

CORE Connection

News from Lutheran CORE

July 2010

Lutheran CORE leaders call for 40 days of prayer preceding historic Convocation

Convocation marks a new beginning for Lutherans in North America

The leaders of Lutheran CORE are inviting Christians around the world to join in 40 days of prayer as Lutherans in North America gather to form the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) and to shape the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE as a community of confessing Lutherans regardless of their church body affiliation.

The 40 days of prayer begin on July 19 and continue through Aug. 27, the day the NALC will be constituted.

Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation is set for Aug. 26-27 at Grove City

Church of the Nazarene in Grove City, Ohio (suburban Columbus).

Devotions and prayers have been prepared for each of the 40 days by members of Lutheran CORE's Steering Committee and Advisory Council and by pastors and church leaders in North America and around the world.

"The significance of this undertaking to form a new church body must be undergirded by the prayers of God's people, not only in North America but around the world," said the Rev. Rebecca Heber, a member of the

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee who is coordinating the prayer effort.

"All of us in Lutheran CORE have been encouraged by the support of Christians around the world. We are especially grateful for their prayers and covet their prayers during these 40 days," Pastor Heber said. Heber and her husband, the Rev. Bill Heber, are developing Oasis Church, a new NALC mission congregation in the Orlando, Florida, area.

The devotions and prayers will be posted on Lutheran CORE's website, www.lutherancore.org.

Register for Convocation and Theological Conference

Registration is open for Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation and Theological Conference. The events are set for Aug. 24-27 in suburban Columbus, Ohio.

The Convocation is Aug. 26-27 at Grove City Church of the Nazarene in Grove City, Ohio. The registration fee is \$35 and includes two meals.

The Convocation will be preceded by a significant theological conference Aug. 24-26 under the theme, "Seeking New Directions for Lutheranism."

Featured speakers for the theological conference include some of the most significant Lutheran scholars in America: Dr. Robert Benne, the Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten, the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Hinlicky, the Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Hultgren, the Rev. Dr. Robert W. Jensen, the Rev. Dr. Paul V. Martinson, and the Rev. Dr. Steven D. Paulson.

The theological conference will be held at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Hilliard, Ohio. Registration for the conference is \$95.

An evening banquet featuring the Rev. Dr. Gemechis D. Buba is set for Wednesday, Aug. 25. It is \$40 extra. Registration for the banquet is nearing its capacity and will close at that time. The Rev. Dr. James Nestingen was to speak at the banquet, but he will be unable to do so because he will be in Germany for his son's wedding.

Registration information for both events is available online at Lutheran CORE's website or you may request a brochure by calling the Lutheran CORE office at 888-551-7254.

Devotions from 40 days of prayer preceding Convocation

Here are two of the devotions that will be a part of the 40 days of prayer preceding Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation.

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.

— **Genesis 50:20**

The theological climax of the account of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis comes after their father Jacob's death. Joseph's brothers feared that he still wanted to get revenge on them, but Joseph assured them that he intended them no harm. Instead, he testified to how God had used their evil actions toward him for a far greater purpose of good — to save the world from starvation and to preserve the covenant God had made with Abraham.

Out of the distress and turmoil of the last several years, we can also see much evidence of what God "is doing today" to preserve the Word of salvation in Christ Jesus and to provide for His faithful people. While there is reason to lament and fear as Joseph's brothers did at what has occurred in our little corner of the Body of Christ, there is far more reason for the hope and confidence Joseph expressed. The Holy Spirit is raising up faithful people and equipping them with boldness and commitment to defend the truth of the Gospel and proclaim that good news of forgiveness of sin, life and salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your only-begotten Son to the cross for our salvation. Grant us faith to trust that word with all our hearts and equip us to proclaim it faithfully to a world in desperate need of your salvation. Grant us undying hope and confidence in your good and gracious

will for us and for the world, even when we walk through the darkest valleys. Pour out your grace on the North American Lutheran Church as it is formed, and on Lutheran CORE, WordAlone Ministries, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ and other groups that are striving together to preserve your truth and extend your Kingdom. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

By Pastor Scott Grorud of Faith Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, Minn. Pastor Grorud is a member of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee and the Board of Directors of WordAlone Ministries.

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

— **Matthew 2: 9-10**

Normally we would associate this text with Epiphany, but I believe it also has a powerful message for us as we anticipate the Lutheran CORE Convocation in August.

For years I assumed that once the star appeared it was stationary. The wise men saw it and then set out to find the king whose birth the star announced. But then I read more carefully the two verses above. They say that the star moved and it continued to move until it brought the wise men to Bethlehem. It was because the wise men continued to follow the star that continued to move that they found the one who had been born king of the Jews.

