

# CORE Voice

Issue - 2017 Autumn

Lutheran CORE



## Raising Up Pastors Where Orthodoxy is Challenged

*by Pr. Steven K. Gjerde*

A confession up front: I think that seminary prepared me for ministry.

It's a shocker, I know, what with so many pastors saying otherwise. But I've spent 17 years in the field now, and I still find myself drawing on what I learned in the classroom. What is seminary, after all? It's three years of studying the Bible, listening to teachers and confessors both past and present, soaking up anecdotes from old preachers, and attempting some controlled practice runs in proclamation, care, and outreach. How does this stuff not prepare us?

Some people complain that seminary prepares pastors for a past era. If anything, I found the seminary that I attended far too concerned about the concept of eras. I valued the Old Professors who prepared me for the world as it is: sin-sick and dying, but beautiful for being so beloved. They cared about the era called *The Day of Grace*, and I've never found that perspective on the world to fail me.

So as I write this article, I'm not out to take a crack at seminaries. Sure, I don't like the heretical ones; they can either change or close any day. It also wouldn't hurt if seminaries were more accountable to the church, and I'd like it if all of their professors served in the field for at least ten years (except for all the lay professors whom I like, of course—you know who you are), and judging from my own experience, it would probably help if all of the faculty considered the ministry as it currently exists worthwhile. (I guess I took more of a crack than I planned.) But with all that said, I like seminaries. I love them, actually, because I think that they're divinely instituted, whatever form they may take. Like the rest of the church, seminaries are collections of bad people doing heavenly things.

But now imagine this problem: imagine that you live in a land where the lovely notes of the Gospel have either fallen silent or turned spotty. In this benighted land, the question of faithful pastoral succession has become urgent and unsure. Despite the best efforts of some, so much foolishness (of the type that holy David mentioned to the choirmaster) has riddled the seminaries

that they are no longer producing laborers who preach Christ and Him crucified — they are even producing pastors who deny that God became, and even now remains, a boy with actual arms that bore the cross. What should the church do within such a land?

Or imagine even that this land is no land, but a particular church within a particular land, a church with a rich heritage of ministry that it now seems to have lost. Such a church may not exist, of course — just pretend. How might congregations go about raising up faithful pastors within such a church, which undoubtedly has its own institutional demands and requirements?

You might say, "Why bother? Quit one church for another." But if you will send missionaries to a benighted land, then care for a moment about a benighted church. There are souls at stake, you know, and people can move slowly. Maybe in this imaginary church (or land), a lot of the good pastors left for better pastures. So if those souls are going to move to a better place, they need better preachers to lead them. Yes, if you will send missionaries to benighted lands, care for a moment about benighted churches — care beyond your own institutional cares.

For perhaps there will be a time (you never know) when pretending is past. Perhaps there is even a time when congregations will find that they are late to be thinking through the question. But congregations must think it through; it is their responsibility to do so. Or were you under the impression that pastors took care of their own? That's an article for another day. For now, ask: How might congregations help raise up faithful, energetic pastors in situations where orthodoxy is challenged?

As a mere pastor, I have few answers to these heady questions. I'm only the product of a seminary, remember? And seminary, I am told, did not prepare me for this sort of thing. But here's what I would imagine, and I commend it to your imagination, and I hope (if any plague of heresy should infect your land or church, which is, of course, hypothetical at this point) that you might put it to action:

Imagine that the seminaries of this benighted church, from which said church requires a necessary stamp of approval for its pastors, were to provide long-distance learning programs — thus allowing for seminarians to live near you, you see, and not within the institution itself.

And imagine that your congregation is the type of

*continued on page 3*



### Inside this Issue:

<b>NALC Convocation Report .....</b>	<b>p. 2</b>
<b>Helping Pastors and Congregations Connect .....</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>2015 Convocation Book Published .....</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>Empowering Laity .....</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>Encuentro .....</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
<b>Global Mission Forum .....</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
<b>Follow-Up to Bishop Eaton .....</b>	<b>p. 7</b>
<b>Trust Is Still the Problem .....</b>	<b>p. 7</b>
<b>Remembering Robert Jenson .....</b>	<b>p. 8</b>
<b>Coming Events .....</b>	<b>p. 8</b>

