

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

October 2009

Lutheran CORE organizes as free-standing synod, begins work toward reconfiguration of Lutheranism

More than 1,200 Lutherans from throughout the United States and Canada voted Saturday, Sept. 26, to create “a free-standing synod for all faithful Lutherans” and to work with “other compatible churchly organizations leading toward a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism.”

“We will be free-standing, not a part of the structure of the ELCA. For us the ELCA churchwide expression has fallen into heresy as a result of the decisions that were made in Minneapolis,” the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., told the Lutheran CORE Convocation in suburban Indianapolis.

“Lutheran CORE will be a free-standing synod for all faithful Lutherans. And we will take on most of the functions that characterize a synod — pastoral care for congregations and pastors, global missions, the formation of new congregations, providing resources for congregational ministry, support for a life in community, theological education, with a leadership structure that will be accountable and capable of decision-making. We will work sensitively on the candidacy and calling processes,” said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, and chair of Lutheran CORE.

The Convocation — which included people from 41 states, Washington, D.C., and three Canadian provinces and was roughly three-quarters lay members

— adopted a constitution that changed Lutheran CORE from a Coalition for Reform to a Coalition for Renewal. This action is more than a name change. It is a change in focus from trying to reform the ELCA to a renewing organization and an alternate church fellowship for Lutherans.

The Convocation also authorized the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee “to initiate conversations among the congregations and reform movements in Lutheran CORE and other compatible churchly organizations leading toward a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism.” A report and recommendations will be brought to Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio.

“This could be one of the biggest events in Lutheran history in contemporary time,” said the Rev. Jaynan Clark of Spokane, Wash., president of the WordAlone Network, one of the reform movements that comprise Lutheran CORE.

The Convocation became even more significant when the ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted in August to change ELCA teaching and practice to affirm same-sex relationships and to allow pastors to be in those relationships in spite of the Bible’s teaching on marriage and homosexual behavior.

Convocation participants gathered at the foot of a large cross inside Holy Spirit Parish at Geist in Fishers, Ind.

Organizers had to move the Convocation to the Catholic church from Christ the Savior Lutheran Church because of the large attendance. Even with the larger space, organizers were forced to close registration Sept. 14 due to space limitations.

“We are living in a period of historic opportunity for the Church in North America. I believe it is abundantly clear that God is reforming the churches of the Reformation,” said Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee. “The question for us is not so much whether we ought to re-vision Lutheranism in North America, but rather how will we respond to this clear invitation to re-vision Lutheranism in North America.

“We are forming a churchly community because our prior churchly community has walked away from the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church,” Schwarz said.

The Rev. Kenneth Sauer of Columbus, Ohio, opened the Convocation by describing the situation facing members of the ELCA. “We now have two churches within one organizational structure. One church emphasized Bible and Theology, the other culture and experience. There are deep divisions over the fundamental meaning of the Gospel, the authority of Scripture, and the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit.

Continued on Page 2

1,200 gather in Indianapolis for Lutheran CORE Convocation

Continued from Page 1

The division reaches into congregations, synods, and seminaries and agencies. Only the churchwide organization seems to be of one mind.”

“We are here to support one another. . . . Elijah needed to know that there were 7,000 in Israel that did not bow the knee to Baal, and we need to know that there are millions of faithful Lutheran Christians in this land who with us want desperately to know how to be faithful in the midst of a church we love which is falling apart,” said Sauer, the retired bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod and former chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops.

The Convocation also heard from leaders of the African immigrant and Hispanic churches in the ELCA. Both communities have been deeply hurt by the ELCA’s actions. Lutheran CORE is committed to support financially the ethnic and other ministries that have taken stands of conscience regarding the ELCA Churchwide Assembly decisions and to help others to do so as well.

“The communion of African Lutheran Churches across North America is in full participation in this Convocation with deep gratitude to God,” said Challa Baro, evangelist for an Ethiopian immigrant congregation in Minneapolis.

“As far as we are concerned our choice is very clear: We have to either give up our evangelical and prophetic ministry in our society and silently die as a denomination or rise to the task of realigning ourselves with churches, leaders and communities of similar conviction and work shoulder-to-shoulder with them,” Baro said.

“My friends, in the middle of these uncertainties, we are glad to see that

God is using these times of darkness to manifest the light. God is using this time as a time when we, as men and women of God, are called to define ourselves by taking a stand on the basis of our beliefs, on the basis of our convictions, on the basis of our conscience bound to the Word of God,” said the Rev. Eddy Perez, pastor of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla.

“My advice to the ELCA members is this: the time for hesitation is now over. God is demanding a response from us. Through the prophet Elijah, God keeps saying to the members of the ELCA congregations: ‘How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him,’” Perez said.

“We are not dividing the church. The church is already divided. We’re just mopping up what the church did,” said the Rev. Paul Ullring, a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

Ullring, pastor of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, outlined steps that individuals and congregations can take as they move into the future.

“We’ve spent all our ELCA years and before, struggling and working against what has now happened. It’s over; it’s done. We don’t have to spend ourselves there anymore,” he said.

“Let’s take that energy, that passion and transfer it to a future that we don’t have clearly, but a future that surely is better than what we’ve been messing with. And let’s be gracious and kind, known for our positive spirit and hope. Let’s be known for what we believe, not what we’re against anymore. Let’s be faithful to the Gospel, the Word of God, and the Lord Jesus.”