I remember hiking in Sequoia National Park in California. Orange triangles on trees indicated the trail. At the

beginning of the hike I could not see all the orange triangles that I would need to see in order to find my way all the way to the end of the trail. Rather when I got to one orange triangle I could see the next orange triangle. To find my way and to stay on the trail it was enough to see only one orange triangle at a time.

As we prepare to gather for the Lutheran CORE Theological Conference and Convocation, which will include the Constituting Convention of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), we do not know everything that will develop and everything that will happen as we see this reconfiguration of North American Lutheranism unfold. Some days will be filled with uncertainty, as I am sure the wise men's journey sometimes was perilous. But we believe that God is with us and that he is guiding and blessing us. We want to follow his guidance one day at a time and one step at a time so that as we continue to serve him we, like the wise men, will be "overwhelmed with joy."

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the star that guided the wise men and brought them to Jesus. Thank you for your guiding us as we anticipate and prepare for the beginning of a new Lutheran church body and the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE. Help us to follow your leading one day at a time and one step at a time. We pray that your Holy Spirit will use our efforts to bring people to Jesus, as the star led the wise men to Bethlehem. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

By Pastor Dennis Nelson of Christ Lutheran Church in West Covina, Calif. Pastor Nelson is a member of the Lutheran CORE Advisory Council, representing the Evangelical Mission Network from the Southwest California Synod.

Lutheran CORE Steering Committee finalizes NALC proposal, makes plans for future of Lutheran CORE

Lutheran CORE's Steering Committee met July 7-8 at Upper Arlington Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio.

The Steering Committee continued work on the proposed constitution for the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The constitution will be brought to the Lutheran CORE Convocation for approval. The proposed constitution will be available on Lutheran CORE's website later this month.

The following matters were discussed by the Steering Committee:

- ✚ Authorized all working groups to continue after the Convocation either as joint working groups of NALC and Lutheran CORE or as provisional working groups for NALC.

- ✚ Decided to use the term "General Secretary" to describe the NALC director. This position will be the chief administrative staff person of the NALC.

- ✚ Congregations wishing to join the NALC should send a letter to Bishop Paull Spring and the L-CORE office.

- ✚ Lutheran CORE has received final approval of its 501(c)(3) charitable tax-exempt status from the IRS.

- ✚ Discussed recommendations for congregational benevolence. Lutheran CORE and NALC will connect congregations directly with ministry needs rather than functioning as a middle man.

- ✚ Coordinator for Mission position was discussed. The coordinator will help to make connections between congregations and ministries in an equitable way.

- ✚ A list of ministries and their needs will be distributed at the Convocation to encourage support for those ministries.

- ✚ Regional mission events are being planned for 2011.

- ✚ Discussed plans for transition as NALC and Lutheran CORE begin to function separately, but cooperatively.

- ✚ Noted that some of the needs of those who are leaving the ELCA are different than those who remain in the ELCA.

- ✚ Discussed need to help those who choose to remain in the ELCA to find faithful ways to stay and to work together with those who leave.

- ✚ A working group within Lutheran CORE must focus on ELCA-specific activities.

- ✚ Discussed extent to which ELCA activities and situation should be reported on by Lutheran CORE.

- ✚ Discussed role of Lutheran CORE at 2011 ELCA synod and churchwide assemblies. This will be decided by the working group on ELCA activities and the new Steering Committee.

- ✚ Communication continues between Lutheran CORE, WordAlone Ministries, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ and the Institute for Lutheran Theology about ways to work together.

- ✚ Discussed logistics and other plans for the Convocation. All efforts and plans are proceeding very well.

- ✚ 40 Days of Prayer planned prior to Convocation. Discussed plans for devotions.

- ✚ Work continues on nominations for NALC and Lutheran CORE positions.

- ✚ Gemechis Buba has replaced Jim Nestingen as speaker for the banquet at

the Theological Conference. Nestingen will be in Germany for his son's wedding.

- ✚ Discussed certification process for pastors. Noted the need for some sort of background check to insure pastors have not been involved in sexual or financial misconduct.

- ✚ Discussed mobility and call process for pastors.

- ✚ Discussed candidacy process and how to best insure confessional Lutheran formation of pastors.

- ✚ Candidates for ministry preparing in ELCA seminaries should be encouraged to seek out orthodox teachers at those schools. At this time, Luther Seminary and Southern Seminary seem to offer the best concentration of orthodox teachers.

