

Lutheran Coalition for Renewal CORE Voice

A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans

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Unity, Truth, and Renewal

by [the Rev. Dr. Steven K. Gjerde](#), Lutheran CORE Vice President



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- A fence against heresy
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The stuff of a thing must match its purpose. “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” (Luke 11:11-12) If I set out to bake your child a birthday cake, I wouldn’t use beet mash and kippers. I’d use flour, water, sugar, eggs—the things that make for a blessed moment of contentment in a room full of reveling toddlers. Sweetness for sweet moments, or something like that. So also the Father, in seeking to make the world righteous, did not send us a sinner, but an innocent, to make us what we were not.

Would we expect the church to operate differently?

Fewer people speak of church unity these days (or so it seems to me), but the subject nearly dominated my time at seminary. During my first year at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, 1996-1997, the campus was roiled by the ELCA’s impending full communion agreement with Reformed churches, the “[Formula of Agreement](#).” Professors lectured on it, and students chewed on it over lunch. In time, Bishop William Lazareth of the Metropolitan New York Synod came to debate the subject with the seminary’s president, Dr. David Tiede. Tiede stood for the agreement, and Lazareth against it.

Each man seemed to take on the flesh of his argument. Tiede, arguing for the careful, academic formulas of a decades-long process, stood

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This Crisis Calls for Unity in Christ

by [Mr. Jacob Moorman](#)



Editor's Note: Jacob Moorman is 22 years old and hails from Mt. Airy, MD. Jacob is finishing a business management degree and plans to attend seminary. He is a member of the NALC's [River's Edge Ministries](#) pastored by K. Craig Moorman. We are delighted that one of our future seminarians is thinking and writing so passionately. We are honored to publish his reflections, and look forward to his faithful leadership in the Church for many years to come.

Just after the protesting and rioting began after the death of George Floyd, my father asked me, "Jacob, if you were to preach tomorrow, what would you say?" This is how I answered:

"I would preach the Gospel. I would preach that we, apart from Christ, are indeed dead in sin. I would say Christ's scandalous, unfathomable, incredible love is most evident when shown in situations like this. With death, riots, looting, violence, anger, and vehement hate; the only response we should have is that which Christ had. For Christ says '... love thine enemies. Pray for them.' On the cross, His love was magnified as He said, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do.' He died for us while we were yet sinners. He died for us while we were His enemies. There's talk of race war. There's talk of division. It is a lie, or it ought to be <revealed as such> in the Church. It is a demonic onslaught meant to divide and divert from the true Gospel. We, as the Church, are bound up in Christ. We are One in and by His Spirit. We should pray for our enemies. We should love our enemies. But, above all else, we should preach the Good News unasham-

edly, boldly, unwaveringly, and continuously. The only division from God is the division of Good and evil, Light and dark. His word pierces as a sword through sinew. It cuts deeply and definitively. It separates. For God alone brings division - the division is a choice to die with Him or to die apart from Him. The difference between the two is the one who dies apart dies for good. The one who dies with Him rises with him. Seek first the Kingdom."



Challenge

More recently I felt prompted to challenge the church in its response to this crisis, especially the leaders in the church:

Our nation is in deep trouble. I fear we are ready to abandon Christ. We are a tattered flag only threads away from being loosed from our foundation, Jesus, the Living God.

"Unity!" shout church leaders. "Stand together for the greater good." What good is it to stand apart from Christ? We cannot shout for justice without holding the Word of God in its rightful place—Above all things.

We are living in the most dangerous time this country has ever seen, and potentially the world. The Lord is, and always will be, our only hope. Unity without Christ is folly. Justice without The Righteous Judge is futile. Peace without The Prince of Peace is chaos. Life without Christ is death.

There is a ripe harvest. People are hurting. There is never a wrong time to preach the Gospel, and there is never a better time to preach the Gospel than now. (Matt. 9:35-38)

Political Stand

But I've seen more church leaders take a political stand rather than one that stands on the Word and proclaims the Gospel. A Gospel that calls out sin. One that calls for repentance. One that glorifies God.

We must not do what men desire us to do. (Gal. 1:10) Our reason, our motive matters. If we are seeking to be honored and applauded by men and women, we ought to fear the Living God and seek repentance. If we are seeking to honor our Heavenly Father, we

Unity is only found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Don't Be Led Astray

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

One of the things that should be most alarming to Christians who take seriously the authority of the Bible as the Word of God is the way in which the LGBTQIA+ movement views, misuses, and misinterprets Scripture.



[Reconciling Scripture for Lutherans: Sexuality and Gender Identity](#) is a booklet distributed by [ReconcilingWorks](#) to give a Biblical basis for affirming the LGBTQ+ lifestyle and for fully welcoming LGBTQ+ people into the life of the church, including as rostered leaders of the church. The booklet covers eight Bible passages, which it describes as the “clobber passages” that have been “used to exclude LGBTQ+ people from the body of Christ,” and eight passages which it claims “offer inclusive and expansive understandings of the nature of God’s welcome” (page 7).

