

Interim Ministry Resources

Chapter 12 Heritage

Controversy in the Church (3)

Controversy in the Church

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Contents	1	
#	Page	Topic
1)	2	A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust
2)	15	A congregation splits over use of language
3)	17	A congregation terminates its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
4)	22	Predestination Controversy
5)	25	A parish terminates its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

1) A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

The biggest church schism to happen in my time occurred around **A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**.

Resources

2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly - Wikipedia

The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly was the eleventh biennial Churchwide Assembly of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#). It convened in the city of [Minneapolis, Minnesota](#), from August 17–23, 2009. The Churchwide Assembly is the 'highest legislative authority' of the ELCA.^[1]

At the time of the Assembly, the ELCA consisted of nearly 4.6 million members organized into nearly 11,000 congregations.

^[2] The Assembly consisted of 1,045 voting members and was chaired by The Rev. [Mark S. Hanson](#), Presiding Bishop of the ELCA from 2001–2013. David Swartling, the Secretary of the ELCA from 2007–2013, served as secretary.^[3]

The 2009 Assembly was dominated by debate on the proposed Social Statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," and its accompanying Recommendations for Ministry Policies. The Statement allowed for differing understandings of same-gender sexual relationships within the ELCA. The Recommendations proposed the development of a process in which congregations, synods, and churchwide units that chose to do so could call pastors and other officially recognized church leaders who were in publicly accountable same-gender lifelong monogamous relationships.

The assembly's agenda also included a proposed agreement of [full communion](#) between the ELCA and the [United Methodist Church](#), the UMC's first such agreement, along with other business matters, including: the passage of the ELCA Churchwide organization's budget, elections of officers and committee members, reports from Churchwide units and greetings from ecumenical partners.

Nevertheless, "Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust" is the legacy of the 2009 Assembly. Its eventual adoption, with its recommendations, opened the way for people in [same-sex relationships](#) to serve as pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA. After its adoption, many congregations and pastors who believed that such relationships were contrary to [Holy Scripture](#), the tradition of the Church, and the [Lutheran Confessions](#) left the ELCA. The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly reshaped American Lutheranism.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_ELCA_Churchwide_Assembly

[Images for 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly](#)

Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin went through a particularly public congregation split. I served there as an interim associate in 1997-1998 and 2000-03, so I had more than a passing interest in what happened a decade later.

March 2013 Grace Lutheran of Eau Claire, WI Court Case Update

-Judge Gale Wyrick has ruled that the Synod Council's decision rendered on January 16, 2013 is final.

-The judge can make four directives of that decision the Order of the Court and enforce them.

-Grace Lutheran Church has been referred to the Synod Council for guidance in the implementation of those directives.

Those four directives are as follows:

1. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately terminate affiliations with LCMC or any church other than the ELCA.
2. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately restore to full voting membership all those voting members moved to associate member status since January 1, 2011. Eligibility for voting membership is governed by *8.02.c.
3. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately recognize that anyone who meets the criteria of *C8.02.c. and who does not want to associate with LCMC is a voting member of Grace Lutheran Church. Individual members who wish to remain affiliated with LCMC may hold associate membership status at Grace Lutheran Church as per *C8.02.d. if they so desire.
4. That Grace Lutheran Church's sole affiliation is with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Affiliation with the ELCA may be terminated only as permitted in the governing documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The judge has ordered that Drew Ryberg, attorney for the plaintiffs, draft an order in conformity with the decision and submit it to Jay Heit for approval. After an order has been mutually agreed upon, the judge will sign it. That order is to be submitted by April 8, 2013.

Posted on the Grace Lutheran Church website at the time. <http://www.grace-church.org/>

Judgment: Eau Claire church to remain ELCA

The dispute over affiliation at Grace Lutheran Church soon could be over.

In a recent decision, Polk County Judge Molly GaleWyrick said the Jan. 16, 2012, decision of the Synod Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin "must be enforced," meaning Grace will be solely affiliated with the ELCA.

Her action is the latest decision in an Eau Claire County civil suit filed on Nov. 29, 2011, by nearly 70 members of Grace Lutheran Church, asking the courts to intervene in the dispute, which fractured the congregation at the historic house of worship.

The group — in its lawsuit — asked GaleWyrick to declare that the longtime Eau Claire church remain solely affiliated with the ELCA and be governed in a manner consistent with the church's constitution and the governing documents of the ELCA.

About six weeks after the suit was filed, the Synod Council — in the final step in an adjudication process resulting from the dispute — made a decision with four directives: That Grace Lutheran Church's sole affiliation is with the ELCA, that the church immediately terminate its affiliation with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ or any other church other than the ELCA, that the church restore full voting memberships to voting members who had been moved to associate member status since Jan. 1, 2011, and that the church immediately recognize anyone as a voting member who meets the required criteria and who does not want to remain affiliated with the LCMC.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_0fd51d2c-9049-11e2-a55a-0019bb2963f4.html

3.18.13

Background

Grace, ELCA vote turning ugly – Leader-Telegram

One of the pastors at Grace Lutheran Church believes other area clergy are trying to influence members of his Eau Claire congregation in an attempt to keep them from leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"ELCA churches are leaving, and as leaders watch, they are trying to develop strategies to throw up roadblocks," said the Rev. Rolf Nestingen, who charges neighboring ELCA pastors of doing just that and says their interference is in violation of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin constitution.

The Rev. Kurt Jacobson of Trinity Lutheran Church in Eau Claire and other area ELCA pastors don't deny they have had contact with members of Grace Lutheran Church, but said those parishioners sought them out, looking for support, information and guidance.

"When a church's pastors attend well to the entire body of people they have been entrusted to serve, and do so with love, integrity and honest attention and care, ministry prospers," Jacobson said via e-mail. "When that isn't the case, it is a natural action for people who are hurting, confused or disenfranchised by said pastors to seek such care in other places. For ELCA pastors in the area to respond with compassion to those people is a Christ-like response."

Jacobson sent an email to Nestingen and the Rev. David Irgens, also a pastor at Grace, on Feb. 17, informing them that area ELCA pastors and Bishop Duane Pederson of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin met and agreed to address Grace members as they came to them. "It doesn't matter how you cast it," Nestingen said of the pastors' involvement. "It's against the rules, and it's just plain wrong."

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_e2cdd6e0-582b-11e0-996c-001cc4c03286.html

3.26.11

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

Twin Cities WordAlone/Lutheran CORE Meeting Date, Thu, October 27, 2011 Time: 8:00 am – 9:00am

Where: Calvary Lutheran

Pastor Rolf Nestingen - Council President Anne Carter - Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI

"Experiencing Grace" The story of one congregation's attempt to leave the ELCA

<http://www.lcmc.net/calendar/event/154>

[PDF] Joining the Unchurched by James Arne Nestingen

At any rate, it's up to you now. In a way that would have been inconceivable even earlier this summer, you are on your own. Having been unchurched by the ELCA assembly; excluded, unrepresented and voiceless, you have been cut loose from that which connected you with believers across the world and across the ages. So, you have been numbered among the rejects. But for all of that, you've got company. If you don't find your neighbors in the faith where you usually did, they are out looking for you. Jesus loves sinners—you qualify. He never lost one of us.



<http://parishbulletin.com/Organizations/21936/Documents/Nesting-en-joining-unchurched.pdf>

https://www.luthersem.edu/faculty/fac_home.aspx?contact_id=jnesting

<http://thenals.org/about/faculty-and-staff/the-rev-dr-james-nesting/>

<https://www.amazon.com/James-Arne-Nesting-e/B001KHKTZI>

<http://steadfastlutherans.org/2013/07/guest-article-elca-has-biggest-split-in-american-church-history/>

<http://issuesetc.org/podcast/483050510H2S1.mp3>

Pastoral Letter from the Bishop

December 1, 2011

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP

Dear Saints,

This pastoral letter addresses the recent lawsuit filed by some members of Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, that became front page news in the local newspaper on Thursday, December 1. The lawsuit is a legal challenge to unconstitutional decisions made by the Council of Grace to dual affiliate with another church body and the manner in which some were removed from church membership. No doubt you share my sadness that the brokenness and controversy at Grace Lutheran have resulted in legal action.

Dual affiliation by ELCA congregations with another church body is precluded by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. After a failed disaffiliation vote that did not garner the votes required to leave the ELCA, the Council of Grace Lutheran voted to dual affiliate with another church body. Further action by the Council included removing active members of Grace from full voting status. These two actions are being challenged in court. What is challenged is not church doctrine or matters of faith; the challenge has to do with whether or not constitutional provisions have been violated by the leadership of Grace Lutheran.

Some have wondered why the bishop has not intervened to restore order. It has been my experience that many equate the office of an ELCA bishop with that of a Roman Catholic bishop. The two are significantly different. ELCA bishops have very limited authority; primary authority resides in congregations, especially regarding matters of employment and property. Congregations call pastors; pastors do not work for the bishop. Congregations own church property; the synod does not. This means that Lutheran bishops cannot intervene in the way that bishops from other denominations can, and most disputes in congregations are settled within the local community without the involvement of the bishop or the synod. Of major concern to me is the public witness we make in Jesus' name. I ask that you speak well of the leadership of Grace Lutheran in spite of past actions taken, that you hold in prayer all those adversely affected by the brokenness, and that you cherish and affirm the partnerships we share as ELCA congregations as we seek to faithfully witness and serve others in the name of Jesus. If you have questions, I encourage you to speak personally with your pastor.

In the name of the Lord of Advent,

Bishop Duane Pederson

Estranged Grace Lutheran Church members suing to stop meeting – Leader-Telegram

Estranged members of Grace Lutheran Church are asking for a temporary injunction to postpone the Eau Claire house of worship's annual meeting scheduled for Sunday.

Those members - affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - also are asking a judge to remove members of the church council and restrain spending and borrowing by members of Grace Lutheran Church who are affiliated with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.

"If defendants are allowed to continue in possession of the premises at 202 W. Grand Ave. ... to conduct annual meetings, to elect officers, to borrow and spend money, when they do not have rightful possession of Grace Lutheran Church ... great harm will befall ... Grace Lutheran Church," pro-ELCA members claim in court documents.

Their request - filed this week in Eau Claire County Court - comes close to two months after nearly 70 members of Grace Lutheran Church filed a civil lawsuit asking a judge to intervene in a dispute about church affiliation.

The dispute arose after a rift developed over the ELCA's acceptance of openly gay clergy.

The motion for a temporary injunction was scheduled for a hearing last week. However, Barron County Judge Timothy Doyle recused himself, according to court officials. Doyle was assigned to handle the case after the defendants in the civil suit - Grace Lutheran Church-LCMC and members of the church council - requested a substitution for Rusk County Judge Steven Anderson.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_b43eb556-843e-5bb8-94af-0dad730e2f4b.html

1.24.12

Judge: Grace Lutheran must postpone annual meeting – Leader-Telegram

Judge Oks restraining order stemming from church rift

Grace Lutheran Church of Eau Claire was ordered Friday by a Polk County judge to postpone its annual meeting, which was scheduled for Sunday.

Judge Molly GaleWyrick approved a temporary restraining order by estranged members of the church. The group also requested, in part, that the judge remove church council members and restrain spending and borrowing by church members associated with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.

The Rev. Rolf Nestingen, senior pastor at Grace Lutheran Church who attended Friday's hearing, said the judge "granted only one of those things, that is that we not hold our annual meeting. She also said that we operate on last year's budget with the same leadership, and that we not spend any extraordinary amounts of money."

Nearly 70 members of Grace Lutheran Church filed a civil suit against the church and its council in November, asking a judge to declare that the longtime Eau Claire church remains solely affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In court documents, the plaintiffs are referred to as Grace Lutheran Church-ELCA, and the defendants as Grace Lutheran Church-LCMC.

The Grace Lutheran Church council voted last April to also join the more conservative Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ after a vote to disaffiliate with the ELCA failed to receive the two-thirds supermajority needed.

Friday's court hearing was the result of the plaintiffs' asking for a temporary injunction to postpone Grace Lutheran Church's annual meeting.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_d8b0ec16-fb5e-55b8-942b-2aee2604f85f.html?mode=jqm

1.28.12

Images for Judge Molly GaleWyrick

Local church won't break away from ELCA - WQOW TV

Despite majority approval, local church won't break away from ELCA

Eau Claire (WQOW) - It turns out, a local Lutheran church was divided on a decision to break away from its national organization.

The congregation at Grace Lutheran voted Sunday whether or not to separate from the ELCA. A large number of members aren't happy with the direction their national organization is headed. For example, the organization decided more than a year ago to allow openly gay clergy who met certain criteria.

A majority of Voters at Grace Lutheran (288) wanted to break away, however the final tally was 52 votes shy of the two-thirds majority needed to approve a final vote.

The pastor called Sunday's vote was "very civil". Leadership at the church will meet Tuesday night to decide where to go from here.

Divisiveness Persists at Grace Lutheran of Eau Claire - Minnesota Church News

Grace Lutheran Church again is attempting to break away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, according to its senior pastor.

During a special meeting Sunday, the congregation voted 236-0, with "a handful of abstentions," to rescind the large Eau Claire congregation's ELCA affiliation, the Rev. Rolf Nestingen said via email.

However, Drew Ryberg, an Eau Claire attorney who is representing nearly 70 estranged members of Grace Lutheran Church in a civil lawsuit, questions the validity of the vote.

"What they did was improper, completely improper," said Ryberg, whose clients are asking a judge to intervene in the dispute over church affiliation.

Nestingén doesn't see it that way. The most recent vote - the historical church's second attempt at disaffiliating with the ELCA in less than a year - was prompted by "recommendations" from the Synod Council of the ELCA's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, he said.

The Synod Council in January sent a letter to church officials detailing its final decision in an adjudication process resulting from the dispute - that Grace Lutheran Church immediately recognize its sole affiliation is with the ELCA, terminate affiliation with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ or any church other than the ELCA, immediately restore full voting memberships to all members moved to associate member status since Jan. 1, 2011, and immediately recognize that anyone who meets the required criteria and who does not want to remain affiliated with the LCMC is a voting member.

<http://mnchurchnews.blogspot.com/2012/03/divisiveness-persists-at-grace-lutheran.html>

3.2.12



Pastor Rolf Nestingen, left, Pastor David Irgens, right.

Grace--Eau Claire has a New Strategy - Minnesota Church News

UPDATE ON FEBRUARY 26, 2012, MEETING

As you should all be aware, on Sunday, February 26, Grace Lutheran Church met in a special congregational meeting to determine a response to Synod Council demands resulting from an adjudication process brought against Grace by Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc. The motion that was unanimously passed (236-0) at that meeting was a successful first vote to disaffiliate from the ELCA. A second vote to disaffiliate is scheduled for May 30, 2012.

This week a letter was sent to Bishop Pederson and the Synod Council informing them of the meeting and the vote.

Today an article was published in the Eau Claire Leader Telegram concerning that vote. I take this opportunity to challenge the claim that the vote was somehow "improper".

Each church has its own constitution which is its primary governance. The ELCA Constitution 9.52 states: "The governing documents of congregations recognized at the establishment of this church shall continue to govern such congregations."

The ELCA also has a Model Constitution for Congregations that is updated periodically by the churchwide organization. When a church (such as Grace) updates its own constitution, it is required to include updates made to the Model Constitution. But a church is not required to update their constitution when and if any changes are made to that Model. That means that while the ELCA changed the rules regarding disaffiliation in the Model, we are not mandated to change our constitution to match the Model. We have rules regarding disaffiliation. Our rules do not require a 30-day notification to the bishop of our intent to vote to leave the ELCA. Our Constitution is our primary governance; and our vote is, therefore, valid and binding. Our Constitution requires notification to the Bishop of the results of the first vote, and a consultation with the Bishop within the 90-days before our second vote. The notice has been sent, and a consultation will be negotiated.

Within the court order, the congregation was instructed to review the recommendations of the Synod Council and discern a response. The "spirit" of the court order was met with a resounding vote to move away from the ELCA.

If anyone has any questions, please contact me.

Thank you.

Anne

Effort to dismiss Grace Lutheran lawsuit denied – Leader Telegram

A lawsuit over the affiliation of Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire will continue, a Polk County judge determined Thursday.

Judge Molly GaleWyrick denied a motion to dismiss the case made by the defendants - Grace Lutheran Church-Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ and members of the church council.

Nearly 70 estranged members of Grace Lutheran Church filed a civil lawsuit on Nov. 29 in Eau Claire County, asking a judge to intervene in a dispute over church affiliation.

During a hearing Thursday in Eau Claire County, the judge said the defendants' latest attempts to leave the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - votes on Feb. 26 and the night before the hearing - were clearly in violation of the spirit of a restraining order she issued in January.

The restraining order, which requires the defendants to limit church spending to ordinary and necessary expenses, remains in effect, the judge said. The order was put in place to ensure the church's money isn't improperly spent amid the dispute.

The votes came after the Synod Council of the ELCA's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin sent a letter to church officials on both sides of the issue detailing its final decision in an adjudication process resulting from the dispute – that Grace Lutheran Church immediately recognize its sole affiliation is with the ELCA, terminate its affiliation with the LCMC or any other church other than the ELCA, immediately restore full voting memberships to all members moved to associate member status since Jan. 1, 2011, and immediately recognize that anyone who meets the required criteria and who does not want to remain affiliated with the LCMC is a voting member.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_a79dc2b5-41cf-5c7e-b013-74e5dde2cb37.html 6.1.12

Judgment: Eau Claire church to remain ELCA – Leader Telegram

The dispute over affiliation at Grace Lutheran Church soon could be over.

In a recent decision, Polk County Judge Molly GaleWyrick said the Jan. 16, 2012, decision of the Synod Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin "must be enforced," meaning Grace will be solely affiliated with the ELCA.

Her action is the latest decision in an Eau Claire County civil suit filed on Nov. 29, 2011, by nearly 70 members of Grace Lutheran Church, asking the courts to intervene in the dispute, which fractured the congregation at the historic house of worship.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_0fd51d2c-9049-11e2-a55a-0019bb2963f4.html 3.18.13

Grace Lutheran Eau Claire, Fifth Sunday in Lent Part II - YouTube

March 17, 2013 Conclusion of Anne Carter's address, and Pastor Rolf Nestingen's message.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uf1TZABIMqw> 3.21.13

Grace Lutheran Church reverends removed – Leader Telegram

Bishop Duane Pederson has removed the pastors at Grace Lutheran Church — the Revs. Rolf Nestingen and David Irgens — from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's roster of clergy.

"The two leaders of Grace essentially (removed) themselves from ELCA leadership by the decisions and behavior in which they (chose) to engage that is contrary to the constitutions and polity of the ELCA," said Pederson, whose term as bishop of the ELCA's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin ends on Sunday.

Nestingen, senior pastor at the historic Eau Claire church, had no comment on the bishop's decision. He celebrated his 35th anniversary of ordination and 15th anniversary of his ministry at Grace in 2012. Irgens, associate pastor at Grace, was unavailable for comment.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_42c95818-95cd-11e2-b869-0019bb2963f4.html 3.25.13

An inspirational message from our President at Grace Lutheran, Eau Claire - YouTube



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H6Po70PTuo>

3.27.13

<http://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/warning-to-elca-churches-from-former-grace-lutheran-eau-claire-president>

A Message from Pastor Nestingen

As our congregational president, Anne Carter, carefully explained recently, on Sun., March 17, the decision of the court, handed down ironically on the Ides of March, in essence, really changes nothing at Grace. Same council. Same officers. Same pastors. In fact, it's actually an improvement as now we have full discretion over our assets, both congregational as well as in terms of the Foundation. The fly in the ointment, so to speak, is that we have been ordered to abide by the

determinations of the Synod Council in January of 2012. Before you jump to any conclusions, however, consider that those directives have no material effect on the ministry at Grace as we now know it. We are told that we can no longer be dually-affiliated. Fine. For the time being we will no longer be dually-affiliated.