- ✚ Candidates for ministry in NALC are encouraged to seek out NALC mentors.

- ✚ Institute of Lutheran Theology has many students. ILT needs additional support from congregations.

- ✚ Discussed publicity material for NALC and common identity in printed materials.

- ✚ DVD on the NALC is almost finished. The DVD will be distributed to those attending the Convocation.

- ✚ Seven Marks Society was granted tentative approval as a member organization of Lutheran CORE pending the society's request to join.

- ✚ Received Southern Ohio CORE as a member reform movement.

- ✚ Received financial report. Noted the need for support from congregations as well as individuals for both Lutheran CORE and NALC.

Lutheran CORE leaders to attend LWF Assembly

Lutheran World Federation facing division caused by ELCA actions on sexuality

Leaders of Lutheran CORE will be among Lutheran leaders from throughout the world who will gather July 20-27 in Stuttgart, Germany, for the Lutheran World Federation's Assembly. The LWF assembly meets every six or seven years.

The world's Lutherans are facing difficulties and division caused by recent decisions by the ELCA and the Church of Sweden affirming same-sex sexual relationships in spite of the teaching of the Bible.

Representatives of Lutheran national churches have noted that the ELCA and Swedish actions have hurt the ministries of other Lutherans around the world.

"The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service." LWF member churches also are to "agree in the proclamation of the Word of God" according to the LWF constitution.

Many Lutherans have noted that the Bible teaches that marriage — between one man and one woman — is the appropriate place for sexual relationships. They note that the ELCA and Swedish acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships goes against the teaching of Scripture and against the commitment to "agree in the proclamation of the Word of God" with other LWF churches.

Lutheran leaders from Africa are providing leadership in addressing the situation created by the violations of the teaching of the Bible and of the communion relationship.

"We are extremely disturbed and deeply regret the recent developments taking place in some member churches of the communion who have taken unilateral decision on same-sex marriages, disregarding the strong sentiments expressed by other members of the communion. This unilateral action has negatively impacted our life together as a communion, something which could have been avoided," the leaders of the 18.5 million Lutherans in Africa say in a message prepared for the LWF assembly.

"We strongly affirm our decision taken in Lund (Sweden) in 2007 that 'marriage is holy, ordained by God and is a relationship between a man and woman.' Therefore, the majority of African member churches say '**NO**' to homosexual acts and regard it to be sinful," the statement says. "We pray for the Spirit of discernment and for the grace of God to abound as we seek to resolve these issues."

The leaders of the two largest churches in Africa — representing more than half of the continent's Lutherans — have also made public statements about their disagreement with the ELCA's new teaching and policy.

The bishops of the 5.3-million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) prepared a statement noting their opposition to the ELCA and Swedish actions.

"Those in same-sex marriages, and those who support the legitimacy of such marriage, shall not be invited to work in the ELCT. We further reject their influence in any form, as well as their money and their support," the

statement says. "We reject inappropriate and false interpretations of Scripture produced to justify the marriage of people of the same gender.

"This church encourages and supports all those around the world who oppose churches that have taken the decision to legalize same-sex marriage," the Tanzanian bishops state.

The president of the 5.28-million member Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) reaffirmed the position of Lutherans in Ethiopia that the acceptance of same-sex marriage "is a clear disobedience to Holy Scripture and God-ordained marriage," a news release from the church announced.

The Rev. Dr. Wakseyoum Idosa said that the decisions passed by the ELCA and the Church of Sweden have "a serious adverse effect on the unity of Lutheran communion" and that "the EECMY is deeply saddened by the decision that these churches have made in connection with same-sex (sexual behavior), which is against the inspired Word of God."

Lutheran CORE is committed to ongoing relationships with orthodox Lutherans throughout the world.

Lutheran CORE leaders have been in regular conversations with the leaders of national Lutheran churches around the world and are profoundly grateful for their support and leadership.

The Rev. Paull Spring of State College, Pa., chair of Lutheran CORE, and the Rev. Victor C. Langford III of Seattle, Wash., will represent Lutheran CORE at the LWF assembly in Germany.

Ecumenical representatives to attend Convocation

Several church bodies have announced that they are sending official representatives for Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation.

The Convocation Aug. 26-27 in suburban Columbus, Ohio, will consider proposals for the creation of the North American Lutheran Church and for the ongoing ministry of Lutheran CORE as a community of Confessing Lutherans regardless of their church body affiliation.

The 5.3-million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania will be represented by two of its bishops. The Rev. Dr. Benson Bagonza, bishop of the ELCT's Karagwe Diocese, will preach at the closing worship of the Convocation.