# Keeping Christ at the Center: Reflections on the NALC Convocation

by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson

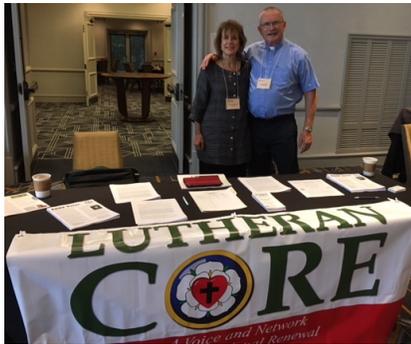
Again it was my privilege to represent Lutheran CORE at the NALC convocation in Nashville in August. It was a delight to be warmly welcomed by the leadership of that church body. It was enjoyable to see many friends and to make many new friends. It was uplifting and encouraging to be told by so many who stopped by our display table or whom we passed in the hallway, “Keep up the good work,” and “Thank you for what you are doing.”



Thank you to everyone who came by our table and said hello. It was wonderful having the displays area right out in front of the meeting room. We experienced a higher level of traffic because of our location. Most of all it was a joy to be with people and to attend a

convocation where Christ is kept at the center.

I have attended church services and I have heard sermons where Christ is barely mentioned, and if He is mentioned, only as an example of what we need to do. I have attended memorial services where during the message He is never mentioned. In contrast, the 650 NALC members and guests who gathered August 9-11 at the Sheraton Music City Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, attended a convention which was centered around the theme, “Holding Fast: Being Reformed,” and where Christ was at the center.



An article at the beginning of the manual for the Mission Festival, which was the first part of the convocation, contained a very insightful Bible study based upon Luke 5. That chapter talks about the time when some of the disciples had been working hard all night, but they had caught nothing. As the article said, it is not that they were lazy. They had been working hard all night. The problem was not with the lake or their nets. The missing part was Jesus and His Word. And so that article said, “Hard work without Jesus is not going to give us any result... When we lift up Jesus,

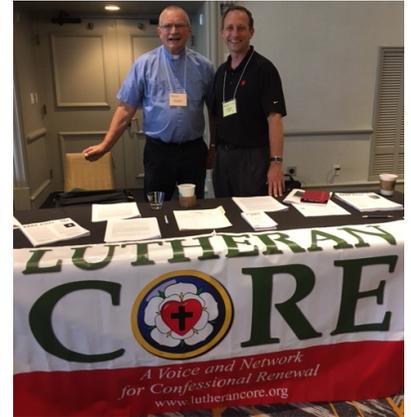


He draws people to Himself. The magnetic attraction in the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ is not the building, the pastor, the choir, or the musicians. It is Jesus.”

That article was absolutely right when it said, “The greatest mistake and crisis in the western church was when we started to push the Word of God away from the center.”

We are seeing a major Lutheran church body decline as the latest political agenda and the latest social justice cause is at the center. In contrast, it was a joy to be with the leadership and membership of the NALC, where Christ is kept at the center.

The NALC’s emphasis upon discipleship was featured prominently during the convocation. The NALC is committed to helping all of its congregations become disciple-making congregations. Our Lord commanded us to make disciples of all nations, so the NALC takes seriously the need for every baptized believer to be a disciple who is trained and equipped to make disciples of others.



A model for life-to-life discipleship was provided during the convocation. Using the word TRIP, it gives a simple way in which everyone could meet with one other person to read and reflect on the Scriptures together, to pray for one another, and to develop relationships that are mutually responsible and accountable. Here is a simple formula that everyone could follow:



After reading a passage of Scripture –

*T – Thanks – Share one thing in this text for which you are thankful*

*R – Repent – Share one thing in*

*this text for which you need to repent and seek forgiveness*

*I – Intercess – Share one thing this text reminds you to pray for*

*P – Plan – Share one thing that needs to change in your life as a result of meditating on this text*

Then, as you continue your conversation with this one person, ask –

*What is the first step you need to take to make this change?*

*When will you start?*



## Raising Up Pastors

(cont'd from [page 1](#))

congregation who could love seminarians, and really love them, and provide for them in soul and in flesh (i.e., understanding and prayer, yes, and also housing and insurance and cash —it all matters to the seminarian, and so to the church, too).

And imagine further that your pastor is the type of pastor who's kept the oil ready and wick trimmed, a pastor who loves good theology, and teaching good theology, and praying and preaching and visiting and reaching, a pastor who wouldn't be threatened by a student pastor.