“Let us stand together, as we see the future of Lutheranism change for the good. It’s worth it. Jesus calls us to do it. He is not defeated or set aside by any decision or action. We have the opportunity to make an eternal difference,” Ullring said. “God has given us this new freedom and opportunity. Let us rise in hope and forgiveness, to put aside the past and find the future we have been called to for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of those he loves and wants.”

“Those who stand against us are not our enemies. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We owe it to them and to those faithful ones who remain within the ELCA to be true to our convictions but gracious in our dealings with them,” Spring said.

Dr. Robert Benne expressed the thoughts of many at the Convocation: “I haven’t been so excited about church life beyond the local parish for a long time. The camaraderie, the singing, the hospitality, the powerful talks, the affirmation of biblical and confessional truth, the focus on the future — all were expressed in almost overwhelming portions. The 1,200 souls present were full of life and determination.

“For the first time in 25 years, I felt liberation from the arduous struggle for the soul of the ELCA and freedom for the shaping of a future church life in which I could joyously participate. I had hoped for such a constructive turning toward the future at Fishers and my expectations were more than fulfilled,” said Benne, the director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

DVDs of the Convocation are available from Lutheran CORE. The texts of many of the speeches are available at www.lutherancore.org.

Reform movements are organizing throughout the U.S.

Lutheran CORE has received an overwhelming response to its organization as a free-standing synod. As a Coalition for Renewal, congregations, individual lay persons, pastors, synods, and other reform movements may join Lutheran CORE whether or not they choose to remain affiliated with the ELCA.

Groups of individuals, pastors, and congregations have been meeting throughout the United States in recent weeks to find ways to remain faithful, to work together, and to have a unified response to the biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA. Some of those groups have formally organized as reform movements in Lutheran CORE.

The actions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to change ELCA teaching and practice on marriage and sexuality and to allow pastors to be in committed same-sex relationships have opened the eyes of many people to the biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA.

New reform groups have organized in Maryland, Northeastern Minnesota,

South Carolina, South-Central Illinois, Southwestern Pennsylvania, and Texas.

Congregations are deciding to affiliate with Lutheran CORE regardless of whether or not they choose to remain in the ELCA.

Lutheran CORE leaders encourage people to form local reform groups in their area if there isn't an organized group. Please send information about group meetings or regional meetings to info@lutherancore.org so that they can be included on the meeting calendar at www.lutherancore.org.

Lutheran CORE's Convocation voted "to initiate conversations among the congregations and reform movements in Lutheran CORE and other compatible churchly organizations leading toward a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism."

Lutheran CORE leaders are in conversation with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) and other compatible

churchly organizations in working toward that goal.

The leadership of the WordAlone Network has drafted a proposal to create a district within LCMC. "This proposal to create an LCMC Central District is intended not to compete with but to complement and support the decision-making process of Lutheran CORE, and its transition from a 'Coalition for Reform' to a 'Coalition for Renewal.' In this period of transition and development, the LCMC Central District could serve Lutheran CORE in various capacities," the proposal states.

"Reconfiguration moves beyond the debate over leaving versus staying in the ELCA," said Ryan Schwarz, a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

"Both for those who leave and those who stay, Lutheran CORE is committed to helping them find ways to work together in common ministry, for the sake of a united and powerful proclamation of the Gospel," he said.

'Bound to Confess and Resist' is theological conference theme

"Bound to Confess and Resist" is the theme of the WordAlone Network Theological Conference Nov. 15-17 at Roseville Lutheran Church in the St. Paul, Minn., suburb of Roseville.

The theological conference will feature members of the WordAlone Network's Theological Advisory Board who will address the current State of Confession in three presentations: "*Status Confessionis* — Its History and Use;" "It is neither safe nor right to go against conscience" and "The Necessity of Resistance to the ELCA."

Theologians who will be leading the

conference include: Mark Granquist, Hans Hillerbrand, James Nestingen, Steven Paulson, Hans Schwarz, and Larry Yoder.

"At critical times in the history of the Christian church believers have found it necessary to declare that they are in a state of confession, *status confessionis*, against church authorities. The actions and decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 2009 have sparked one of those times. While on the surface it appears as though the ELCA is divided over sexual matters, in fact the deep division is over the authority of God's Word. The ELCA

has placed itself in authority over God's Word in Scripture," the conference brochure explains.

There will be opportunities for small group discussion of the presentations. Participants can also choose from a variety of workshops that will include ways that individuals and congregations can oppose the path chosen by the ELCA and confess the truth in concert with other Lutherans in North America.

Laypersons and pastors are welcome to attend this significant and timely conference. Registration information is available at www.wordalone.org.

Working groups shaping Lutheran CORE freestanding synod and setting stage for the ‘reconfiguration of Lutheranism’

Lutheran CORE adopted a constitution at its Convocation Sept. 28 marking its beginning as a free-standing synod. The constitution explains that “Lutheran CORE shall engage in mission as:

- ✚ A confessional and confessing movement for all Lutherans who identify with the purposes of Lutheran CORE.
- ✚ A churchly community, grounded in Word and Sacrament, and rooted in the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions.
- ✚ A free-standing synod, taking on as needed those ministries that synods typically carry out, apart from a direct relationship with another Lutheran church body.
- ✚ A coalition of congregations, individual lay persons, pastors, synods and other reform movements.

Lutheran CORE is forming working groups that will direct its life as a free-standing synod and provide leadership in working toward “a reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America.”