The Rev. Francis Stephanos, President Emeritus of the Ethiopian Evangelical

Church Mekane Yesus and former Vice President of the Lutheran World Federation, will address the Convocation on behalf of the 5.28 million Lutherans in Ethiopia.

The Rt. Rev. Ray R. Sutton of Dallas, Texas, will bring greetings from the Anglican Church in North America. Bishop Sutton is chair of the church's Ecumenical Relations Task Force.

The Rt. Rev. Roger Ames, bishop of the Anglican Diocese of the Great Lakes, will also be present for the Convocation.

The Rev. Larry Lindstrom, pastor of St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Farmersville, Ohio, will address the Convocation on behalf of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC). Pastor Lindstrom is chair of the LCMC Board of Trustees.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod will be represented by the Rev. Larry Vogel, associate director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations

The Roman Catholic Church will be represented by the Rev. James Massa, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs. Father Massa is the lead staff for Lutheran-Catholic relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He also represented Roman Catholics at the 2009 ELCA Church-wide Assembly.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be represented by the Rev. Marcus Kunz, ELCA Executive for Discernment of Contextual and Theological Issues, and Myrna Sheie, ELCA Executive for Governance and Institutional Relations.

NALC DVD coming soon

A DVD presentation on the new North American Lutheran Church (NALC) will soon be available.

The DVD features members of Lutheran CORE's Steering Committee talking about the NALC. It is designed for use by congregations and individuals in telling the story of the new Lutheran church body.

Those who attend the Lutheran CORE Convocation will receive a complimentary copy of the DVD.

Individuals and congregations may order a DVD by sending an e-mail with their name, mailing address and

phone number to nalcdvd@popp.net.

You may also mail your request to:

Lutheran CORE

Attn: NALC DVD

2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220

New Brighton, MN 55112-2202

Please do not call to order a DVD. Limiting DVD orders to mail and e-mail will allow the Lutheran CORE office staff to focus on registrations and arrangements for the Convocation and Theological Conference.

Through the generosity of donors, we are able to make these available to you free of charge. We ask that you limit your order to one DVD.

Congregations can join NALC

Lutheran congregations can now express their desire to unite with the proposed North American Lutheran Church (NALC). They will become members when the church body is constituted on Aug. 27.

Congregations that wish to be among the charter members of the NALC may approve a resolution indicating their desire to join the church body.

A letter noting the congregation's decision to join the NALC should be sent to Bishop Paull Spring and to the Lutheran CORE office in New Brighton, Minn.

National youth gathering set for 2011 in Chicago

A national gathering for Lutheran youth is planned for July 7-10, 2011, in Chicago. The four-day national youth event — called “Impact” — is being planned by Youth Encounter.

Impact’s emphasis will be on equipping young people to live out their faith in Jesus Christ. The national youth event is for high school students in grades 8-12.

The program will include messages from Christian speakers, music from nationally renowned Christian bands, small-group workshops, and a service project with Feed My Starving Children.

“Captive Free,” a Youth Encounter music ministry team, will also be performing and relating with the youth throughout the event.

Impact will be held at the Holiday Inn Select in Naperville, Ill. The event runs Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon. Program fees are \$189 per person for groups that

register by the early-bird deadline of Feb. 9. Hotel rooms are \$85 per room per night.

Youth Encounter is a Christian non-profit youth ministry organization that has hosted events for Lutheran youth and sponsored traveling ministry teams for 45 years.

Youth Encounter sponsors regional events throughout the country for junior high youth, called “Quakes,” and for high school youth called “Zones.”

“Youth Encounter events have always been focused on encouraging youth and adult leaders to go deeper in their faith in Jesus Christ,” said Lisa Rykken Kastler, Program Executive of Youth Encounter.

“Youth and leaders will have a chance to gather with other church groups as they worship, fellowship and serve as a larger community of Christ. Getting away from everyday life and journeying in Jesus’ name to a new

place is a shared experience that God uses to draw people together as He draws them deeper in their faith.”

Youth Encounter’s mission is to partner with Christian communities to strengthen their youth ministry.

Youth Encounter confesses the Triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — revealed through Jesus Christ, according to the Christian Scriptures; submits to the Christian Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and the source and final norm of its proclamation, doctrine, faith, and life; subscribes to the Lutheran confessions; and upholds the historical Biblical moral positions of the Christian tradition.

Youth Encounter works with congregations so that young people may be established in Christian faith, empowered for Christian living, engaged in Christian ministry, and equipped for Christian leadership. For more information on Impact go to www.youthencounter.org/impact.