Otherwise we are told that we must restore full voting rights to certain of the dissidents, something we had already done back in May of 2012. We are also told that in all future matters, including any affiliation votes, we must abide by the Constitution of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), something we had already endeavored to do in the first place.

http://www.grace-church.org/images/april_aog2013.pdf

Page 2

April 2013

Third Sunday of Easter at Grace Lutheran Eau Claire, WI Part II - YouTube

Grace Lutheran Eau Claire, April 14, 2013 Pastor Rolf Nestingen bringing the message "A Real Eye Opener"



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bxvra2gfms>

4.14.13

[Images for Pastor Rolf Nestingen](#)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rolf-nesting-56a8aa117>

Letter to (congregation presidents of Grace and Amazing Grace) and pastors of the Chippewa Valley Conference – ELCA

April 9, 2013

Dear Mrs. Carter and Ms. Sands,

Following the summary judgment rendered by the circuit court, the two factions in disagreement at Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, apparently came to differing interpretations as to the January 16, 2012, adjudication decision of the Synod Council, specifically the interpretation of point three of the decision: "That Grace Lutheran Church immediately recognize that anyone who meets the criteria of *C8.02.c. and who does *not* want to remain affiliated with LCMC may hold associate membership status at Grace Lutheran Church s per *C8.02.d., if they so desire." Additionally, we have received 2 letters from Mrs. Anne Carter to the Synod Council dated April 4, 2013 and April 5, 2013. It is evident from these communications that Mrs. Carter and those who concur with her point of view grossly misunderstand the Synod Council's adjudication decision, constitutional interpretation, and the polity and practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Because the judge has directed both parties back to the Synod Council for guidance and direction, the Synod Council of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin provides the following clarification of point three referenced above:

1. The January 16, 2012 Synod Council decision required immediate action. In response, the LCMC faction conducted two disaffiliation votes seeking to disaffiliate from ELCA. These votes on February 26 and May 30, 2012, were done in response to the Synod Council decision. By their actions and decisions, those who occupy the building at 202 West Grand have demonstrated their ongoing desire to "remain affiliated with LCMC." Thus, all persons who are not affiliated with Amazing Grace, a synodically authorized worshipping community, immediately "hold associate member status at Grace Lutheran Church."
2. If those who hold associate membership status do not wish to hold such status because of their LCMC affiliation, they may withdraw their Grace Lutheran Church associate member status and have no affiliation with Grace Lutheran Church.
3. If those who hold associate membership status wish to be full voting members of Grace Lutheran Church, they may make membership application to the new ELCA Congregation Council to indicate that they do "not want to remain affiliated with LCMC." The Synod Council hopes that many associate members will relinquish their LCMC affiliation so that they may qualify for possible voting membership at Grace Lutheran Church in the future.
4. Those Grace Lutheran members affiliated with Amazing Grace, a synodically authorized worshipping community, and all others who were unconstitutionally removed from voting membership from Grace Lutheran Church are immediately restored to full voting membership.

As a result of the adjudication decision of the Synod Council, the constitutional implications for Grace Lutheran's leadership are clear. The Synod Council states the following so that there can be no misunderstanding or misinterpretation regarding membership and leadership:

-Because the LCMC affiliated persons at 202 West Grace who acted as a Congregation Council are immediately associate members of Grace Lutheran Church, they no longer hold elected positions of leadership; only full voting members are constitutionally eligible to hold elected leadership positions in an ELCA congregation.

-Initially, only those associated with Amazing Grace are eligible for elected leadership at Grace Lutheran Church.

-Former leadership affiliated with LCMC is to immediately cease and desist all matters regarding the governance of the congregation and immediately take cooperative steps to transfer all governance authority to Amazing Grace leadership (turn over facility keys, financial records, data bases, account signatory authority, etc., and to provide all information and

complete access to information to govern the congregation). All personal property of Grace Lutheran Church shall remain at 202 West Grand Avenue.

-All membership applications of Grace Lutheran associate members must be submitted to the new ELCA Congregation Council for consideration.

-Eligibility for the Grace Lutheran Foundation board of directors will also be determined by constitutional membership criteria.

The adjudication decisions of the Synod Council of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin are final. With the above clarification, the Synod Council hopes and prays that Grace Lutheran Church will engage in ministry and mission as a fully participating member congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and that the long road to reconciliation and healing may begin.

Sincerely,

The Synod Council of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

cc: Tom Guelzow, Synod Attorney

Pastors of the Chippewa Valley Conference — ELCA

http://www.elcatoday.com/uploads/2/4/2/8/2428588/synod_council_decision_4.9.13.pdf

Synod Council: Grace leaders no longer eligible to serve – Leader Telegram

The pastors at Grace Lutheran Church have been removed from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's roster of clergy, and now the members of the church's congregational council are no longer eligible to hold elected positions of leadership, according to the Synod Council of the ELCA's Northwest Synod of Wisconsin.

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_e1e863a4-a3eb-11e2-8cb5-001a4bcf887a.html

4.12.13

Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

B. No Dual Roster Membership: In accordance with bylaw 8.72.15.d., an ordained minister of this church who enters the ordained ministry of another church body, or who joins a religious group or congregation of another church body (except as provided in 7.41.17.b.), or who serves a group schismatic from this church or from a congregation thereof, shall cease to be a member of this church. The ordained minister's name shall be removed from the roster of ordained ministers by the bishop of the synod, who shall report the action to the secretary of this church and to the next Synod Assembly.

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Policies_Procedures_Roster_Mgmt.pdf

Page 49

Letter from president of Grace Lutheran Church

4.13.13

To: Synod Council of Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA

From: Anne Carter - Council President, Grace Lutheran Church

Date: 4 April 2013

RE: Synod Council Decision of January 16, 2012

On March 14, 2013 Judge Molly GaleWyrick, Circuit Court Judge from Barron County, rendered a decision in the lawsuit filed against Grace Lutheran Church by members of Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc. In this declaratory judgment, she has declared that the aforementioned Synod Council decision is final and enforceable. The Synod Council decision is as follows:

1. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately terminate affiliations with LCMC or any church other than the ELCA.
2. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately restore to full voting membership all those voting members moved to associate member status since January 1, 2011. Eligibility for voting membership is governed by *C8.02c.
3. That Grace Lutheran Church immediately recognize that anyone who meets the criteria of *C8.02(c) and who does **not** want to associate with LCMC is a voting member of Grace Lutheran Church. Individual members who wish to remain affiliated with LCMC may hold associate membership status at Grace Lutheran Church as per C8.02(d), if they so desire.
4. That Grace Lutheran Church's sole affiliation is with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Affiliation with the ELCA may be terminated only as permitted in the governing documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In order to comply with the decision of the court, the following actions have been taken:

1. Notice was sent to Mark VanderTuig, Service Coordinator for LCMC. Grace Lutheran Church was removed from the LCMC roster of churches effective March 14, 2013. (See Attachment A)
2. All those members who had been removed to associate status since January 1, 2011 were restored to full voting membership in May 2012. A letter of reinstatement was sent that same month. (See Attachment B)
3. Announcement of the judge's decision was made to the Grace congregation and members have been directed to inform the church office of their desire to remain affiliated with LCMC. They will be moved to associate status as they make notification. (See Attachment C)
4. When and if Grace Lutheran Church votes to rescind affiliation with ELCA, the congregation will follow constitutional guidelines. Grace now holds out as an ELCA congregation.

Judge GaleWyrick has ordered both plaintiffs and defendants to seek further clarification of implementation of the decision from the Synod Council. We recognize that the authority of the Synod Council resides with the NW Synod of Wisconsin's constitution. We also recognize that the constitution gives the Council no authority over the assets,

governance, property, pastoral call or membership of an individual congregation. We believe that we are in compliance with the Council's decision.

Thank you.

Attachments

Cc: Grace Lutheran Church Council

Jay Heit, Herrick & Hart Law Office

Rolf Nestingen, Senior Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church

David Irgens, Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church

Letter to Rostered Leaders in the Chippewa Valley

4.23.13

The Honorable Molly E. Gale Wyrick signed the court order today that was submitted by Drew Ryberg, attorney for the plaintiffs, Grace Lutheran ELCA. In brief, the order affirmed the plaintiff's position which included the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin's council's adjudication decision of January 2012, and the synod council's clarification of April 8, 2013. This is a significant moment in the life of Grace Lutheran Church. Those who have in the past assumed possession of 202 W. Grand have been ordered to turn over keys to the building and access to all records and property by 5pm today, April 23, 2013. A motion by the defendants' attorney to stay the order until the appeals process is complete was denied. The plaintiffs and those remaining as a part of Grace Lutheran Church now continue the work of healing, reconciliation, and identifying steps in moving back to the building. Please keep all those affected by these decisions in your prayers.

In the Grace of Christ,

Rev. Ramie Bakken

Assistant to the Bishop

Grace Lutheran Church keys change hands at judge's orders – Leader Telegram

"Many have asked why it was necessary to go to court," said Deb Sands, the newly elected council president for the ELCA congregation, in a statement. "Quite simply, we were left with no other option due to the complete failure of Grace's former leadership to follow the church's constitution (and) appropriate rules of church governance or abide by any of our Synod Council's decisions. Even the court's orders have been defied."

http://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front_page/article_27ee9872-ad61-11e2-8a41-0019bb2963f4.html

4.24.13

Church members forced to hand over keys to members who left years ago – WEAU

4.24.13

Eau Claire (WQOW) - A judge hands down a ruling in an Eau Claire church dispute that goes back years. The result of that ruling is that church keys have been turned over.

Grace Lutheran in Eau Claire finds itself in a bind.

"It's been years of a battle between the ELCA and people that feel they're going in the wrong direction," explains Grace Lutheran Facilities Manager Cynthia Mayer.

The majority of members at Grace Lutheran wanted to affiliate their church with another Lutheran church under a different organization.

"The national organization approved gays and lesbians in their admission to church and the like and my understanding is that's what they were strongly opposed to and decided to go out on their own on that issue and make an issue of it which separated, sadly, the church itself," points out ELCA Attorney Thomas Guelzow.

The church says that wasn't the main issue.

"Our initial disagreement has been with theology. We simply want to worship the way that we have for the last 100 years and 500 years if you think about Martin Luther," says Grace Lutheran Pastor David Irgens. "This new way of interpreting scripture is Jesus Christ as a symbol instead of the person of Jesus Christ."

Even though a majority supported dual affiliation, church members needed a two-thirds majority. They fell short, but still opposed changes that were made. So, they practiced as if the vote were approved; which in effect, split the church.

"The overall structure of the church is not like the Methodist Church or the Episcopal Church or the Catholic Church.

There isn't a hierarchy," says Congressional Council President Anne Carter. "We are individual churches who work together, but there is no 'overlordship' and that's what is being imposed upon this church unconstitutionally and without due process."

Some stayed while others formed another congregation called "Amazing Grace."

The case went to court. The Amazing Grace parishioners wanted action taken against those who were still actively practicing at Grace Lutheran. Those at Grace were asking for a split from the ELCA. The court's decision came down on Tuesday.

"The judge agreed with us," Guelzow says. "Essentially it ruled yesterday there is a separation of church and state."

The judge said all governing authority must be given to the Amazing Grace congregation.

Church leaders were told to give up the keys, but initially refused until Wednesday afternoon. The keys were turned over when those at Grace Lutheran were threatened with being in contempt of court.

<https://www.weau.com/home/headlines/Judge-rules-Eau-Claire-church-congregation-to-hand-over-keys-removing-membership-204588871.html>

Ten jobs in limbo as new group takes over Eau Claire church – WEAU

4.25.13

Eau Claire, Wisc. (WEAU) – A divided church is changing more than Sunday services. Jobs are at stake.

Two days after a judge ruled some in the congregation could not be full members of Grace Lutheran Church, about a dozen are left not knowing if they have a job.

<http://www.weau.com/news/headlines/Ten-jobs-in-limbo-as-new-group-takes-over-Eau-Claire-church-204759841.html>

The Truth about Grace - YouTube

A message from Anne Carter, Rev. Rolf Nestingan, and Rev. David Irgens.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJnO9hLZrdE>

4.27.13

Letter to Rostered Leaders in the Chippewa Valley

5.2.13

Dear Colleagues of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin,

The following update on events at Grace Lutheran in Eau Claire, are provided for you as rostered leaders in your community. Following the transfer of leadership (symbolized in the press by the handing over of a basket of keys), Grace Lutheran members have temporarily closed the building to the public, and have been working to change voicemail, gain access to computers, web page information, recover accounts, and so forth.

A media relations board produced a television broadcast that was aired at Grace's usual time on channel 18 with a message delivered by Rev. Aaseng from St. John's Lutheran in Eau Claire. This coming week the program will include a sermon by Rev. Jacobson from Trinity Lutheran in Eau Claire. The same broadcast will be aired on the radio at the usual time that Grace Lutheran has held this spot.

An interim will be appointed to serve Grace Lutheran in the near future. Pastor Rehak, interim at First Lutheran and serving the Amazing Grace community, has been leading a 3-part series of guided conversations to prepare those at Amazing Grace to return to the building at 202 W. Grand.

Area clergy are invited to be present for the 3rd conversation as these members return to 202 this Monday, May 6, at 6:30 p.m. This conversation will be one of allowing God to talk to them through scripture and prayer for healing and hope. We will circle around the Grace members in three specific locations (possibly 4) where pain and spiritual injury has occurred; the primary gathering space, the Council room, and the sanctuary. If you are planning to attend and would like to participate, please contact Michael Rehak at 608.509.8795 or by email mrehak@first-lutheran.org. Plan to gather at First Lutheran at 6:30 and walk down together.

We expect that worship for Grace Lutheran will be offered in 2 locations for a time as members work toward healing and wholeness as a community of faith. Those who have been affiliated with Amazing Grace will continue to worship in the chapel at First Lutheran. Worship at Grace Lutheran's building at 202 W. Grand will likely begin again on May 12 for those who have remained at Grace and are not affiliated with LCMC. At an appropriate time determined by the interim pastor and the congregational leadership we expect that the wider ELCA community will be invited to join the congregation in a community worship service.

Many of you were disheartened by the news reports that occurred as the transfer of leadership happened at Grace Lutheran and by Mr. Irgens' and Mr. Nestingen's comments to the press. Yes, there was misinformation that was shared. No, we will not go "on air" to dispute the falsehoods or the misinterpretation of events. To do so will invite further argument and further negative press. What we can do and will do, is continue to be the body of Christ, engaged in ministry in our communities.

As the local mission interpreter in your community, we encourage you to tell your story about the ELCA. Share what we believe, what your congregation and its members accomplish in the name of Christ and in service to our Lord.

This is the most important type of witness you can provide in the face of those who would disparage our beliefs and teachings. [Additionally, feel free to utilize these short statements that address some common questions in your pastoral conversations.](#)

In the Grace of Christ,
Rev. Ramie Bakken
Assistant to the Bishop

Saving Grace LCMC - Eau Claire, Wisconsin - Facebook

Saving Grace Lutheran was formed after the ELCA closed the doors of Grace Lutheran Church, removing the congregation and staff until further notice.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Saving-Grace-LCMC/231682173543270>

Saving Grace First Service - YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kfqoo-GjKjI>

5.5.13

A Service of Reclaiming the Promise – Grace Lutheran Church

5.6.13

At First Lutheran Church

Hymn *Healer of Every Ill*

Psalm 121

Process to Grace Lutheran Church

At the Door

John 10:1-3, 7b
 Prayer
 In the Gathering Space
 Psalm 22:1, 11-13, 16, 19-22
 Sharing *In this space I was...*
 John 14:18-21a, 15:12
 Prayer
 In the Council Meeting Room
 Psalm 36:1-4, 7-10
 Sharing *In this space I was...*
 2 Timothy 1:13-14
 Prayer
 In the Sanctuary
 Psalm 122:1, 7-9
 Sharing *In this space I was...*
 Ephesians 4:30-5:2
 Prayer
 At the Pulpit
 2 Timothy 2:14-15
 Clergy – *As ordained clergy in the ELCA we reclaim this pulpit for the proclamation of the Gospel.*
 Prayer
 Hymn *Have No Fear Little Flock*
 Sending
 John 14:27
 Hymn *All Are Welcome*

Easter sunday at Grace Lutheran Eau Claire part ii - YouTube

Apr 17, 2013 - Uploaded by Saving Grace.
 28:31 Saving Grace First Service by Saving Grace
 18:28 Second Sunday of Easter at Grace

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyGUKaeZ_64

Saving Grace Third Service - YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QcxlCVart4>

5.19.13

Warning to ELCA Churches from Former Grace Lutheran (Eau Claire) President – Exposing “Exposing the ELCA”

5.23.13

To all this concerns:

It is important that every member of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the ELCA understand the recent decisions made by the Synod Council against Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI. To that end, attached to this email are three letters.

The first, from Grace Lutheran leadership, outlines compliance with a decision made by the Synod Council in January 2012. The second, from the Council to Grace, contradicts that compliance and dictates a new set of directives. The last letter questions those directives and details the consequences of those directives on Grace members and the community of Eau Claire.

Please read through the letters carefully. They are sent to you so that you will understand that if this happened to Grace Lutheran Church, it will happen to you.

Thank you.

Anne Carter

Former President of Grace Lutheran Church

Letter from former president of Grace Lutheran Church

5.27.13

Dear Synod Council Member:

On April 9, 2013, the Synod Council of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin rendered a second decision against Grace Lutheran Church, 202 West Grand Avenue, Eau Claire, WI, as related to the adjudication brought by Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc. in December 2011. On April 23, 2013, that decision was imposed on Grace Lutheran Church by a circuit court judge. Your decision changed the governance and gave control of the assets of Grace to an outside group. Your decision changed the status of the majority of the active members – those who attended, contributed, worshipped, and worked at Grace Lutheran – to associate status. The doors of Grace have been locked, and we have been refused access.

You should be aware of the following:

- Your decision was made when Grace Lutheran Church was an ELCA-only congregation. Thus, your decision was made against ELCA members.

- Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc. is a separately organized LLC made up of members and non-members of Grace Lutheran Church. Your decision effectively turned over control of an organization to non-members of that organization.
- Bishop Duane Pederson is formerly of *First Lutheran Church*, Eau Claire, WI; Assistant to the Bishop Amy Odgren is from *First Lutheran Church*; Synod Council Vice President Lynn Fering is a member of *First Lutheran Church*; attorney for the NW Synod, Tom Guelzow, is a member of *First Lutheran Church*; Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc. has been holding services at *First Lutheran Church*.
- Ramie Bakken, representing the NW Synod, sent out letters that encouraged reconciliation. She claimed that the invitations were sent to all Grace members, but those letters were not sent to associate members. Some of those letters were, however, sent to Grace members who are deceased.
- The doors of Grace Lutheran Church have been locked for over a month. No one has been allowed access to remove personal property from the building. Because of the lockdown the food pantry, third largest in Eau Claire, has been unused; all anonymous groups that met in the building have been forced to find other accommodations; Boy Scout Troop 36 has also been forced to meet elsewhere and all their materials were being held; the ham radio group has not been able to meet at all because Grace leadership will not release their equipment.

Because your decision has far-reaching repercussions and has caused confusion, we respectfully request that you answer the following questions:

- Who called the Synod Council to meet about this decision? Who ran the meeting? Where was the meeting held? Who was in attendance at the meeting? Who presented the points of the decision? What were the points of debate? What was the final vote?
- What is the constitutional basis for your authority to dictate membership in an individual congregation?
- What is the constitutional basis for your authority to control the assets of an individual congregation?
- What is your legal authority to award the assets of one independent corporation (Grace Lutheran Church) to a separate corporation (Amazing Grace ELCA, Inc.)?
- Is it really in the best interest of the NW Synod that the Synod Council be controlled by the special interests of one congregation?
- Is it really in the best interest of the NW Synod that representatives carelessly send correspondence to dead people?
- In retrospect, did the Synod Council truly consider all the ramifications of this decision and its effect not only on Grace Lutheran but also on the community it serves?
- Do you recognize that you have now set the precedent that a Synod Council can overturn the ruling body of an individual congregation? You have done this to Grace. It is only a matter of time before it will be done to your home congregation as well.

One of the foremost responsibilities of any governing council is to protect the rights of its members. It must also respect the integrity of the organization it represents. The members of Grace Lutheran Church were excluded from the process of the Synod Council from the very beginning. We have the right to get answers to fundamental questions. Because we consider your decision to be illegal, unfair, unconstitutional and, frankly, immoral, we respectfully request that you reflect on your decision-making process and explain how such a hostile takeover of assets is a positive reflection on the ELCA in general or the NW Synod in particular.

For the last three years, members of Grace Lutheran Church have asked for the right to ask questions about the direction of the ELCA. The former bishop attempted to silence us. Now, by virtue of this decision, the Synod Council concurs with that censorship. We are saddened and disappointed by this failure to seek the truth.

Jesus tells a story about an unfair judge who finally gave justice to a woman simply because she would not stop demanding it. We pray, that in this case, justice will be more readily granted.

Thank you.

In His Service,

Anne Carter, Former Council President, Grace Lutheran Church

Cc: Pastor Rolf Nestingen

Pastor David Irgens

Pastors of NW Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA by email

Congregations of NW Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA by email

<http://www.exposingtheelca.com/1/post/2013/05/warning-to-elca-churches-from-former-grace-lutheran-eau-claire-president.html>

Letter from former president of Grace Lutheran Church

From: Saving Grace Lutheran Church Congregation [mailto:leadershipsglchurch@yahoo.com]

Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2013 12:53 AM

To: undisclosed recipients:

Subject: Attention ELCA Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Members

To all this concerns:

It is important that every member of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the ELCA understand the recent decision made by the Synod Council against Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI. To that end, attached to this email are three letters.

The first, from Grace Lutheran leadership, outlines compliance with a decision made by the Synod Council in January 2012. The second, from the Council to Grace, contradicts that compliance and dictates a new set of directives. The last, questions that decision and details the consequences of that decision on Grace members and the community of Eau Claire.