I have written an article which responds to the way in which ReconcilingWorks has misused and/or misinterpreted each one of these sixteen passages. In this article I cover two things –

First, the way in which the clear and obvious meaning of Scripture is set aside in order to get Scripture to support the LGBTQ+ perspective.

Second, the way in which the booklet never adequately addresses the fact that whenever the Bible speaks of same-sex sexual behavior, it always speaks against it.

A link to the full article can be found [here](#). Two of the groups of people whom I especially had in mind as I wrote this article are these:

- People who hold to the traditional, Biblical view, who are looking for resources to help them de-

fend and advocate for that view.

- People who are genuinely seeking and wondering—with so many voices to the contrary—if the traditional, Biblical view is plausible and defensible.

I urge you to read it and to share it with others.

* * * * *

List of Confessional Resources

Many thanks to all the pastors who have contributed to the List of Confessional Resources which Lutheran CORE has prepared. This list includes books, videos, commentaries, ministries, and movements. Click [here](#) for a link to this annotated bibliography of confessional resources.

If you have a resource that you would like to see added, please let us know. May you be blessed by and during your summer reading.

Coming Events

- ♦ **Lutheran Week (now NALC’s Virtual Mission Convocation)** - Virtual Event from Aug. 7-8, 2020; Registration closes on August 3, 2020 at 5 p.m. [Click here](#)
- ♦ **LCMC 20th Annual Gathering and Convention**—Arden Hills, MN at North Heights Lutheran Church on Oct. 5, 2020. This event will be live streamed. Only 250 voting delegates can attend in person. [Click here](#)
- ♦ **Encuentro 2020** - likely virtual in Oct. 2020. Enfleshed Word / Verbo Encarnada. Click [here](#) to read about last year’s event.

Seminarians Page

- ♦ CORE has added a new page called [Seminarians](#) to its website. It contains a list of confessional resources and articles that help students make sense of what our culture says about Scripture.

We Never Close

by [Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch](#)

About the author: Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch STS serves as Chaplain to the LMVFM Board of Directors. She is a retired pastor in the NALC and LCMC. She lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

“We never close.” These three words demonstrate how Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries (LMVFM) fulfills its mission: In ‘normal’ times and times when pandemic illness, economic downturn, and social unrest increase Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) reactions in veterans, military contractors, and their families. These reactions range from heightened anxiety and severe depression to uncontrollable anger and even suicide.

“For LMVFM and the military community, the ongoing epidemic is military suicide brought on by untreated moral and spiritual injury, or PTS,” according to the Rev. Leslie Haines, executive director, and lead chaplain. For several years now, more than 20 US veterans have been committing suicide every day. It’s an epidemic in itself.

Founded in 2007, LMVFM works with individuals and congregations from coast to coast, border to border, by:

Providing free Christ-centred clinical and pastoral counselling for veterans, military contractors, and their families, along with Bible studies and other small-group opportunities.

Educating frontline providers with best practices for addressing military service-related PTS, through seminars for pastors, health and human services professionals, congregations, and family members.

Deploying ‘Paws and Effects’ emotional therapy dogs to apply their unique, unconditional care in the counselling sessions as well as educational and outreach settings.

As Chaplain Haines explains, the need is great for older veterans as well as for younger ones who’ve been serving continually in the Middle East since 1991.

“The current pandemic has only made matters worse,” Haines notes. “Isolation, uncertainty and social upheaval only aggravate the severe depression, heightened anxiety, and un-

controlled anger that are symptoms of PTS. At LMVFM, we’ve seen a steady increase in clients for individual and family counselling since COVID-19 hit our nation.”

A few recent examples from the LMVFM mission files (names changed to protect confidentiality):

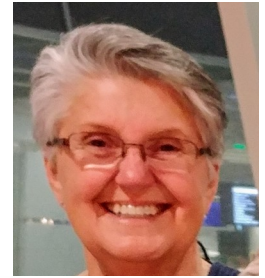
James, a combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, was doing well until a workplace incident nearly led him to suicide. Counselling is helping James recognize what triggers his PTS and control his responses.

When COVID-19 precautions caused Veterans Administration facilities to lock down, Rob, a 92-year-old Korean veteran, wasn’t allowed to pick up his hearing aids. We reached out to an LMVFM supporter who serves as a nurse at that VA hospital, and much to the relief of the veteran (and his wife) he had his hearing aids two days later!

Active duty families like Lieutenant Murphy, Celia and their two young sons, who are based away from an active military base, don’t have the supportive community and services that come with living on base. Murphy’s duty location is more than an hour and a half away from his home, and his duties have increased during the pandemic, leaving Celia and the boys to shelter, alone, too often. Couples’ counselling and support for the family has helped ease the strain and isolation.

When the pandemic hit, Pete, a Viet Nam combat veteran, and his wife suddenly found themselves with 12 persons under their roof: Their adult children and spouses, and grandchildren including three infants under the age of three months, two of them with special needs. The home’s plumbing broke down, and repair bills went well beyond the household’s budget. With LMVFM’s assistance and our connections to other military support services, Pete’s plumbing issue was resolved, and the bill covered.