Resources for congregational life, pastoral support

The Lutheran CORE working group on Congregational Life and Pastoral Support has compiled a list of resources as a service to Lutheran CORE congregations and pastors.

We have provided this list in the hope that it will be found helpful by our members,” said the Rev. Mark Braaten of Tyler, Texas, a member of the working group. “We encourage congregations to review their own options for what will best serve their local ministry.”

The list includes sources of resources for diverse areas of congregational life including children and family ministry, youth ministry, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, confirmation, adult education, conflict resolution, congregational renewal, discipleship, evangelism, stewardship, vocation, marriage, worship, spiritual formation, small-group ministries, and women’s and men’s ministries. Also included are resources for pastoral support including care for pastors, societies for clergy, and continuing education.

The list of resources is available at www.lutherancore.org.

Pastor Braaten is also available to assist individuals and congregations in seeking resources. You may reach him by phone at 903-561-1865 or by e-mail at mbraaten@oslctyler.org.

“This list is not all-inclusive. We apologize for resources that we have left off, and we intend to add to this list as we learn of additional orthodox and biblical resources,” he said.

Missouri Synod addresses ELCA actions, commits to support confessional Lutheranism

Delegates to the Convention of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod overwhelmingly adopted a resolution noting the difficulties caused by the ELCA's decisions supporting same-sex relationships and committing the LCMS "to support confessional Lutheranism at home and abroad."

In a resolution, adopted 1,093-61 (95 percent) by the Convention July 10-17 in Houston, the LCMS notes that:

✚ "The decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at its August 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis regarding homosexual relationships are contrary to Scripture and 2,000 years of Christian teaching, and to confessional Lutheranism in particular.

✚ "Many congregations and individuals have withdrawn from or are considering withdrawal from affiliation with or membership in the ELCA and consider their decision necessitated by conscience, Holy Scripture, and right reason.

✚ "For the sake of good order and in furtherance of the clear proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, many of these same congregations and individuals have organized themselves into groups such as WordAlone, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), Lutheran CORE, etc.

✚ "Individual and congregational contacts from the ELCA with LCMS congregations and officials have increased significantly since August 2009.

✚ "This decision by the ELCA has also grieved Lutherans and upset inter-church relations among confessional Lutheran church bodies outside the United States.

✚ "While this state of disruption and uncertainty among confessional Lutherans threatens to hinder the proclamation of the Gospel, it also calls us to confess our faith anew.

✚ "The LCMS, while not encouraging discord in the ELCA, nevertheless cannot turn away from those who dissent from the ELCA, lest we deny our own convictions.

✚ "The LCMS has been encouraged to provide leadership and support to emerging and formative Lutheran church bodies."

The delegates to the LCMS Convention adopted the following commitments:

✚ "That the LCMS earnestly pray for her brothers and sisters in the ELCA, including those who have departed from this biblical and Christian understanding, asking that the ELCA would reconsider — even now — its actions.

✚ "That the LCMS provide encouragement to other Lutheran church bodies as they strive to remain faithful to confessional Lutheranism.

✚ "That the LCMS commend groups such as WordAlone, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), Lutheran CORE, and others for their

courage and faithfulness in opposing the ELCA's recent decision.

✚ "That the LCMS commend efforts such as the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)-sponsored Confessional Leadership Conference (June 2010) which gathered Lutheran leaders from around the world for the purpose of promoting confessional Lutheranism

✚ "That the LCMS . . . continue exploring ways together with the International Lutheran Council to bring together Lutherans for the purpose of promoting confessional Lutheranism throughout the world."

Delegates also adopted a resolution 1,133-35 (97 percent) which affirms Christian teaching on sexuality and commends two documents prepared in response to the ELCA decisions "for study and reference."

The two documents are "Same-Gender Relationships and the Church," prepared by the International Lutheran Council and "Theological Implications of the 2009 ELCA Decisions," prepared by a task force appointed by LCMS President the Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick.

New LCMS President Elected

The Rev. Matthew C. Harrison was elected president of the LCMS. Pastor Harrison has been the executive director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care since 2001. Dr. Kieschnick has been LCMS president since 2001.

Synod assemblies highlight deep divisions in ELCA

Assemblies offer little hope ELCA can restore Biblical teaching on sexuality

2010 synod assemblies highlight the deep divisions in the ELCA on the church body's new teaching and policy on marriage and sexual behavior. The assemblies also show that it will be very difficult to get the ELCA to return to Biblical teaching on sexual ethics.