Individuals are welcome to volunteer for service on these working groups or to nominate others for this important work. Information on how to nominate someone is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

Here are the working groups that will be directing the life of Lutheran CORE and some of their tasks:

✚ **Vision and Planning:** Explore possibilities for the future of Lutheran CORE including relationships with other reform movements. Cooperate with reform movements in other church bodies. Develop plans and

recommendations regarding a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism. Review constitution.

✚ **Theological Education:** Sponsor theological conferences on Scripture, theology, and the Lutheran Confessions. Develop a plan for continuing education for pastors, lay ministers, and lay people. Consider a plan for mentoring seminarians and newly ordained pastors. Utilize the Institute for Lutheran Theology. Explore possibility of a deepening relationship with an already-existing seminary.

✚ **Synodical Consultation:** Develop a memorandum of understanding with supportive bishops and synods on the calling process, the candidacy process, and disciplinary procedures. Utilize the contribution of “Clergy Connect,” the WordAlone calling process. Explore with supportive synods ways to share ministry resources. Involve retired bishops in this process.

✚ **Organization:** Develop a budget for 2010 and a budget proposal for 2011. Prepare a plan for fund raising for individuals, reform movements, and congregations. Provide nominations for officers, Steering Committee, Advisory Council, and Committee on Appeals. Develop a plan for staffing needs and office location. Assemble a roster of membership. Foster relationships with other reform movements. Develop a process for the Committee on Appeals. Plan for the 2010 Convocation.

✚ **Mission and Benevolence:** Plan for the formation of new congregations and satellite ministries. Support missionary agencies like the World Mission Prayer League. Target selected global missionaries engaged in pioneer evangelism (within and outside the ELCA) and

develop plans for their support. Plan for ways to support immigrant African, Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic congregations. Assemble list of options for financial support for benevolence, including Lutheran CORE, and worthy ministries inside and outside of ELCA.

✚ **Congregational Life and Pastoral Support:** Develop plan for pastoral care for pastors, lay ministers, and congregations. Provide resources for evangelism. Explore possibilities for pastoral and congregational clusters. Assemble a list of resources for congregational ministry in Christian education, stewardship, youth ministry, etc.

✚ **Ecumenical, Lutheran and International Relationships:** Maintain contact with Lutheran Churches and communities outside North America. Explore possibilities for partnerships between Lutheran CORE and other Lutheran church bodies. Consider relationship with ecumenical agencies — American and international.

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

Published monthly by

Lutheran CORE
Lutheran Coalition for Renewal

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112

www.lutherancore.org

Rev. Dr. David J. Baer, editor

editor@lutherancore.org

Please copy and share
this newsletter widely.

Resources to help individuals and congregations move forward

“What Do We Do Now?” is a resource that has been prepared by Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) to help individuals and congregations make decisions about the best way to move forward given the Biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA.

It includes the following documents:

✚ **What Can We Do When We Get Home?** A narrative description of options and questions facing ELCA congregations and suggestions for ways to move forward.

✚ **What You Can Do - Organizational & Legal Matters for Congregations.** Suggestions on organizational and legal matters to help congregations have the ability to discern their future course in their relationships with the ELCA.

✚ **Possible Amendments to Congregation’s Constitution.** Amendments addressing significant issues resulting from the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly which could be included in a congregation’s constitution or bylaws.

✚ **What Might We Do? What Should We Do?** Three checklists of things to do based on different congregational situations: 1. For those who choose to remain in the ELCA; 2. For those who would like more time to discern; and 3. For those who want to sever ties with the ELCA now.

“It is important that those who want to uphold the authority of Scripture find ways to work together. We need each other. We want to work together to do what will be best for all of us and for

the continuation of faithful Christian teaching in our congregations. Each congregation and individual must prayerfully discern the best way to be faithful.

“Please pray for all those in ELCA congregations forced by the assembly’s actions to make difficult decisions. Please pray for the leadership of Lutheran CORE and of the ELCA. And please seek ways to work together with others to uphold the authority of God’s Word for the faith and life of the church,” the document states.

The document is available online at www.lutherancore.org. It also includes contact information the members of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee who may be contacted for answers to questions or for assistance.

Support ethnic congregations that have stood on Scripture

Some of the most faithful and courageous stands on the teaching of the Bible on marriage and sexuality and against the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly have been taken by individuals and congregations of African immigrants, Hispanics, and Asian Americans.

These congregations and pastors are often dependent upon support from the wider church and have received funding from the ELCA and from ELCA synods. Their courageous decisions to stand on Scripture and to break ties with the ELCA — including funding ties — have been significant statements of faith and confidence in God’s ability to provide for their needs.

The Lutheran CORE Convocation Sept. 26-27 committed Lutheran CORE “to support financially the ethnic and other ministries that have taken stands of

conscience regarding Churchwide Assembly decisions” and to “provide a vehicle for channeling contributions to these ministries.”

“We know, and accept the fact that our response will bring consequences,” said the Rev. Eddy Perez of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla. “Some of our Hispanic Pastors, for instance, who serve as Mission Developers, could be in jeopardy of losing their mission funding, compensation and even their buildings.”

“Our mission and ministries are very young and tender. Therefore they are in need of much care, attention and guidance. If we differ to offer this much needed moral and Biblical leadership our churches can easily slip into a state of emergency and loss of membership,” said Challa Baro, representing the African Lutheran Churches.