Imagine embedding long-distance seminarians with such a pastor in such a congregation, for an official internship for certain, but also for times and seasons on either end of that internship, so that as the seminarians attend the official classes, they might also learn what they would otherwise miss by serving, reading, and praying with that good pastor and congregation.

Just imagine that a bit. All righteousness fulfilled on all sides (with God's mercy). An apprenticeship practiced beyond the time of internship, without sacrificing the theology or neglecting the institution's requirements. The opportunity to slip some good into a sad situation, for the good of the people in that benighted land, and for the good of the Gospel.

Imagine it, because you never know when you might need such a plan. Surely it's just a hypothetical now, but it may just happen (you never know!) that you'll find yourself in a situation where the plan is long past due. Or maybe you could think of some different sort of plan.

Necessity is the mother of invention, the Gospel is worth some creative thinking, and as my own seminary so often liked to say, a good seminary education is, after all, a partnership between seminary, student, and church.

*Pr. Gjerde is vice-president of the Lutheran CORE board and pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin.*

## Helping Orthodox Pastors and Orthodox Congregations Connect

One of the greatest challenges that orthodox ELCA congregations are facing is finding an orthodox Lutheran pastor. We are in conversation with the leadership of several ELCA churches who are saying that the names they receive from their synods do not even come close to matching their needs in terms of theology and mission perspective. We believe that that situation will only become more severe as an increasing number of orthodox pastors who remain in the ELCA continue to retire and as ELCA seminaries continue to produce pastors whose priorities are a far cry from preaching and teaching the Bible as the Word of God and reaching people for Jesus Christ.

A few churches have listed a pastoral vacancy on Clergy Connect, which can be found by going to the [home page of our website](#). We encourage more congregations to make use of this free service. Here is a brief description of one ELCA congregation in Oregon, which is looking for a pastor –

*Congregation is twenty-five years old with an average attendance of two hundred per Sunday*

*Two blended services with Sunday School between services during the school year – one service preceded by breakfast during the summer*

*One hundred fifty-two members participating in twelve adult*

## NALC Convocation

(cont'd from [page 2](#))

*How can I support you?*

*Finally, after you pray for each other, agree to contact each other by phone and see how it is going.*

I was blessed by and enjoyed attending the convocation and look forward to attending again next year.

*Pr. Nelson is the President of the Lutheran CORE Board and the Director of Lutheran CORE.*

*Photos with article: Terry Nelson is busily organizing things while her husband Pr. Dennis Nelson speaks with board member Pr. Cathy*

*Ammlung and retired Director Pr. Steve Shipman;*

*Pr. Nelson greets former chair of the Lutheran CORE board, Lynn Kickingbird;*

*Pr. Nelson with Pr. Warren Smith from Pennsylvania;*

*Pr. Nelson with Pr. Brett Jenkins of the CORE board;*

*Pr. Nelson with Dr. Maurice Lee, NALS Faculty member and Pastoral Summit participant;*

*Pr. Nelson with David Lerseth, Friends of Malagasy Mission, Eric Swenson, International Partners and also Lutheran CORE social media and web guru, Jordan Long, Lutheran Church of South Sudan, Evan McClanahan, NALC pastor in Houston, and Timothy Swenson, Institute of Lutheran Theology;*

*Pr. Nelson with Dr. Nathan Yoder, keynote Bible Study presenter.*



*small groups, who meet for Bible study and fellowship and are involved in some kind of service project*

*Ninety-five members involved in some way in putting on the worship services*

*A full program of children's, youth, and music ministries*

*Various outreach ministries, including the following -*

*Support for a hospital in Tanzania, including a school and housing for lepers*

*Mission to low income youth in the Dominican Republic*

*Local efforts, which include annual events in support of foster children and home repairs for low income folks*

Please contact me at [dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com](mailto:dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com) for a more detailed description of this pastoral position.

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# St. John Lutheran Church: Empowering Laity

By *Kim Smith*

We arrived a little late as always and popped open our chairs. We typically sit under a large, shady tree as far back from the speakers as we can get. While reminiscent of an outdoor concert (there *was* a band playing on stage) this was the summer contemporary service at a rather unusual ELCA Lutheran church.