Almost half of the ELCA's 65 synods considered resolutions addressing the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly changing ELCA teaching and policy to allow pastors to be in same-sex sexual relationships. 2010 synod assemblies are the first opportunity for synods to respond to the churchwide assembly's actions.

Resolutions asking the ELCA to return to its previous standards for pastors failed in 26 synods, and resolutions asking for the removal of the ELCA's new social statement on sexuality failed in 14 synods, according to an online vote count by "Goodsoil," one of the groups that organized the successful campaign to overturn ELCA teaching on homosexual behavior. Many of the votes on the resolutions were very close — including a tie vote in the Southern Ohio Synod.

Even though the synod assemblies do not offer much reason for optimism to ELCA members who still hope that their church body might be able to uphold Biblical teaching on marriage and on same-sex sexual behavior, there were a few bright spots.

The South Carolina Synod voted to "affirm that intimate sexual relations belong exclusively within the Biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman" and "that the South Carolina Synod in its teaching and community of faith be

faithful to the norm of Holy Scripture." The South Carolina Synod also approved resolutions asking for reconsideration of the ELCA social statement on sexuality and asking the ELCA to rescind the changes in ministry policies.

The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod approved a "sense" resolution declaring the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to be in conflict with the Lutheran Confessions and thus with the synod's constitution. The synod assembly also directed that two officials from the synod attend Lutheran CORE's 2010 Convocation as observers and recommend ways that the synod might work together in mission with the North American Lutheran Church.

The South Dakota Synod approved a resolution that "expresses its conviction that the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in adopting the social statement 'Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust' violate the Confession of Faith of the ELCA" and asking the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly "to reconsider and remove the social statement."

By a 5-vote margin, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod passed a resolution that "this synod teach and confess that marriage is between one man and one woman, and sexual activity belongs exclusively within the traditional Biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage."

The Western Iowa Synod Assembly voted to ask the ELCA to "revisit" the changes in ministry policies and to return to the ELCA's former standards for pastors.

Only three synods adopted resolutions supportive of the changes in ELCA teaching and policy: Metropolitan Chicago, Metropolitan New York, and Metropolitan Washington, D.C.

The deep divisions in the ELCA were also addressed by several synods.

The South Dakota Synod voted to "express its desire to maintain whatever unity and shared ministry might be possible with individuals and congregations that choose to end their affiliation with the ELCA."

The South Dakota Synod resolution also urges "the bishop and Synod Council to exercise restraint in the discipline of congregations and pastors" "as pastors and congregations discern their relationships with the ELCA and with other church bodies."

The "restraint in discipline" resolution highlights the significant reversal in the ELCA's teaching and policy.

Prior to 2009, several synods and the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed resolutions asking for "restraint in discipline" of congregations that called pastors who were not in compliance with the ELCA's standards for pastors regarding same-sex sexual relationships. Now that the ELCA's standards have changed, congregations that oppose the ELCA's reversal of teaching and policy are the ones who are being threatened with discipline.

Many synods have seen much lower attendance at their 2010 assemblies. Many orthodox Lutherans have been distancing themselves from the ELCA and have chosen not to attend their synod assemblies.

ELCA house is sadly and irreparably divided

Mark D. Hanson, a member of American Lutheran Church in Rantoul, Ill., wrote this letter to Bishop Warren D. Freiheit of the Central Southern Illinois Synod following the synod's assembly. The letter describes the difficult situation facing many in the ELCA.

Dear Bishop Freiheit:

I hope this letter finds you well, and recuperating from the hard work of Synod Assembly. My wife, Kerry, and I attended the assembly for the first time this year representing American Lutheran in Rantoul. Unfortunately, our assembly experiences coupled with many days of prayerful discernment and discussion compel me to write you about the vitriolic and disagreeable culture of discord, disagreement, and self-interest that seems to permeate the fabric of the ELCA, our synod, and beyond.

We are all sinners in need of God's Grace and our promised salvation through Jesus Christ, poignantly reaffirmed by the Confession and Forgiveness of Sins during the especially heated debate on the floor of the Synod Assembly. Thus, my purpose is not to attack, criticize, or cast judgment. Hopefully guided by the Holy Spirit, I wish only to share the insights and observations of my witness with you. I appreciate the difficult circumstances you find yourself in as our bishop, and in no way intend any insult or disrespect to you or your position. As we agreed at our meeting in Rantoul, nothing is gained by shutting down dialogue because of disagreement.