“We are humbled by the witness of these faithful and courageous Christians. We need to do all we can to help them continue their ministries,” said the Rev. Mark Chavez, director of Lutheran CORE. “Every penny of funds designated for these ministries will be forwarded to them.”

Contributions for these ministries may be sent to Lutheran CORE. Please indicate that your gift is for the ethnic ministries. You may also designate your funds for one of the specific congregations or ethnic groups.

Gifts to support these ministries or for the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE may be sent to:

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

Bishop Kenneth Sauer asks ‘What after Minneapolis?’

Following are excerpts from the opening address to the Lutheran CORE Convocation by Bishop Kenneth Sauer. His entire address is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

This gathering has been 20 years in the making. While many of us thought that the task of forming a new church entailed working through the differences of the LCA, the ALC, and the AELC, there were others who saw the opportunity for a radical new church body in which the role of the office of ministry of Word and Sacrament would be diminished, and the impact of multiculturalism, feminism, and flowering of the culture of the sixties would dominate. We were blithely optimistic.

An index of the history of the ELCA shows the most notations under the rubric of “sexuality.” And so it was. I don’t think we realized that, for the revisionist group, it was a matter of “justice,” meaning the rights of any who wanted to, to have their lifestyle endorsed and to be ordained. Ignored was the church’s teaching that ordination is a privilege, not a right. It was a political issue, and the strategy was to do what was necessary to win.

To the very end, the rest of us thought it was a theological and Biblical issue of being faithful and obedient to what the Church believed, taught, and confessed. The justice issues like civil rights protected by the state were not the issue.

There have been a blizzard of observations on “how we got here” — all of which are valuable. The conclusion of folks both in Goodsoil and in CORE is that we now have two churches within one organizational structure. One church emphasized Bible and Theology, the other culture and experience. There are deep divisions over the fundamental the meaning of

the Gospel, the authority of Scripture, and the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit. The division reaches into congregations, synods, and seminaries and agencies. Only the churchwide organization seems to be of one mind.

We have been subjected to pious calls to unity, spiced with Bible passages that have little connection to our problems. Appeals are made to orthodox to continue the Bible and Theological study which the Churchwide Assembly ignored in its actions. How hypocritical is that? The most recent plea is for “*Churchmanship*,” a call to acquiesce on the basis of not rocking the boat. True Churchpersonship would have been to declare these actions out-of-order because the changes constituted a revision of the church’s normative teaching on sexuality and are contrary to Scriptures and Lutheran teachings.

We are here to support one another. We are here to know that we are not *Elijahs* under some broom tree complaining to God that we alone are left to be faithful. Elijah needed to know that there were 7,000 in Israel that did not bow the knee to Baal, and we need to know that there are millions of faithful Lutheran Christians in this land who with us want desperately to know how to be faithful in the midst of a church we love which is falling apart.

The structures we put together are to enable Word and Sacrament and mission. . . . Does our present churchwide organization fulfill the tasks assigned to it or is there need for reform? Is reform possible? Members, pastors, congregations and teachers now must consult, think and pray their way to an answer.

There have been many voices all in agreement that what has happened is a catastrophe for the confessional

integrity of our church. But the voices are not unanimous in giving us advice whether the structure is reformable. Thus the question of whether to stay or go.

One thing I think is clear: Either choice can be a faithful one. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise!

This is the task before us. Some of us are sure that the facts are there so clearly that separation has already happened. Some of our finest leaders think the time has come for a realignment of Lutherans in North America.

Many congregations are wondering if they should wait to see what happens in the ELCA. Some among us think that congregations should stay in the ELCA, with love speak the truth to the power that now runs things, pray for the church and suffer.

It could be prudent to wait for a time to see how Churchwide implements the actions of the assembly, whether it seeks the largest amount of diversity or the largest amount of conformity.

It will give you strength and support to join with others in organizations like Lutheran CORE which can be done while remaining in the ELCA.

If the decision is to leave, it must not be done with anger and vengeance. It must be with sorrow and love for those who remain. And whatever new thing we do must meet the criteria for Church — a fellowship in Christ, provision for Word and Sacrament, and structures to make it happen that are free, creative, responsible and responsive.

Staying or leaving — are we ready to answer together? Are we ready to greet the vision to which we may be being led by the Spirit today?

Schwarz: 'God is reforming the churches of the Reformation'

Following are excerpts from Ryan Schwarz's address to the Lutheran CORE Convocation. His entire address is available at www.lutherancore.org.

In the midst of our sorrow, in the midst of our shock, in the midst of our grief, we are living in a period of historic opportunity for the Church in North America. I believe it is abundantly clear that God is reforming the churches of the Reformation. In every denomination, theological divisions over Scripture, Christian morality, and the uniqueness of Christ can be seen.

In each denomination, as in the ELCA, the dynamics are the same. Two competing and irreconcilable gospels coexist inside the same church body. But while these dynamics are consistent, the responses of the faithful are different. In each Reformation tradition, faithful Christians are creating their own future reality, with God's help, tailored to the particular circumstances of their communion.

The question for us is not so much whether we ought to re-vision Lutheranism in North America, but rather how will we respond to this clear invitation to re-vision Lutheranism in North America.

We will ask each of you to commit Lutheran CORE to begin a one-year process of discussion leading to a possible reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism. We do not enter into this process with preconceived notions of what the results will be. In fact, we urge each of you, as much as possible, to do the same — to enter with us into collective discernment of our common future, without established notions of what that future must look like.

