

Lutheran Coalition for Renewal CORE Voice

A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans

Issue 1 2020
January



In this issue, read about the ELCA’s alarming use of alternate pronouns for Father and Son and how that puts the Gospel and salvation at risk. The ELCA is also being called out for information it posted on its own Facebook page. In addition, read a book review of Robert Benne’s latest book (he mentions the ELCA too) and read about Lutheran CORE’s strategy for handling the clergy shortage.

Reflections on the Augsburg Confession — Part 2

by [Pr. David Charlton](#), Lutheran CORE Board Member

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” (Matthew 11:2-6 NRSV)

There goes the Son ...

These days, there are many who are offended by the God revealed in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Scriptures. The primary offense is caused by the name Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Others take offense at the masculine pronouns that the Bible uses for God. As a result, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its hymnal *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, worked diligently to reduce the use of masculine pronouns to refer to God. This was particularly true in the translation of the Psalms. In addition, they provided an alternate invocation for the beginning of the liturgy that enabled congregations to avoid saying Father and Son. Many of the Prayers of the Day and all of the Proper Prefaces, were changed so that prayer was addressed to God in general rather than to the Father. Over the



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ELCA: Answer the Question! — Part 2

by [Pr. Dennis D. Nelson](#), Lutheran CORE Executive Director

Once again the ELCA refuses to be honest, to have integrity, and to allow the way it is doing things to be challenged. Instead, once again it just ignores those challenges as it demonstrates that it hopes that those who disagree will eventually just give up and go away.

Towards the end of last November the ELCA declared on its Facebook page, “Before 2009, our denomination sinfully refused to ordain any of our openly LGBTQIA+ siblings.” It also said, “We highly recommend checking out some of ReconcilingWorks’ resources.”

I have several problems with these statements.

Sinful or Favoritism?

First, the ELCA is calling sinful the traditional position on sexual ethics, even though the traditional view was declared by the 2009 social statement to be one of four acceptable “conscience-bound” positions that would have a place in the ELCA. I had the same problem in 2018 when ELCA pastor [Nadia Bolz-Weber](#), speaking at the youth gathering, led thirty thousand young people in renouncing the traditional view as a lie and the ELCA did nothing to distance itself from her as well as from her statements and actions.

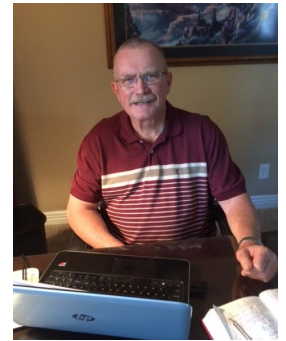
If the ELCA feels that it is free to take any one of the four positions that were approved in 2009 and state publicly that that is the only acceptable view and that holding to and advocating for any of the other three positions is a sin, then it can also be said that the ELCA still teaches that homosexual behavior is a sin (since that also is one of the four acceptable views) and that the ELCA still believes that ordaining openly LGBTQIA+ persons is a sin.

How can the ELCA, who claims to be a champion for justice and fairness, continue to make public statements and continue to take actions that favor any one of the four “ministry perspectives” over the others? This kind of blatant favoritism is also shown in the Facebook page’s strong recommendation of ReconcilingWorks resources and not also giving equal endorsement to resources that advocate for the traditional view.

Boundaries

Second, what the ELCA has declared on its Facebook page goes far beyond the boundaries of what

was actually approved in 2009. The 2009 social statement and changes in ministry policies said nothing about bisexual, transgender, or any of the other letters of the LGBTQIA+ formula. The decisions in 2009 addressed only same sex attracted people who are living in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same gender relationships.



Demeaning

Third, what the ELCA has declared on its Facebook page denigrates the ministry of same sex attracted people who were serving in the ELCA prior to 2009 while living faithfully according to traditional, Biblical sexual ethics. *To claim that the ELCA did not ordain same sex attracted people prior to 2009 is simply false*, to say nothing about its being stunningly demeaning to those faithful servants of God.

