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New church body formed for North American Lutherans *Lutheran CORE to continue as unity movement for confessing Lutherans*

GROVE CITY, Ohio — A new Lutheran denominational body was born on Friday, Aug. 27, as Lutherans from throughout North America voted overwhelmingly and enthusiastically to form the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

The decision to form the new church body was made at the annual Convocation of Lutheran CORE which attracted more than 1,100 Lutherans Thursday and Friday at Grove City Church of the Nazarene. Thousands more watched the convocation online.

The Convocation adopted a constitution and elected provisional leaders for the NALC. The Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., was elected as bishop of the NALC. Spring served as the bishop of the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for 14 years.

Spring and other church leaders were elected for one-year terms. Those congregations and individuals who join the NALC will elect their own leaders at the church body's first annual meeting next year. Spring has said that he will not be available for reelection.

"The North American Lutheran Church is now launched on its mission — to proclaim the good news of Christ to all people. We pray that God will be by our side and with our congregations as we move forward in His name," said Spring.

"We have a great opportunity before us. We not only want to look back toward the past, but to look ahead to the mission God has given us — to confess Christ faithfully, to witness to others, and to grow in God's mission. This is our opportunity now in Lutheran CORE and in the North American Lutheran Church," said Spring.

"The NALC will embody the center of Lutheranism in America. The NALC will uphold confessional principles dear to Lutherans including a commitment to the authority of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. Members and congregations of the NALC will have direct involvement in the decisions and life of the NALC," said the Rev. Mark Chavez of Landisville, Pa., director of Lutheran CORE.

The new church body was approved with no opposition. Some current pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who attended the Convocation chose to abstain because of their ELCA responsibilities.

Some of those in attendance asked to be able to sign a document noting their assent to the creation of the NALC. Many waited for more than an hour to do so because they wanted to formally note their involvement in the historic action.

Lutherans around the world celebrated the creation of the NALC. Two of the largest Lutheran churches in the world sent official representatives to the Convocation. Representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus told the Convocation of the support of their church bodies for the NALC. These two church bodies from Africa are the second and third largest Lutheran churches in the world, each with 5.3 million members. They reported that Lutherans throughout Africa were praying for the Convocation and for the NALC.

“May God bless Lutheran CORE and the vision of the NALC,” said the Rev. Francis Stephanos, president emeritus of the church in Ethiopia and a former vice president of the Lutheran World Federation. “One cannot put the word of Scripture to a vote. . . . The churches of the South will choose Scripture over the mighty dollar.”

The Rev. Dr. Benson Bagonza, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania’s Karagwe Diocese, preached for the closing worship service and participated in the installation of Bishop Spring.

“The presence at our convocation of so many ecumenical and international guests is very significant,” said Spring. “Their presence among us is a reminder that we are not alone in our ministry and that we intend to forge strong ties and relationships with other Christian communities as we go forward in the North American Lutheran Church.”

The Convocation voted to request membership in the Lutheran World Federation for the NALC as a part of the church body’s commitment to an ongoing relationship with faithful Lutheran churches in Africa and Eastern Europe.

The NALC is also committed to a close partnership with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), an association of congregations that many former ELCA congregations have joined since it was formed in 2001. More than 280 congregations have joined LCMC since last August.

“As you make your stand today, I pledge that your siblings in LCMC will stand beside you,” said the Rev. Larry Lindstrom of Farmersville, Ohio, chair of the LCMC Board of Trustees. “I anticipate many congregations will choose to join both LCMC and the NALC.”

A way to move forward together

In addition to creating the NALC, Lutheran CORE’s 2010 Convocation approved proposals designed to provide a way for Lutherans who uphold Biblical teaching to move forward together. Lutheran CORE will continue as “a confessional and confessing unity movement for all Lutherans regardless of church body.”

“The NALC and Lutheran CORE will link us together as confessional, faithful Lutherans,” said the Rev. Paul Ulring of Columbus, Ohio, who was elected Thursday as the moderator of

Lutheran CORE. “We believe that God is at work, so these are wonderful times ahead.” Ullring is pastor of Upper Arlington Lutheran Church.

