



Lutheran CORE - Coalition for Reform

"Working together for positive reform in the ELCA"

www.lutherancore.org

March 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

This letter is an invitation to participate in the hope that God has given us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we confess that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is that hope. "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything" (Colossians 1:18).

This is an invitation to affirm the authority of Holy Scripture as God's Word of Law and Gospel. Led by the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge the Scriptures as God's determinative Word for faith and life. "All scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

This is an invitation to a renewed commitment to the confessions of the Lutheran Church. With the Holy Spirit as our guide, we find our identity in those confessions and understand them as critical for our participation in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:6).

This is an invitation to strengthen the ministry of the local congregation and the spread of the Gospel to all people. Impelled by the Holy Spirit, we seek the renewal of congregational life in witness and mission; and we are committed to the conversion of all people to faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

This is an invitation to be partners in a confessional movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. With the Spirit by our side, we are resolved to support one another in a shared ministry and to engage with one another in the mission of the church. "Make my joy complete: be of one mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Philippians 2:2).

This is an invitation to personal renewal under the Word of God. With the Holy Spirit helping us, we affirm the Common Confession as a summary of the teachings of the Lutheran Church and as a sign of our loyalty to God and his Word. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

I

Over the past three years Lutheran CORE has worked for the reform of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our chief goal has been to serve as a voice for the Word of God within the

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ELCA. We have sought to maintain the Christian doctrine of marriage and the normative use of the Biblical names for the persons of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Within the ELCA we have sought to uphold both Biblical authority and Lutheran identity. To effect these reforms, we have used the constitutional structures of the ELCA – synod assemblies, churchwide assemblies, and the election processes for synodical and churchwide leaders.

The results of our efforts to reform the ELCA have thus far been uneven. We say this frankly and honestly. We have had some positive results in certain synods and in some decisions by the churchwide organization. But on the issues that have mattered the most to us, our results have been mixed. We have not been able to enjoy the success for which we had hoped in churchwide elections. The commitment of the ELCA to its Trinitarian heritage continues to weaken, as evinced by the increasing avoidance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our church's liturgical and educational publications. The ongoing debate over marriage and sexuality seems never-ending. We see indications of a weakening Lutheran identity within our church.

We have also come to appreciate that an increasing number of members feel isolated and dispirited regarding the directions of the ELCA. For them and for the ELCA as a whole, the leaders of Lutheran CORE have come to the conclusion that a clearer, more distinct witness is needed.

II

Lutheran CORE intends to strengthen and expand its mission and ministry. We invite lay people, pastors, congregations, and partner movements within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to join in this new endeavor. Participation in Lutheran CORE is open to all who share our goals and intentions and who agree with the Common Confession.

1. Lutheran CORE will consider and adopt a constitution at our convocation in Indianapolis, September 25-26, 2009. This constitution will provide a framework for our ongoing ministry. We will take other organizational steps as may be required.
2. Lutheran CORE will work to strengthen the renewal of personal faith and congregational life. We will explore ways by which we can function as a churchly fellowship. We will provide a sense of community and identity for our supporters and partners.
3. Whenever possible, Lutheran CORE will cooperate with synods and the churchwide organization and support faithful ministries. In other cases we will provide alternative resources for congregational life in worship, Christian education, and youth ministry.
4. As a matter of urgency, Lutheran CORE will work for the outreach of the Gospel. We will seek to develop new congregations, revitalize existing congregations, and provide support for global missionaries in pioneer evangelism.

5. With its partners, Lutheran CORE will develop a design for theological education for pastors and lay people. We will give special attention to continuing education events and conferences and to mentoring and training opportunities.
6. We recognize that in the ELCA the candidacy process, the calling process, and disciplinary procedures are synodical functions. In ways to be determined, we will assist synods, congregations, and rostered leaders in these functions. We will also work with synods in the resolution of congregational and other conflicts.
7. We intend to work with all Lutherans in North America who desire to maintain a confessional Lutheran witness on behalf of the Word of God.

III

The ministry of Lutheran CORE has been significantly enriched by the participation of numerous reform movements. Each such movement has its own identity and perspective. But, together, we have found much in common and have all benefited by our collegial efforts toward reform and renewal.

Lutheran CORE seeks to serve as an umbrella for these various ministries and movements, providing coordination and complementarity in mission. We value the resources that each movement brings to our common task. We intend to foster the ministries of these movements. We also intend to work toward the formation of additional reform movements across the country, according to need and interest.

Further, we invite our partner reform movements, as well as member congregations, to assist us as we plan for the expansion of our ministry and mission. We invite them to ongoing dialog with us and urge their participation in our constituting convocation in Indianapolis in September 2009.

We recognize that not all our supporters will agree with the design we have outlined in this letter. We know that some are considering leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We have anguished over this question ourselves. To those who are considering a withdrawal from the ELCA, we wish you well, and we respect your decision. We will pray for you. We are open to exploring with you how we may continue to work together for the mission of the church.

But we continue to understand Lutheran CORE to be a ministry within the ELCA, on the principle of selective participation. Should decisions at the 2009 or a later churchwide assembly go against our Christian convictions, our participation in the ELCA will become even more selective. We have considered contingency plans in case the 2009 churchwide assembly takes such actions. We earnestly hope and pray that we will not have to proceed with them.

We continue to ask for your prayers, for your energy and commitment, and for your financial support.

God keep us in his grace.

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee

The Rev. Mark Braaten, Tyler, Texas
The Rev. Mark Chavez, Landisville, Pa.
The Rev. Scott Grorud, Hutchinson, Minn.
The Rev. Rebecca M. M. Heber, Lake Mary, Fla.
The Rev. Kenneth Kimball, Waterville, Iowa
The Rev. Pastor Victor C. Langford III, Seattle, Wash.
Mr. Ryan Schwarz, Washington, D.C.
The Rev. W. Stevens Shipman, Lock Haven, Pa.
The Rev. Paul Spring, State College, Pa.
The Rev. Paul Uring, Columbus, Ohio
The Rev. Erma Wolf, Brandon, S.D.

**Lutheran CORE
2009 Convocation**

Christ the Savior Lutheran Church, Fishers, Indiana (Indianapolis)
September 25, 4:00 p.m. - September 26, noon

Keynoter – The Rev. Kenneth Sauer, chair of Lutheran CORE Advisory Council, former Bishop of Southern Ohio Synod and former chair of ELCA Conference of Bishops

Responder - Mr. Ryan Schwarz, Lutheran CORE Steering Committee, Washington, D.C.,

What after Minneapolis?
Resources for ministry
Adoption of Lutheran CORE constitution