What was most surprising, since Pastor Brian Hughes was on sabbatical, was the lack of a supply pastor. Instead, *St. John Lutheran Church* in Columbia MD, drew on its own resources, a number of trained laity, to cover for him during his absence. Although training began at least a decade ago, it wasn't until Pastor Hughes' heart attack while shipwreck diving in the St. Lawrence Seaway in 2012, that St. John's laity were empowered to preside at communion, pray for healing and preach; on and off-site.



The goal for St. John's trained laity is to help them grow in faith in terms of character (to become like Jesus and the early disciples) and to become competent. Amazing things have occurred at the intersection of character and competence.

At a recent outdoor service a member of the congregation, a special forces veteran, had just lost yet

another friend to suicide. He and his wife sat in the front row and remained seated during communion. Having been prompted to check on him, two trained laity asked if they could pray for him in his loss. He said yes. He began to cry. Other people gathered around and joined in. He began openly weeping and shaking in grief. Soon there was a crowd, including young people and even children, who were laying on hands and praying. All while the band played and people moved to the various communion stations. Later he remarked that, for all the friends he had lost in combat and since coming home, that moment in worship was the first time he was able to publicly express his grief. What kind of church creates members who know how to respond and do so within an atmosphere where such a man can be vulnerable and healed in Christ's presence?

This is all tied to creating a resilient church with members who know how to live as disciples in their daily life. This has also become the congregation's primary leadership pipeline for Missional Communities, multi-generational gatherings of 20 to 30 people who are beginning to become a central model for growing disciples. The motto of Missional Communities, also known as an *Oikos*, is that they are "small enough to care, large enough to dare."

At St. John, some of the empowered laity also take on a Lay Pastor role. Though the term is often foreign in Lutheran circles, it is how they make a distinction between the ordained and those who are being trained and released to fully embrace their gifts within the Body of Christ. St. John's lay pastors range in age from about 30 to 60. They are not permanently lay pastors, but can recommit each fall. In the past 10 years, 40 or so have been trained and about 25 are now serving the congregation. While none have gone on to seminary, they do go on as disciples did in

the early church — creating disciples and being missional right where they live and work. Some have even received hospital training to function as volunteer chaplains.

Many of them now have amazing stories to share. An example; a couple of years ago a trained member was visiting family in Wisconsin around Christmas. While driving somewhere as snow began to fall, she watched a car in front of her slip off the road and roll several times into a ditch. After calling 911, she reached through the broken windshield and held the hand of the driver, still strapped upside down in the car, and prayed with her until first responders arrived. It wasn't that many years ago that St. John would not have produced a member who would sit in Wisconsin snow and ice, praying with someone trapped in a car while gasoline pooled around her.

Pastor Hughes emphasized *that their youth are learning the exact same things as the adult empowered laity*. They are using *Rich Melheim's Faith Five* at home and at church and the congregation's ministry is highlighted in the red edition of Rich's book, *Let's Kill Sunday School before It Kills the Church*. As a model for disciple-making they have been mentored by Mike and Sally Breen of *3D Movements*. The youth are being taught to thrive in a post-Christian culture. In order to be resilient, St. John trains as many laity as possible — not just lay pastors.

Moving toward an all-encompassing disciple making process has meant taking a hard look at some of the historical understandings of how that happens. Or hasn't happened in some cases. In Pastor Hughes' opinion, "Confirmation as we have understood it is an irrelevant vestige of a dead European Christendom. Any pastor with at least 20 years of experience knows what a failure it has been when it comes to creating faithful disciples."

While there is no confirmation program at St. John, there is a multigenerational service on Pentecost and Reformation Sunday in which the confirmation prayer is used. Pastor Hughes jokes that someday he should fill out an annual parochial report with, "How many confirmed?" — 280 this year.



Pastor Hughes recently spoke at the Rethinking Church conference at the ELCA's Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. His topic was *Resilient Church: When Robust Isn't Making it and Fragile Is not an Option*. In a nutshell, fragile churches shatter when chaotic changes come upon them. In an effort to retrench and hold the line, churches may believe they must build a robust structure which can resist any change that might come upon them. For St. John, the question is how to release disciples who know how to make disciples and are prepared to take advantage of any spiritual breakthroughs that might present themselves. In other words, *the challenge is learning to recapture the understanding of Christianity as a movement and not an institutional bulwark* that must be managed correctly to survive.