The ELCA of old is dead. The new ELCA birthed at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly is irreparably divided, shackled to the illusionary concept of bound conscience. Prior to the assembly, I still held hope the division and egregious trauma to the body of Christ

done within ELCA might yet be healed. My hope was assaulted by the disagreeable and devilish behavior I saw clearly encroaching into the midst of ELCA, first in the unfortunate and inflammatory article found on the ELCA website by Dr. Jon Pahl and then in two separate incidents at Synod Assembly.

The first incident occurred after your clear and concise description of the rostering process and the ramifications for pastors involved in other organizations such as Lutheran CORE or a new church body such as the proposed NALC. A speaker rose and demanded that congregations considering leaving the ELCA fully understand the consequences such an action holds for their pastors. The tone, and in my opinion, intent were an open and unapologetic threat.

As you know, far better than I, a strong bond between congregation and pastor is deeply personal. For not only are our pastors the shepherds of our Faith, and that of our children, but are also our friends and members of our family. We are very protective of them. I believe congregations serious about exploring opportunities outside the ELCA are well aware of the multi-faceted consequences and benefits of doing so, without threatening reminders that insult their intelligence. In the current charged and divisive ELCA environment, threats, and even unintentional implications of threats, are the devil's work, and counterproductive and damaging on all fronts.

The second incident followed Pastor Ron Rasmus' remarks after the defeat of Resolution 2010.10: Defining Bound Conscience. Pastor Rasmus strongly expressed his disagreement to the outcome, and his belief traditional, orthodox Lutheranism is no longer welcome within the ELCA or our synod.

While he spoke, incredibly disturbing jeers and derisive remarks, almost other-worldly in their brash inappropriateness for the time and place, were made by many individuals in the house around us.

The most damaging remark was rather loudly stated, "Then why don't you just leave!" In that moment, with that hateful comment, my hope for ELCA died. I realized that orthodox traditionalists clinging to the Lutheran understanding and recognition of Scriptural authority had lost their case. Popular culture more concerned about appearances and an errant definition of social justice had carried the day, trampling those in opposition.

I pray my perceptions are wrong!

Jesus teaches us in Mark that "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." The ELCA house is sadly and irreparably divided, both socially and theologically. Perhaps rather than simply watch the house fall to the detriment of all, two separate houses are now needed to replace the hostility. Perhaps in separation rather than division, we might find a new unity in binding up the wounds we have inflicted upon the body of Christ. Perhaps in accepting another front in the spiritual war we are engaged as allies, we might discover what bound conscience actually means. But most importantly, rather than internally segregating ourselves and retrenching our differences with escalating argument and vitriol, we might thwart the devil at his own game and renew our efforts in the work and call God has set before us all.

Through God all things are possible!

Sincerely and Respectfully,

Mark D. Hanson
American Lutheran, Rantoul, Ill.

Northeastern Iowa Synod Secretary resigns, notes commitment to ordination vows, Confession of Faith

Pastor Marshall E. Hahn resigned June 24 as the elected Secretary of the ELCA's Northeastern Iowa Synod. Pastor Hahn's letter of resignation to Bishop Steven L. Ullestad illustrates the difficult situation many orthodox Lutherans are facing in the ELCA.

Bishop Ullestad,

It is with a profound sense of sadness that I offer my resignation as Secretary of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA.

In our conversation last fall we discussed the difficult position in which I found myself following the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. As I explained, not only was I convinced that there was no Scriptural warrant for changing our teaching on human sexuality and our ministry standards with respect to homosexual behavior, I also could not reconcile myself with the fact that an argument from Scripture was not even offered within the documents approved by the assembly which authorized these changes.

I came to see the overriding issue to be more than a disagreement over how to treat homosexual relations in the church. Instead, I came to understand the issue as a confessional one, which I attempted to outline in my statement, "The Confessional Crisis Created by the Decisions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly." (See "CORE Connection" - November 2009.)

The primary issue I raised in that statement can be summarized as follows:

The decisions made at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly with respect to homosexual relations and the rostering of those engaged in such relations were made without reference to a compelling argument from Scripture for doing so. Instead, the lack of a consensus in the church on this issue was deemed to be sufficient for making these changes. Deciding these issues which concern the ordering of our lives as sexual beings and the ordering of the public ministry of the church in a manner which is not based on a compelling argument from Scripture is contrary to our commitment as a confessional Lutheran body to the authority of Holy Scripture, and is in violation of our ELCA Constitution which binds us to that commitment to "the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life" (ELCA Constitution, 2.03).

As a pastor of the church, I have taken a vow to uphold the authority of Scripture in my preaching and teaching, and to abide by the Constitution of the ELCA, with particular attention to the Confession of Faith upon which it is based. As such, I have considered it my duty to oppose the actions taken at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. In our conversation last fall, I told you that as long as I served in a position of leadership in the synod, I would be seeking to overturn those actions.