Two times I telephoned the person whom the ELCA contact center said is in charge of its Facebook page. Two times I left a voice mail message, asking that person to call me back so that I could inquire as to how these statements fit in with what was actually approved in 2009. But neither time did this person call me back. I did not want to be accused of harassing this person, so I did not call a third time, but I do think that that is an interesting way to not be held accountable for the accuracy and fairness of what is posted on the ELCA Facebook page. Just do not call the person back. Then you do not have to deal with what they have to say.

My goal: make the ELCA uncomfortable about what they are doing, alert people to what is happening, and then be there for people when they become aware.

Many times I have been asked by people whether I think that what Lutheran CORE is doing will actually get the ELCA to change. I always respond, “No, I do not. It would take an intervention by God to accomplish that. Rather my goal is three-fold - to try to make the ELCA uncomfortable about what they are doing, to alert people to what is happening, and then to be there for people when they become aware.”

Thanks Be to God! Memoirs of a Practical Theologian by Robert Benne

by [Pr. Dennis D. Nelson](#), Lutheran CORE Executive Director

I was thoroughly blessed through reading the recently published memoirs of Dr. Robert Benne. Many thanks to Dr. Benne for writing them and to the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau for publishing them. Reading Dr. Benne's memoirs reminded me of when I saw the 1989 movie, "Born on the Fourth of July." While watching that movie, and while reading Dr. Benne's memoirs, I felt like I was reliving several of the years of my own life.

I was born ten years after Dr. Benne, but like him I grew up in a culture that supported and encouraged the Christian faith. He grew up in a small town in Nebraska. I was born in Minneapolis and spent some of the formative years of my life in a small town in Iowa. At that time the world was trustworthy and safe, America was great and good, and right and wrong were clearly defined (page 77). Bob Benne met his first black persons in college. I had my first Asian friend in seminary.

I experienced and was dramatically changed by the same social and cultural dynamics that strongly affected him, though at an age of ten years younger. We were both influenced by the liberal idealism of the early 60's. Like him, I came to view the church mainly as an instrument of social transformation (page 83). I identified with his self-description, "I tried to swim with the radical tide" (page 88). I was amused by his comment, "I became a 'social justice warrior' before the term had been coined" (page 106). He mentioned that while teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago he worked with the Ecumenical Institute, an organization that offered introductory courses to the Christian faith, workshops on anti-racism, and training in community transformation. I remember while attending college near Chicago hearing a presentation by one of the staff members of the institute. I was stirred by what he said and was determined that that is what I wanted to do after graduating from seminary.

I could identify with Dr. Benne's then sharing the story of how he came to realize the spiritual bankruptcy of that view of the mission and message of the church. He described himself as a "wanna-be radical" who got "mugged by reality" (page 90). He came to see how, by viewing the church primarily as a vehicle of social transformation, he had reduced its transcendent message to merely human efforts (page 89).

I greatly appreciate the way in which Dr. Benne shares so personally, openly, and honestly the story of his own spiritual and ministry journey. He feels deeply and articulates boldly and clearly the seriousness of the departure of much of American Lutheranism from the historic Christian faith. He feels the pain, and he can articulate the issues.

In the final pages of his memoirs he describes the events of the last twenty years, including the formation of LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ), Lutheran CORE, and the NALC (North American Lutheran Church). He states wisely and accurately, "Though church schisms are undoubtedly serious matters that should be undertaken



THANKS BE TO GOD!

MEMOIRS OF A
PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN

ROBERT BENNE

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New Year Reflections on Our Future as a Church

by [Pr. Dan Brandt](#), Director of [Congregations in Transition](#)

There are at least two significant and alarming trends confronting American church bodies in general, and mainline Protestants in particular.

One is the developing clergy supply crisis, and the second is the aging and upcoming precipitous decline of most of our congregations.