# Encuentro 2017

## October 17-19

### St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Chicago

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#### **The Rev. Dr. Alberto Garcia**

Professor Emeritus, Concordia University, Wisconsin  
Co-Author of *Wittenberg Meets the World: Reimagining the Reformation at the Margins*



#### **The Rev. Kenneth R. Elkin, STS**

Williamsport, Pennsylvania  
*Reflections from Pilgrimages along Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Spain*

#### **Best Practices Panels Include**

*Presentations of Three-Year Olds: Cultivating Baptismal Identity*  
*Quinceanera: Affirmation of Baptism, Service, and Witness in Christian Community*

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*Visit to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center*  
*Resource Fair featuring Concordia Publishing House and Augsburg Fortress*  
*Bilingual Holy Communion on the Day of St. Luke, Evangelist*  
*Evening Prayer and Vigil for Peace, Hermosa Neighborhood, Chicago*  
*The Rev. Dennis Nelson, Scottsdale AZ, Update on the Ministry of Lutheran CORE*

*\$60 per person Registration until September 29; \$75 after September 29*

#### **Contact Pr. Keith Forni to Register**

815-600-3030 or [KeithLForni@gmail.com](mailto:KeithLForni@gmail.com)

*Sponsored by St. Timothy ELCA, First and Santa Cruz Lutheran Parish, ELCA  
Bilingual Ministry Resource Center, Joliet, Illinois, and Lutheran CORE*

# The Gospel Shows Its Power around the World:

## Report from the Global Missional and Confessional Lutheran Forum

by Pr. Paul Borg

Oh the stories we heard from around the globe at this Forum! We heard stories...

- ✘ Of many African congregations each giving birth to 10 - 15 new mission starts;
- ✘ Of African Lutherans bringing thousands of Muslims to a relationship with Jesus (they conveyed that Muslims are easy to reach because they already know about Jesus. We just tell them the rest of the story);
- ✘ Of Churches which were burned down not just once, but twice. When the culprits were thrown into jail, the Christians from that congregation visited them for months in prison. At the same time these Christians took care of their families, brought food, and shared resources until the prisoners were released. Many of those families then wanted to know more about this Jesus who gives these Christians such forgiveness and love. Many are now part of the Church and reaching others;
- ✘ Of many thousands of Sudanese who fled for their lives across the nearby Ethiopian border and landed in refugee camps. The Christians decided that this was a special place to reach out and care for the homeless, and start many new Lutheran Churches (some of the great Church planting is right there in the refugee camps);
- ✘ Of Christians living out what they call their vocation. Construction workers shared how they will build new bridges or new homes. When the excellent construction work is completed, all the workers have been brought to Christ;
- ✘ Of bold Scandinavian and German leaders standing strong, lifting up the power of Sacred Scriptures amidst a culture and state church that demeans and ostracizes them.

And the stories continue. We heard them during the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum which met for the third time this August 8 and 9 in Nashville, Tennessee. There are now 29 participants from many parts of the globe: Germany 2, Norway 3, Sweden 1, Denmark 2, Ethiopia 4 (including the newly elected president, Rev. Dr. Yonas Yigezu), Tanzania 5 (including the new Presiding Bishop of the entire ELCT, Bishop Fredrick Shoo and his wife Janet), Sudan 1, Belarus 1, and United States 9 (including 1 from LCMC and 1 from CORE). 26 of the 29 were present. This is quite a growth in a short 3 years' time.



Here is a picture of 23 of the 26 present. We had a marvelous time sharing how the Good News of Jesus and Sacred Scriptures is spreading, and how disciples are multiplying disciples.

A few other highlights ---

The participants from the West are asking those from the South to "please come and rescue us." Their call is rooted in the famous call to the Apostle Paul and the Early Church in Acts 16, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Many believe that the Ethiopian Lutherans (now over 9 million) and the Tanzanian Lutherans (now over 6 million) have some important things to share with us.

African Christians are seeing the Western secularization creeping into their countries. And they are asking us to share ways the Faithful can stand boldly amidst such change.

The 3 fold purpose of this global forum continues to be lifted up:

- ✘ to provide support and encouragement for those who are working for reform and renewal throughout the world — in accordance with the witness of the Holy Scriptures and as affirmed in the Lutheran Confessions;
- ✘ to discover together through Biblical and theological reflection ways to make disciples of all nations;
- ✘ to equip all believers both in renewal of the Church and the outreach of the Gospel to those who have not yet believed in Christ.

