monastic vows and the theology of marriage that the Reformers developed out of the Holy Scriptures and professed in the Augsburg Confession in the light of the gospel. One of the most important social consequences of the Reformation gospel is therefore ignored as an embarrassment and left behind as an impediment to the sexual liberation intended for us by the religious Left. I am just waiting for some fool to argue that, as Luther insisted against monastic vows that sexual desire implanted by God cannot be denied, so also homosexual desire cannot be denied. I am just waiting, as I said, for some fool to try that silly piece of reasoning. It overlooks the central issue in contention in this controversy, whether God has created and blessed homosexual desire, or whether such desire is a deformation of God’s good creation. Well, let’s be merciful. Cogent reasoning has never been the strength of the religious Left, which looks instead for emotional symbols to serve as pretexts to fool people.

3.01. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under his rule and authority.

One looks in vain for this Spirit of Jesus Christ in these documents, let alone a procedure which would reflect the lordship of Christ in any meaningful way. On the contrary, the Social Statement never even thinks to say that the church (even “this church”) does not belong to me or to you or even to all of us together, but to Jesus Christ: “with His own blood he bought her and for her life He died.” Instead, the Social Statement and the processes informing it proceed as if the church belongs to us, so that we can turn it into whatever we want, as supposedly led by the

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mocked in action.”*

“Spirit” apart from the external word and news of the gospel of Christ’s redeeming lordship as authoritatively witnessed to in Scripture. The rule of Christ and His authority in His church are thus mocked in action, reduced to nothing but pious window-dressing for moving “this church” in the way its elite in the religious Left want it to go, not according to the will of its one and only Lord, whom we are to hear and obey in life and in death.

3.02. The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations. This church, therefore, derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inherent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful. In length, it acknowledges itself to be in the historic continuity of the communion of saints; in breadth, it expresses the fellowship of believers and congregations in our day.

But members of the commission who drafted the Social Statement were instructed not to represent their own congregations, nor to think their own theological thoughts, nor to argue for the truth that binds us together in love on the basis of canon, creed, and confession. All this was disallowed and instead they were instructed to seek institutional consensus. We have this on the express witness of task force member Marit Trelstad in her posted comments on this website in response to the statement of the three task force members behind Dissenting Position #1. Likewise, at the assembly in August, the delegates will be instructed that they are not representatives of their congregations and synods but constitute some unique and historic expression of God’s will for these sacred seven days in which they will be led by the Spirit to throw historic continuity with the church through the ages out the window. Never were the task force members asked, nor will the assembly delegates be asked, to preserve, protect, and defend the broader fellowship of the faithful.

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What we have just seen, point by point, in reviewing the present proposals vis-à-vis the ELCA's own confession of faith and ecclesiology, is that what is at stake in this vote in August is not the pastoral treatment of homosexuality, but a theological coup d'état by the religious Left. Homosexuality is just the catalyst of a profounder division that already runs through "this church."

If anything, homosexuality is being used as a wedge issue by the theological Left. Our problem in turn is not so much with a decent and Christian acceptance in the church of homosexual persons, like all the rest of us, with concrete issues, with brokenness, in penitence and humility. The real issue is the theological makeover of Lutheranism that is occurring in the process: the allergy to the divine name of the God of the gospel, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the liturgical life of "this church"; the open attack on the authority of the canonical Scripture as the source and norm of faith and life; the abandonment of the historical mission of the Lutheran confessional movement to advocate and advance the reform of the Western Church (i.e. Roman Catholicism) and to unify other Protestants in this cause; the shift towards "enthusiasm" in theology under the pretext of "contextual" exegesis; the snide vilification of the Great Tradition as well as of the Lutheran heritage; the abandonment of evangelical mission overseas to call to faith in Jesus Christ, as well as its minimizing at home . . .

I could go on, sadly, for pages. You get the picture. Behind all of this must we not see the loss of confidence in Jesus Christ as given to us in the Holy Scripture in the Holy

Church by the Holy Spirit as our identity and mission in the world? In its place, must we not see the rhetoric of Lutheranism being dishonestly employed to pursue a kind of Christianity, which honestly goes by the historical name of liberal Protestantism? I wish such revisionists of the theological Left would have the spiritual integrity and intellectual honesty to recognize their lineage in Zwingli rather than in Luther and move on, whether to the high-church Episcopal Church or the low-church UCC, both of them hemorrhaging members even faster than the ELCA. But they won't. They want the property and name of the ELCA, and don't seem to care what damage they do to the rest of us in the process.

*“These proposals
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We have just looked and seen. These proposals are a pretext for the systematic and massive dismantling of the ELCA's doctrinal commitments to Scripture, creed, and confession in order to advance the agenda of the religious Left. It won't stop with blessing homosexuality. To fail to see this is to stick one's head in the sand, in the deluded hope of saving the ELCA institutionally, while the heart and soul of "this church" in the Word of God and

Luther's doctrine is being sacrificed on the pretext of compassion for homosexuals. In fact, homosexuals are being used by the religious Left, among other things in not being challenged by genuine pastoral care to acknowledge with the rest of us their own specific form of brokenness.

From the ruins that may follow after August, we should want to belong to a church in which those trained in Lutheran and ecumenical theology, and who have earned the pastoral trust of their congregations, will deliberate theological issues on the basis of canon, creed, and confession as the norms by which faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His gospel are discerned. What we desperately need in our church of the Reformation, "without emperor or pope," is the re-establishment of a ministerium pledged to our binding confessions, since these persons bear the office and evangelical authority to judge questions of doctrine. We need as well the confirmation of the people of God, representing congregations that are the local form of the church, in a lay synod of people who know that they are not to heed the voice of a stranger but only that of the Good Shepherd.

Out of this crisis foisted upon us by the religious Left, we who are faithful to God's Word and Luther's doctrine need to abolish the broken, manipulated, expensive, demoralizing governance which has brought the ELCA, half-a-million members less in its twenty brief years, to this brink of irreparable damage, and to replace it with a serious church of Lutheran conviction in but not of this society in service to the world and the ecumenical Church.

This essay is reprinted from Lutheran Forum - www.lutheranforum.org.