Both of these trends are related, to some degree, to the generational issue of aging Boomers. The single most eye-opening statistic—reported on repeatedly by PEW Research—is that less than half as many Millennials are attending church than was the case for their Boomer parents back in the 1980's and 1990's. I still remember a particular cover story of Time Magazine back in 1993. It was the April 5th issue. (I just Googled it.) The quote on the cover of that issue was “The Baby Boom Goes Back to Church.” Needless to say, there has been no story, in the last decade, reporting a similar trend among Millennials.

Of course the decline of mainline Protestant churches is also due, in large part, to the on-going and accelerating secularization of American culture. And *that* reality is taking a toll on all national church bodies. But the more *generational* realities of our future are not simply about an inflated view of my own generation's importance. This is about demographic realities helping us to see and clarify the urgency of what is before us as the Body of Christ. And to put it bluntly, the reason why the clergy supply crisis will be upon us sooner than the dramatic, precipitous decline in overall church membership is this: Most Boomers will, like me, have the good fortune to be retiring before they make the transition to assisted living and/or death.

Clergy Supply Crisis

What's going on in the ELCA gives us a convenient window into what the LCMC and NALC will be facing. As I shared in previous articles, the ELCA is facing a major crisis with both clergy supply and their projected membership decline in the very near future. And aggravating these largely demographic realities is the rapid secularization of ELCA organizational culture. The ELCA's Department of Research and Evaluation projects — based on the aging of their membership and the decline in baptisms — that by 2041 there will be less than **16,000** members worshipping — *nationally* — on a typical Sunday! That compares to 864,000 worshipping as of the end of 2018. And the issue of clergy supply for the

ELCA? *That* crisis has already arrived. As of June of 2019 there were 2,776 empty pulpits out of a total of approximately 9,000 congregations.

Two Strategies

With Lutheran CORE's [Congregations in Transition \(CiT\) ministry](#) we are focused on both a short-term and long-term strategy to help LCMC, NALC and orthodox ELCA congregations address both of these daunting challenges. And let's not deceive ourselves. Our commitment—as orthodox clergy and congregations—to a Scripture-focused and more evangelistic worldview does not make us immune to the challenges the ELCA is facing. Somewhat more insulated perhaps, but not immune.

1st Century Model for Ministry

The CiT approach to congregational ministry is, overall, *the empowerment of the laity*. First, because it is the biblical, 1st century model for ministry and outreach; and second, because an unhealthy dependence on the availability of ordained, full-time clergy will not even be a future option for many of our congregations.

Our mission, with CiT, is inspired by texts like 1st Peter, chapter two, verses 4-5. Writing to the laity of his generation, Peter declares:

... You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Gifted Transition Teams

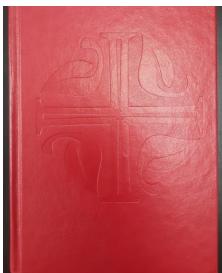
The three congregations (all LCMC) I am currently coaching are all facing the retirement of their only pastor. While each of these rural/small-town churches are just large enough to still afford a future full-time pastor, they are all rapidly aging worship communities who are very aware of their significant membership decline over the last twenty years. But here's the good news: Their three transition teams are comprised of incredibly gifted and committed lay leaders. And these lay leaders are very invested in the current and future ministries of their congregations. My role is to insure that these members (of the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus) will be motivated to step forward and lead their congregations even if the search for their next pastor takes longer than anticipated.

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Reflections on the AC —Part 2

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years, Sundays and Seasons, the electronic worship resource from Augsburg Fortress, has offered a variety of alternatives for those who are so offended. Finally, at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, a social statement was passed calling for an even greater use of “gender-inclusive and expansive language for God.”



*Evangelical Lutheran
an Worship*

The Trinity

The [Augsburg Confession](#), on the other hand, affirms the doctrine of the Trinity in the strongest terms, saying:

*We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: **God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.** [emphasis mine]*

What’s at Stake?

So what is at stake? Is this just quibbling over words? Are we as Lutherans bound to the language used in the Augsburg Confession? Will it really make a difference if we use expansive language for God?

