



Coalition for Renewal

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"Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5)

November 18, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The past couple months since the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and Lutheran CORE's Convocation have filled us with a strong sense of hope. The Spirit has stirred up a remarkable outpouring of activity by traditional Lutherans across the country. Congregations are entering into discernment processes to determine their own future courses. Congregations and individuals are refocusing their benevolence giving on faithful ministries. New local and regional renewal movements are being formed almost weekly. Just this past week, we welcomed six new regional affiliates of Lutheran CORE, from Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia and the Southeastern US, as well as the Union of Oromo Evangelical Churches and the Seven Marks group of pastors.

It is now clear that a very substantial portion of the ELCA cannot and will not accept the decisions of the Churchwide Assembly this past summer. Along with the WordAlone Network and our other renewal movement partners, we in Lutheran CORE are now hard at work planning pathways forward for faithful Lutherans, both for those who decide to stay in and those who decide to leave the ELCA. This letter describes some recent significant decisions about those future pathways.

The Lutheran CORE Convocation in Fishers, Indiana, voted to transform our ministry into a free-standing synod, operating apart from any Lutheran church body. This free-standing synod will serve as a coalition of those who choose to leave and those who choose to remain within the ELCA. It will include congregations, reform movements, individual pastors and laypersons, synods, and schools, from across the USA and hopefully Canada as well. It will carry out many synodical functions and will serve in partnership with other reform movements. In this manner, Lutheran CORE will continue to be a confessing and confessional movement that is open to all faithful Lutherans.

Many of our members and friends, both congregations and individuals, will stay in the ELCA, at least for the time being. For them, the free-standing synod will provide a fellowship or community of traditional Lutherans and an ongoing connection to orthodox Lutherans who leave the ELCA. It will also provide, as a service to its member congregations, faithful synodical functions such as missions and evangelism support, assistance in the call process, and resources for theological education, congregational teaching and worship.

It has also become clear over the past few months that many faithful congregations will certainly leave the ELCA as a result of the ELCA's departure from Biblical teachings. Some of those congregations will join Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), an association of Lutheran congregations formed in 2001 which we view as a valued partner in mission. Other congregations, however, have come to us asking us to form a church body with a more traditional denomination structure and scope.

As a result of these conversations and requests, and after much prayer and deliberation, the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee has decided to explore the formation of a new Lutheran church body in North America. We do this in service to those congregations who wish to leave the ELCA, and perhaps also for congregations who might wish to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) as a result

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of similar issues in that church body, and to advance the mission of Christ by planting new churches across North America.

This new church would have a confession of faith and a constitution. It would have the competence to examine and ordain clergy, and a discipline process for congregations and clergy. It would be capable of reaching church-to-church relationships. Its constitution would provide for the election of officers and it would be governed by a representative assembly of delegates. The new church would provide for dual membership for congregations and ordained ministers. It would invite other Lutheran churches and entities to participate in shared ministry. It would utilize resources for ministry from already-existing para-church movements and from the WordAlone Network, and would develop other resources as needed. We intend for this new church to be complementary to the ministry and mission of LCMC.

The new Lutheran church body and the free-standing Lutheran CORE synod would cooperate closely in ministry and mission. Special attention will be given to the calling and mobility process, resources for ministry, local and global missions, and strengthening a sense of community and witness to the Gospel. The new Lutheran church body and the free-standing synod will also seek to develop close relationships with other Lutheran churches and entities — particularly with LCMC, and also with others including the ELCA, the ELCIC, and the LCMS.

One thing we want to lift up clearly. We are seeking to do something that has proven difficult in other denominations: maintain tangible unity and organic relationships between those who leave and those who stay in the ELCA. For this reason we are forming both a new church body and a free-standing synod, and both are essential to our vision of continued fellowship and common ministry. Please join us in making a commitment to this important goal.

We have asked our Vision and Planning Working Group to develop narrative designs for the new Lutheran church and for the continuation of Lutheran CORE's ministry as a free-standing synod. Those designs will be published for review and comment in February 2010. After that, constitution task forces will prepare a constitution for the new church, as well as constitutional amendments necessary to implement the free-standing synod, for adoption at the 2010 Convocation of Lutheran CORE on August 26-27 in Columbus, OH.

In all that we do, we remain in prayer and seek to discern the will of God. Likewise please keep us and the members of the Vision and Planning team in your prayers. That team includes retired Bishops Paull Spring and Ron Warren, Pastors David Glesne, Dan Selbo, Michael Tavella and Cathi Braasch, Mrs. Carolyn Nestingen and Mr. Ryan Schwarz. Please feel free to reach out to any of them, or any of us, with your thoughts and suggestions. Contact information is available on our website, www.lutherancore.org.

We grieve that it has become necessary for so many to leave the ELCA and for so many others to alter their relationship with the ELCA, but we are heartened by the clear sense of mission and ministry that is motivating these changes. As we move forward, let us walk humbly as we seek to follow the path that God has in store for us.

In His service,

The Lutheran CORE Steering Committee