“Lutheran CORE’s actions at this convocation and the launching of the NALC are significant progress in forming a community of confessing Lutherans that crosses denomination lines and national boundaries,” Chavez said.

“Our Lord’s reconfiguring of the Lutheran landscape not only in North America, but worldwide, is breathtaking and exciting. We pray that Lutheran CORE and the NALC will faithfully follow Him and in all things give glory to our Heavenly Father,” said Chavez. “It has been wonderful to witness the joy and hopeful excitement of so many Lutherans to move forward and do the main thing — proclaim Jesus Christ and His Gospel to make disciples.”

“The future that we envision for confessing Lutherans in North America is one that is centered on the absolute truth of Christ Jesus and committed to making disciples for Him,” said Ryan Schwarz of Washington, D.C., chair of Lutheran CORE’s Vision and Planning Working Group. “Both Lutheran CORE and the NALC will stand in continuity with the tradition of the Christian Church over the past 2,000 years and will orient their activities primarily for the support of congregations in their ministries.”

“Lutheran CORE and the new NALC are two pathways for faithful, confessing Lutherans in North America to remain connected to each other and to the vast majority of Lutherans and Christians globally who reject the theological innovations of the ELCA and ELCIC,” added Schwarz, who was elected to serve on the NALC’s Executive Council.

The NALC is a member of Lutheran CORE and will do much of its mission and ministry in conjunction with Lutheran CORE to help maintain unity among confessing Lutherans and to carry out mission and ministry efficiently.

Lutheran CORE’s 2009 Convocation Sept. 25-26, 2009, in Fishers, Ind., asked that a proposal for the “reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism” be prepared and brought to the 2010 Convocation. In response, “A Vision and Plan for The North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE, a Community of Confessing Lutherans” was released in February.

“The North American Lutheran Church places great emphasis on congregational ministry and congregational renewal.” Spring said. “We know that the congregation is not the sole form of ministry in the church. But the congregation is surely the chief community of faith for ministry and renewal. We are hoping that our congregational focus will be evident in the way we carry out our ministry.”

Spring noted that Lutheran CORE and the NALC are committed to faithfully teaching the historic Christian faith as it has been confessed by Lutherans and also to moving forward in faith and mission.

“We are inspired by the groundswell of congregations interested in joining the NALC, as well as the other Lutheran and Christian church bodies interested in discussing fellowship and shared ministry opportunities with the NALC,” Schwarz said.

“Our common commitment to Christ’s Great Commission — making disciples of all nations — is a firm foundation for continued growth of the NALC, broader unity through Lutheran CORE, and building of church-to-church relationships in coming years.”

Lutheran CORE and the NALC are also committed to close ties with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.

Theological Conference addresses crisis in Lutheranism

More than 800 people attended a theological conference featuring some of the most significant Lutheran scholars in America that preceded the Convocation. “Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism” was the theme of the Aug. 24-26 conference at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio.

“We are at a crossroads where our theological tradition and the teaching of the Christian faith are being placed in jeopardy,” the Rev. Dr. Carl Braaten told the conference. Braaten is one of the most respected Lutheran theologians in the world.

Lutherans throughout the United States have been wrestling with the implications of recent actions by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reversing the ELCA’s policy on pastors in same-sex sexual relationships. ELCA pastors are now allowed to be in same-sex relationships and to officiate at same-sex union ceremonies. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved a social statement in August 2009 that changed ELCA teaching on sexuality and authorized a reversal in policy regarding pastors in same-sex relationships.

Lutheran CORE leaders note that the problems in the ELCA are really not about sexual behavior but rather about an ongoing movement away from the authority and teaching of the Bible throughout the ELCA, on issues far broader than simply human sexuality.

“It was not our choice to leave the ELCA, but the ELCA has chosen to reject ‘the faith once delivered to the saints,’ so now we are acting to maintain our position within the consensus of the Church catholic,” said Schwarz.

“The ELCA has decided that it is in a position of authority over the Bible itself rather than submitting to the authority of the Bible over all matters of faith and life,” Chavez said. “And unfortunately, most of the attention is given to the sexuality issues, but there are actually much more disturbing trends within the ELCA.”

For more information go to www.lutherancore.org or www.thenalc.org.

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