Reconfiguration moves beyond the debate over leaving versus staying in

the ELCA. It is healthy to engage in that debate, and we learn from each other in doing it. But when all is said and done, the reality is as Bishop Sauer described it: many faithful congregations will leave the ELCA, and many faithful congregations will also stay in the ELCA. A reconfiguration mindset envisions ways to connect both groups for common ministry and common witness, over the long haul.

For those faithful congregations and individuals who discern a call to leave the ELCA, Lutheran CORE and our renewal partners are committed to helping them find a suitable long-term church body, whether those suitable bodies already exist or whether we must work with others to form something new.

For those faithful congregations and individuals who discern a call to stay and witness within the ELCA, Lutheran CORE and our renewal partners are committed to helping them carry out that witness with integrity. Many of these congregations will be looking for alternative assistance in call processes, alternative, faithful resources for worship and education, alternative pathways for faithful theological education and such. Lutheran CORE will seek to ensure that such alternative resources are available.

And both for those who leave and those who stay, Lutheran CORE is committed to helping them find ways to work together in common ministry, for the sake of a united and powerful proclamation of the Gospel.

We're also blessed to have many representatives here at Fishers from the ELCA's African national ministries and from its Hispanic congregations. These faithful brother and sisters have taken a clear stand against the actions of the Churchwide Assembly, at great risk to

themselves, it must be said. The ELCA has talked for years about prioritizing ethnic ministries, and yet it has just adopted teachings that make ethnic ministry profoundly more difficult. Might it be the case that a reconfigured North American Lutheranism will consider ethnic minorities to be truly equal partners in ministry, rather than what they so often appear to be — percentages to be increased so long as they accept our evolving teachings?

The process of reconfiguration ultimately has only one goal: to configure orthodox Lutherans in North America for maximum effectiveness in carrying out the mission of the church — the Great Commission — in faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

What form a reconfigured Lutheranism will take, we do not know for certain. Whether it will be a church body, a federation, a fellowship, or all of the above, these are questions for our collective discernment over the coming year. We can get there, we will get there, if we keep ourselves focused on the vision of what a reconfigured Lutheranism can be.

Envision, if you will, thousands or even millions of faithful Lutherans, confessing a common faith in concert with the whole Church catholic, collectively freed from the challenges of the recent past and focused, first and foremost, on making disciples for Jesus Christ. Envision a church that spans national boundaries and ethnicities by finding our unity in Christ rather than in quota systems. Envision congregations and individuals across this continent joining together, firmly placed at the center of Lutheranism and affirming a renewed commitment to the authority of Scripture as the source and norm of our faith and life.

Paull Spring: ‘A free-standing synod for all faithful Lutherans’

Following are excerpts from Bishop Paull Spring’s address to the Lutheran CORE Convocation. His entire address is available at www.lutherancore.org.

We are here at Fishers to re-form ourselves. Reformation is a good Lutheran word. The church must always be about reforming itself. We want to be part of the solution, with the help of the Holy Spirit. So Lutheran CORE will be re-forming itself — God willing — along the following lines:

✚ We will become more intentionally a confessional and confessing movement. A movement moves and is not static. Part of our movement will be back to the past, to Jesus and the great acts of our salvation; back to the past of 325 when the Nicene Creed was professed, back to the Reformation, that reforming movement within the whole Church, when the truth of the Word of God was reaffirmed in the midst of the Church catholic.

But as a movement, we want to look to the future as well. And we want to engage in the mission that God places before us in the present. We want to “make a good confession in the midst of many witnesses.”

✚ We will become a churchly community and fellowship. We will find our identity in the words of the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession. We want to be Church, God’s people and Christ’s body.

✚ We will be a free-standing synod. The word “synod” comes from two Greek words that mean either a “gathering” or “on the way together.” As individuals and as congregations some may remain members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for a time, but our relationship will be largely formal and external.

Others may well choose other institutional relationships within the Lutheran family.

Lutheran CORE will be a free-standing synod for all faithful Lutherans. And we will take on most of the functions that characterize a synod — pastoral care for congregations and pastors, global missions, the formation of new congregations, providing resources for congregational ministry, support for a life in community, theological education, with a leadership structure that will be accountable and capable of decision-making. We will work sensitively on the candidacy and calling processes, hopefully through sensitive conversations with supportive bishops and synods in the ELCA.

We will be free-standing, not a part of the structure of the ELCA. For us the ELCA churchwide expression has fallen into heresy, as a result of the decisions that were made in Minneapolis.

✚ We will serve as an umbrella for other reform movements. There are now ten of them as partners with us in Lutheran CORE. We hope for more.

✚ Lutheran CORE, therefore, will be a coalition, an association, an alternative community — For congregations who choose to join with us. For the other reform movements who are partners with us. And for the many individuals, lay people and pastors, who now feel marginalized within the ELCA.

As individuals, some of us will decide to remain within the ELCA, for the time being and for different reasons. Others, however, will choose another path. Regardless of the Lutheran church body you determine for yourself, you can still be a part of Lutheran CORE’s ministry.

So we’re not exactly forming a new

church as such. But a free-standing synod, open to all faithful Lutherans, ELCA and non-ELCA. We’re forming a synod, a community of believers, gathered together under Word and Sacrament, and engaged in mission and ministry for the sake of the world.

Over the next year we’re going to form working groups that will put flesh on the bones of Lutheran CORE. There will be working groups on finances, synodical consultation, organization, mission, benevolence, vision and planning, theological education, congregational life and pastoral support.