Please read through the letters carefully. They are sent to you so that you will understand that if this happened to Grace Lutheran Church, it will happen to you.

Thank you.

Anne Carter, Former President, Grace Lutheran Church

Letter from Pastor Eric Bakken to the Congregation Council at Evangelical Lutheran Church in Black River Falls, WI and distributed to rostered leaders in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin 5.30.2013

Greetings,

I just wanted to let you know that there is a letter that has been sent out by a Ms. Anne Carter (former president of Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire) with the intention to cause unrest on the eve of the NW WI Synod Assembly (this weekend). I want to summarize again as I did at our last council meeting, the process that has played out there.

First, as some congregations have decided to do, there was an effort by the leadership of Grace Lutheran to leave the ELCA and become a member of LCMC (a Lutheran denomination where many of the congregations who have left the ELCA are going). That vote failed with 57% of the membership in attendance voting to leave, and 43% of the membership in attendance voting to remain in the ELCA. In order for a congregation to leave the ELCA, a legal vote must take place with two thirds of those present voting to leave the ELCA. The leadership of Grace Lutheran then petitioned and were granted (by the LCMC) dual membership within their denomination even while Grace held membership within the ELCA. This is against the ELCA constitution, thus the Synod Council informed Grace Lutheran that they needed to drop their affiliation with LCMC immediately (they did not comply). The leadership of Grace also removed members of Grace who had voted to remain in the ELCA without due process, and took a 2nd vote to disaffiliate with the ELCA (this vote was conducted improperly).

A group of approximately 70 individuals calling themselves "Amazing Grace" (representing the 43% who had voted to remain in the ELCA) began a law suit against the leadership of Grace Lutheran, and in March of 2013 won that law suit. A counter law suit brought by the leadership of Grace Lutheran church was dismissed by the courts as being frivolous.

The court decision supported a process for the "Amazing Grace" individuals to begin the process of defining such issues as to the status of membership, and the establishment of leadership within the congregation. This process determined that those who had been a part of the efforts to lead Grace Lutheran out of the ELCA were immediately defined as associate members and would have to petition with the newly established leadership of Grace Lutheran (initially those who were identified in the law suit as Amazing Grace) to be restored as full voting members.

This process is for sure messy and difficult, but it is a process that has been supported by the courts and is the best process available to those who have had their constitutional rights trampled over by the former leadership of Grace Lutheran. Following the court decision, Bishop Pederson removed both pastors of Grace Lutheran Church from the ELCA clergy roster, for schismatic activity within the ELCA (a decision which is within the responsibilities of the bishop, and one in which Bishop Pederson showed great restraint). Both former pastors, Ms. Anne Carter, and other former members of Grace Lutheran who attempted to lead the congregation unconstitutionally out of the ELCA, now worship in an alternate site in Eau Claire, and call themselves "Saving Grace." They have continued to carry on a verbal campaign against the ELCA, the NW WI Synod of the ELCA, and the folks who have received their congregation back (formerly known as Amazing Grace).

Throughout this process, the former members of Grace Lutheran have used their TV broadcasts and the local media to paint a distorted picture of the chain of events which have transpired and have attempted to cast themselves as some sort of underdog fighting a big mean corporate villain, thus casting themselves as innocent victims. On the other hand, the Amazing Grace folks, our bishop, and the Synod Council showed great restraint and refused to enter into the name calling and abusive behavior that Ms. Anne Carter and the former pastors at Grace Lutheran exhibited. This has unfortunately created a lot of misinformation but will serve the integrity of the ELCA well in the long run.

If you have any further questions, please give me a call.

In Christ,

Pastor Eric Bakken

New Beginning with Grace

by Deb Sands speaking at the NW Synod Assembly, June 1, 2013

As Ruth and Naomi began their long walk back to Bethlehem, their future seemed very uncertain. Once home, their prospects didn't immediately improve. Yet, they steadfastly placed their trust in God; and as we now know, God gave them a great new beginning – not only for them in their time, but through them, for all people.

My name is Deb Sands and I am the new President of Grace Lutheran Church here in Eau Claire. As many of you know, our ELCA members, like Ruth and Naomi, have traveled a long and difficult road the last 2 years. Yet we, too, place our trust in God and with His help, we look forward to a new beginning for our church. One based on faith, hope, and love – for all.

The members of Grace are proud to be ELCA members and proud that Grace Lutheran is still an ELCA church and that the Lord has brought us back home. The ELCA is a church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. The members of Grace ELCA have, for the past 2 years, fully and faithfully lived those words as we worshiped at First Lutheran in a Synodically, Authorized Worshiping Community known as Amazing Grace. Throughout that time of exile, we never gave up hope or confidence that justice and truth would prevail; that our church's **constitution and governing documents** would be honored – and they were! It has been an amazing journey!

On behalf of all of the ELCA members of Grace, I want to publicly thank our Synod staff, the Consultation Committee and the Synod Council. Their faithful and unwavering support throughout this journey has truly been a blessing. The pastors, staff and members of First Lutheran have been stalwart in their support of the members of Grace and our fight for justice. Like Naomi when she had nowhere else to go, we, too, turned back to our original "home" of 100 years ago, our mother church, First Lutheran, who took us in, cared for us and strengthened us to begin anew.

That new beginning actually begins this Sunday with a worship service at 10:30 at Grace with our new interim pastors: Rev. Kent Garlinghouse and Rev. Chet Hoversten. Please let your congregations know that we welcome you and all who can join us in celebration. Through all of the trials and tears of these past years and the challenges that lie ahead, we are strengthened by 2nd Corinthians 5:17 "for those who place their faith in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." Thank you all for your continuing help and support in our journey of faith. Thanks be to God.

Welcome Pastor Kent - Grace Lutheran Church

<http://www.grace-church.org/images/AmazingGrace6152013.pdf>

6.1.13

Moving Forward in Grace

Please attend the community meeting in the chapel after service this Sunday, June 9, and the following Sunday, June 16, during the Community Meeting after worship, we will begin the interim process of moving Grace Lutheran congregation into your God-given future. Please join us to hear what we will all be working on during the next 6 to 9 months. Thanks for your most warm welcome and for the wonderful worship service last Sunday.

Pastor Kent Garlinghouse

Welcome Pastor Kent - Grace Lutheran Church

<http://www.grace-church.org/images/AmazingGrace6152013.pdf>

6.9.13

Turmoil in Eau Claire parish leads to division, court fight, lockout: A battle over property and an endowment fund by Michael L. Sherer / July 30, 2013

In an all-too-familiar scenario, two factions among the members of a congregation affiliated with the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** have locked horns. The issues are complex, and the story is still being written, but one thing is certain. **Grace Lutheran Church** in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, will never be the same. And members and former members may not be speaking to one another for years to come.



<http://metrolutheran.org/2013/07/turmoil-in-eau-claire-parish-leads-to-division-court-fight-lockout/> 7.30.13
[Images for Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin](#)

Saving Grace LCMC - Facebook

Saving Grace Lutheran was formed after the ELCA closed the doors of Grace Lutheran Church, removing the congregation and staff until further notice.



<https://www.facebook.com/Saving-Grace-LCMC.../info>
<http://www.saving-gracechurch.com/#/about-us/history>
[Images for Saving Grace LCMC - Facebook](#)

Sample Constitutions & Bylaws - LCMC

As more and more new congregations join LCMC, we are receiving more requests for samples of constitutions and bylaws for their review and to assist in the creation or rewriting of their own constitutions and bylaws. LCMC does not have a "model" constitution and does not require approval of a congregation's constitution. The following congregations have graciously provided copies of their constitution and bylaws as an aid to any congregation seeking assistance. There is no requirement to use any of these. They have been provided solely as examples for congregations seeking direction.

<http://www.lcmc.net/constitutions-bylaws/415>
[Images for Sample Constitutions & Bylaws - LCMC](#)

Saving Grace Lutheran Church / Welcome

Pastor Rolf Nestingen's Retirement Reception - Sunday December 20, from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall

<http://www.saving-gracechurch.com/#/news-events>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrNprO2Uvrc> Saving Grace Lutheran Church Service 12-20-15 – YouTube
[Images for Saving Grace Lutheran Church / Welcome](#)

2) A congregation splits over use of language

Grace Lutheran Church of Eau Claire, Wisconsin in the above events originally came into being in 1910 after a split from First Lutheran Church in order to hold services of worship in English.

History - Grace Lutheran Church Homepage Eau Claire

A strong faith in God and courage: the early church organizers were filled with both when they gathered on a bitterly cold January night in 1910 to organize Grace English Lutheran Church. There were 137 charter members.

After purchasing property at Second and Grand in 1912, it was another three years until the cornerstone was laid in September 1915.

Before the church construction was complete, services were held at the West Side Church and the North Side Church alternately. Pastor H.M. Thompson was the first pastor and conducted the Rites and Sacraments of the church for Grace's young congregation. The church building was completed in 1916 and the Grace family had a permanent home.

<http://grace-church.org/history.html>

[Images for History - Grace Lutheran Church Homepage Eau Claire](#)

At the half-life of its life cycle in 1960,

[\[PDF\]the life cycle of a congregation - Amazon S3](#)

We must understand, at the outset, that the life cycle of a congregation has little, if anything, to do with chronological time. A calendar cannot be used to predict the onset of a particular stage in the life cycle. It has to do with the relationship and balance of certain **“gene structures” common to congregational life**.

<http://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c3935/lifecycleofacongregation.pdf>

[Images for life cycle of a congregation](#)

[Images for “gene structures” common to congregational life](#)

Grace Lutheran was one of the largest congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran (ELC).

[Evangelical Lutheran Church \(United States\) - Wikipedia](#)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) was a [Lutheran](#) denomination that existed from 1917, when it was founded as the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA), until 1960, when it joined two other church bodies to form the second [American Lutheran Church](#).

In 1959, just before its merger into the ALC, the ELC had 2,242 pastors, 2,482 congregations, and 1,125,867 members.^[1]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_(United_States))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwegian-American_Lutheranism The Evangelical Lutheran Church (1917-1960)

First Lutheran and Grace Lutheran gathered for services of worship ½ block apart until the time when the former 150 years after its beginning merged with Our Savior's Lutheran to form Spirit Lutheran and agreed to use the facility from Our Savior's Lutheran.

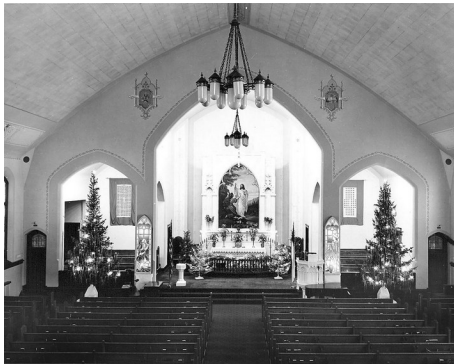
[First Lutheran celebrating 150 years | Religion | leadertelegram.com](#)

By Christena T. O'Brien Apr 25, 2015

First Lutheran Church began as a gathering of Norwegian Lutherans, but it grew into a church that reached out to many, including the homeless, the hungry and the sick.

"I think First Lutheran Church has been a pillar in this community by responding to the needs in the community," said the Rev. Amy Odgren, the church's senior pastor.

First Lutheran, 1005 Oxford Ave., is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year beginning Sunday, May 3. Its long history includes a number of initiatives to help others, multiple buildings and thousands of members, including 100-year-old Dorothy Anderson of Eau Claire.



https://www.leadertelegram.com/features/religion/first-lutheran-celebrating-years/article_486c406a-1714-5df4-a711-35b8f6242bcc.html

[Images for First Lutheran celebrating 150 years | Religion | leadertelegram.com](#)

[History | Spirit Lutheran Church | Eau Claire, WI](#)

History. Spirit Lutheran Church. Eau Claire, WI. Our Savior's Lutheran Church and First Lutheran Church were in dialogue for approximately one year about a possible consolidation, then formed "Dream Teams" to explore what we could accomplish together.

<http://spiritlutheran.org/about/history/>

[Images for History | Spirit Lutheran Church | Eau Claire, WI](#)

[Two Lutheran churches in Eau Claire vote to merge | Front Page | leadertelegram.com](#)

By Elizabeth Dohms Jun 9, 2015

The names and missions of two Eau Claire Lutheran churches already are similar, and soon they will combine to form one parish.

https://www.leadertelegram.com/news/front-page/two-lutheran-churches-in-eau-claire-vote-to-merge/article_609878f5-c04a-5f4b-9a16-5b529655c310.html

Images for Two Lutheran churches in Eau Claire vote to merge | Front Page | leadertelegram.com

Resources

Anatomy of a Church Split | CT Pastors - Christianity Today

Heeding the early signs of conflict can save churches untold heartache.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/december-online-only/anatomy-of-church-split.html>

Images for Anatomy of a Church Split

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/browse/>

Church Splits and Fights: How Do You Heal Them? – Preach It, Teach It

Unfortunately, conflict between/among Christians occur all too often. They may be out in the open for all to see; on the other hand, they may be hidden deep below the surface. I grieve that you were hurt in church by fighting Christians. I am sorry you experienced the pain of watching a church crumble. While it may seem to you now that Christians are not different from other people, there really are some wonderful Christian people who really are different. They solve problems in a mature Christian way following the guidelines God laid down for solving conflicts in an atmosphere of love. I'm sorry that as a new Christian your church was not one of those.

<https://www.preachitteachit.org/articles-blogs/ask-roger/post/archive/2010/april/article/church-splits-and-fights-how-do-you-heal>

Images for Church Splits and Fights: How Do You Heal Them? – Preach It, Teach It

Congregational Splits: Seventeen Lessons in the Aftermath - MinistryHealth.Net

The Most Important Lesson

What's the most important lesson to learn from congregational splits?

It's simply this. Regardless of what happens in ministry, God is there. Because He is there you can celebrate that He is there guiding each individual event, moment, and action. Though it may not always be evident during the crisis, in the aftermath His presence and guidance in those events will be absolutely UNMISTAKABLE!!! The greater joy is to see how God, after healing has begun, brings renewal and vision to the ministry in ways that prior to the conflict were unimaginable.

102 Leadership Lessons From Congregational Splits - MinistryHealth.Net

http://www.ministryhealth.net/mh_articles/102_leadership%20lessons_from_split.html

Images for Leadership Lessons From Congregational Splits

How to Recover from the Heartbreak of a Church Split - Church Leaders

It's impossible to address every situation in a blog. There is no 'one-way' to handle every situation and no singular way to view every circumstance. But I urge you to be protective of the local church. Protect the unity of the church as a whole. Be mindful of the long-term impact on people.

<http://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/162654-how-to-recover-from-the-heartbreak-of-a-church-split.html>

Images for How to Recover from the Heartbreak of a Church Split - Church Leaders

Nine Thoughts on Church Splits - ThomRainer.com

There is little good that comes from church splits. The residual pain is lasting, and the negative community impact is enduring.

After reflecting on church splits over my thirty-year tenure, and after conducting an informal Twitter poll, I have nine major thoughts I would like to share with you in this article.

<http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/nine-thoughts-church-splits/>

Images for Nine Thoughts on Church Splits - ThomRainer.com

<http://thomrainer.com/2015/11/twenty-five-silly-things-church-members-fight-over/>

<http://thomrainer.com/2015/11/how-to-lead-a-leadership-176/>

<http://thomrainer.com/2015/05/fourteen-key-reasons-for-the-breakdown-of-church-unity/>

<http://thomrainer.com/2017/11/revitalization-church-split-revitalize-replant-017/>

<http://thomrainer.com/2017/10/five-difficult-pastors-follow/>

#2

<http://thomrainer.com/2017/08/dying-churches-die/>

<http://thomrainer.com/2014/07/five-frequent-issues-conflict-among-church-members/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Thom-S.-Rainer/e/B001IGLMVG>

https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/27470.Thom_S_Rainer

Images for thom rainer (author)

What Does the Bible Say About Dividing A Church? - OpenBible.info

https://www.openbible.info/topics/dividing_a_church

https://www.openbible.info/topics/division_in_church

<https://www.openbible.info/topics/division>

Images for bible and dividing a church

<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Bible-Verses-About-Dividing-A-Church/>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/church-splits.html>

Images for cause of church splits

<https://www.bibleinoneyear.org/bioy/commentary/2256> Three Bad Attitudes That Cause Division | bibleinoneyear.org
<https://chasingalion.com/a/12-what-does-the-bible-say-about-division-within-the-church>

Images for division within the church

<http://web.ovc.edu/terry/articles/division.htm> The Sin of Division

<https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Division-Among-Christians>

Images for Division Among Christians

<http://www.biblelessons.com/church.html> A History of Church Divisions - Bible Lessons

Images for History of Church Divisions - Bible Lessons

3) A congregation terminates its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The synod staff asked me to accept an assignment at an open-country two-point parish in the summer of 2009. I figured I could stay there a year until a new seminary graduate became available the following summer. Then came the **2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly** and the vote on **A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**. On the Monday morning after the Saturday vote, a designated member of the Congregation Council showed up at the parsonage to ask me how I could help the congregation disaffiliate from the ELCA. I told him I was not able to help him do that and urged him to slow the process down. The attitude of many changed on a dime. Whereas, when I first came, they seemed to be polite to me, now they seemed to be distant. It soon became evident that the movement towards this decision had been building momentum for 8 years and that the decision had been made beforehand that, if the Churchwide Assembly vote went a certain way, the congregation was going to disaffiliate. As it turned out, this congregation was the first in the synod to disaffiliate and did so with, other than two abstentions, all votes in favor of disaffiliation. I stayed a total of 6 months, and then the synod staff decided it was better for both parties that I take another assignment. Even though it is now thought that most of the congregations choosing to disaffiliate have done so, the following lessons learned in 2009 can be helpful in other such contentious issues in the future:

Listen

It was important to me to listen not only to the presenting matters but to the issues below and behind. Some of the members felt betrayed that the Churchwide Assembly would go against deeply held beliefs.

Calm

It was important for me to remain calm and to remember that anger directed against me reflected a broader anger at a churchwide many members felt to be in moral decline.

ELCA Hits Bottom by Robert Benne | Articles | First Things

Some of the dissenters were surprised and saddened by the results and the inevitable break that would follow. I was neither surprised at the outcome nor unhappy about the break. I had participated in twenty years of rearguard resistance that we knew would not prevent the inevitable embrace of liberal Protestantism by the ELCA. We wagered that once the dike of orthodoxy was broken, a veritable flood of heterodoxy would ensue. Further, after the defeat I was finally able to leave the negative mode of resistance and move to the positive mode of helping to organize a new church that was more faithful to the Lutheran tradition.

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/10/elca-hits-bottom>

<https://www.firstthings.com/author/robert-benne>

Images for ELCA Hits Bottom by Robert Benne | Articles | First Things

Civil

Going along with the above two, it was important for me to urge people to speak and act in a civil manner.

Boundaries

It was important for me to confront the patriarch of the congregation determined to disaffiliate when he called up people from the other congregation urging them to consider disaffiliating. I told him that it was one thing to urge people in his congregation to disaffiliate but it was another thing to urge people in the other congregation to disaffiliate as well. In the end, I took comfort in that at least one of the congregations chose to continue its affiliation with the synod and churchwide.

Promote

It was important for me to make the argument that congregations can do more together than alone, rather than advancing an argument defending the decisions of the churchwide assembly. I did so in announcements and sermons, bulletins and newsletters, as well as bringing in special speakers on Companion Synod, Lutheran Social Services, and the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, as well as a son of the other congregation studying at one of the ELCA seminaries. In the end, I thought the congregation may choose to continue its affiliation with the Bible Camp, Lutheran Social Services, and Lutheran World Relief even if it chose to disaffiliate from the synod and the churchwide.

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin | Home

TOP TEN GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

<http://www.nwswi.org/> HOME about us

<http://www.nwswi.org/home/about-us>

Images for TOP TEN GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

Process

It was important for me to insist that due process be followed. So, when a member of the Congregation Council sent an email to the church secretary asking that an announcement be included in the bulletin that there would be a meeting at her home to discuss disaffiliating, I said that such a meeting was inappropriate and that everything should be out in the open. In consultation with the synod staff, it was finally determined that the best that could be done was to allow the congregation to disaffiliate with a minimum of acrimony as long as the congregation followed the constitutional provisions.

Disaffiliation from the ELCA – Northwestern Minnesota Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Considering a motion to disaffiliate from the ELCA is one of the most serious actions that can be taken by voting members of an ELCA congregation. The constitutional provisions are designed to ensure that voting members of the congregation have an opportunity to evaluate thoroughly the issues involved with terminating the relationship between the congregation and the ELCA. It is critical, therefore, that the governing documents of the ELCA, the synod and the congregation be strictly observed and followed.

<https://nwmnsynod.org/resources/disaffiliation-from-the-elca/>

<http://nwmnsynod.org/faqs/questions-about-the-2009-sexuality-social-statement/disaffiliation-from-the-elca/>

[Images for Disaffiliation from the ELCA](#)

Constitution

The 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly made changes in the model constitution for congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America based on lessons learned from the disaffiliations.