The next gathering will probably be outside of the U.S. — possibly in Africa.

A concluding personal note. What a joy to be learner and part of this movement! And what a delight to share some of the journey of CORE with others globally.

*Pr. Borg has represented Lutheran CORE at several gatherings of this group.*

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## Empowering Laity

Continued from page 4

What makes ELCA Pastor Hughes unique? He may well be the only Harley riding, scuba-diving pastor in the world with an earned doctorate in Family Systems who captains his own yellow submarine and brings it to Vacation Bible School. In addition to all the things going on at St. John Lutheran, the church property is also used by other churches including members of a Korean Baptist church, a Burmese refugee church and a Latino church.

St. John is also the primary support of Good Samaritan Orphanage in Tanzania. It also works to provide backpacks and school supplies to local school children and it hosts the homeless during Christmas week because, "Christmas, it's not YOUR birthday." In addition, Pastor Brian is also participating in four leadership huddles. One is with a local group of Fellowship of Christian Athletes coaches, where he also serves on the county board - using sports as a means by which to reach the lost in their community.

*Kim Smith is a member of the Lutheran CORE Board.*



# Follow-Up Letter from CORE to Bishop Eaton

*Some of you may recall that Lutheran CORE asked Presiding Bishop Eaton of the ELCA to acknowledge and affirm the work of pro-life Lutherans within the church that she serves. She sent a response promising to write after several months — which we at Lutheran CORE understand. Nevertheless, in light of her recent advocacy in favor of DACA, we thought it opportune to remind her of our correspondence and again raise the issues of life and family. Here's our email to her:*

Dear Bishop Eaton,

The peace of Christ be with you.

I note that you issued a statement yesterday regarding President Trump's decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. There you cite the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement on immigration, which prays God to "give us the grace of a welcoming heart and an overflowing love for the new neighbors among us." You also affirm the Evangelical Lutheran Church's historic commitment to the unity of families, and you mention how young people brought to the United States as children enhance our communities by their presence and contributions. Today, I write to remind you of our earlier correspondence regarding the ELCA's relative lack of welcome for those children who will never have the opportunity to enhance anyone's community, the aborted.

In that correspondence (*forwarded below*), you had promised

on April 21 to respond to my concerns after some months. I am not writing to suggest that you are late in doing so — I imagine that your workload is profound, and the summer has only just ended, so it's all good — but in light of your public statement on DACA, I thought it timely to renew my earlier comments. A church that purports to be committed to 1) welcoming children whom others do not want, 2) loving new neighbors, even those whom others consider inconvenient, 3) the wholeness of families where others wish to diminish or divide them, and 4) the principle that "life is precious and beautiful and, even in its painfulness, something fiercely to be protected," is surely a church that has the capacity to affirm, publicly and at its highest levels, the work and commitments of this church's members who work to safeguard the unborn and protest the unjust and inhospitable abortion industry.

I wrote my first email to you, and now this subsequent one, as a pastor of the ELCA and on behalf of Lutheran CORE, which speaks on behalf of many in the ELCA who stand for the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family. I look forward to your future correspondence on the subject, and I continue to hold you in prayer as you serve God's church and His "overflowing love for the new neighbors among us."

Sincerely,

Pr. Steven K. Gjerde

Vice-President, Lutheran CORE

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## Trust is Still the Problem in the ELCA (and synods aren't helping)

*by Pr. Steve Shipman*

Bishop Eaton correctly diagnosed our problem in the ELCA when she addressed the Pittsburgh Churchwide Assembly in 2013: We don't trust one another. But to be trusted, an organization must keep its promises and let its words and actions be consistent (the operative word is integrity). So let's see what is happening in regard to the 2009 sexuality actions.

What was *actually adopted in 2009* was to permit synods and congregations *which so desired* to ordain and call pastors in "Publicly Accountable Life-Long Same-Sex Relationships." (PALMS) The social statement did not address the alphabet soup that has been added, and it acknowledged four positions in the church regarding same-sex relationships, including those who believe that "same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law." This conviction is to be respected equally with the other three, and the implementing resolutions specifically mandated the ELCA to make provisions in its policies for those who do not believe persons in PALMS relationships should be ordained.

The national church has made a few steps to honor these actions, including a good-faith effort to include representations of "convictions 1 and 2" in the task force on ministry to same-gender families. And CORE representatives have always been warmly welcomed as observers at Church Council meetings and at Churchwide Assemblies.