God is calling us to do something. The ELCA has fallen into heresy. It is a time of confession and a time to resist. It is, please God, also a time for new life and transformation and for mission.

Lutheran CORE will become de facto my church, perhaps our church, our church beyond the local congregation. We will function as a synod, as much as we can. We will serve as a church. I speak of Lutheran CORE as a churchly community — a confessional and confessing movement, with a churchly character and a synodical ministry.

We need to stay together in some fashion. Some of our opponents would love to see us divide. But, God willing, we’re not going to allow this to happen. The cause of God’s Word and our identity as Lutheran Christians is too important to allow division among us.

And we’re not going to let bitterness overcome us either, for then we would destroy ourselves. Those who stand against us are not our enemies; they are our brothers and sisters. We owe it to them and to those faithful ones who remain within the ELCA to be true to our convictions, but gracious in our dealings with them.

Pastor Eddy Perez: ‘God is demanding a response from us’

Following are excerpts from the greeting by Pastor Eddy F. Perez of Iglesia Luterana San Pedro in Miami, Fla., to the Lutheran CORE Convocation. Pastor Perez was representing Hispanic churches in Florida. His entire address is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

In the First Book of Kings, Chapter 18, we find the prophet Elijah confronting 400 false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. It was a dark time of apostasy in Israel. It was a time when many in Israel abandoned their faith and their God. It was a time of confusion. It was a time when many compromised their faith by hesitating between two opinions. We read in the story that the prophet came near the people and admonished them saying: “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

My dear friends, the Word of God prophesied by Elijah, is still relevant and alive for us and the church today. As in the time of Elijah, we are living in difficult times. Many are hesitating between two opinions. Many have followed heretical doctrines. Many have been misled.

We have seen the Churchwide Assembly of the largest Lutheran body in the United States denying with their actions the authority of Scripture. We have been witnesses to the saddest and darkest time in the history of the ELCA.

After the decisions reached in Minneapolis, this church is not the same anymore: there is a different emphasis, a different Gospel message, different standards for ministers, and a different approach to Scripture.

Last August, Hispanic Pastors serving in Florida signed a powerful response to

the 2009 Churchwide Assembly decisions. The response states our renouncement and repudiation to the new policies, declaring them to be incompatible with Christian teaching, the tradition of the Christian Church, and our consciences. It states our rejection to the idea that any human being, prelate, council, or assembly, can rightfully vote to invalidate the teachings of Holy Scripture.

As expected, we have received different kinds of reactions — from compliments and words of encouragement to insults. We know and accept the fact that our response will bring consequences. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Some of our Hispanic Pastors, for instance, who serve as Mission Developers, could be in jeopardy of losing their mission funding, compensation, and even their buildings.

Many of our prospective candidates for ministry have decided not to start their candidacy process in the ELCA. In turn, they are now in an odd situation: feeling the call from God, having the vocation and the desire of responding to the call, but at the same time they are not willing to accept the resolutions adopted by the ELCA at Minneapolis.

But, my friends, in the middle of these uncertainties, we are glad to see that God is using these times of darkness to manifest the light (1 Corinthians 11:19). God is using this time as a time when we, as men and women of God, are called to define ourselves by taking a stand on the basis of our beliefs, on the basis of our convictions, on the basis of our conscience bound to the Word of God.

In the middle of these uncertainties, we

are glad to see that God is lifting up men and women of faith who have decided to stand on the Rock of His Word. Moreover, God is using this time of trouble to transform and empower our lives. In turn, many who were perhaps discouraged are now being encouraged. Many who perhaps were afraid are now courageous. Many who were perhaps spiritually paralyzed are now fighting the good fight — the good fight of faith.

On the other hand, my advice to the ELCA members is this: the time for hesitation is now over. God is demanding a response from us. Through the prophet Elijah, God keeps saying to the members of the ELCA congregations: “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

It is my prayer, and it should also be our prayer, that every single ELCA member may decide to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. It is my prayer, and it should also be our prayer, that every single ELCA member would protest the 2009 Churchwide Assembly decision and would decide to uphold the Scriptures as the infallible rule of faith and conduct.

On behalf of the Hispanic Pastors of Florida, I would like to thank all of you for allowing us to be part of this historical moment.

Our gratitude also goes out to Lutheran CORE for all the work that you have done. Thank you for conveying the Message. Thank you for being a prophetic voice. Thank you for your exhortations. Thank you for staying behind us throughout these difficult times. And finally thank you for helping us confess in the words of Martin Luther: “Here we stand. God help us!”

Reflections from Communion of African Lutheran Churches

Following are excerpts from the Reflections from the Communion of African Lutheran Churches throughout the United States of America and Canada presented to the Lutheran CORE Convocation by Challa Baro, Evangelist for Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church in Minneapolis. The entire address is available at www.lutherancore.org.

The communion of African Lutheran Churches across North America is in full participation on this Convocation with deep gratitude to God. In such a very distressing, shocking and confusing time for all of our churches, we are deeply grateful to God who has never abandoned His beloved church and who offers us this resurrection experience of renewed life in Christ through this Convocation.

This is a very historic Convocation; it is closely watched by people of all motivations. It is also being watched globally and ecumenically as the decision taken in Minneapolis has fundamentally shattered and deeply impacted our global and ecumenical ties. The big question we are wrestling with is, "Now what?"