[DOC]Model Constitution for Congregations 2019 - ELCA Resource Repository

Chapter 6.

CHURCH AFFILIATION

- *C6.01. This congregation shall be an interdependent part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or its successor, and of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This congregation is subject to the discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- *C6.02. This congregation accepts the Confession of Faith and agrees to the purposes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and shall act in accordance with them.
- *C6.03. This congregation acknowledges its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in which:
 - a. This congregation agrees to be responsible for its life as a Christian community.
 - b. This congregation pledges its financial support and participation in the life and mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - c. This congregation agrees to call pastoral leadership from the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in accordance with its call procedures except in special circumstances and with the approval of the bishop of the synod. These special circumstances are limited either to calling a candidate approved for the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or to contracting for pastoral services with a minister of Word and Sacrament of a church body with which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officially has established a relationship of full communion.
 - d. This congregation agrees to consider ministers of Word and Service for call to other staff positions in the congregation according to the procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - e. This congregation agrees to file this constitution and any subsequent changes to this constitution with the synod for review to ascertain that all of its provisions are in agreement with the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and with the constitution of the synod.
- *C6.04. Affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be terminated as follows:
 - a. This congregation takes action to dissolve.
 - b. This congregation ceases to exist.
 - c. This congregation is removed from membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America according to the procedures for discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - d. This congregation follows the procedures outlined in *C6.05.
- *C6.05. This congregation may terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the following procedure:
 - a. A resolution indicating the intent to terminate its relationship must be adopted at a legally called and conducted special meeting of the congregation by a two-thirds vote of the voting members present. Such meeting may be held no sooner than 30 days after written notice of the meeting is received by the bishop of the synod, during which time the congregation shall consult with the bishop and the bishop's designees, if any. The times and manner of the consultation shall be determined by the bishop in consultation with the Congregation Council. Unless he or she is a voting member of the congregation, the bishop and the bishop's designees, if any, shall have voice but not vote at the meeting.
 - b. The secretary of the congregation shall submit a copy of the resolution to the bishop, attesting that the special meeting was legally called and conducted and certifying the outcome of the vote, and shall mail a copy of the resolution to

voting members of the congregation. This notice shall be submitted within 10 days after the resolution has been adopted.

- c. The bishop of the synod and the congregation shall continue in consultation, as specified in paragraph a. above, during a period of at least 90 days after receipt by the synod of the notice as specified in paragraph b. above.
- d. If the congregation, after such consultation, still seeks to terminate its relationship, such action may be taken at a legally called and conducted special meeting by a two-thirds vote of the voting members present. Notice of the meeting shall be mailed to all voting members and to the bishop at least 10 days in advance of the meeting. Unless he or she is a voting member of the congregation, the bishop and the bishop's designees, if any, shall have voice but not vote at the meeting.
- e. A copy of the resolution, attesting that the special meeting was legally called and conducted and certifying the outcome of the vote, shall be sent to the bishop within 10 days after the resolution has been adopted, at which time the relationship between the congregation and this church shall be terminated subject to paragraphs g., h., and i. below. Unless this notification to the bishop also certifies that the congregation has voted by a two-thirds vote to affiliate with another Lutheran denomination, the congregation will be conclusively presumed to be an independent or non-Lutheran church.
- f. Notice of termination shall be forwarded by the bishop to the secretary of the ELCA, who shall report the termination to the Churchwide Assembly.
- g. This congregation shall abide by these covenants by and among the three expressions of this church:
 - 1) Congregations seeking to terminate their relationship with this church which fail or refuse to comply with each of the foregoing provisions in *C6.05. shall be required to receive Synod Council approval before terminating their membership in this church.
 - 2) Congregations which had been members of the Lutheran Church in America shall be required, in addition to complying with the foregoing provisions in *C6.05., to receive synodical approval before terminating their membership in this church.
 - 3) Congregations established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be required, in addition to complying with the foregoing provisions in *C6.05., to satisfy all financial obligations to this church and receive Synod Council approval before terminating their membership in this church.
- h. If this congregation fails to achieve the required two-thirds vote of voting members present at the congregation's first meeting as specified in paragraph a. above, another special meeting to consider termination of relationship with this church may be called no sooner than six months after that first meeting. If this congregation fails to achieve the required two-thirds vote of voting members present at the congregation's second meeting as specified in paragraph d. above, another attempt to consider termination of relationship with this church must follow all requirements of *C6.05. and may begin no sooner than six months after that second meeting.

***C6.06.** If this congregation considers relocation, it shall confer with the bishop of the synod in which it is territorially located and the appropriate unit of the churchwide organization before any steps are taken leading to such action. The approval of the Synod Council shall be received before any such action is effected.

***C6.07.** If this congregation considers developing an additional site to be used regularly for worship, it shall confer with the bishop of the synod in which it is territorially located and the appropriate unit of the churchwide organization before any steps are taken leading to such action.

<https://www.elca.org/constitution> 2019 Model Constitution for Congregations

<https://download.elca.org> > ELCA Resource Repository > Model Constitution

<http://www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary>

[Images for Model Constitution for Congregations 2019 - Chapter 6. CHURCH AFFILIATION terminate its relationship with the ELCA](#)

Disaffiliation from the ELCA

The congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are bound to one another in a continuing covenant relationship. The promises of this covenant are historically grounded in the fact that every congregation of this Church comes into being through the prayers, support and generous benevolence of other congregations of this Church. The covenant is framed by the constitutions of this Church and established by an array of interconnected public promises made by pastors and congregations.

Under certain conditions, a congregation may choose to terminate its participation in that covenant. For this reason, the covenant itself provides an honorable and respectful process for the termination of that relationship, outlined in pertinent sections of the governing documents of the ELCA. Covenants may be renegotiated, but they may not be redesigned by only one party to the covenant.

Considering a motion to disaffiliate from the ELCA is one of the most serious actions that can be taken by voting members of an ELCA congregation. The **constitutional provisions** are designed to ensure that voting members of the congregation have an opportunity to evaluate thoroughly the issues involved with terminating the relationship between the congregation and the ELCA. It is critical, therefore, that the governing documents of the ELCA, the synod and the congregation be strictly observed and followed.

nwmnsynod.org/faqs/questions-about-the-2009-sexuality-social-statement.

<http://nwmnsynod.org/faqs/questions-about-the-2009-sexuality-social-statement/disaffiliation-from-the-elca/>
Images for Disaffiliation from the ELCA

A classmate of mine from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, served as senior pastor of a large congregation, which voted to disaffiliate.

Large ELCA Congregation Votes to Leave the Denomination - ELCA

CHICAGO (ELCA) -- Community Church of Joy, Glendale, Ariz., ended its affiliation Sept. 27 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States.

The congregation was the 10th largest in the ELCA with 6,800 baptized members. According to the 2009 ELCA Yearbook, Community Church of Joy's current operating expenses are more than \$2.7 million. It gave more than \$207,915 to the ELCA and other organizations in benevolence. By a unanimous vote of 129-0, Community Church of Joy terminated the relationship at a congregational meeting following worship.

"I was praying that (the vote) would be a clear direction from the congregation," said the Rev. Walter P. Kallestad, senior pastor of the congregation. Seeking to be consistent with the congregation's decision, Kallestad announced to the congregation his intention to resign from the ELCA's clergy roster.

<https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/6626>

Images for ELCA Congregation Votes to Leave the Denomination

Images for Rev. Walter P. Kallestad resigns from ELCA clergy roster

Images for Community Church of Joy Rev. Walter P. Kallestad

Many of the congregations, though, that voted to terminate their relationship resided in rural communities and small towns.

For the record: 926 congregations take first votes to leave ELCA | The Lutheran

The **ELCA Office of the Secretary** is now updating information about congregations disaffiliating from the **ELCA** on a quarterly basis.

As of June 30, 926 congregations had taken first votes to disaffiliate from the **ELCA**. These 926 congregations took a total of 1,004 first votes. Of those, 699 passed and 305 failed. There have been 671 second votes; 637 passed and 34 failed. Of those, 625 have completed the termination process and are no longer on the roster of congregations of the **ELCA**.

Of the disaffiliating congregations, about two-thirds are from rural communities or small towns of less than 10,000. Since March 31, the numbers represent 15 additional congregations that passed first votes and six additional congregations that passed second votes.

Most of the votes came in reaction to the 2009 **Churchwide Assembly's** votes on sexuality.

http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=10866

Images for For the record: 926 congregations take first votes to leave ELCA | The Lutheran

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/issues/>

<https://www.livinglutheran.org/contact-us/>

Resources

A church divided, together | Minnesota Public Radio News

What the episode with the ELCA church demonstrates—as did the furor over the decision by the Episcopal church in 2009 to allow gays and lesbians to serve in all roles of church ministry—is that sometimes it's not possible to agree to disagree any longer; that if enough people speak up, previously hidden fissures are exposed.

Our inquiry became a sort of social Richter scale revealing a community rocked by a temblor that the rest of us hardly felt.

We've created this online project to give our audience, Lutherans and non-Lutherans, a feel for the true impact of last August's vote. It's also a window into the cultural politics of the day—typified by wedge issues that leave little or no middle ground.

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/tradition-interrupted.shtml>

Images for A church divided, together | Minnesota Public Radio News

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/new-welcome.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/coming-together.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/day-to-day.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/map.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/forum.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/history-family-change.shtml>

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/08/church-divided/splitting-at-faultlines.shtml>

Church Policy Questions – Northwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

[Congregational Declaration Regarding Churchwide Actions](#)

[Rostered Leader Dual Membership](#)

[Congregational Dual Membership](#)

[Constitutional Process for Considering Church Affiliation](#)

[Disaffiliation from the ELCA](#)

[If we close our congregation, what happens to church properties?](#)

<http://nwmnsynod.org/faqs/church-policy-questions/>

[Images for Church Policy Questions – Northwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA](#)

ELCA Northwestern Minnesota Synod Bishop Comments on Hawley Lutheran Church Vote

“Hawley Lutheran Church is a strong, active congregation. We would hate to lose them from our fellowship in the ELCA. I look forward to the consultation I’ll be having with them, which is a required part of the disaffiliation process. This will be an opportunity for me to hear their concerns and urge them to remain in the ELCA.”

<http://faithforum.areavoices.com/2010/09/20/elca-northwestern-minnesota-synod-bishop-comments-on-hawley-lutheran-church-vote/>

[Images for ELCA Northwestern Minnesota Synod Bishop Comments on Hawley Lutheran Church Vote](#)

Reflection on Leaving the ELCA

Question:

We are so opposed to the ministry policy changes taken by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly that we feel like leaving the ELCA. How should we ponder this possibility?

Responses:

First, an anecdote to help you in your discernment.

Many of us have had the experience of driving down a highway and suddenly hitting a bank of fog—going from “clear sailing” to a situation of very low visibility. How do you respond when you are suddenly driving through a foggy stretch of highway?

Chances are you do two things:

you don’t stop abruptly, because another driver could run into your car from the rear; and

you don’t keep traveling at the same speed, because you could “rear-end” a driver ahead of you.

So, your first reaction, wisely, is to slow down—to keep moving, but to reduce your speed. When the thought of withholding or redirecting mission support first hits you, imagine yourself entering a bank of fog. Don’t stop. But please slow down. Take a deep breath. Give yourself—and your fellow church members—time to respond thoughtfully rather than to react instinctively.

Second, reflect deeply and discuss intentionally the question: “Exactly why do we feel like leaving?” Be brutally honest and jot down all the reasons that come to mind—do a little personal (or corporate) brainstorming.

Complete the following sentence. You and other members of your church may generate a number of responses as you “fill in the blank.”

nwmnsynod.org/faqs/questions-about-the-2009-sexuality-social-statement

<http://nwmnsynod.org/faqs/questions-about-the-2009-sexuality-social-statement/reflection-on-leaving-the-elca/>

[Images for Reflection on Leaving the ELCA](#)

Synod and the Churchwide Organization

The Future of God’s Church – Death and Resurrection

Keynote Address by Bishop Duane Pederson

Walking Together: a congregational resource event March 17, 2013

During the years I have been bishop, I have experienced significant diminishment of the wider ministries of our denomination, primarily because our congregations are diminishing. While there are other factors to explain the reductions in the ministries of the whole church—institutional demise, cultural shifts, local concerns trumping broader mission, shrinking resources, etc.—I’m going to name what is rarely expressed. There is, in my view and in my experience, a very real danger of rampant *congregationalism* that feeds off American rugged individualism, which is the exact opposite of a biblical understanding of being joined together intimately as the body of Christ. This sense of congregational independence flies directly in the face of what it means to be an interdependent church, and runs contrary to what I believe is needed to meet the mission challenges of our day. We don’t need congregations who see themselves as independent; we need congregations who see themselves as part of a greater whole, thus creating the capacity of every congregation to be part of witness and service far, far beyond their own respective communities. That’s why a strong relationship with the whole church is vitally important. Without that broad connection, congregations can become little fiefdoms with a very narrow view of mission.

Frankly, I think this rugged individualism has been a significant factor in the schisms we have experienced of late in the ELCA. The **disaffiliations** rarely had to do specifically with the sexuality decisions of 2009. They more often involved clan fights within congregations, thinly disguised power plays grounded more in “no one tells me what I can or cannot do” than any serious theological convictions, polarization steeped in creating perceived enemies to rally the troops to be against some untruth, or just not wanting to be accountable to anyone. These activities and perspectives have often reflected modern societal anxieties where people feel like they no longer have any control in their lives, and this anxiety and perceived loss of control has been played out in the life of the church in very destructive ways.

Death and Resurrection - Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

http://www.nwswi.org/webfiles/fnitools/documents/keynote_pederson_2013.pdf

Page 6

[Images for Synod and the Churchwide Organization Keynote Address by Bishop Duane Pederson](#)

For congregations who choose to terminate their relationship, there is sometimes an ongoing turbulence as disaffected people find something else to fight about. For instance, some years later I ran into a member of the above-mentioned congregation who recounted that the new pastor became a focus for a new controversy and some of the members became upset and left the congregation.

On a much larger scale, mega church North Heights Lutheran Church of Arden Hills, MN terminated their relationship with the ELCA to join the Alliance of Renewal Churches only to close its doors on 3/13/2016 following a congregation split.

Ex-megachurch closing doors: Decline in finances, congregation split sinks Arden Hills' North Heights Lutheran

North Heights Lutheran, which once drew several thousand, has fallen victim to internal strife.

North Heights Lutheran Church, once numbered among the nation's biggest ELCA congregations, is shutting down.

The church in Arden Hills, along with a sister congregation in Roseville, had 7,600 members at the beginning of the century. Then a noisy civil war, in which breakaway members created a ferocious website posting internal church documents, led first to the closing of the original building and finally the shutdown announcement on Sunday.

Church officials declined to comment Tuesday as did others connected to the church.

"I really have no comment on this right now," said Mike Bradley, director of the Alliance of Renewal Churches, the church network with which North Heights affiliated itself after breaking away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

At its peak, North Heights conducted several services on Sundays. But a voicemail message Tuesday said it is down to one — this Sunday's.

Arden Hills megachurch North Heights revived, just weeks after closing - StarTribune.com

<http://www.startribune.com/ex-megachurch-in-arden-hills-nearing-its-last-service/371474331/>

<http://www.bemidjipioneer.com/news/region/3982346-ex-megachurch-closing-doors-decline-finances-congregation-split-sinks-arden>

<http://allchristiannews.com/minnesota-megachurch-facing-controversy-female-pastor-hired/>

Images for congregation split sinks Arden Hills' North Heights Lutheran

The mega church opened under new leadership 3 weeks later.

Arden Hills megachurch North Heights revived, just weeks after closing - StarTribune.com

New leadership at North Heights Lutheran Church in Arden Hills announced in an e-mail to hundreds of worshipers that services will resume this weekend according to John Tolo, a longtime member who received the news Sunday.

The e-mail added that the church's Roseville location, which was closed last summer, also will reopen. The church board has stepped aside, the e-mail continued, and has been replaced by a council of elders.

<http://www.startribune.com/north-metro-megachurch-revived-just-weeks-after-closing/374655361/>

<http://www.twincities.com/2016/04/04/arden-hills-north-heights-megachurch-resurrected/>

Images for Arden Hills megachurch North Heights revived, just weeks after closing

4) Predestination Controversy

One of the open country congregations I served early in my installed pastoral ministry traced its history back to a split over the predestination controversy around 1890. Interestingly, the new congregation built a church right across the road from the church from which it split. Oral history relates the story of how a supply preacher drove to lead a service of worship one Sunday and came to the top of the hill to see the two churches facing each other and observed that the scene looked like two roosters ready to square off.

The written history of one other congregation in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin that I served in interim ministry traced its origins to the predestination controversy:

THE HISTORY OF THE BETHEL LUTHERAN OF BALDWIN

In the beginning...

A doctrinal strife on the subject of **predestination** caused 160 members to withdraw from the North Rush River Congregation.

They organized Our Savior's Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation on August 22, 1887. This new congregation then built the Woodside Church a mile away. The 2 ½ acres was purchased for \$100.00, and the church was built at a cost of \$8,000.00. The cornerstone was put in place on June 24, 1888. It was noted that the craftsmen came to the church site to build all the woodwork, as trees were very plentiful there. The spindles, railing and support columns were made on a turning late powered by a steam engine. Butternut wood was used for much of it as it is a softer wood and easier to carve. Much of the labor was donated by members of the new congregation. Rev. N. Arveson was the first pastor.

The same strife happened at the Baldwin Evangelical Lutheran Church, and families started leaving the church, some joining the Baptist Church. When the new Woodside Our Savior's Church was built, the families joined this congregation. The women members of Our Savior's Church who lived in the Village of Baldwin were anxious to organize their own ladies group. Their first meeting was at the parsonage of Rev. S. K. Ulsaker on January 17, 1906, and they chose The Tabitha Mission Society as the name of their organization. By the end of the first year, they had 34 members in their new Ladies Aid.

The group in the Village of Baldwin organized the Bethel Norwegian Evangelical Congregation on July 15, 1909. They shared the pastor with Our Savior's Lutheran Congregation at Woodside. Rev. C. F. Johnson came to serve the congregations in 1913, and it was during his pastorate the Baptist Church building was rented for services by the Bethel Congregation. In the Baldwin Evangelical Lutheran history, it was noted that Rev. C. F. Johnson had asked about renting their church, and the prices were set; services without heat was \$2.00, afternoon services with heat was \$3.00, and special services such as funerals was \$4.00. The janitor fee was not included. In the year 1923, the Baptist Church building was purchased by the Our Savior's congregations of Woodside and Bethel Lutheran. Work was formally begun to organize the Village Lutheran Congregation of Baldwin. The Tabitha Mission Society dispersed their treasury, which went to help purchase as well as for maintenance of their church.

The Woodside Our Savior's Lutheran and the Village Lutheran were always served by the same pastor, and the parsonage was located one block from the church in Baldwin. The church in Baldwin was later referred to as the Chapel. The North Rush River Lutheran and the Baldwin Evangelical Lutheran were served by the same pastor.

The written history of the congregation in which I grew up, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Story City, Iowa, also traced its origins back to the predestination controversy:

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Story City, IA / About Us / Our History

100TH ANNIVERSARY HISTORY OF IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF STORY CITY

"God bless America"! How wonderfully God let that be the prayer of those pioneers who laid the foundation of our great democracy. As they came to make their homes in the cities and prairies of our land it was with a reverence and devotion to God as their most precious heritage. God had been their very real refuge and strength. Neither would He forsake them as they braved the hardships of a new frontier.

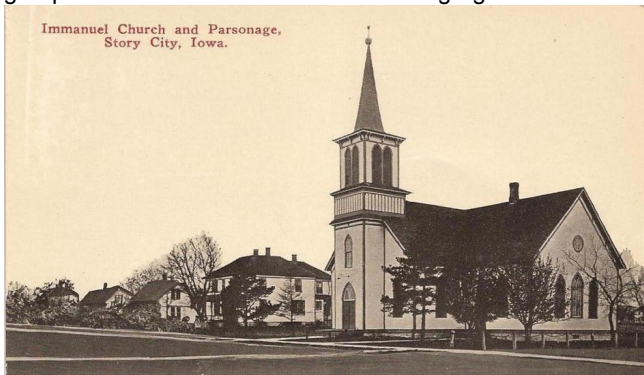
This can also be truly said of those Lutherans who settled in Story City, Iowa, and its vicinity as they came from Norway and other parts of this country. For them the Church was the center of their interest and their living, and all things were measured in light of God's will and building of His Kingdom.