The resolutions I brought to the November Synod Council meeting were my attempts to act on that

opposition. I deliberately called upon the synod council to "repudiate" the actions of the Churchwide Assembly. This was not a denial of the authority of the Churchwide Assembly, but rather, an appeal to a higher authority we are to uphold, namely, the Confession of Faith as contained within the Constitution of the ELCA. The intention was to bring this debate to the whole church, and force the church to address the confessional issues involved. I did not expect this to be a simple nor quick undertaking, nor did I realistically consider there to be much of a possibility for it to succeed. But I was determined to try. Meanwhile, I sought to use the language and concepts adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of "bound conscience" and "structured flexibility" to create a space within our synod in which the existing ministry standards could be maintained.

When those resolutions were rescinded at the January Synod Council meeting, and particularly when the ELCA Churchwide Council adopted the revisions to ministry policies without any mention of the concerns I had raised, it became clear that these efforts would prove futile. Nevertheless, I was determined to continue to argue for them through the synod assembly. But that was not to be, either.

My greatest disappointment is not that my efforts have been rebuffed, but that the concerns I have raised have not been addressed. I still stand by what I

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No avenues remain for opposition within ELCA

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wrote in my statement last fall. And nowhere have I received an answer to the issues I have raised. Neither ELCA Secretary Swartling's rulings nor the decisions of the ELCA Churchwide Council dealt with the confessional, constitutional issues raised by the failure of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to present — or even refer to — a compelling case from Scripture for the changes that have been adopted. At the 2010 Northeastern Iowa Synod Assembly, not one of the speakers who spoke in opposition to the resolutions I authored touched upon the primary issue that was at the heart of those proposals.

With the defeat of those resolutions at the synod assembly, I can see no further avenue to oppose the actions of the Churchwide Assembly within the Synod Council. And I cannot, in good conscience, carry out policies which I believe to be in violation of the Confession of Faith I promised at my

ordination to uphold. It is for that reason that I am offering my resignation as Secretary of the Northeastern Iowa Synod. I will fulfill my duties related to the 2010 Synod Assembly, and will be available to meet with whomever is appointed to replace me for the final year of my term if such would be helpful in any way.

I want to thank you for your partnership in this ministry. Even though we have disagreed at times, and in some important ways, I have never doubted your integrity nor your honesty. I also wish you to extend my thanks to the entire synod council, to Vice-President Susan Armstrong, Treasurer Larry Gregory, Assistant to the Bishop Linda Hudgins, and your entire staff for their helpfulness and support and for putting up with my often last-minute submissions. It has been a privilege to serve the synod in this way for these last seven years. Please know that I continue to keep you and your staff and the whole synod in my prayers, as I ask that you

would keep me in your prayers as I continue to discern my relationship with the ELCA.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Marshall E. Hahn
Secretary, NE Iowa Synod, ELCA

Marshall Hahn is pastor of the St. Olaf Lutheran Parish — Marion and Norway Lutheran Churches — St. Olaf, Iowa. He is a leader in Call to Faithfulness, one of the reform movements that make up Lutheran CORE. He was a voting member and faithful witness at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Another leader in Call to Faithfulness, the Rev. Gary Hatcher, pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Greene, Iowa, also resigned his position in the Northeastern Iowa Synod following the synod's assembly. He was chair of the synod's Candidacy Committee. He noted many of the same concerns articulated in Pastor Hahn's letter.

Institute of Lutheran Theology opens online bookstore

The Institute of Lutheran Theology has opened a new online bookstore in cooperation with Amazon.com.

In addition to serving ILT students, the new bookstore provides a way for Lutherans to support the Institute.

The new bookstore will facilitate access to the materials ILT students need to be successful in their studies. It will also be a means for Lutherans to support the work of ILT by purchasing Christian materials through ILT that they would purchase anyway.

The products in the ILT store are similar to most Christian bookstores, including Christian books, magazines, e-books, software, music, and videos. To support students' needs, it also includes office and computer products. Church supplies will be added in the future.

The bookstore is what is known as an Amazon aStore. Amazon hosts the store, maintains the inventory, and handles all of the particulars of sales. ILT selects the types of products it wishes to sell, and promotes the store.

ILT can select categories of materials to sell or specific items to sell.

The Institute of Lutheran Theology receives a small commission from each sale. All ILT proceeds from sales in the bookstore go to fund the library's collections and services in support of students, faculty and constituents.

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