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Lutheran CORE organizes, begins working toward reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America

INDIANAPOLIS -- More than 1,200 Lutherans from throughout the United States and Canada took actions Saturday, Sept. 26, that they hope will lead to a reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America. The Lutherans were in Indianapolis for a Convocation formally organizing the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (Lutheran CORE).

The event became even more significant when the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted in August to change its teaching 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.

"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 how we will respond to the clear invitation to re-vision Lutheranism.

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

The Convocation took action to adopt a constitution and to change 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 renewing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to a renewing organization and an alternate church fellowship for Lutherans.

"Lutheran CORE will be a free-standing synod for all faithful Lutherans," explained the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of Lutheran CORE. "We are going to do things that synods typically do: strengthening personal faith and congregational life, providing resources for congregational ministry, developing new congregations, supporting global missionaries, providing some forms for theological education for pastors, developing mechanisms for theological reflection and conversation related to Scripture and the Confessions."

"God is calling us to do something. The ELCA has fallen into heresy. It is a time for confession and a time to resist. It is, please God, also a time for new life and transformation and for mission," said Spring, the retired bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

The Convocation also authorized the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee "to initiate conversations among the congregations and reform movements in Lutheran CORE and with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ 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 Convocation in September 2010.

"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 renewal networks that comprise Lutheran CORE.

The Rev. Kenneth Sauer of Columbus, Ohio, opened the Convocation Friday by discussing the current 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. The division reaches into congregations, synods, and seminaries and agencies. Only the churchwide organization seems to be of one mind."

"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 heard from leaders of the African immigrant and Hispanic churches in the ELCA. Both communities have been deeply hurt by the ELCA's actions.

"The communion of African Lutheran Churches across North America is in full participation in this Convocation with deep gratitude to God," said Challa Baro, assistant pastor of 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. Eddie Perez of 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 Ulring of Columbus, Ohio, a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee.

"There is a future for us, a future that we only glimpse right now. Things will happen that will make it possible for us to do this, things that aren't clear right now, but Jesus is in clear view," said Ulring.

Ulring 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," Ulring 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," Ulring 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.

The convocation was moved from Christ the Savior Lutheran Church to Holy Spirit Parish at Geist in the Indianapolis suburb of Fishers because of the large attendance. . . Even with the larger space, organizers were forced to close registration Sept. 14 due to space limitations.

A DVD of the Convocation presentations is available from Lutheran CORE. The text of many of the speeches will be available online at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).

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