The early history of Immanuel Lutheran Church is bound up in the life of St. Petri Lutheran Church. In June 1857, Norwegian Lutheran immigrants formed a congregation. Within this fellowship, they worshipped and worked seeking in all things to Glorify God. The members of this congregation as true children of their times were caught up in the issues of the day. Within the congregations of Norwegian background, the last decade of the 19th Century found them embroiled in the doctrine of **Predestination**. Though theological disputes are to be deplored, let it be said as tribute to these sincere souls that they took their Bibles seriously. They studied Church Doctrine and discussed this openly. They believed strongly and defended with zeal the positions they felt God had led them to take. Thus, it was in 1898 that the St. Petri Lutheran Church of which we were a part, found itself divided on this doctrinal question. Action was precipitated by the calling of a pastor. Both sides wanted their new pastor to represent their theological position. Should the new pastor be called from the Norwegian Synod or from the United Norwegian Church Seminary? The division was quite equal.

Difficult and unpleasant as were the circumstances that culminated in the formation of two separate congregations, a spirit that only God Himself could inspire is expressed in the report of the group that met on July 22, 1898, to acknowledge their separation. Translated the report reads:

"When the situation is such that we who before belonged to the same congregation must now part, we will use this opportunity to say a sincere and heartfelt farewell and thank you for all the good we have shared together in years past, and wish you God's grace and blessing."

The group that continued as the St. Petri congregation retained the church building with a monetary consideration to the group that was to become Immanuel congregation.



<http://storage.cloversites.com/immanuellutheranchurch4/documents/Centennial%20History%20of%20Immanuel--1998.pdf>

Images for Immanuel Lutheran Church, Story City, IA / About Us / Our History

<http://immanuelstorycity.org/about-us/our-history>

<http://immanuelstorycity.org/about-us/our-history/?view=mobile>

<http://stpetrilutheran.weebly.com/>

Resources

James A. Nestingen - « From the Outside – Election, the Means of Grace and the Christian Community - YouTube

Sep 10, 2014 - Uploaded by Lutherske Fordypningsdager

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5kH4zVLtSw

Images for James A. Nestingen - « From the Outside – Election, the Means of Grace and the Christian Community -

YouTube

https://www.luthersem.edu/faculty/fac_home.aspx?contact_id=jnesting

<http://fortresspress.com/author/james-nesting>

<https://www.amazon.com/James-Arne-Nesting/e/B001KHKTZI>

https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/626337.James_Arne_Nesting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2koVu0ZVz20> James A. Nestingen - «Why Am I a Lutheran? – From Slave Bound to Free»

Lutherans in North America by E. Clifford Nelson - Page 313 - Google Books Result

The most abrasive of the conflicts was the predestination, or election, controversy.

<https://books.google.com/books?isbn=1451407386>

<https://www.amazon.com/Lutherans-North-America-Clifford-Nelson/dp/0800614097>

Images for Lutherans in North America by E. Clifford Nelson

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3002092-the-lutherans-in-north-america>

https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/621795.E_Clifford_Nelson

This book gives today's Lutherans a sense of **heritage**, identity and continuity, a sense of self-understanding. Readers will see themselves as part of a family. They can identify with the struggles, hopes, and frustrations of wave after wave of immigrants adapting to the strange new world of America and at the same time trying to preserve all they had known and loved and brought with them from the homeland. The genius of the entire volume is that it points beyond family memories to an ongoing and continuing life of which we and our children are a living part. Contributors: Theodore G. Tappert, Eugene Fevold, Fred W. Meuser, H. George Anderson, August R. Suelflow, and E. Clifford Nelson.

<https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/1649/The-Lutherans-in-North-America>

Images for Lutherans a sense of heritage, identity and continuity, a sense of self-understanding

[PDF]THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHOSEN: THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY IN MIDWESTERN LUTHERANISM AND ITS LASTING RAMIFICATIONS

The Election Controversy touched all of the Lutheran church bodies in the United States, but was felt most strongly among those in the Midwest. It generally pitted the recent Midwest immigrants of a more doctrinally orthodox Lutheran persuasion against those who were either less orthodox, or whose orthodoxy was more of a pietistic bent. It generally set synod against synod, but one group, the Norwegian Synod, was split asunder.

<http://www.lmsusa.org/LutheranUnderstandingofChosen.pdf>

Images for THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHOSEN: THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY IN MIDWESTERN LUTHERANISM

<https://online.nph.net/the-election-controversy.html>

I do not claim to be a church historian, but it seems to me that the schism over **A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust** in 2009 is the most divisive in those branches of Lutheranism in the Upper Midwest that presently constitute the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America since that of the predestination controversy in 1890.

5) A parish terminates its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

I started an interim ministry assignment at St. John's Lutheran Church of Spencer and Riplinger on 11/16/2020. I had earlier served this parish in 2003. I worked with the transition task force to complete the ministry site profile and have it reviewed by the synod minister on 4/16/2021.

Concerned if the ELCA Is Right for You?

1 Corinthians 12:14

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

The council is aware that some congregation members are questioning specific actions within the ELCA and how this relates to St. John's affiliation with the ELCA. These members will be meeting to discuss the specifics of their concerns on August 22. If you would like more information, please contact Allen or Gail Jicinsky 715-659-4053.

Please note, this is not a council driven team. St. John's council's job is to ensure due process is followed and all congregation members opinions are heard.

Please pray for St. John's as we continue in this pattern of transition. May God lead us as we look into the future.

Thank-you,

Pam Hardrath

Council Chair



August 12, 2021, 12:11pm

St. John's Lutheran Church Leadership Minutes for September 14, 2021

New Business:

- Request from congregational discussion group concerned with some ELCA practices: Gail Jicinsky represented a group of 15 members who had met to review concerns about some ELCA practices. The group requests 1) a taskforce to review current policies and practices of the ELCA to determine if they align with the principles that St. John's bases its ministry upon, and 2) an alternative

for members to support St. John's with offerings without the tithe to ELCA. All opinions are welcome on the task force and discussions are ongoing about the mission, vision, and alignment of St. John's; representation from Riplinger's congregation will be invited as well. After discussion, the council approved the request for the taskforce and offering category option.

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Page 10

Connect November 2021

SOME THINGS TO KNOW

NEW GIVING CATEGORY

Due to the number of members concerned about our affiliation with the ELCA, the council has decided to add a giving category. The new General Fund- non tithe giving category is for members who would like to give their offering to St. John's without any part being tithed to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. If you do not switch to this category, your offering will continue to go into the General Fund and a tithe of that will be sent to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin monthly. Questions, please contact Pam Hardrath.

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Page 4

Connect November 2021

Informational Meeting at Spencer on December 19 at 10am

The Research Task Force on the ELCA has requested to discuss their report. This request was approved by the Congregation Council at its meeting on November 9. An additional meeting will be offered January 9. The council decided to bring the proposed motion to terminate this congregation's relationship with the ELCA and to transfer its affiliation to the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) to a vote after the annual meeting on January 23. Information about LCMC will be presented at the December 19 informational meeting. A 2/3 vote is required. If this vote passes, a second required vote would be taken on May 8.

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Page 1

Connect December 2021

SOME THINGS TO KNOW

On November 9, 2021, I received a signed petition from 25 congregation members asking for a vote to terminate our congregation's current affiliation the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). If we vote to terminate that affiliation we must align with another Lutheran denomination at the same time. After careful examination of available Lutheran denominations, I believe Lutheran Congregation in the Mission of Christ (LCMC) would be a good fit for our congregation. Joan Bruss, Bob and Glenda Fellenz, Wayne and Charla Hagen, Allen and Gail Jicinsky, Bruce and Janine Luepke, Jenny Nieman, Teri Schorer, Mary Seefeld, and Cindy Weiler formed a task force researching why they feel the ELCA no longer aligns with the guiding principles of our congregation. Thank you so much for the many hours you spent compiling this information. It takes a lot of courage to open yourself up to the scrutiny of others. Their full report and information on the LCMC will be available at the beginning of December and shared with everyone. Detailed reports will also be available in the church brochure rack or mailed by request. The task force will be holding informational meetings on December 19, 2021 and January 9, 2022 following worship at the Spencer congregation to address concerns and answer questions. Following these informational meetings, per our constitution we will hold the first voting Congregation Meeting on January 23, 2022 following the annual meeting. If there is a 2/3 majority vote in favor of this change, the final voting Congregation Meeting will be held on May 8, 2022 following worship. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or a member of the task force. Thank-you!

Pam Hardrath

Chair of Congregation Council

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Page 4

Connect December 2021

Informational Meeting at Spencer on January 9 at 10am

The Research Task Force on the ELCA has completed their research and report for your review. Copies of the written report are available to pick up from the brochure rack. Two meetings were scheduled to answer questions congregation members may have. The first December 19, and the second January 9.

Annual Meetings Coming up in January

Annual meetings are coming up at Riplinger on January 16 and Spencer on January 23. The Spencer Congregation Council at its October 12 meeting decided to postpone elections from the October congregation meeting called for in the constitution to the January 23 annual meeting and to recommend that the constitution be changed so that elections are held at the annual meeting.

Votes on Denominational Affiliation to Follow Annual Meetings

The Spencer Congregation Council decided to present a resolution indicating the intent to terminate the relationship of St. John's Lutheran Church of Spencer with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and to affiliate with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) to a vote following the annual meeting on January 23 after receiving a written petition signed by 25 members. Information about LCMC is included with the Task Force Report. A 2/3 vote is required to pass. If this

Page | 27

resolution passes, a second required vote will be taken on May 8. Riplinger will vote on this same resolution after the annual meeting on January 16.

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Page 1

Connect January 2022

SOME THINGS TO KNOW

ELCA AFFILIATION VOTING INFORMATION/ SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The first congregational vote to decide if we will sever ties with the ELCA will take place on January 23, following our annual meeting. The vote is a 2/3 majority of the voting members in attendance. To be a voting member, you must have communed (tracked by signing in on the blue welcome pads in your pew during worship) and made a contribution of record since January 23, 2019. A contribution is recorded when you use simply giving, make a contribution following the link on the church website, put your contribution in an envelope with your name on it or use the envelopes provided to you after January 23, 2019. If you are wondering if you are a voting member, please contact Pam Hardrath via email at tpkrh4@gmail.com • Like the annual meeting, the special congregational meeting will be available via Zoom. Paper ballots will be used in person and via Zoom. If voting on Zoom, you will be asked to hold up your yes or no answer with your video on. Your vote will remain anonymous, but we must be able to see who is voting. • If the vote passes on January 23, we will have a second vote on May 8 following worship.

LCMC (LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS IN MISSION FOR CHRIST)

At the December 19 informational meeting, more information was requested regarding the LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ). Pam Hardrath researched the information regarding Lutheran associations. Per our constitution, if we vote to leave the ELCA, we must also vote to affiliate with another Lutheran Synod or Association. If we do not, even if it is a majority vote to leave the ELCA, the church building would stay with any members who would like to remain with the ELCA. Of the Lutheran Synods or associations found in Wisconsin, many do not allow women Pastors, women in council positions and/or open communion. These synods or associations were eliminated from the equation. That left the ELCA (current Synod), LCMC and NALC. One thing the NALC has is a mission director, They help congregations think through and execute the missions the congregations in their Synod can support. We are pretty connected to our missions, COME Meal, Giving Tree and our Youth Mission Trips to name a few. I did not feel it was in our congregation's best interest to be under that type of leadership. So, that left the LCMC. LCMC does not have a number of rules that we must add to our constitution. It is known for allowing members to be free in their worship and how their congregations operate. We will not have to make a lot of changes within our building. The council agreed this was a good choice for St. John's moving forward if the congregation does vote to leave the ELCA. There is more information on the LCMC in the Task Forces Report, page 31.

WORSHIP FOLLOWING VOTING:

Another question regarded worship following voting. If the vote is in favor of leaving the ELCA or if Pastor Bolstad would be called away from our congregation, worship will continue. The tentative plan is to have a pulpit supply minister perform worship one Sunday per month so we are able to have communion. For the other Sunday's, we will use a sermon series (similar to what Pastor Rebekah used). Lay people in our congregation will use the series to perform worship. The sermon is prewritten and personal touches are added by the presenter. The worship committee will choose the series. Worship will continue to be blended, meaning we will have a mix of organ and online music. Worship services will continue at 9am.

PASTOR CALL:

Because our congregation is considering leaving the ELCA, it is not appropriate to hire an ELCA pastor at this time. If we vote to stay with the ELCA on January 23, we will continue our call process through the ELCA. When Pastor Randy visited our council in December, he informed us it may take some time to receive a candidate. He explained people are not very comfortable moving because of COVID continuing. The other reason he cited is how rural our area is. If the vote on January 23 is in favor of leaving the ELCA, the call committee will meet and fill out the paperwork that is mailed to pastors looking for a call within the LCMC. These packets will be ready to mail if the vote on May 8 is also in favor of leaving the ELCA. Hopefully, we will see a new pastor in the fall.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Please pray daily for the life of our congregation. Pray for patience, kindness, and caring conversations during this important season of the unknown within our congregation. Pray that our congregation will remain loving and experience positive fellowship and success no matter the outcome of the vote and beyond. Pray for Pastor Bolstad and for our future pastor and that our ministry continues in a way that is pleasing to and praises God. Amen.

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Page 5

Connect January 2022

ELCA AFFILIATION TASK FORCE REPORT

To Members of St. John's – How did we get here?

Although our congregation has been affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for decades, many of us have focused on the life within and through our congregation and probably have not paid close attention to what occurs synod-wide or church-wide nationally/internationally. One event in 2009 was the exception. That is when the ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved the social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust." In this document, the ELCA voted to allow for people who are in publicly

accountable, life-long monogamous same-sex relationships (PALMS) to serve as pastors. Our congregation wrestled with this decision at the time and the majority decided that we would take the stand ELCA allowed in that we will not accept a PALMS pastor to serve our congregation. Life at St. John's settled down after that and we went about being church in the best way we knew how to be. However, to the credit of some of our members who were paying attention to the approved policies, accepted practices, and published statements over the years of pastors, bishops and other church leaders of the ELCA beyond our little Spencer congregation, conversations started taking place with concerns regarding our ELCA affiliation and our financial support of the ELCA. Several members who raised this concern contacted our Congregation's Chair, Pam Hardrath. She encouraged a gathering of these people to talk about this and to share what our concerns were. From this gathering of 15 people, unanimous support was received to request the following three actions from our Council: 1) Appoint a Task Force to review current policies and practices of the ELCA to determine if they align with the principles that St. John's bases its ministry upon, and 2) provide an alternative for members to financially support St. John's without offerings being tithed to the ELCA and 3) invite representation on the Task Force from St. John's, Riplinger. Council approved all requests at their September meeting. The Task Force volunteers met and determined the main areas of concern and divided the research responsibilities to each member of the team. Task Force members dug in with due diligence to get to the truth and document examples if in fact, the ELCA does not align with our congregation's core principles and beliefs. Allen and Gail Jicinsky, Task Force leaders requested research assistance from Pastor Steven Gjerde. Pastor Gjerde served as our pastor for three years after Pastor Ault left and prior to Pastor Rebekah Tarras. He is currently serving as Sr. Pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau. Zion had been affiliated with the ELCA up until about a year ago, at which time they left the ELCA and became affiliated with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). The question raised "If we leave the ELCA, then what?" Of all the other Lutheran associations, LCMC seemed the logical choice. Pastor Gjerde, by our request, attended one of the team meetings to answer any questions we had regarding LCMC. The Task Force completed its research in November and prepared a summary report of its findings for the church council and congregation at large. Attached is the full report. I am thankful beyond measure to the devoted members of the Task Force for their commitment, time invested and passion in making this service a priority in their busy lives. Most importantly, I witnessed their character and humility in being led by the Holy Spirit in this endeavor because of their love for Christ and this congregation of which they desire more than anything to thrive and grow in faith and service to our Lord. Task Force volunteers: Joan Bruss, Bob and Glenda Fellenz, Wayne and Charla Hagen, Allen and Gail Jicinsky, Bruce and Janine Luepke, Jenny Nieman, Teri Schorer, Mary Seefeld, and Cindy Weiler. Special thanks also to Pam Hardrath for the many ways she assisted in this process. We humbly submit this report for your review and in service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Gail Jicinsky, Task Force Leader

Table of Contents

Biblical Authority	Page 3
Evangelism	Page 6
Paganism	Page 11
Parental Authority and Influence on Youth	Page 13
Human Sexuality and Marriage	Page 16
Political and Social Bias	Page 19
Financial Implications	Page 23
Constitution/Congregational Authority	Page 25
Additional Resources	Page 28
Possible Next Steps	Page 31

Biblical Authority

Summary: "This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation. The official statement of the ELCA is that "We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In our preaching and teaching, the ELCA trusts the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The ELCA's official Confession of Faith identifies the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds; and the Lutheran confessional writings in the Book of Concord as the basis for its teaching. ELCA pastors and deacons promise to carry out their ministry in accordance with these teaching sources." In reality, there are many examples of ELCA pastors, bishops and other church leaders who have broken the promise to carry out their ministry in accordance with these teaching sources. Furthermore, the ELCA refuses to do anything about the pastors who deny the basic beliefs of the historic Christian faith. "The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world." (Constitution C2.02.) We have determined that many ELCA pastors, bishops and other church leaders have set aside the authority of the Word of God and replaced it with their own version of theology. For this reason, we believe St. John's and the ELCA are not appropriately aligned.

Background:

ELCA Pastors preach false doctrine:

- Two rostered pastors of the Southwest California synod, Jarmo Tarkki and Ted Meyer reject the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. Jarmo Tarkki is quoted from an interview (The Legacy of Reformation, You Tube, 10/30/17) stating, "The stuff that Luther believed, we no longer believe. Some of these religious concepts belong in the museum of holy relics and beliefs. Let me give you one example: Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Just stop to think about that. Essentially, what that means is human sacrifice. Now what does that tell you about what kind of God we have? So, we ask and challenge that kind of belief and I think that we should. We will challenge those kinds of traditional beliefs." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6RUHM1ckeE>

- The late Marcus Borg, college professor and advocate for "Progressive Christianity," was a frequent speaker at ELCA colleges and bishops' convocations. As a Progressive Christian, Borg denies important beliefs of the historical Christian faith while affirming what Christians have long held as unorthodox or outright heretical positions. He has long denied the inspiration and authority of the Bible, saying, "I let go of the notion that the Bible is a divine product. I learned that it is a human cultural product, the product of two ancient communities, biblical Israel and early Christianity. As such, it contained their understandings and affirmations, not statements coming directly or somewhat directly from God" (The God We Never Knew). He explicitly denies Jesus' virgin birth: "Jesus almost certainly was not born of a virgin, did not think of himself as the Son of God, and did not see his purpose as dying for the sins of the world." He also denies the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ: "I do not think that the gospel stories of Easter require us to think of the resurrection in material physical terms. I see them as parables of the 4 resurrection. Parables are about meaning. They are truth-filled and truthful stories, even as they may not be literally factual" ("Continuing the Resurrection Conversation").

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=youtube+video+of+debate+between+Marcus+Borg+and+Willia+m+Lane+Craig&view=detail&mid=E664422EB83755D176A8E664422EB83755D176A8&FORM=VIRE>

<https://marcusjborg.org/books/the-god-we-never-knew/> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/10/continuing-the-resurrection-conversation/>

- Rev. Zach Johnson - "Firstly, to declare that Christianity is the only "true religion" is to place God in a box. Now don't get me wrong, as a Christian I strongly believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior and is the means that leads me to God, as well as the means that leads me to salvation. However, to say that this is the only way that God can bring people salvation or lead people to God would be very short sided on my part. God is far beyond my understanding or any human understanding. God can't be placed in a box. We cannot put human limitations on God. This is really part of having faith. The mysteries of God are so beyond us that it leads us to continue to seek out God so that we can more fully understand this God who loves us beyond measure, and (from a Christian point of view) became human in order to reconcile humanity back to God. But to say that God can only save through Christ is to place a limitation on God. For me it's a both/and understanding. God indeed saves through Christ, but perhaps God saves in other ways (and through other religions) too." <http://icannolongerstaysilent.blogspot.com/>

ELCA Separating Law from Gospel: Mark C. Chavez identified several areas of concern in his publication "God, Christ, and Biblical Authority in the ELCA Today." One of the significant ways "in which the ELCA has undermined biblical authority is by violating one of the most important Lutheran teachings about God's word. Lutherans have taught that it is important to distinguish law and gospel, but they should not be separated. In the early 1990s, however, I heard an ELCA pastor separate law from gospel when he said to other pastors, "As Lutherans the only thing we need to agree upon is the gospel. We can disagree on social issues and ethics." His assertion is embedded in the ELCA's social statement on sexuality. That is, "if salvation is not at stake in a particular question, Christians are free to give priority to the neighbor's well-being and will protect the conscience of the neighbor who may well view the same question in such a way as to affect faith itself. ... This social statement draws upon this rich understanding of the role of conscience and calls upon this church, when in disagreement concerning matters around which salvation is not at stake, including human sexuality, to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), honor the conscience and seek the well-being of the neighbor. Every time I read those assertions in the ELCA social statement, I am shocked. They certainly cannot be reconciled with our Lord's own words in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount in which he speaks the law as clearly and as forcefully as anywhere else in the Bible: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17). Nor can the ELCA's teaching be reconciled with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11) The ELCA teaching pits Christ against his words in the Bible and God the Father against His word. When we as sinners separate law from gospel, we will fashion a god who just happens to approve of our sinful inclinations."