As far as we are concerned our choice is very clear: we have to either give up our evangelical and prophetic ministry in our society and silently die as a denomination or rise to the task of realigning ourselves with churches, leaders, and communities of similar conviction and work shoulder-to-shoulder with them on the alternative evangelical, confessional, and missional fellowship for the sake of advancing God's kingdom and reconfiguring Lutheranism to get back to its outstanding dogma and kerygma (doctrine and teaching) on matters of life, faith and mission.

We have served Lutheran churches on both sides of the Atlantic. Currently we, the leaders of this vibrant community and the flock of Christ we are called to care for, are in the state of confusion, bewilderment and brokenness.

During the assembly in Minneapolis our voice was totally shunned. . . . Our pleas were seen as the unworthy voice of a backward culture from a dark African continent where some assembly partners would never choose to visit. Our voice was diminished to the voice of an unfit person from an uncivilized culture who is not worthy of sharing his/her opinion. Those words were clearly heard across the continent.

Our mission and ministries are very young and tender. Therefore they are in need of much care, attention and guidance. If we differ to offer this much needed moral and biblical leadership our churches can easily slip into a state of emergency and loss of membership. Right now most of our churches are already distracted from focus on mission; our pastors are facing a difficult task of interpreting and explaining things that are biblically, morally, ethically and culturally despicable and very farfetched from what they know. The common counsel they get from church hierarchies is that it doesn't apply to them. How can a teaching social statement and ministry policy adopted by a given denomination apply to one and exempt the other. Where is the unity in teaching, in faith and in life?

Our calls to this Convocation are clear and simple:

✚ Call to unceasing prayer! As far as we are concerned the 2009 Churchwide Assembly resolution is a clear indication of the spiritual state of the ELCA and its churches. There is a

major spiritual crisis in the church. What took place in Minneapolis is a spiritual blow to the church. A spiritual crisis should get a spiritual response.

✚ Call for strong unity! As people of God who are facing the same challenge, it time for us to be united locally, nationally and internationally for the sake of the Gospel. . . . Let us stand united on the Holy Word of God and on our confessions. Through unity and collaboration we can be able to contain this crisis and effectively respond to the persistent and forceful attack launched on the one holy, universal and Christian church of Jesus Christ.

✚ Call for a functional organization! We have to take concrete steps and not nominal actions. . . . This organized body must be ready, prepared, envisioned and provisioned for the sake of evangelical mission in the world.

✚ Call for domestic and global mission! Actions and decisions taken at the Churchwide Assembly were internationally impactful. . . . Therefore an international or global mission entity should be organized in response to this crisis and proactively assist and steward the longstanding global relationships we have as evangelical, confessional and missional Lutherans worldwide. In that work we are prepared to have a leading role as we have more than 17 million Lutherans directly impacted by this action in Africa.

✚ Call for optimism and faith in God! Today we want to register gratitude to God and to leaders and participants of this Convocation for giving us this chance to share our position and clearly state our missional determination. We are also committed to stand strong in unwavering solidarity with all of you as we believe, hope and pray that you will also walk with us in this journey!

Pastor Paul Ulring: 'What do we do now and next?'

Following are excerpts from the address to the Lutheran CORE Convocation by Pastor Paul Ulring on the theme, "What to Do When You Go Home." His entire address is available online at www.lutherancore.org.

What do we do now — and next? That is the real question before us as we prepare to go our separate ways today. What *can* we do about our future — together and in our separate places of being Lutheran Christians now?

First and most importantly, let's live in forgiveness and hope, not because we know what's next, but because we know Who will be with us. Jesus Christ wants our future more than do. He has a mission; we must do it together. But we cannot do it, wrapped in anger or pain. Resentment is the only poison we take ourselves, thinking we are hurting someone else. The remedy and solution is forgiveness. We can't change what has happened, but we can set it free in forgiveness.

We can pray and stick together and work on this future as best we can. We can focus on the call of Jesus. It's still ours and more important than ever to do. I intend to connect and support other pastors and lay persons in the days ahead. My phone and internet will call me to listen and counsel and point struggling people to Jesus and to His future for us and to work things out the best we can.

Little things we need to do right away, need to be done. Read your congregation constitutions. That's a first, if you haven't yet. What are your options. What have your constitutions obligated you to do . . . and not do? Do some careful work on the decision about what you're going to do with your benevolence dollars. Whatever you do with your money, don't keep it!

Whatever you decide, keep it focused outward. Don't spend benevolences on heat and lights. It will eat you alive.

Get going; movement is needed. Find out what your options are right now. Don't wait. Your friends are counting on you to make good decisions right away. Get short-term goals and do them right away. And don't be alone. Call someone; let others call on you. The devil is planning to wait — on our anger, our despair and our inaction. Talk with your people, people in your congregations. Listen to them and help them know you're working on this already. Especially for those most angry or embarrassed by the ELCA, they need to sense something is happening. Let them sense your hope and zeal.

Some of us are going to be moving to leave fairly soon, but it needs to be done carefully and with the mission of Jesus in view. There is no rush to make a decision, but there *is* a rush to get people connected to the issues. Gather with people near you, to talk and pray and seek both information and possibilities. Possibilities are there and there will be more, I am sure of that. Don't expect lots of solutions and clear answers. There's lots of careful, prayerful work to be done.