The answer is, “Yes!” What was at stake at the Council of Nicaea was far more than a quibble over words. The Council was not engaged in an esoteric debate about a doctrine that few lay people would ever understand. What was at stake was the Incarnation itself. Is the Son divine, or only the Father? Was God truly incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, or did it only appear to be the case? It was the position of the orthodox that the Gospel and salvation itself were on the line. Rejection of the Incarnation was a rejection of the Gospel. The Lutheran reformers would have agreed.

The Gospel

Why is the Gospel at stake? To explain this, let me introduce a couple of terms with which you may not be familiar. The terms are general revelation and particular revelation. General revelation refers to the knowledge of God that is available to all people. Romans 1:20 says:

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. (NRSV)

Some knowledge of God is available to all people. For instance, through the use of reason we can

come to know that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. If we look at nature, at the beauty and precision that it contains, we can catch a glimpse of the Creator. If we pay attention to the moral law that is written in our hearts, we know that God is holy and righteous. Some of us have even felt God’s presence in our lives. Reason, nature, the moral law, and our feelings can give us some idea of what God is like.



Pr. David Charlton

What none of them can do, however, is enable us to know that God is a gracious God. Knowing that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent doesn’t tell me whether God cares about me. What nature reveals about God is too ambiguous to tell me whether he is good. For every beautiful sunset, perfect snowflake and cuddly puppy, there is a hurricane, earthquake or an incurable disease. *The moral law tells me that God is holy, but it doesn’t tell me whether God is merciful to sinners like me.* My feelings about God are ambiguous as well. One minute I may have a sense of God’s love and peace, but another moment I feel abandoned or condemned by God. General revelation can take us no further. Luther says:

I answer that there are two ways of knowing God. One is general, the other particular. Everyone has a general knowledge—that is, that there is a God that created heaven and earth, that He is righteous, and that He punishes the wicked. However, regarding what God thinks about us (His will toward us), what He will give or do to deliver us from sin and death, and how to be saved (for certain, this is the true knowledge of God), they don’t know any of this. In the same way, I may know someone by sight but not thoroughly because I don’t fully understand that person’s feelings toward me; that is how people by nature know there is a God. But what is His will and what is not His will, they have no idea!

The God We Meet in Jesus Christ

Particular revelation, on the other hand, which refers to God incarnate, Jesus Christ, does. When we encounter God in the baby in the manger and the man on the Cross, then we do know that we have a gracious God. It is the God we meet in Jesus Christ who

[At the Council of Nicaea] it was the position of the orthodox that the Gospel and salvation itself were on the line. Rejection of the Incarnation was a rejection of the Gospel.

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enables us to have faith, to trust that we are loved and forgiven. Again, Luther says:

Christ is the only means, and as you might say, the mirror in which we can see God and by whom we can also know His will, for in Christ, we see that God is no cruel and demanding judge but a Father of extremely goodwill, loving and merciful. In order to bless us—that is, to deliver us from the law, sin, death, all evil, and to grant us grace, righteousness, and eternal life—He “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” This is the true knowledge of God, the divine persuasion that does not deceive us but paints us a trustworthy picture of God, other than this there is no God.

Offended by the Incarnation

This is why traditional Lutherans are alarmed by the call for more “gender-inclusive and expansive language for God.” It is not because we oppose inclusive language in general, as is often alleged, or that we want to subordinate women to men. Something more is at stake. When we are offended by the very words that Jesus used to name God, when we are offended by his masculinity, as in the past some were offended by his Jewishness, when we are offended by the claim that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, we are offended by the Incarnation itself. In that case, we are offended by the only thing that makes it possible for us to know and trust that we have a gracious God. The Gospel, justification by faith, and salvation itself, are at stake. Instead of being offended, we give thanks, as we do in the proper preface for Christmas:

In the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh you have opened the eyes of faith to a new and radiant vision of your glory: that beholding the God made visible, we may be drawn to love the God whom we cannot see.