<http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/ChavezBiblicalAuthorityin%20ELCA74-1-2.pdf>

Commentary: At St. John's, we believe that Jesus Christ, our Lord, used the Old Testament as Scripture, therefore, we do also. Jesus states that the Old Testament testifies to Him (Luke 24:44-47). Jesus Himself speaks and provides the material of the Gospels (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31), and so we use the Gospels. Jesus grants His authority to the apostles who wrote the Epistles, saying, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16), and so in the Epistles we hear the voice of Jesus. Therefore, the Old Testament is used and taught by Jesus; the Gospels preach and record Jesus and His words; and the Epistles are authorized and affirmed by Jesus in His authorization of the apostles. For this reason, we receive Scripture as the Word of God and Book of Life.

This is also, then, why the Confessions say: “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Psalm 119:105, Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The Scriptures are, for all Lutheran churches and their pastors, the sole means by which we know the truth of the Christian faith.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34). As Luther said, “the Scriptures are the swaddling clothes of Christ. You cannot have Christ without the Scriptures; their words are wrapped up tightly to Him”.

To quote an unidentified missionary “While we are called to love all people and to display God’s grace toward them, we are also called to live under the authority of God’s Word. We cannot do one at the expense of the other.”

Pastor Dennis D. Nelson in CORE VOICE Issue 4, July 2018 summarizes “In the ELCA in the last several years is the fall of traditional Biblical values, destruction of a reliance upon authority of scriptures, and a Babylonian captivity of God’s people as they are being carried away by church leaders into a foreign land of a strange theology and a strange concept of the mission of the church.” <http://lutherancore.website/wpcontent/uploads/2018/07/Summer-2018--final.pdf>

We are currently in the process of seeking our next pastor. Our research has shown numerous pastors of the ELCA straying from biblical authority.

Evangelism

Summary: St. John’s Lutheran Church is named after the apostle who wrote, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him might not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Our constitution defines our purpose as “reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ” (Constitution, C4.02d). However, the ELCA has adopted perspectives and processes that conflict with this Gospel mission. For that reason, we recommend departing from the ELCA and joining the LCMC.

Background: In its official statements, the example of its bishops, pastors, and missionaries, and at both the congregational and synodical level, the ELCA has subjected salvation through Christ alone to doubt and encouraged a false understanding of grace that fumbles with the subjects of repentance and faith.

First, in its official statements and synodical votes, the ELCA has distanced itself from preaching faith in Christ alone as the way of salvation. Two particular actions demonstrate this point:

1) In August 2019, the ELCA adopted “A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment.” This document made the following statements official for the ELCA: a) There are “limits on our knowing” the way to God the Father. b) “We must be careful about claiming to know God’s judgments regarding another religion or the individual human beings to practice it.” c) “All we know, and all we need to know, is that our neighbors are made in God’s image and that we are called to love and serve them.” d) “In a deeply divided, world, and as a faithful response to Christ’s message of reconciliation, we seek right, peaceful, and just relationships with all our neighbors, including those of other religions and worldviews.” e) “Neighbor refers to all those who profess a religion, as well as those who do not, including those who consider themselves atheist or agnostics or ascribe to other worldviews that are not explicitly religious.” The document does not encourage sharing the message of the Gospel with any of these neighbors for the purpose of “bringing them to faith in Christ.” Moreover, lest we have any doubts as to what this statement means:

2) At the adoption of this statement, an amendment was proposed to delete the words “limits on our knowing,” because the policy is inconsistent with Scripture, especially Jesus’ own words in St. John: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The voting member submitting the amendment fairly stated, “We have a clear statement from Jesus, who is fully God and fully man. We do therefore have a basis to know God’s views on religions that do not require faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Son.” Yet the amendment was quickly defeated, and the policy adopted, 97.48% voting in favor. And there is more:

3) A resolution by the ELCA’s New England Synod Assembly in June 2017 says the following: “Be it resolved that the New England Synod memorialize the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to initiate a process to amend the phrase “bring all people to faith in Christ” in C4.02b and its constitutional parallel in order to achieve greater consonance with both our understanding of Christian witness and sensitivity to our interfaith contexts.” A resolution like this is the result of the ELCA’s rejection of the truth of Scripture. When leaders in the ELCA teach there is no hell, and their missionaries do not seek to convert the lost, why not remove the phrase “bring all people to faith in Christ” and all similar words from the ELCA official documents?

Second, the statements of ELCA’s bishops, pastors, and missionaries underscore that they no longer believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the way of salvation. ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton and other bishops, such as Paul Egensteiner of Metropolitan New York, have both stated that they think hell is empty, contrary to what Holy Scripture states regarding the final judgment

(<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2018/3/7/18372814/top-lutheranbishop-if-hell-exists-i-think-it-s-empty>, <https://www.mnys.org/from-a-bishops-desk/this-bishop-loves-you/>) Scriptural discussion of repentance and faith in Christ the Savior are absent. But we have stronger statements still:

1) In 2013, Living Lutheran published a response from an ELCA pastor to the question, “What happens to people of other faiths?” Rev. Monica Villarreal responded and stated, “At the risk of being a heretic . . . I contend that God in fact saves the whole world and all peoples through Jesus Christ alone and that this salvation extends to all, including Jews, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, etc. For where there is love, there is God.” It should be noted that Living Lutheran is the official magazine of the ELCA.

2) Rev. Angela Zimmann, an ELCA missionary, lets everyone know what her job is NOT as a missionary of the church. She writes: My job as a missionary in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is not to convert anyone to anything. The “accompaniment model” for missionary work, to which we subscribe, is defined as walking together in solidarity, practicing interdependence and mutuality.” <https://www.thedailybeast.com/notalk-no-peace-how-israels-separation-barrier-cuts-off-the-conversation>

3) Another ELCA author, in a blogpost hosted by Living Lutheran but now conveniently deleted, stated the following: “I usually associate evangelism with an effort to convert nonbelievers to Christianity, something that makes me very uncomfortable. Too often the desire to bring about conversions grows out of a belief that nonbelievers need to be 'saved' from eternal damnation by adopting the Christian faith. To the extent that evangelism is about 'saving souls,' I want nothing to do with it. I approach matters of faith and belief with humility, unwilling to assert the superiority of my own religious beliefs over those of others.” (<https://www.elca.org/en/Living-Lutheran/Blogs/2011/03/110307>)

4) ELCA Lutheran pastor says belief in Hell is ‘awful theology’ Pastor Charlie Ruud, from Mount Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, made that statement during Sunday Worship on September 5, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/596697741?ref=fb-share> These are not stray, marginal leaders. These are bishops, pastors, and missionaries of the ELCA. Their statements not only go un-retracted; they are repeated and celebrated within the ELCA.

Third, there are examples of congregations in the ELCA also abandoning evangelism and treating religions that don’t trust in Jesus Christ alone as equal to the Christian faith. A few examples suffice to make the point. None of these have been contradicted or disciplined by the ELCA, but rather permitted to continue and be celebrated: 8

1) On March 5, 2019, Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis was highlighted for welcoming Muslims into its church to offer prayers to Allah during Ramadan. The ELCA pastor, Jane Buckley-Farlee, is quoted as saying that she and her congregation “[s]ometimes even pray with them.” <https://www.facebook.com/mplssynod/posts/10161612894300094>

2) ELCA Calls the Qur’an a Revelation. April 23, 2020, The ELCA official Facebook page published a post, which stated, “We wish our Muslim neighbors a generous and blessed Ramadan.” In addition, the same Facebook post included this statement by the ELCA: “This month commemorating the revelation of the Qur’an is a month of intense spiritual rejuvenation, devotion and reflection.” This post remains on the official Facebook page of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A similar message was posted this year acknowledging Ramadan on 4/12/21. The Qur’an was written long after the New Testament and clearly states that Jesus is not the son of God. This is encouraging a teaching and religion that is opposed to Christian beliefs.

Commentary Of all the problems that our congregation faces in the ELCA, this question of the sole Lordship and Redemption through Jesus Christ alone is the most serious and questions what kind of educations our future pastors are receiving. As Christians, Lutherans, and members of St. John’s Lutheran Church, we believe the only way to gain salvation is by faith alone through Jesus Christ. This is abundantly clear in John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Many verses support salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

- Acts 16:30-31 “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They (Paul & Silas) replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

- Romans 10:9 “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;”

- And probably one of the most famous verses: John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (See also Acts 2:38, Ephesians 2:8, Mark 16:16, John 3:15, John 3:36) We have been taught as Christians that there is both salvation and condemnation in heaven or hell. Jesus makes many references to the fate that awaits unbelievers:

- Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.” • Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” In addition, the Athanasian Creed and The Augsburg Confession Article XVII also affirm those who have done evil things, the ungodly, will enter into hell and eternal punishment.

Many ELCA leaders, bishops, and pastors, are giving false assurances of salvation. The earlier reference to Pastor Charlie Ruud, and his statement that belief in Hell is ‘awful theology,’ was based on Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In his message, Pastor Ruud stressed “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” When he did this and spoke of hell as ‘awful theology’ he gave assurance that Jesus will get everyone out of Hell. He really needs to back up to read Paul’s words in Romans 1:1-2 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” It is clear from this statement that Paul was referring to believers in Christ when he said nothing can separate us from the love of God. Pastor Ruud’s message is an example of scripture being taken out of context and used as a false narrative, which is a dangerous form of misinformation.

Despite biblical facts and Lutheran beliefs, the ELCA is moving in a different direction and seems to believe that a “just and peaceful world neighborhood” can be achieved, not necessarily through acts of repentance and submission to the lordship of Christ, but through acts of cooperation with others who put their trust elsewhere. In addition, the belief that the entire world will be saved, and there is no hell, has led directly to the abandonment of global missions as evangelism. The ELCA has replaced it with the “accompaniment

model” for missionary work, which is defined as “walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.” This might sound good. After all, we all want a peaceful existence with our neighbors. However, the ELCA has recast the Church’s role from being one of proclaiming the coming of the kingdom through the redemption wrought at the cross to one of imagining a “peaceful and just world neighborhood here and now” brought about by mutual respect for and cooperation among all peoples of the world, whether they consider themselves “religious” or not. The problem with “accompaniment,” it speaks a lot about a “peaceful and just world in the here and now,” but very little about the next. It is missing the whole point of the Great Commission, which was to spread the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Teaching that everyone goes to heaven and there is no hell, or if there is a hell, it is empty, has resulted in a denomination that no longer works to evangelize and lead people to Christ.

(Taken from the St. John’s Lutheran Church website)

As a denomination, we believe: “The call of the Church is to worship God, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to carry out his Great Commission to make disciples who live out his teachings of love for God and one another. We are also called to work for unity within the worldwide body of Christ, joining with other Christians in prayer, worship, faith conversations, meeting human needs, and caring for God’s creation.”

Our beliefs are supported by God’s Word as found in Matthew 28:19-20, Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And, surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:16- 20 is known as the Great Commission. It is the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread the gospel to all nations of the world. It has become the tenet in Christian theology emphasizing ministry, missionary work, evangelism, and baptism. As disciples of Jesus Christ, it is our belief and our duty to go, to make disciples, and to share and spread the gospel throughout the world!

- Our Lord Jesus declares faith in Himself to be the universal mission of the Church (Luke 24:44-49, Acts 1:8, John 6:28-40).
- The apostles declare it to be the mission of the Church (Acts 2, Romans 1:1-5, Romans 10, 1 Timothy 2:1- 7).
- Throughout the epistles, the apostles are working to lead people away from their pagan and preChristian lives to a more thorough Christian faith (1 Corinthians 10:1-22). 10

As Lutherans, we believe the Bible is the inerrant (without error) Word of God, and Christ alone is the Savior of creation, and that the Church exists to proclaim this salvation so that the whole world may repent and believe. This is so thoroughly attested in the Holy Scriptures. For this reason, the Church understands its mission to be, specifically, a mission of conversion, leading people by God’s power and truth to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone, “the way and the truth and the life!” The ELCA, by denying Jesus as the only way to salvation and abandoning evangelism, has negated the very purpose God sent His one and only son into this world. It denies the sacrifice and purpose for which Jesus died on the cross. It denies our very beliefs as disciples of Jesus, that Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice. He died so we may have forgiveness of sins and be worthy of salvation only through Him. Anything else is unbiblical and promotes a non-Lutheran, and non-Christian understanding of salvation, which has the potential to lead more people to death than to eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Denying the Lordship of Jesus Christ is without a doubt the biggest and most serious issue within the ELCA. For this reason, we recommend that the ELCA no longer be the national church body to which St. John’s belongs.

Paganism

Summary: Our congregation professes our faith as part of our worship services using the Apostles Creed: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...I believe in the Holy Spirit...” The triune God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have been taught the Ten Commandments, the first two state “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.” It is alarming that there are ELCA bishops, pastors and entire ELCA congregations who feel so enlightened that they have “corrected” God in His use of His preferred pronoun and refrain from referring to God as “He.” Also shocking are accepted pagan practices of praying to Sophia. These are some of the many reasons why we recommend leaving the ELCA and joining the LCMC which upholds the true Name of the one and only God. Background: The ELCA refuses to do anything about bishops, pastors, and laity whose advocacy and language violate traditional Christian standards and expectations. Instead, the ELCA celebrates its inclusivity and diversity.

- Rev. Emily Ewing is an ELCA pastor who is employed as a “Social Justice Pastor” at a United Methodist church. In a Facebook post written 2/14/21, Pastor Ewing writes “FYI: TRANSfiguration Sunday is a celebration of Jesus being trans and nonbinary. Dazzling change and consistency.” <https://www.facebook.com/emily.e.ewing/posts/10100857995517493>
- Patricia Lull is the bishop of the St. Paul Area Synod of the ELCA. In an article called “Not What We Bargained For” she begins with this: “Grace and peace to you from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Mother of us all. Amen”. <https://spas-elca.org/bishop-lull-not-bargained/>
- The ELCA’s official hymnal “Evangelical Lutheran Worship” desexes all the Psalms to get rid of masculine pronouns for God. Also included are such hymns as “Mothering God you gave me birth”.
- Lesbian pastor and popular ELCA speaker Barbara Lundblad proposed to baptize in the name of “the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Mother, Lover, Friend; Wisdom, Word and Breath of Life.” http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/9-4_Ministry/9-4_Face_to_Face.pdf

• It has become popular in some liberal churches to close the worship service not “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” but “in the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier”, again, to get rid of the Bible’s language for God. This practice is also occurring in the ELCA and encouraged by it, as evidenced by the practice of Bishop Annie Edison-Albright of the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin.

• A student at Luther Seminary in Minnesota, which is stated to be the largest seminary of the ELCA, performed in drag in the chapel as part of the annual “Lip Sync Battle” held at the location. Anders Nelson, who was in his final year of studies and desires to enter into ministry, posted a video of his performances “Rhonda F’Plause” to social media. Nelson, wearing a long blonde wig and a very short pink dress, danced to the song “Baby, I’m Burnin” by Dolly Parton: “Your eyes reflect love and desire/I see that you need me/I need you to please me/You touch me and set me on fire,” the lyrics state. “I cannot resist you/Each time I kiss you/Then everything goes up in flames.” During the second verse of the song, Nelson grabbed a fan reflecting the song’s “burning” theme, shaking his hips, which drew laughter from the crowd. After kicking his legs up into the air, he later made his way down through the chapel pews to entertain some of those present up-close. One man in the front began to clap along as others laughed. Nelson took home the trophy.

<https://christiannews.net/2018/12/17/you-touch-me-and-set-me-on-fire-student-performs-in-drag-in-elcas-luther-seminary-chapel/>

• Ordination of Pastrix Dawn Bennet in 2020 into the ELCA included the lecterns (those who read the scripture for everyone) were comprised of a “pagan wiccan priest who loves Jesus,” an agnostic best friend, and a gay pastor. She was prayed over and blessed by an assemblage of theologically aligned ELCA ordained ministers, rejoicing as they laid hands.

<https://pulpitandpen.org/2020/04/14/queer-elca-pastrix-ordained-with-drag-queen-nuns-whilejennifer-knapp-serenades/>

• After the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, a service of welcome was conducted for those ELCA pastors who were in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same sex relationships (PALMS). As part of the service – at the time when the Lord’s Prayer would normally be prayed – there were seven different prayers offered (you could take your pick!), including a prayer to the goddess Sophia. Ebenezer HerChurch, a radically feminist ELCA congregation in San Francisco, provided this prayer.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110727020258/http://www.herchurch.org/index.html>

• More regarding Ebenezer HerChurch – This is a congregation in the San Francisco Bay Area that is in good standing with the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA. From their web site: “Our Christian/Lutheran feminist prayers and liturgy reach back into the storehouse of tradition to bring forth names as Mother, Shaddai, Sophia, Womb, Midwife, Shekinah, She Who Is.” They do so out of renewed insights into the nature of the Gospel empowered by the risen Christ-Sophia. (see herchurch.org) Instead of the Lord’s Prayer, they pray the following written by Miriam Therese Winter o Our Mother who is within us, we celebrate your many names. Your wisdom come, Your will be done, unfolding from the depths within us. Each day you give us all that we need. You remind us of our limits and we let go. You support us in our power and we act with courage. For you are the dwelling place within us, the empowerment around us and the celebration among us now and forever. Amen.

Commentary: Some people may have a hard time equating God as a Father because their own father neglected them, abused them, or abandoned them. Others may say that the Bible has a chauvinistic tone, and so therefore we need to refer to God as a mother. The main issue in painting God as “mother” is that it crafts Him in our own image. We should not craft God to look more like us, be more like us, instead we should learn about who He is. God, not having a physical body outside of Jesus Christ, does not have a specific gender. But we need to take into account what Scripture says. Scripture calls God “Father,” especially in the preaching and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. We never run into the term “God the Mother” anywhere in Scripture. Jesus’ ministry was especially tender toward women and He elevated them. God may have more feminine traits such as caring for his children like a hen shielding them with its wings (Psalm 91:4) but we need to base our belief in God on how Scripture refers to him outright, as Father and Jesus as His Son.

Matthew 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” When it comes to salvation, Jesus made an exclusive claim – The gate to God is narrow, but the invitation is broad. Jesus was very politically incorrect! Truth by definition is exclusive. This is a very contrary view compared to our culture and the ELCA today. We are drilled on inclusiveness. A member of St. John’s participated in the last Churchwide Assembly and found that the main message was that the ELCA congregations need to be more inclusive. Many of the presentations boiled down to this – accept everything, stand for nothing. Scripture warns us to beware of false prophets. (Matthew 24:5, Matthew 24:11, Matthew 24:24, 2 Peter 2:1) One primary way to discern if someone is a false prophet is by the doctrine they preach. Do they distort, manipulate, add to or take away from the Word of God? If any of this is the case, then stay away before you are led astray. For this reason, we urge St. John’s to end affiliation with the ELCA.

Parental Authority and Influence on Youth

Summary: St. John’s Lutheran Church has a long-standing history of teaching the Christian faith and Lutheran traditions to many generations. This is one of the many reasons that St. John’s has continued to exist, we have continued to teach the next generation so that each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands. (Psalm 78:5b-7). St. John’s ministry began in 1878, throughout those 143 years we have taught children, youth, and adults the Bible, Luther’s Small Catechism, Lutheran traditions and have equipped and encouraged them to live their faith in their daily lives outside of the church building. The ELCA has been deteriorating as a faithful witness to the Gospel, has included inclusive language that is not Biblical, does not call sin, sin and has been straying from the teachings of the Bible.

Background: Through our research we find that the beliefs and core values of St. John's and the ELCA do not align, what we continue to find is that the ELCA documents state what they believe, but then do not follow their own statements or constitution. We believe the 6 examples listed below show that the ELCA has no regard for parental authority, and they clearly are influencing youth with worldly views and not teaching biblically.

