

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lutheran CORE releases proposal for reconfiguration of Lutheranism

Proposal recommends new Lutheran church and continuation of Lutheran CORE

Leaders of Lutheran CORE released a proposal for the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America on Thursday, Feb. 18. The proposal calls for the continuation of Lutheran CORE as “a community of confessing Lutherans” and for the formation of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), a new Lutheran church body.

Lutheran CORE’s national Convocation Sept. 25-26, 2009, in Fishers, Ind., asked that a proposal for the “reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism” be prepared and brought to Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation Aug. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio. The proposal released Feb. 18 is a response to that request. It was released now so that Lutheran CORE members can provide input to aid in drafting the proposals that will be considered by the 2010 Convocation.

“We are committed to maintaining the unity of as many faithful Lutherans in North America as possible,” said Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., who chaired the Vision and Planning Working Group that created the proposal.

Many individuals and congregations are considering whether or not to remain affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) because of what they see as the ELCA’s continued drift from the teachings of the Bible and traditional Christianity. “These proposals are a way for those who uphold traditional Christian teaching — both those who are leaving the ELCA to join the NALC or another body, and those who will remain in the ELCA — to work together,” Schwarz explained.

“There are deep divisions in the ELCA as a result of the Churchwide Assembly’s recent actions,” he added.

The actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August to affirm same-sex sexual relationships and to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in those relationships in spite of the teaching of the Bible have been seen by many ELCA members as evidence that the Bible no longer functions as the ultimate norm for the faith and life of the ELCA. Similar concerns are being expressed about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

“These proposals are a way for Lutherans to move forward in carrying out the true mission of the Christian Church — which is sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ — while leaving behind past struggles to reform the ELCA,” Schwarz explained.

North American Lutheran Church

“Confessing Lutherans have raised their voices over the past several months, asking for a church body which is faithful in its preaching and practice to the Holy Bible and to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheran CORE has heard these requests and, in response, now proposes to form the North American Lutheran Church (NALC),” the proposal explains.

“The NALC is being established in response to those members and friends of Lutheran CORE who have expressed a preference for completely withdrawing from the ELCA or ELCIC. They are looking for a new Lutheran church body which stands in the tradition of the Church, is denominationally structured for leadership, oversight and accountability, enhances representative governance by congregations and affirms and supports ministry and mission at the congregational level.”

The NALC and Lutheran CORE will function cooperatively in shared ministry and mission. To express and build unity amongst their respective members, most ministries of the two bodies will be carried out jointly: domestic and global evangelism, theological education, and human service.

Lutheran CORE

“Lutheran CORE affirms that both staying in and leaving the ELCA and ELCIC can be faithful courses for confessing Lutherans. We envision a reconfiguration that maintains the highest degree of ongoing unity and cooperation possible among those who leave and those who stay,” the document states. “A primary vehicle for this unity will be the continuing ministry of Lutheran CORE, reconfigured as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies.”

“Lutheran CORE intends to be a community of Lutherans who acknowledge that Scripture is the only and final authority in matters of faith and life, and who accept the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful and trustworthy witness to the Word of God. It will be composed of individuals, congregations, partner renewal movements and church bodies, including the NALC, who agree with its constitution,” the proposal explains.

“Lutheran CORE is not becoming the NALC. It is aiding in the formation of this new church body,” explained the Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of Lutheran CORE’s Steering Committee and a member of the working group that prepared the proposal.

“Lutheran CORE will continue as an association of confessing Lutherans spanning denominational bodies. Lutheran CORE will serve those in the ELCA, those in the NALC, and hopefully those in other Lutheran church bodies such as LCMC who share a commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions,” explained Spring, the retired bishop of the ELCA’s Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. “The NALC will provide a church body for those who choose to leave the ELCA.”

Four Key Attributes

The proposal outlines four “key attributes” of both Lutheran CORE and the NALC: “Christ-Centered,” “Mission-Driven,” “Traditionally-Grounded,” and “Congregationally-Focused.”

“The vision statement’s commitment to prioritize making disciples of Christ in congregations, communities and in all nations is key. That’s the ‘main thing’ and if Christian churches don’t do it, no one else will,” said the Rev. Mark Chavez of Landisville, Pa., director of Lutheran CORE.

“The people who drafted the proposals for Lutheran CORE and the NALC come from several different backgrounds and traditions in North American Lutheranism. They are united in a common confession of the Christian faith and commitment to submit to the authority of God’s Word over all matters of faith and life. That’s hopeful and exciting,” Chavez said.

The proposal was drafted by an eight-member working group. It was reviewed and approved by Lutheran CORE’s Steering Committee and its Advisory Council of theologians and church leaders.

Members of the Vision and Planning Task Force are two lay people: Schwarz and Carolyn Nestingen, Dallas, Ore.; four ELCA pastors: the Revs. Cathi Braasch, Smithfield, Neb.; Dan Selbo, San Jose, Calif.; David Glesne, Fridley, Minn.; and Mike Tavella, Abington, Pa.; and two retired ELCA bishops: Spring and the Rev. Ronald Warren, Grove City, Ohio, former bishop of the ELCA’s Southeastern Synod.

“It is fitting that these proposals are being announced on the day that the Lutheran church remembers the great reformer Martin Luther. Luther brought new life and renewal to the church of his day. We pray that God will use these proposals to bring new life and renewal to the church of our day,” Spring said.

Feb. 18 is the date on Lutheran church calendars for the commemoration of Martin Luther as a renewer of the Christian Church. Luther died Feb. 18, 1546.

Congregations already leaving ELCA

Congregations around the country are already taking votes on whether to leave the ELCA. ELCA Secretary David Swartling reported that, as of Feb. 3, 220 congregations in 49 of the ELCA’s 65 synods have taken votes to leave the ELCA.

Two votes at least 90 days apart — each receiving a two-thirds majority — are required for a congregation to end its affiliation with the ELCA. Swartling reported that 156 congregations attained the required two-thirds majority on their first vote. Twenty-eight congregations already have taken their second vote. All of those votes attained the two-thirds majority for the congregation to leave the ELCA.

Several congregations have had a significant majority vote to leave the ELCA but failed to reach the two-thirds majority, increasing the crisis and division in those congregations.

Many ELCA congregations are facing divisions among their members and financial difficulties as a result of the ELCA assembly’s actions. Revenues to the ELCA churchwide organization and to many synods have decreased as congregations have chosen to redirect their benevolence giving to ministries other than the ELCA.

Additional information and the proposal draft are online at www.lutherancore.org.