1 Luther, Martin. Martin Luther's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (1535): Lecture Notes Transcribed by Students and Presented in Today's English (p. 350). 1517 Publishing. Kindle Edition.

2 Theodore G. Tappert. Augsburg Confession (Kindle Locations 58-59). Kindle Edition.

3 Ibid., p. 350.

4 Ibid., pp. 346-347.

5 Lutheran Book of Worship: Ministers Desk Edition. 1978 Augsburg Fortress, p. 209.

Thanks Be to God! Memoirs of a Practical Theologian by Robert Benne

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with trepidation, it has seemed clear to me that the schismatic party was actually the ELCA. It simply collapsed before the ‘progressive’ American culture, as did other mainline Protestant denominations. . . . The ELCA bishops, whose first duty was to defend the orthodox truth, failed miserably” (page 167).

I am very grateful to Dr. Benne for writing these memoirs and am very thankful for the opportunity to read them. I also want to thank Dr. Benne for the role he has played in the formation and life of Lutheran CORE and the ministry that he continues to have.

Dr. Robert Benne currently teaches Christian Ethics at the online [Institute for Lutheran Theology](#). He was Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion and Chair of the Religion and Philosophy Department at Roanoke College in Virginia for eighteen years before he left full-time teaching in 2000. He founded the Roanoke College Center for Religion and Society in 1982 and directed it until 2012. He continues at Roanoke College as a research associate in its religion and philosophy department. A link to the ALPB (American Lutheran Publicity Bureau) website where you can order a [copy](#) of his memoirs can be found [here](#).

New Year Reflections on Our Future as a Church

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I had many short-comings in my 40 years of ministry as a parish pastor. However, being a gatekeeper was not one of them. In fact my greatest joy in ministry was enlisting, equipping and motivating members to use their God-given gifts and abilities to serve their congregations and surrounding communities. This is now, more than ever, the best hope for the Body of Christ: to facilitate the ministry of the laity in the face of significant challenges faced by today's church. This will require both faith and creativity on our part. But let us never underestimate what God can accomplish, despite any and all obstacles, through the incredible gifts of our (non-ordained) brothers and sisters in Christ.

NALC Annual Life Conference in Joppa, MD (Jan. 23, 2020)

Trinity Lutheran Church
1100 Philadelphia Rd
Joppa, MD 21085

One big difference between the ELCA and the NALC is life. The NALC supports life and its Bishop Emeritus, John Bradosky attended the March for Life regularly during his episcopate. *Bishop Dan Selbo also plans to attend both the NALC conference on the 23rd and the March for Life events on the 24th!* Please plan to attend too!

Agenda:

- ◆ 12:00 p.m. - Free Lunch (While not required, head count appreciated... to rebeckaandreae@yahoo.com)
- ◆ 1:00 p.m. - Welcome - Rebecka Andrae
 - ◆ Opening Devotions – The Rev. Christopher Porter, Life Conference Chaplain
- ◆ 1:20 p.m. - Dr. Sheila Page “Pain Perception in the Developing Human” Q & A
- ◆ 2:05 p.m. – Rev. Leslie Haines executive director for Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries, Inc. “How Suicide Threatens Our Veterans” Q & A
- ◆ 2:50 p.m. - BREAK
- ◆ 3:10 pm – Speaker Q & A
- ◆ 4:15 p.m. – Divine Service The Rev. Dr. David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, presiding; The Rev. Christopher Porter, conference chaplain
- ◆ 5:15 p.m. – Conference Concludes

March for Life in Washington, DC (Jan. 24, 2020)

by [Kim Smith](#), Lutheran CORE Board President/Editor

I first attended the March for Life in 2018 and one of the highlights of my day was attending the National Memorial Service for the Preborn and their Mothers and Fathers. That year the [Benham twins](#) spoke about how their family met and converted the woman behind Roe v. Wade. Click [here](#) to read that story. But the real point is that this service has good speakers and attending will get you into town early with time to chill before the march begins.