But some synods seem to be doing the opposite of the 2009 mandates, and bishops and others speak as if the ELCA endorsed the whole gamut of sexualities being celebrated in our culture.

The Oregon Synod, for instance, adopted in 2016 a resolution giving extra voting members to LGBTQIA [don't ask; it was amended on the floor from LGBTQ] persons from congregations.

It seems as if the spirit and letter of the CWA actions in 2009 would instead say that those opposing same-sex relationships should be the ones receiving the extra voting members.

And the Lower Susquehanna Synod has put on a full-court press for congregations to become "inclusive and welcoming," starting with its action to become a "Reconciled in Christ" synod in 2016. Its [website](#) promises a "wide welcome" and uplifts three congregations that are appropriately welcoming.

Evil person that I am, I checked to see how this welcome is being received.

The one congregation, in suburban Harrisburg, reports a decline in worship attendance from 2006 to 2016 of 5%, or 128 to 111 (and with the same number the last three years, one wonders if it isn't lower). Membership dropped from 380 to 238. A second, in center-city Harrisburg (and a very gay-friendly neighborhood) hovered between 50 and 57 and last reported 44. The third, a historic church in a community surrounded by growth, plummeted in attendance from 272 to 142 (from 185 just since 2013) and in membership from 1039 to 585. Evidently a lot of people no longer feel included or welcomed in these congregations.

And of course, one might ask how identifying oneself as an RIC synod fulfills the plea of the Sexuality Statement that all four positions were to respect one another's "bound conscience" on the matter.

If the ELCA is to restore trust, it needs to be honest about what it believes and what it will do. Maybe it is too late, and the ELCA will continue its decline into a boutique denomination of social activists who think they are far more significant in the larger society than they really are. But some of us have chosen to stay with the sinking ship, praying that the Holy Spirit will graciously send repentance and renewal.

# Coming Events

**Encuentro on Lutheran-Hispanic Ministry**, Chicago, IL, October 17-19, 2017. Presenters will represent both academic and parish ministry perspectives. A Resource Fair will feature a variety of materials for Christian education, evangelism, worship and devotional life, and there will be visits to Chicago-area ministry and cultural sites. Current and longtime practitioners in bilingual ministry are expected, as are those who are considering it in their congregational context. Sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the Bilingual Ministry Resource Center. Contact [KeithLForni@gmail.com](mailto:KeithLForni@gmail.com) or *Facebook: First and Santa Cruz Lutheran Church*, or *see page 5*.

**LCMC Annual Gathering**, October 8-11, Hilton Minneapolis. "We Confess Our Faith," visiting the Reformation themes of Justification, Two Kingdoms, and Priesthood of All Believers. Service projects, vendors, worship, and many other activities. *Click here for more information*.

**March for Life**, January 19, 2018, Washington D.C. Plan to join us!



We were saddened to receive word of the death of *Dr. Robert Jensen*, a teacher and shepherd to many supporters of Lutheran CORE, including your editor.

Jens, as we knew him, was a tireless advocate for faithful theology and teaching, not just in the ELCA but in the ecumenical Church. He and his friend Carl Braaten established the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology and together led it for many years. Jens also spoke at many of the conferences sponsored by Lutheran CORE, even as his physical health became problematic.

His erudition and personal graciousness, along with his ability to teach clearly, will be greatly missed.

Rest in peace, Jens, in the nearer presence of the Lord you served so faithfully!

**Thank you for your prayers  
and financial support of Lutheran CORE!**

**Because of you  
we can continue to serve as**

**A Voice and Network  
for  
Confessional Renewal**

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## Weekly Devotions and Sermon Starters

Weekly devotions continue to be available on *the blog* on Lutheran CORE's website. Pastor Dennis Nelson, president of the board and director of Lutheran CORE, posts a devotional based upon one of the following Sunday's readings every Tuesday. Pastor Steven Gjerde, vice-president of the board, writes a devotional based upon one of the previous Sunday's readings in the Missouri Synod lectionary series, which is posted every Wednesday. A link to these devotionals is then posted on a number of different Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Please help us get the word out about these resources. We desire that they be an inspiration to all who read them, and also a source of ideas, thoughts, illustrations, and images for pastors as they prepare for the following Sunday's sermon.

## CORE Voice News and Information from Lutheran CORE

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