



Lutheran CORE - Coalition for Reform

"Working together for positive reform in the ELCA"

www.lutherancore.org

August 2008

Dear Friends in Christ,

A year from now the churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will meet in Minneapolis. At this assembly our church will take action on a social statement on sexuality, as well as consider yet again recommendations on the ordination of actively gay and lesbian persons.

The position of Lutheran CORE and of our supportive partners on this issue is by now well known to you. For further information on what we and others have written on this matter, I encourage you to check out our website at www.lutherancore.org.

Over the past year Lutheran CORE has been working hard to secure the election of voting members to the churchwide assembly who support the classic, orthodox position on marriage and ordination. We are in the process of developing model resolutions and memorials for synod assemblies and are planning how we may effectively make our position known to the churchwide assembly. Our hope and prayer is that this assembly will reaffirm the Biblical norm for marriage, one man and one woman in a life-long covenant of fidelity, along with the standards for ordination as these are spelled out in the "Vision and Expectations" document of our church.

There are three things you can do in this process, if you have not already done so. First, you can prepare a response to the draft statement on sexuality, either as an individual or as a part of a congregational group. November 1st is the deadline for returning these responses to the ELCA task force for studies on sexuality. Second, you can attend and speak out at a hearing in your synod on the draft statement. Third, you can sign the open letter to the task force that we have developed. You can do this by going to our website and using the directions on the link to the letter, by sending an email message with your name, city, and state to info@lutherancore.org or by writing to us at 2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220, New Brighton, MN 55112-2202.

Lutheran CORE means Lutheran Coalition for Reform. We are individual lay people and pastors, active and committed members of the ELCA. We care deeply for our church, and our intention is to remain within our church. The ELCA is our church. Even more, it is also a member of Christ's Church. Lutheran CORE is a movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We are a confessional movement on behalf of the ELCA. We are committed to the authority of the Bible and to the Bible's interpretation according to the Lutheran Confessions. We see ourselves as a voice for the Word of God within the ELCA. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we seek to lift up the Bible as God's Word of Law and Gospel, of judgment and grace, as a word that proclaims Christ as God's way of salvation and for newness of life.

Lutheran CORE
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Those of us in Lutheran CORE have our differences. Some of us are political and social liberals; others are political and social conservatives. Probably most of us are moderates on these matters, people of the center. We have our differences on some matters of doctrine and practice. We are not of the same mind on worship nor on the ministry of bishops in the historic succession. We have different perspectives on the church's ecumenical direction.

But we have learned that there is more that unites us than divides us. We are not extremists of either the left or the right. Rather, we are of the center, the radical center. We place our confidence in the redeeming work of Christ and his Word. We claim as our own the Lutheran confession of the Gospel within the tradition of the Church from its beginnings. In all we do as Lutheran CORE, we strive to keep Christ at the center, Christ at the midpoint for the faith and life of the whole Church and for the ELCA.

At the same time, we have serious concerns for our church. We are cautiously hopeful that the current study of the Bible will lead to a more confessional understanding and use of the Bible as God's Word among us. In the face of the ELCA's decline in membership, we seek for the growth of our church, both at home and in global mission. We are deeply worried at the possibility that the ELCA may approve the blessing of same sex unions and the ordination of actively gay and lesbian persons to the office of the ministry. We see worrisome signs - witness the new hymnal - that our church's confession of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is weakening. With our partners and supporters, Lutheran CORE is working diligently to call and elect to synodical and churchwide leadership people who share our concerns and commitments.

Some people believe that the churchwide assembly next year in Minneapolis will resolve these issues once and for all, especially the ordination of active gays and lesbians. Those of us in Lutheran CORE are coming to believe that this will not be the case. Sexuality, in any case, is not the only issue confronting our church, nor is it the chief one. That issue is the authority of the Bible and its interpretation according to our confession. More and more the ELCA appears to be losing its identity and confession and becoming just another declining, mainline Protestant denomination. Since we are by conviction Lutheran Christians, the direction our church appears to be taking saddens us greatly.

But we are also full of determination and resolve. In fact, for the sake of the Word of God and because of our confession, we are committed to our ministry as Lutheran CORE for the long haul. The Minneapolis assembly will be an important event, but it will not be the last one. The needed reform of our church and its renewal will continue far beyond Minneapolis.

To this end, the Lutheran CORE steering committee is exploring right now the shape and direction for our ministry for the years ahead. We are consulting with our partner movements in this process. We are asking ourselves: In what form shall we continue as a confessional movement within the ELCA?

Last fall we held a very successful gathering at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Lindenhurst, Illinois. We plan a second such event in 2009, following the churchwide assembly. The dates are September 25 and 26. I hope that all of you will reserve these dates. We will worship together and engage in Bible study. We will debrief the Minneapolis assembly. And we will consider a plan for the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE and our partner movements. Details will be announced after the first of the year.

At several points in this letter I have referred to "within the ELCA." This is our hope and intention. We do not intend to withdraw from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We hope that all those who support us in Lutheran CORE share this intention. Our efforts are being blessed with increasing support from people in our church, and our focus is on drawing closer together in ministry with each other, regardless of the future direction of the ELCA. Mindful of all this, now is not the time to leave.

We recognize that this is not what some may wish to hear from us. The drift of the ELCA toward becoming another mainline Protestant denomination continues. The issues before us in our church seem so daunting. A kind of "ELCA fatigue" can easily overcome us.

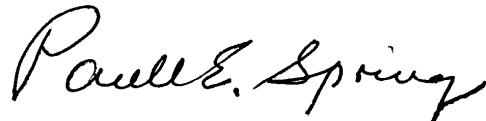
Our counsel to ourselves and to all our supporters is: Do not lose heart. In his explanation to the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther lists despair as one of the temptations against which Christians need to struggle. The number of our supporters among individuals and congregations is steadily increasing. Many of these individuals and congregations are making financial contributions at an increasing level for our ministry. There are now fully ten other reform movements who are a part of Lutheran CORE. With these partners we now have coordinators working for reform and renewal in at least fifty of the sixty-five synods. The leadership in Lutheran CORE is now in prayer regarding God's will for the future shape of our ministry. In so many ways our ministry has never been stronger than it is today.

For all of which we give thanks to God, the God who has revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Our prayer for ourselves and for our supporters is that God may use us for the good of his Church. We pray for hope in God and for continuing zeal for our ministry. We are not of the left or of the right. Rather, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are a ministry at the center of the Church's life and mission - where Christ is to be found, worshiped, served, and obeyed.

May God bless you, one and all. And . . . see you all again, September 25 and 26, 2009!

Cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paull E. Spring". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Paull E. Spring
Chair