- 1) At Luther Seminary, an ELCA seminary, during worship the Holy Spirit is referred to as female. According to the ELCA's constitution Chapter 2 Confession of Faith C2.01. "This congregation confesses the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" AND from the ELCA's Education Social Statement page..... "When the Christian Church talks about education, it does so in the light of its faith in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." ³⁶"For there are, besides, many kinds of spirits mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, as, the spirit of man, heavenly spirits, and evil spirits. But the Spirit of God alone is called Holy Ghost, that is, He who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For as the Father is called Creator, the Son Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost, from His work, must be called Sanctifier, or One that makes holy."- From Martin Luther's Large Catechism Part II Article III
- 2) At the 2018 National Youth Gathering 3 different keynote speakers led the assembly of 31,000 teenagers astray from Biblical teachings and truths. ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber led the youth in a chant of "Do you renounce the lie that Queerness is anything other than beauty?" And the youths dutifully chanted back: "I renounce them." So the crowd was led to reject Christian teaching that homosexual orientation is "objectively disordered" and that acting upon it is sinful. Pastor Bolz-Weber has since encouraged all females to mail their purity rings to her so that she could melt them down and make a sculpture of a vagina; in return for their purity rings she will mail them an "Certificate of Impurity". ELCA Pastor Tuhina Verma Rasche who has notoriety as a blogger and networker of #DecolonizeLutheranism. Her blog is a bit hard to believe; it features two Advent devotionals entitled "F*** This S**t" and "#ShuttheHellup." Her blogs carry wonderful messages such as "The 'American Dream' is code to hold on to white supremacy" and "Whiteness is such a hell of a drug, white people are willing to blow up the entire f***ing world in order to maintain white supremacy." Those remarks are clues as to what #DecolonizeLutheranism is all about. Here is an excerpt from its webpage: "The time has come for marginalized communities to lead our church into the 21st century—people of color, the disabled, all genders (women, trans, and non-conforming), sexualities, ages, incarceration or immigration or citizenship status, and others." This liberation from the church's Eurocentric whiteness must be engineered by a task force that is 100 percent people of color or people who speak a language other than English. Parents sending their teenagers to the ELCA Youth Gathering are entrusting their children to the ELCA, to care for and properly instruct them in Christ-honoring ways and with Christ-honoring content. It is a mistake. The ELCA has proven to be an extremely liberal denomination that twists, ignores and violates God's Word. And the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has proven again that they cannot be trusted, These two keynoters not only reject traditional Christian notions of sexual identity; they also challenge classic teachings on sexual morality. Both signed a petition that was concocted by an organization called "Naked and Unashamed" The petition calls for the ELCA to stop "privileging marriage as the only acceptable form of sexual relationality" and to start "editing out language that perpetuates heteronormativity and sexual oppression" from its guiding documents. Fortunately, neither spoke about their notions of sexual morality to the hormone-driven teenagers who cheered them on. The third keynote was an 11-year-old transgender "girl" Rebekah Bruesehof, Rebekah's mom, an ELCA pastor's wife first told the teens that her child, who is biologically a boy, "deeply knows herself to be a girl". The mother said "she wasn't a boy, we just didn't know that yet." Her congregation held a renaming ceremony at her son's tenth anniversary of baptism, and they renamed him "Rebekah". This "girl" is now an "out and proud" transgender person and an activist for transgender and non-binary people...all at age 11. Then Rebekah came out on the stage to speak to the teens: "Transgender is being who God made me to be...God does not make mistakes...Its difficult to be in a world that is trying to make you... be someone else. My mission is to make things better for transgender kids, to speak hope. I may only be 11 years old, but I talk to legislators to make better laws for kids like me...Transgender kids are just like other kids...By being who God has called me to be, hearts and minds are changed, I can change the world...I hope that the Church is a place where everyone can bravely be themselves in all their uniqueness...Paint a giant rainbow flag out front (of your church)."
- 3) The ELCA is continually targeting youth with worldly views and passing them off as Christian Biblical views. One example of a worldly view is having sex with many people before marriage to "try it out". This view is being promoted by ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber³ who was recently installed as the ELCA's Pastor of Public Witness. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 it says: "Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people- none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God." *Marriage is the appropriate context for sexual intercourse. This continues to be the position of this church. We affirm that the goodness of sexual intercourse goes beyond its procreative purpose.* from ELCA's Social Statement on Abortion page 4
- 4) The ELCA encourages the teachings of Critical Race Theory encouraging youth to be involved with condemning white supremacy and racist rhetoric, as was resolved by the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly⁴. St. Olaf College, an ELCA college offers Critical Race Theory training.
- 5) Bible Camps specifically for youth to question/explore their gender identity. Lutherock is a camp of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, located in Newland, NC. They hold all kinds of gatherings for children and teens. To date (8/27/2010) there were three gay youth camps that have direct ELCA involvement. Lutherhill is one of them, The second one is The

Naming Project⁵ camp held at Bay Lake Camp in Deerwood, MN. Bay Lake Camp. The third camp is called Wonderfully Made and it is held at Bear Creek Camp, Wilkes Barre, PA. Lutherans Concerned/North America has this to say about the camps, "...there are now three organizations that offer camps and retreats for youth who want to explore the connections between faith, sexual orientation, and gender identity. These camps are designed not only for LGBT youth, but youth of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

- 6) ELCA congregation in NY created an APP (MNYS App) "where kids can create avatars of any "ethnicity and gender-identity combination" and marry them in a church."
- 7) Two ELCA approved publishing houses carry materials that in our opinion are unbiblical-a) Augsburg Fortress (aka 1517 media) has a resource titled "Wholeness & Holiness", the description for the resource reads: For years many Christians have been drawn into a belief that abstaining from sex before marriage is the only thing that is required to be labeled as "pure." Wholeness & Holiness addresses this misconception as well as the misconception that biblical purity rules are irrelevant to present-day Christians. This course will guide students to explore and correct these common misconceptions. Biblical purity is always about the wholeness and holiness of people and communities. b) We Are Sparkhouse- on their blog this fall featured this: "Celebrating National Coming Out Day and Trans Day of Remembrance"

Commentary: Honestly, doing this research was extremely disheartening. I (Jenny) have been a huge advocate for the ELCA for approximately 18 years. In 2008-2009 I attended the Northwest Synod of WI's (our synod) Youth and Family Certification school, I was part of the Youth Worker's Network in our synod for 12 years, I served on the Synod Council for 6 years. In 2019 I began serving on the Synod Youth Board as the adult representative for the Chequamegon Conference along with two of St. John's high school youth. The two high school youth resigned from the Synod Youth board in 2020 due partly to how they felt the Synod Youth Board was pushing LGTQBI+ inclusiveness and making them extremely uncomfortable if they didn't agree with the conversations. In 2009, I advocated strongly for St. John's to stay affiliated with the ELCA at the information meetings concerning the 2009 Churchwide Sexuality Decision. During all those years, I had been blessed with many resources and knowledge to be able to help St. John's further their children, youth, and family ministries. I truly believed that the ELCA was a Bible believing church that was eager to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world. I am saddened that in the last few years the events and things that I have read about the ELCA have really changed my mind. When I first started to research, I took a look at the statements of belief the ELCA has in their constitution and on their website and I thought "these all sound like the statements of belief that St. John's has held to since 2009 and earlier"; however as I began to read about the events that have happened and decisions being made for us by the ELCA it was clear to me that the ELCA is not abiding by the documents that they say they are. The research that I helped with on this project has given me more facts and data to help me come to the difficult decision that I believe it is time for St. John's to sever ties with the ELCA and affiliate with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC).

It is in our opinion that these findings do not align with St. John's Lutheran Church's constitution and guiding principles. Furthermore, it does not appear that most of these findings do not align with the ELCA's own documentation of what they believe and how they are governed, so we suggest severing ties with the ELCA.

Footnotes:

¹<https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/part-ii/article-iii/>

²<https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/appalling-speakers-at-the-2018-elca-youth-gathering>

² <https://medium.com/fuckthisshit/fuckthisshit-an-advent-devotional-b33fd0a79831>

³<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/talking-my-children-about-sex-without-shame;>

<https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/category/youth>

⁴<https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064629226454/search/?q=critical%20race%20theory;> <https://criticalrace.org/schools/st-olafs-college/>

⁵www.thenamingproject.org

⁶<https://newamericangovernment.org/evangelical-lutheran-church-creates-child-grooming-app/>

Additional Resources

2009 Churchwide Assembly decision on the Human Sexuality Social Statement- the original decision was to allow gay or lesbian pastors who were in monogamous, lifelong committed relationships to be ordained. This is not the current practice; this opened the door for transgender pastors and for pastors who are sexually active outside of marriage to be ordained. Back in 2009, the ELCA voted to ordain practicing homosexuals and now allows for homosexual "weddings" and transgendered pastors. In 2009 conservatives were assured that their "bound conscience" on the homosexual issue would be respected. But since 2009 *Living Lutheran* magazine has promoted many articles showing homosexuality and transgenderism in a positive light, but has not printed one article representing the traditional viewpoint on homosexuality.

"The Bible identifies the root of what corrupts creation as human sin, the rupture in our relationship with God. Instead of loving God with all our being, we turn away from our Creator and center our lives on ourselves, consistently loving ourselves more than we do God and our neighbor. Sin profoundly disrupts and distorts human community, penetrating the heart of individuals and entangling human institutions." from page 6 of the ELCA's Education Social Statement

Paragraphs in italics come from the Education Social Statement from the ELCA's website:

The ELCA's calling in education recognizes special responsibilities and accountability in certain specific areas:

□ *It affirms the essential role of parents and congregations in the faith formation of young people and urges revitalization of the baptismal commitment to educate in the faith for vocation, a commitment that continues throughout life.*

Dependent on the Holy Spirit, education in the Church centers in worship—in Word and Sacrament—and permeates all of congregational life and mission. It addresses us as whole people in our relationships, shaping the way we think, feel, and act. It strengthens our trust in the gospel, cultivates the gifts of the Spirit, and teaches us what is true about God's relationship with creation on the basis of the Bible and the Church's doctrines. It encourages us to understand and affirm the content of our faith in ways that invite us into the wondrous mystery of God's love for the world that passes all understanding.

During their formative years, young people face the challenge of learning to discern and pursue what is good and right amid conflicting ideas and enticing alternative ways of living. An environment of living faith equips them to grow and mature in their baptismal calling in a pluralistic culture that exhibits both God's goodness and sin's corruption. In such an environment parents willingly accept their obligation for their children, create the structure and climate for children to grow in freedom, and set parameters on how the culture will be allowed to influence their children.

Especially important during these formative years is their schooling experience. Parents as well as congregations will teach their children and young people that being a student is a calling—a way to serve God and others. They will convey to them a love for learning that opens youthful minds to the exciting quest for knowledge. Faith inspires us to understand God's world and to delight in the discovery of truth. Students are called to take the wonderful opportunity and demanding responsibility of learning with utmost seriousness, showing Being a student is a calling—a way to serve God and others.

The following guidelines are designed to help congregations focus intentionally on faith formation:

Educational ministries will:

- *rely on the Holy Spirit to work through education to form, guide, and enlighten learners in the faith;*
 - *inspire, inform, and challenge children, youth, and adults, including those with disabilities, with faithful, interesting, and effective teaching and learning;*
 - *implement educational materials and programs that are rooted in the triune God, the Bible, and the Lutheran Confessions;*
 - *plan and assure that the education ministry of the congregation is centered in and flows out of worship;*
 - *encourage Christians to be lifelong learners in the faith,*
- providing opportunities for all to grow in their faith and to be equipped for their vocation in the Church and the world;*
- *provide opportunities for discussing and studying social issues, ethics, science, and other religions in light of faith;*
 - *incorporate the best teaching and learning methods available with a willingness to try new approaches; and*
 - *incorporate educational programs and practices appropriate to the age, interest, learning abilities, and other characteristics of the people for whom they are intended.*

Children, youth, and family ministries will:

- *welcome and educate all children and youth in ways that recognize their wonderful complexity and dignity;*
- *give priority to the ministries of children, youth, and families through trained leadership, finances, and resources; and*
- *work to strengthen the family and to create an intentional partnership between the congregation and the home.*

Educational ministry leadership will:

- *support the pastors and other leaders who are called to be teachers of the faith;*
- *provide for the ongoing education of teachers;¹² and*
- *draw on the resources and people available in this church, including ELCA program units, and take advantage of opportunities offered by our seminaries, colleges, and lifelong learning centers.¹³*

A vibrant congregational ministry in education for children, youth, and adults carries out the biblical mandate "to equip the saints" (Ephesians 4:12) and prepares them for their vocation in daily life. It gives us hope that all of the generations will have a living faith in the God who calls us.

Bishop Eaton's gender is nonbinary: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/bp-eaton-interview/>

Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber speaking at NYG: <https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/elca-pastor-preaches-the-beauty-of-queerness-and-universalism-to-31000-lutheran-teenagers>

APP for Kids: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/11/07/evangelical-lutheran-church-app-children-marry-lgbt-couples-same-sex-wedding/>

Sin to not accept LGBTI... <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/11/07/evangelical-lutheran-church-app-children-marry-lgbt-couples-same-sex-wedding/>

Transgender hero: <https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/elca-publicizes-13-year-old-transgender-hero>

CRT: <https://criticalrace.org/schools/st-olafs-college/>

Holy Spirit as her: <https://www.exposingtheelca.com/exposed-blog/luther-seminary-chapel-preferred-pronouns-and-the-holy-spirit-is-a-her>

<https://www.exposingtheelca.com/the-bible-vs-elca.html>

<https://www.challies.com/articles/test-every-doctrine-test-every-teacher/>

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/10/elca-hits-bottom>

2019 Churchwide Assembly summary: <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8003>

Lutheran Core August article about 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly: <http://lutherancore.website/2019/08/22/letter-from-the-director-august-2019/>

What St. John's believes: <https://www.stjohnsspencer.com/about-1>

Science & Faith <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=2935417866721669>

CRT video from ELCA pastor Clint Schnekloth <https://www.facebook.com/schnekloth>

Letter about RCA: https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8121?fbclid=IwAR0tWr71LramsJE6TWa-reWheR_RJKckMmOYGI1FuD1ky3FeI7m7XUOWHLoQ

We are Sparkhouse website blogs: <https://blog.wearesparkhouse.org/celebrating-national-coming-out-day-and-trans-day-of-remembrance>

RIC (Reconciling In Christ): <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/racialequityplan/> ; <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/ric/aboutric/>;
<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/resources/injustice/>; <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/trainings/talksogie/>

The Naming Project (camp for LGBTIA etc) <https://www.thenamingproject.org/about/>

Augsburg youth resource on purity: <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/category/287171/Wholeness-Holiness>

ELCA's idolatry and unbiblical uses in 2021: <http://lutherancore.website/2021/10/15/letter-from-the-director-october-2021/http://lutherancore.website/2021/10/15/letter-from-the-director-october-2021/>

Youth Gathering ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber denouncing that acting on homosexuality is sin:

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/10/elca-hits-bottom>

Book of Concord: <https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/>

Definition of gender identity on RIC website: Gender Identity: one's internal sense of gender

The mocking of All Saints Day article: (Clint Schlenkloth's FB page, from Patheos website:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/2021/11/grieving-extinct-species-on-all-saints-day/?fbclid=IwAR1scfov7ka3aobZcIrszyt3n1Atnj4N3ldoWTBiD6ps2UY1gksv0bXbBQ>

Here is a screenshot of the devotional written by Rev. Rasche: Day One Fuck. Matthew 24:44.



Tuhina Verma Rasche

Follow

Nov 26, 2016 · 4 min read

Fuck. What a way to begin an Advent devotional.

Fuck is that catch-all word, screamed out in a fit of rage. Blurted out in incredulous surprise and awe. Said under one's breath when things aren't going well. Cried out in a deep mourning and lamentation.

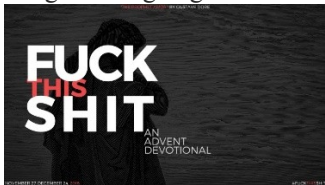


Image credit: Jason Chesnut

I come to the opening devotion of #FuckThisShit with #allthefeels, anxious knowing that this is the text that sets the tone for Advent, but also trusting that the Holy Spirit will move how She will to inspire creativity and justice.

When my fellow troublemaker and #FuckThisShit conspirator, [Jason Chesnut](#), and I started talking about this devotional and its visceral nature, I had been filled with so much anger and so much rage because of police shootings, the destruction of black and brown bodies, and the racism and vitriol tied to the 2016 presidential election. These emotions fueled much of my writing and energies in the past months. I thought this anger and rage would keep me, in this body, fueled to write during the season of Advent, yearning for God's justice in the midst of so much that has gone wrong in this calendar year. As this devotion starts, I am weary, wanting now to keep that anger and rage at arms length, whispering "Fuck" in the midst of a physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion that now gnaws at my bones. I come to this word of meditation and today's verse tired, weary, and so very much ready for Christ to come again.

It seems I will continue that weary walk in this season of waiting, hoping, and anticipating. Today's verse, Matthew 24:44 says "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." While yes, the Son of Man will arrive at an unexpected hour, there is the need to keep watching, to keep waiting, and to keep vigilant until that hour comes. Can I keep watch in this waiting? Or will I be no better than the disciples passed out in the Garden of Gethsemane while Jesus prayed in anguish? I cannot help but reflect on this passage of Matthew's Gospel, especially when Jesus tells the disciples, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going" (Matthew 26:45)

Human Sexuality and Marriage

Summary: In 2009, St. John's held several meetings after the ELCA Churchwide assembly to discuss the status of pastors serving at St. John's who are in publicly accountable, life-long monogamous, same-sex (PALMS) relationships. At that time, our congregation determined that it would not accept pastors or other rostered leaders in PALMS relationships at St. John's, and our constitution continues to say so to this day. However, since 2009, the ELCA has not only fully embraced the agenda of those who support same-sex erotic relationships, it has even started to abandon its commitment to monogamy and embraces a full array of sexual arrangements contrary to the Word of God and His love. For this reason, we recommend leaving the ELCA.

Background: In 2009, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved the social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust." In this document, the ELCA voted to allow for people who are in PALMS relationships to serve as pastors in the ELCA. It also affirmed its commitment to continue supporting those who hold to the traditional and Biblical view of sex and marriage. Since then, however, the situation has radically changed:

First, it has begun leaving the standard of monogamy. YouTube channel Barcroft TV recently interviewed two women and a man who are in a relationship with one another as a "throuple." Bishop Leila Ortiz of the ELCA Washington DC Synod is showcased as affirming their lifestyle and saying, "There's still many people who would be scandalized and would even be scandalized by my acceptance of them. And that's okay, that's okay. I'm very grounded in my faith. How do you judge and how do you point fingers and condemn people that don't know any other way of being? People have been in polygamous relationships for decades, they have just been private about it. So now we are in a place where it is public. This isn't just a fad. This is a reality that has always been." (<https://elca.org/News-and-Events/7993>, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/08/09/bishop-leila-ortiz/>) To this date, Bishop Ortiz has not retracted her statement or been disciplined. In addition, even though the ELCA only voted on lesbian and gay relationships in 2009, its public conversation and news releases consistently reference other sexual variants: bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersexed, and others. This point highlights the next one:

The ELCA has begun leaving the Biblical view of humanity as male and female. Here we may point to several events:

At the 2018 youth gathering, an event where many youth gathered without their parents and without prior knowledge of the events and speakers, a transgender activist and her pre-adolescent, transgender child (Jamie and Rebekah Brueschoff) were keynote speakers, even though transgenderism had never officially been approved.

In an episode of Chicago's Sun -Time's Face to Faith podcast, ELCA Presiding Bishop Eaton powerfully affirms LGBTQ community saying; "Our church has done work for years thinking about this. And we have come to the understanding that God's creation is diverse and that the diversity of God's creation is actually a gift," Bishop Eaton said. "When we take a look at people's sexual orientation or gender identity, it's not completely binary. Everybody isn't male or everybody isn't female. There is a whole spectrum to that. I think that's something that's new for a lot of our people to think about, but it's the truth..."

<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/bp-eaton-interview/>

On the ELCA Facebook page and on YouTube on June 20, 2020, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton talks about pride month and "gives thanks for the blessings of our LGBTQIA+ siblings and prays that we will all have a sense of pride in being part of the fearfully and wonderfully made family". Again, on June 20, 2020 Bishop Eaton gives her full support for gay pride month and "celebrates the gifts of the LGBTQIA+ siblings". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSvw2YuxbPk> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjWgBigEugk>

On the cover of Living Lutheran magazine, May 14, 2021, they celebrate Megan Rohrer as being the first transgender bishop elected in the ELCA: "On Saturday, the Rev. Megan Rohrer, pastor at San Francisco's Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, was elected bishop for the Sierra Pacific Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, ELCA's presiding bishop, praised the synod for recognizing Rohrer's talents. <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/05/living-into-hope-grasping-onto-grace/>; <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbcout/out-news/evangelical-lutheran-church-elects-first-transgender-bishop-rcna902>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d166q_4mcak

The ELCA has begun making these changes deceitfully, dishonestly, and without consulting the people of God. Even though a vote was taken to only allow for a very limited change to our public teaching (namely, that people in a PALMS relationship may be a pastor in the ELCA), the ELCA has behaved as though the vote allowed for all changes in sexual teaching currently embraced by the culture.

For example, The ELCA claims to be celebrating the tenth anniversary of LGBTQIA+ person's being able to serve freely in the church. How can the ELCA be trusted to stay within the boundaries of any future decision when it is not staying within the boundaries of this decision? See the contrast between the actions actually taken <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/6568> and what ten years later is claimed to be the actions that were taken <https://www.elca.org/50yearsfordainedwomen>

This inaccurate and dishonest celebration, combined with the ELCA's persistent pressing of agendas foreign to the Church's life, underscores the degree to which the ELCA has ceased to be, for our congregation, a trustworthy guide and help.