It's going to be tricky, I know. But there is a part of this that is terribly exciting, too, don't you think? We've spent all our ELCA years and before, struggling and working against what has now happened. It's over; it's done. We don't have to spend ourselves there anymore. Let's take that energy, that passion, and transfer it to a future that we don't have clearly, but a future that surely is better than what we've been messing with. And let's be gracious and kind, known for our positive spirit and hope. Let not resentment be the poison that we drink. Let's be known

for what we believe, not for what we're against anymore. Let's be faithful to the Gospel, the Word of God, and the Lord Jesus.

What has happened, Jesus saw coming. He was not surprised, no matter how people interpret a tornado and a broken cross. We are not alone. Just look around you and think of the hundreds, thousands who weren't able to join us for these hours, people who, with us, care and want what's coming.

There are no more messages to be sent to Chicago or to anyone in particular. We are not defeated, just forever changed and sent to what we know is both true and essential. We can move with clarity and vision even if we don't know the destination because Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Now we can spend ourselves much more specifically and directly for what matters, what lasts, what we know to be true.

Let us stand together, as we see the future of Lutheranism change for the good. It's worth it; Jesus calls us to do it. He is not defeated or set aside by any decision or action. We have the opportunity to make an eternal difference. Will we? I believe we will. I'm going home excited, though I don't know what's coming. I trust Jesus; I trust you; I trust *us* more than I've ever trusted Lutherans before.

God has given us this new freedom and opportunity. Let us rise in hope and forgiveness to put aside the past and find the future we have been called to for Jesus' sake and for the sake of those He loves and wants. This is about Lutheran orthodoxy and Confessions, and it is about God's Word. And it's about mission to people without Jesus. Both point us, call us to be together. I'm ready. I believe you are too.

Pastor Erma Wolf: ‘We gathered at the foot of the cross’

Following are Pastor Erma Wolf's concluding comments at the Lutheran CORE Convocation Sept. 26.

“What will be our witness for these two days? What will we say about this Convocation?”

I know that there is a wide variety in Lutheran pieties regarding the use of a crucifix in the church. Some find a crucifix a good object of devotion, while others see it as focusing on the wrong thing, the death of Christ rather than his resurrection. But I think we needed to be here for these two days, before this crucifix. From where I stand up here, I look at the stations of the cross, with Jesus taking up his cross and carrying it, then falling, then rising, then falling again, and finally being nailed to it. And you are looking at the end of that journey, at his death. It is good that here, for this time, we have been reminded of the cost of our salvation.

If we in the Church are indeed the body of Christ, then this is the Church — broken, pierced, abused, despised, dead. The Church is always dying. And heretical, because Jesus bears all our sins on his own body, on the cross. Scripture says that “He became sin in our place, so that we might become his righteousness.” The Church is heretical; the Church is also holy. We are one holy catholic and apostolic Church, but also sinners and heretics, and we are dead. If we are the body of Christ, we are dead because Christ really died.

The crucifix proclaims the most outlandish, terrible, unbelievable proclamation, that Jesus Christ died and was buried. If the Church is his body, we too die, buried with him. That is the portrait of the Church in the world. Paul wrote, “We carry in the body the death of Jesus.” It’s not the end of the story,

but it is a necessary part of the story; otherwise the resurrection is a sham, a trick that God pulled. But Jesus died, and was buried. And then, he rose.

The power of the resurrection is not ours; it does not belong to the Church as a possession. It is God’s gift alone. He gives to unworthy sinners whose only merit is that they have been buried with Christ in baptism, so that they might be raised to new life in Christ, with Christ.

So go and tell this about these days: As prophesied, we gathered at the foot of the cross. We gathered, not in anger, despair, or fear; instead, we’ve entered a time of discernment, of active resistance, confessional discernment. We’re seeking the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, for us, for the ELCA, for the whole church.

It is about prayer. We must pray, for ourselves, our congregations, pastors, bishops, pray for guidance, wisdom, courage, patience. We need to pray for those who disagree with us. If you don’t have someone you’re praying for that you disagree with, pick one. Pick the one you’re maddest at, the person or organization that drives you nuts, pray for God to be with them and bless them and be active in their lives. They don’t understand us. But they are our brothers and sisters, for whom Christ died, and Jesus ordered us to love one another.

Discernment is about repentance. Our repentance: for the time we’ve wasted over the years, for our failure to bear witness to the Gospel, for those we’ve not welcomed because of race or sexual orientation, for letting the church shut the door on them, for our failure to walk with them, to declare to them that they are God’s precious sons and daughters, Christ’s lambs for whom he died. It is not about withholding anything.

I said this two years ago, and I will say it now: You are the leaders you are looking for. You came here because you love the Lord, and because when his body is broken and in pain you could not stand idly by. You would not be here, none of us would be here, if God had not laid a call on you. God has called us, and he is faithful to his Church because we are his body. And we have our work cut out for us! But discernment is also about hope, new life, and joy, because we know the end of the story. There’s a lot we don’t know right now, but we know the end of the story. We believe in the power of God to bring life out of death.

I’ve been moved, and humbled, by those who have witnessed to us, especially Pastor Baro and Pastor Perez. Their witness gives me courage, and it honors us by their willingness to walk with us, in and through this time.

So go and give this witness: that we gathered together at the foot of the cross. We are not on the Titanic; we are not in a lifeboat. We’re in the belly of the ark of the Church, and Jesus is with us, and with all the other sinners dressed only in the garment of baptism. We will arrive safely at the port we are bound for. God is faithful. He will sustain us in this season: of discernment, of prayer, of repentance, of mutual support, and of hope and new life.

So let us end as we began:

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Go and tell the joyful Gospel!