If you attend and can't find the others, text 570-916-7780 to reach Steve Shipman. Bring a water bottle, a phone charger and a SmartTrip card if you're using the [metro](#). You can buy it there, but

lines will be long at the end of the day.

Agenda:

- ◆ 8:30 a.m. - National Memorial Service for the Preborn and their Mothers and Fathers at DAR Constitution Hall 1776 D St., NW (18th and D St) Washington, DC 20006.
 - ◆ All clergy are invited to vest and process at the service. Participating clergy must arrive by 8:00 a.m.; the color is white.
- ◆ 10:30 a.m. – Walk towards 12th St & Madison Dr NW Washington, DC 20004 (between the museums of American History and Natural History) where we will meet with other Lutherans. Look for the corner with the grassy area and all the Lutheran banners such as NALC, Lutherans For Life, LCMS. (We will begin to congregate on the corner of 12th & Madison around 11 a.m.)
- ◆ 11:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. Musical opening
- ◆ 12:00 p.m. - Rally Program
- ◆ 1:00 p.m. - March up Constitution Avenue to Supreme Court and Capitol Building
- ◆ 3:30 p.m. - March for Life concludes

Joint Anglican/Lutheran Discipleship Conference (Feb. 13-15, 2020) in Orlando, Florida

This conference is about discipleship and it is the very *first* joint conference between the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) and the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). Per the [DiscipleLife2020.org](#) site, “both describe themselves as ‘Great Commission’ churches—committed to the Lord’s charge to ‘Go, make disciples...baptize...teach...’ (Matthew 28:19-20).”

The NALC and ACNA also have a lot of resources available on Facebook including videos from [Bishop Charlie Masters](#) of the Anglican Network in Canada and NALC [Bishop Dan Selbo](#).

You can find everything from the schedule to how to register and book your hotel by clicking [here](#).

We are already in the second week of January and ... who wouldn't want to go to Florida in February? This is a good opportunity to meet other biblically-grounded Christians intent on creating disciples to spread the Gospel.



Sponsoring an Event?

We Would Love to Help You Get the Word Out

If you are planning an event that you believe Lutheran CORE members would want to know about and that is consistent with the [Common Confession](#), please let us know. **Brief articles and pictures are always welcome.** We also can share them via our website, Facebook and Twitter feeds. Contact CORE's editor, Kim Smith, at kss01ohio@gmail.com.

Coming Events

2020 NALC Life Conference	Trinity Lutheran Church, Joppa, MD	Jan.23, 2020	God loves life!	Click here
March for Life 2020	Washington, D.C.	Jan.24, 2020	Silent No More	Click here
Disciplelife 2020	Sheraton Orlando North Hotel, Maitland, FL	Feb.13, 2020 @ 1 pm —Feb.15 @ noon	A Vision for Forming Disciples Through Word and Sacrament	Click here
Pro Ecclesia Conference 2020	Loyola University, Baltimore, MD	Jun. 8-10, 2020	The Sermon on the Mount Save the date!	Click here
2020 Lutheran Week (NALC Convocation)	Omni William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA	Aug 3-7, 2020	TBD	Click here

Website Features

- * Want to find specific newsletter articles or Letters from the Director? Check out our **new** topical index for our Communications page. See [Topical Index](#).
- * CORE's [Transitions \(CiT\) page](#) is for congregations in transition. Learn how a trained coach can be assigned to help your congregation!
- * CORE connects confessing congregations and pastors on its [Clergy Connect](#) page. We have again created two new posts for churches seeking pastors since the last newsletter was published.
- * Check out our [Worship](#) page to see all the worship resources Pastor Cathy Ammlung has posted including [Prayers of the Church](#).
- * CORE posts a [daily devotion](#).
- * CORE posts a short list of blog friends under [Friends of Lutheran CORE](#).



Thank you!

We are very grateful for all who support our work. Thank you, and God bless you.

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or online at www.lutherancore.org.

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CORE Voice

Published by Lutheran CORE

Kim Smith, Editor

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