Commentary: Over and against this doctrinal and moral drift, we affirm the faith that we have been taught at St. John's since its inception: Our Lord Jesus and His apostles consistently uphold natural marriage between man and woman as the place for sex to be experienced and enjoyed. Departures from this ethic are directly rebuked. Jesus upholds marriage of male and female over against divorce and adultery (Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-2). Paul affirms marriage as divine in its origin and a picture of the union between Christ and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Natural sex between man and woman is affirmed over against other types of erotic behavior (Romans 1:21-27, 1 Timothy 1:9-11, Hebrews 12:16, 13:4, Revelation 21:8, 22:15). Jesus predicated marital two-ness—the restriction of the number of persons in a sexual

union to two, whether concurrently (no polygamy) or serially (no cycle of divorce and remarriage) —on the fact that “from the beginning of creation, ‘male and female He made them’ [Gen 1:27] and ‘for this reason a man ... will be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh’ [Gen 2:24]” (Mark 10:2-12; Matt 19:3-9). Perhaps most significantly: the Scriptures nowhere authorize, affirm, or otherwise bless any sexual union other than that of husband and wife. In the absence of a word from God, the Church cannot supply its own.

We have been taught as Christians that we are in the world but not of the world. Simply stated, this means that we are to shine the light of Christ in this dark world we live in. Romans 12:2; “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” How do we renew our minds? By the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through the study of God’s Word. There are many aspects of our culture today that are widely accepted in the world’s view but are absolutely unacceptable through the eyes of God as He has revealed in His Word.

We affirm that God loves everyone and desires all to be saved. Jesus summarized the 10 commandments into two. Love God and love your neighbor. Scripture also tells us in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”. We do not get to pick and choose. As faithful followers of Christ, we should strive to be obedient in all things. The Bible clearly calls us to love all God’s people but it also calls us to be disciples and confront wrongdoing (Matthew 15:15-17; 1 John 1:9; Galatians 6:1-2)

We understand and accept that we are born with sexual attraction. It is who we are. We also understand that in this sinful world sexual attractions may be misdirected for a variety of reasons. What we do with our sexual inclination makes all the difference in whether or not our lifestyle aligns with scripture. There are many references to appropriate sexual behavior. For example: Hebrews 13:4; “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous”; Ephesians 5:3 states, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people”; 1 Corinthians 6:9; “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men.”

Sexual relations outside of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman is sin. Yes, God loves everyone. He hates sin. We are called to love others. We are called to have compassion, show mercy and to encourage one another, not to endorse any sinful behavior.

However, the ELCA is persistently asking its people to endorse this very sinful behavior, and it is producing pastors that uphold this same unbiblical ethic. We recommend, for all of its dishonesty, both in the teaching of the faith and its handling of ministry standards and the ELCA’s public life, that the ELCA no longer be the national church body to which St. John’s belongs.

Political and Social Bias

Summary: St. Johns is a rural church in a relatively conservative area. Our mission statement is: Praising God, Building Relationships, and Sharing the love of God. Together! This mission is solidly focused on the Gospel and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Several social media practices and political views of the ELCA do not align with our mission statement and instead veers the focus on politics and social engineering.

Background: The items listed below are some examples of how our current affiliation with the ELCA leads the Church to focus on things that are not central to our mission of the Gospel.

Topic: Abortion and Planned Parenthood

Quote from Bishop Eaton letter: “Amid the legislative challenges to access to abortion, we must remember that this church supports ongoing access to legal abortion as well as access to abortion services and reproductive health care that is not restricted by economic factors.” Source: Letter dated May 2019: Rev. Elizabeth Eaton. Blog dated November 17, 2016: “Inez Torres Davis is the Director of Justice for Women of the ELCA (WELCA). On her Facebook page, she has a photo that says ‘I stand with Planned Parenthood’.

These are difficult days to stand with the nation’s largest abortion provider, given the grisly facts that came out in the news about what they do with aborted baby parts. But sadly, this ELCA leader stands with them, and the ELCA insurance provider continues to pay for abortion”. Exodus 20:13 Thou shall not murder. Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Topic: Social Media Posts

Numerous posts on Social Media by ELCA affiliated leadership, influencing others in actions that lead people away from biblical teachings. Source: ([https:// www.elca.org/Resources/Presiding-Bishop-Messages](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Presiding-Bishop-Messages)) We can see the following: As of 11/1/2021, there are 191 messages and statements. These messages and statements almost exactly follow the flow of media interest—that is, they follow the news cycle, rather than the Good News- and express only and ever the view of one particular political party or persuasion. Of those messages and statements: 27 relate to immigration, 21 relate to racism, 15 relate to gun control and gun violence, 7 relate to climate change and environmentalism. As well as several dozen relating to nuclear power, specific Supreme Court cases, commentaries on elections and political figures, Islam, pipelines, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Syria, Israel and the federal minimum wage. Of those messages that are recognizably related to Christian ministry, such as general Christmas and Easter messages, many of those in their content will also focus on political and social issues. In none of these messages does Faith in Jesus Christ appear as the central focus.

Another Source of Political Posting:

www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/topics/statements/ A statement from Bishop Eaton addressing racial justice: Dated April 16, 2021 “As an anti-racist church that condemns white supremacy, we acknowledge how these injustices are traumatizing to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and call on God’s comforting love. We join in the lament over the lost lives of Daunte and Adam and in the cry for justice. We recognize that rooted in slavery, racism is manifested through the history of Jim Crow policies, racial segregation, the terror of lynching, extrajudicial killings by law enforcement, and the disproportionate incarceration of people of color.”

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

Yet, we don’t only need to look at the national expression of the ELCA. We may also look at its local expression, The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, of which St. John’s is a member congregation. Here we find the focus on social and political issues as well. Synod website resource:

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Faith_Sexism_Justice_Social_Statement_Adopted.pdf?_ga=2.205102928.1713009072.1601588749-1507588863.1601397142

The Social Statement- Faith, Sexism & Justice section #27 reads:

#27) Use inclusive language (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and expansive language (other than human) for God. This church is committed to the deepest Christian understanding of the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining and speaking about God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God’s self-revelation and mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language. This practice follows the scriptural witness that God transcends human categories. Therefore, as in the Scriptures, metaphors for and images of God should be drawn frequently from the lives of people of all identities and experiences and gleaned from nature in all its diversity. Employing inclusive and expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the God of beauty and love who reveals God’s self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.

Racial Justice and Equity Statement of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

The people and congregations of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin believe we are a stronger and better church and society when we walk together instead of separated by skin color or ethnicity. In response to the history of injustice and racism in America, the congregations of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin reject systemic racism as sin that must be addressed by our church and society. As the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, we seek to join Jesus in the restoration of the world by first confessing our sin, brokenness, and separation from God. We encourage all the congregations and ministries in our region to ask God to forgive us and guide us into repentance where we acknowledge the broken world:

- We confess that we – the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, its member congregations, campus ministries, and social ministry organizations – live in broken relationships with our neighbors because of the divisions of race that we have failed to correct. “Because we are sinners as well as saints, we rebuild walls broken down by Christ. We fall back into enslaving patterns of injustice.”
- We confess that many of our stories, our cultures, and our celebrations are based on racist ideas, concepts, and origins. “A wall of hostility stands intact. Captive on one side of the wall, people with access to opportunities and institutions are largely unaware either of their own cultural biases or the worth of other cultures. On the other side of the wall, people scarred by slavery and other forms of degradation and suffering [including genocide] have seen their cultures ridiculed and reviled, or destroyed.” This is a partial example of the Racial Justice and Equity Statement of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. For the complete statement reference:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/0a/0a854394-3a19-4d9f-b1aef93021508921/documents/FINAL_Racial_Justice_Equity_Statement.pdf

All italicized words of the statement can be found in the Racial Justice and Equity Statement Glossary of Terms on the Synod website for further explanation.

Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, Culture, ELCA, 1993, p.2

Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, Culture, ELCA, 1993 p.4 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/> This reference provides a comparison of all church affiliations and the difference in the diversity within each faith denomination. See The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective, ELCA, 1991. https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf?_ga=2.70518421.424791730.1593614271-1503398755.159309924 With the changes in the political and social views of the ELCA since the 1991 statement referenced above, the question we ask ourselves, “Is the ELCA moving to a different type of religion, Progressive Christianity?” Source: <https://stream.org/when-christianity-is-pointless/> “Progressive Christianity is represented mostly in mainline Protestant denominations. Nearly all of these are in membership freefall. And it’s become almost impossible to parody. That’s at least partly because, as theologian J. Gresham Machan said of liberals in his day, “the faith they’re teaching is not Christianity at all. It’s a completely different religion. It’s a social reform agenda fueled by feelings, informed by secular thought, while barely draped with religious language.”

In his book, Christianity and Liberalism, Machan contrasted liberalism with real Christianity. “Real Christianity began with an announcement – a revelation about the supernatural life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the implications of this good news for our lives. The faith once delivered to the saints, makes demands on us. It has the power and the right to change us and our world. It challenges our deeply held beliefs. This faith rewrites our deepest concepts of who we are and what’s true. It demands our lives change, be made after the life of our Savior, and redefined by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.”

“If your God - however you define him, her, it or they- never demands change, then your God is you. That is what progressive Christianity has largely become. And it’s why it’s dying. If God’s desires are indistinguishable from our own and His commands

identical with the progressive social agenda-to the extent that you don't even have to believe in Him to pastor a church- then we might as well all stay home on Sundays and listen to NPR (NPR Definition: independent Non-Profit Media Organization)."

"Thank God, though, Christianity is worth believing. Thank God it's true. It does make demand on our lives, and it offers a salvation better than any that our culture mistakenly will ever "progress."

"Christians are driven by their mission and desire to share the Word of Christ so that Christ will find faith on earth when He comes on the day of judgement. That is our "politics" the politics of preaching for the sake of faith in Jesus Christ, NOT achieving any political party's agenda."

"Though we are told we should respect our leaders, we cannot forget who our ultimate leader is: God." God permeates and supersedes every aspect of life. It is God's will that takes precedence over everything and everyone; Mathew 6:33

Commentary: The NWS, the local district of synod to which St. John's belongs, has fully adopted the social and political agenda of the ELCA to such an extent that the focus has shifted from preaching Christ crucified for the sake of repentance, forgiveness, and faith, and has shifted to aiding and abetting political programs aimed at reengineering society. For all these reasons, we recommend that St. John's depart from the ELCA and join the LCMC, which is a church focused on the evangelical mission of Jesus Christ.

Financial Implications

Summary: The ELCA had been making changes that Bishop Elizabeth Eaton refers to as the FUTURE CHURCH. Those changes go against teachings of the Bible and, in fact, change the way we are to look at God. The following is a response by Don Kriefall on 11/7/11 to "Ain't That the Truth, Fall of the ELCA" blog article entitled "Introduction to the ELCA "Conscience-bound Beliefs" article: "Those that stand idly by and acquiesce to the false gospels promoted by the ELCA, are just as guilty as the leaders that foist this progressive garbage upon their membership. As Lutherans, we believe in Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone in all matters of faith. Scripture means little to the leaders of the ELCA and if you choose to continue to be a member of the ELCA, you tacitly agree to the values that organization espouses. So, yes, I'm sorry, but you are known by the company you keep, and the company known as the ELCA does not preach the gospel that our Lord taught. This is not about Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, it is about the word of God, which is being rewritten by the leaders of the ELCA to "satisfy the itching ears" of those that want a God on their own terms. We all need to pray for those that accept or preach these errant teachings, that they see and understand that these teachings just widen the chasm between them and our Lord and Savior." <http://aintthattruth.blogspot.com/2011/11/fall-of-elca-evangelicallutheran.html>

Background:

1) In 2020 our small congregation supported the ELCA by a tithe of about 10% or \$14,026 and so far in 2021 as of early November is up to \$9,730. 51% of our Synods revenue goes back to National headquarters (use is not listed) with remaining 49% used for administrative costs and "Lutheran outreach, including campus ministry here in our area." Source: Article from "The Blade" from Oct 11, 2021. Sadly, this includes advocacy for nonBiblical subjects in our area (see "Political and Social Bias" report.)

2) Luther Seminary in MN is in financial trouble. It lost \$4,000,000 during the 2012 school year and has now been forced to sell the majority of its property, and even rent back some of it in order to stay afloat. Source: Article from "Exposing the ELCA Blog" from 12/13/2012.

3) The ELCA supports the National Council of Churches (Bishop Eaton is on their board). The ELCA provides funds to NCC as well as our Bishop spending time as our employee to serve on the board for them. Note: A member of our congregation wrote to the ELCA asking for information on why we support the NCC. There was no response from the ELCA. Source: Juicy Ecumenism blog from Nov. 2013 states, "The NCC opposes historic Christian teaching on sexual morality compassion for unborn children." <https://www.usselca.org/where-do-our-offerings-go/> Read to the end.

4) Wisconsin Christian News article on 8/2/2021 included the ELCA as one of the organizations that comprised NCC. A quote from that article "The National Council of Churches has sided with the radical environmentalists who decry alleged overpopulation. The necessary remedy according to the NCC is abortion, or what they prefer to call "reproductive justice." They support sodomy but call it "sexual justice: and welfare socialism but call it "economic and social justice." The ELCA benefits package pays for abortions and transgender surgeries.

5) Approximately \$70,000 worth of church properties have been sold with revenue going to the ELCA. The ELCA is proposing 2022-2023 budget of \$899,000 with the major addition to the receipts from the sale of former church properties. Funding the national and synodical organizations as a declining organization makes it a matter of interest for the organization to have smaller congregations close so they can sell the property for extra revenue. Source: The ELCA website

6) Projected forecast per "faith+lead" publication from Luther Seminary (faithlead.luthersem.edu/decline) just 16,000 worship across the entire ELCA by 2041. Baptized membership in 2017 was 3.4 million and projected to be 66,000 by 2050. These statistics signify that the tithes we are giving to the ELCA are going to a declining 24 institution. Assuming our tithes increase each year that means we give more each year to the ELCA – but for what?

7) Since 2009 over 650 congregations have left the ELCA (74 of them in Minnesota). Source: Davidbarnhartblogspot.com, 1/9/13 Mr. Barnhart is a pastor and director of Abiding Word Ministries.

Commentary: St. John's has been committed to a 10% tithe to the ELCA. St. John's has also made a strong and successful effort in paying off our mortgage. Our members went above and beyond and eliminated the mortgage in roughly three years. This was a clear indication of our stewardship and commitment to our church. Is it not fair to question how the tithes to the ELCA are spent? Would a

body like the LCMC that appears to allow more local control of funding be more aligned with our values? In Luke 12:33-34, Jesus urges us to give of our money to help the poor because “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” This passage is not saying that our giving is an index of our commitment (though this is often true), but rather that our giving affects our level of interest and commitment to God. If we invest in stocks, our interest in, and commitment to, that company will increase. The more we invest in God’s work, the more our interest in and commitment to God will increase.

Constitution / Congregational Authority

Summary: St. John’s has been endowed by God with a mission to its local community. Faithfulness in mission includes calling a trustworthy pastor and maintaining flexibility in ministry to respond to local needs. However, the constitutional demands of the ELCA have increasingly restricted our flexibility and limited our access to pastoral candidates. For these reasons, we recommend leaving the ELCA to be free of the dominating governing structure we are currently under and to give us the freedom and a better opportunity to call whomever we choose.

Background: To be a congregation in good standing within the ELCA, St. John’s has obediently updated its constitution whenever directed by edition changes adopted at Churchwide assemblies. These constitutional changes promise flexibility as well as making certain requirements. From the introduction to the Model Constitution for Congregations: “This current edition of the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America contains changes adopted by all Churchwide assemblies, including the fifteenth Churchwide Assembly in 2019. It is consistent with the requirements of the governing documents of the ELCA’s Churchwide organization and synods, and it provides organizational flexibility to recognize the context of local congregations. Sections of this constitution are required when a congregation amends its governing documents. These sections must be used without alteration or amendment of the text in any manner (neither additions nor deletions are permissible).” The reality is, as these edits have been approved, the control and “organizational flexibility” that our congregation should be provided has diminished over time. The governing document of our congregation is largely controlled by a domineering ELCA structure. As part of this constitutional structure, only those candidates approved by the ELCA and nominated by our bishop can serve as our pastor. As of this date, there has not been a single candidate offered to our congregation to consider. Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) offers us more options to call a pastor. We would have the ability to issue a pastoral call to whomever we choose and there are pastors associated with the LCMC available for call at this time. As explained in other sections of this Task Force summary document, there are many examples of ELCA pastors and bishops who are performing their duties in an unworthy way and certainly not in alignment with our congregation’s core beliefs.

- From the Lutheran Confessions: “Consequently, when the regular bishops become enemies of the Gospel and are unwilling to administer ordination, the churches retain the right to ordain for themselves. For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers.” Every congregation has the right to ordain and call for themselves ministers. It may be that for good order we invest that right in bishops; but if bishops become enemies of the Gospel and domineering leaders, then congregations retain the right. 26 Galatians 1:7-9 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

- Also from the Lutheran Confession: “Since the distinction between bishop and pastor is not by divine right, it is manifest that ordination administered by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right.” Pastors have the same authority as that of bishops and may exercise that authority for the sake of mission. Bishops do not, by virtue of that name or office, have a divine right to legislate pastors and congregations in a manner that conflicts with the truth or to restrict their exercise of the ministry. 1 Cor 1:2 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” (The church in Corinth is fully the Church, with all of its rights and privileges, though it is in fellowship with all other churches across the world).

- Our current congregation constitution approved by synod consists of 130 sections (identified by C#.) Of those 130 sections, 85 (65%) are required by the ELCA. We cannot modify, add to, delete from; or change in any way. The remaining 45 sections (35%) are optional and what our congregation has control over. Specifically we have authority regarding: o Name of our Congregation o Process of transfer/release/removal of a member o Rules of frequency of congregational meetings, rules regarding special meetings and voting requirements o Officers of the congregation and description of duties (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) o Other council positions and description of duties (Worship, Food/Fellowship/Fun, Beyond Our Doors, Congregation Care, Buildings and Grounds) o Congregation committees and duties (Executive Committee, Call Committee, Counting Committee, Constitution Committee and Cemetery Committee) o Organizations within the congregation (an example would be the Women of the ELCA which no longer exists in our congregation)

- One key component of what we have no authority over is in Chapter 6, section C6.04. The process to terminate affiliation with the ELCA. It is one of the longest sections in the constitution. A condensed synopsis: A signed petition requesting termination sent to the synod, multiple congregational votes at least 90 days apart with at least 2/3 passing at each vote taken, synod representatives meeting with congregation between voting meetings and ultimately synod approval whether to allow our termination. o In comparison to Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), one vote, simple majority according to our own established procedures is all that would be required to end affiliation.

- The conditions whereby the ELCA may claim our church assets including property is defined in Chapter 7. o In comparison to LCMC, the congregation owns the property. LCMC may assume no ownership under any circumstances. 27
- Statistics from “The Supply and Demand for Clergy in the ELCA” Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop Adam DeHoek and Kenneth Inskeep, March 2016

There is a large demand for pastors in the ELCA and not all the graduates have a Masters of Divinity. As a result, new graduates are snapped up quickly, and the pastoral call process is much slower in the ELCA than in other denominations, with some congregations waiting for years. In contrast, the LCMC has 136 candidates available for call, or shortly available for call (seminarians), for a much lower pool of demand. Moreover, the LCMC sends out all openings to all pastors, so even pastors not available for call may choose to become available for a specific church.

Commentary: The ELCA expects financial support from our congregation (also mandatory per constitution), which in turn financially supports Churchwide structure. St. Johns has given to the ELCA very faithfully. One has to question what St. John’s is receiving in return. The major benefit to us is a qualified pastor. But the reality is that the ELCA has only provided us with one pastor, Pr. Rebekah Tarras. Pr. Ault and all before him came out of the Missouri Synod, and while Pr. Steve Gjerde came through the ELCA pipeline, he was raised in the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and educated largely in the Missouri Synod, and is now LCMC. As it is now, the ELCA is bereft of pastors. The bishop only has the authority in our church that we choose to give her. We have not called her to be our pastor; we have elected her to be pastor to the other pastors. That is a different thing. In order to improve our opportunity to call a qualified and godly minister of Word and Service and to be freed of the tyrannical structure we are currently under, we recommend severing our affiliation with ELCA and associate instead with LCMC.

Results of Special Congregation Meetings

A resolution indicating the intent to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to affiliate with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ passed 13-2 at a legally called and conducted special meeting of the Riplinger congregation on January 16 and 67 to 5 at a legally called and conducted special meeting of the Spencer congregation on January 23. A second meeting to vote on this resolution is scheduled for May 8 at both congregations.