

W. Stevens Shipman appointed director of Lutheran CORE

The Rev. W. Stevens Shipman, pastor of Southern Clinton County Lutheran Parish ELCA in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, has been appointed as director of Lutheran CORE, effective January 1, 2012. He succeeds the Rev. Mark Chavez, who resigned September 15th to accept a call as North American Lutheran Church (NALC) general secretary.

"I feel humbled and a little anxious as I assume this position," stated Pr. Shipman. "Humbled, because it was the farthest thing from my mind to be doing anything other than parish ministry, and anxious, because Mark Chavez is a hard act to follow! Mark served for 12 years directing Lutheran CORE and its predecessor organizations, and his contribution and leadership have been exemplary. I pray I can continue his example," he said.

Pr. Shipman cares deeply about church renewal, and he has worked to recover the continuity Lutheranism shares with the catholic tradition in a broad ecumenical context while at the same time lifting up the evangelical outreach to call members and unchurched people to personal faith and discipleship.

"Lutherans in North America, along with most of the traditional Christian groups, are at a crossroads," Shipman said. "Lutheran CORE has a unique opportunity to help pastors and congregations grow in becoming more Christ-centered, mission-driven, traditionally-grounded, and congregationally-focused.

"I am especially concerned about the need to be mission-driven," he said. "The trickle out of Lutheran congregations has become a flood, and we need to discover ways to reach out effectively to the growing number of unchurched people, especially younger adults. On the basis of the Bible and the Christian tradition, we must challenge many of our culture's directions which, if continued, will only lead to further decay of our churches and our society. I am excited as well as a bit intimidated to be asked to be the director of Lutheran CORE at such a time as this," he said.

"We welcome Pr. Steve as the new director of Lutheran CORE," said Rev. Paul Ulring, Lutheran CORE moderator. "Steve knows the challenges of Lutheran CORE's future. He is very close to the history and chemistry of our mission and constituency. He brings the kind of diversity and solidarity that is Lutheran CORE's DNA," Ulring said.

A native of Sunbury, Pennsylvania, Pr. Shipman has been active in church life since childhood, from serving as a Luther League district chairman as a youth to his present work as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA).

A graduate of Susquehanna University with a major in English (1969), Shipman graduated from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 1973 and was ordained by the former Central Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America in June 1973. He earned a master of sacred theology degree from Gettysburg Seminary in 1989 under noted Lutheran scholars Robert Jenson and Eric Gritsch.

He has served congregations across Pennsylvania, in both rural and modest suburban settings, and has been involved in synodical and local ministerial and community service groups. He has been a member of Lions International for more than 25 years. As a communications director of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, he oversaw the synod's transition to desktop publishing.

Pr. Shipman's involvement in Lutheran CORE dates from its founding in 2005, when Pr. Paull Spring invited him to serve as secretary of Lutheran CORE.

Shipman attended various national and local Lutheran conferences on the Holy Spirit, and worked with the former Central Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) as evangelism chair. Throughout the 1980s he helped develop and lead "A Lutheran Style of Witness" events in his synod.

He was one of the founding members of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessing Fellowship (ELCF), a group that brings confessing Lutherans together for mutual support. The ELCF continues to be a Lutheran CORE member organization.

Pr. Shipman is also a member of the Society of the Holy Trinity, an inter-Lutheran religious order founded in 1997 for pastors that seeks to encourage pastors' faithfulness to their ordination vows.

"I'm delighted that Pr. Shipman has agreed to serve as Lutheran CORE director," remarked Pr. Mark Chavez. "Steve's involvement since Lutheran CORE's inception makes him eminently qualified to lead the ministry into the future. He is known for wise counsel and sound judgment, and is respected for bringing together confessing Lutherans for a unified witness to our Lord. He is a dear brother in Christ, and I look forward to working with him in this transition," Chavez said.

Pr. Shipman served as a voting member to ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee (2003), where he reported for Forum Letter of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. He represented Lutheran CORE as a congregational visitor at both the Chicago (2007) and Minneapolis (2009) assemblies. Prior to the formation of the ELCA, Shipman was a voting delegate at the LCA Convention in Toronto in 1984.

Pr. Shipman and his wife Linda are the parents of an adult son and daughter.

"I really feel the Holy Spirit was at work in Steve's appointment," Steering Committee chair Lynn Kickingbird remarked in response to the appointment.

"Although it may have been the farthest thing from his mind, Steve's name was lifted up by many others as the logical and best candidate for Lutheran CORE at this time. He has been involved with Lutheran CORE since its beginning as well as other Lutheran reform and renewal groups. He has skillfully served as secretary for the past six years, and has been blessed with the gifts of wisdom and administration. Most importantly, Steve has the heart of a servant who boldly shares God's Truth with others. I have already learned so much from him, and I look forward to his leadership."