“Meanwhile, we’ve had steady traffic of new and returning counselees – including a 20 percent increase in client caseload during April alone,” Haines recalls. “In addition, we did lots of well-being calls with current and prior counselees, offering support before pandemic-induced stress became too much to bear.”



More than 20 US veterans commit suicide every day.



Emotional therapy dogs help to put counseling clients at ease and help them start talking about their military experience and its effects on their soul and psyche.

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Your Online Ministry Presence Matters!

by [Dr. Don Brandt](#), Director, Congregations in Transition for Lutheran CORE

The pandemic is not only still with us, it is currently surging in areas of the country which, until recently, were not seriously impacted. And while churches in many states are just now resuming in-person, indoors worship, the future of our congregational ministries can still seem precarious and uncertain.

While we never want to minimize the importance of believers' being able to experience Christian worship and fellowship in each other's physical presence, we do need, now more than ever, to pay attention to the *online presence of our ministries*.



I recently came across an article by Chuck Lawless, from the Billy Graham School of World Missions, on the "Signs of a Bad Church Website." This is a summary of his article in my own words.

1. The church does not even have a website! This is just not an option anymore—especially with online ministries becoming essential due to the pandemic. Remember: This health crisis could last a while. Yet I am still finding LCMC and NALC churches which have no website!

2. The website is inadequate. These are websites I bring up on my laptop and think, "Why did they even bother?" A totally inadequate and poorly designed website gives a poor initial impression to any potential visitor who is "checking you out" online.

3. Your website has no contact information. It should include the pastor's name, church email address, and phone number.

4. The website has no information about your worship services.

5. The information on your website is not updat-

ed and even includes event dates that have already taken place! This is the most common issue I have found while checking on hundreds of Lutheran church websites. Lenten worship service information is not helpful when it is still on your site in July!



6. Spelling or grammatical errors are common. Find a volunteer who will proofread, beforehand, any information the pastor or administrator/secretary is about to post on your website.

7. No driving directions are provided. Not everyone uses Google Maps. Brief, written directions to your location will be helpful.

8. No recorded or streamed sermons are available. As long as there is public anxiety about gathering indoors for worship, this is extremely important.

9. Childcare information is not provided. If you provide childcare during worship, mention that fact. Nesting stage, potential first-time visitors want to know.

10. A brief summary of your congregation's core beliefs. Be sure to avoid terms that might be meaningless or confusing to the unchurched. [LCMC](#) and [NALC](#) congregations have the option of using a summary of the core beliefs from their national church websites. But don't hesitate to add your own, more personal "mission statement" as an introduction to any list of your national church's core beliefs.

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Unity, Truth, and Renewal

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straighter and with a more polished, fresh-faced poise than the energetic, nobby-nosed Lazareth, the latter all in clerical black, his eyebrows as thick as his [confessional](#) objections. They started with the issues at hand (the Holy Supper, predestination, the lifting of confessional condemnations), but they soon hit on the question of the Church and its unity.

Like any good ecumenist, Tiede invoked the words of Jesus in John 17:21: our Lord Himself prayed for his disciples “that they may all be one.” Why would we not be open to the fulfillment of that prayer among us? Those words animated Lazareth like no other point in the debate, leading to what would become its most memorable moment for me. Leaping to his feet, his eyebrows arching sharply, Lazareth stuck both of his meaty index fingers in the air and declared, “That they may all be one—that the world may believe!”

Purpose

Belief in the truth of Jesus: here is the purpose of the Church’s unity. Therefore, the stuff of that unity must match its purpose. It must be a unity in and of the truth, even if it means ending fellowship with falsehood. So Lazareth argued, convincingly for me. Lutherans could not and should not overlook their serious objections to the Reformed teaching of Communion and predestination, thinking that the mere form of unity (the human will to be one, with all of its social achievements) was itself instrumental to the faith God creates. Only the unity comprised of truth could lead others to truth. Only sweetness leads to sweetness; only the Son’s innocence makes us innocent; only a unity conceived by the truth can beget faith in the truth.

This view, formed so clearly by Articles VII and VIII of the [Augsburg Confession](#), continues to have implications not only for those remaining in the ELCA but also for those who have left it. By rooting the unity of the Church in the truth of the Word, it locates the possibility and assurance of unity, not in constitutional arrangement, but in the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. As the Church speaks its proper message and sets forth the Lord’s true Supper and Baptism, it is revealed to be the *una sancta*, the one, holy catholic and apostolic gathering of believers that midwives new believers into the world.

Division from Heresy

And if the unity of the Church resides in its preaching and ministering, then so do its limits.

Votes and constitutions have their place, as signposts and jingle bells for keeping every cow in its field. But they provide no lasting or certain refuge, nor do they fulfill the call of Jeremiah: “Go out from the midst of her, my people!” (51:45) In as much as the Church experiences its unity in the doing of the ministry, it is there, too, that it must experience its division from the world and from heresy.

As Lazareth saw in regards to the Formula of Agreement, closed pulpits and closed altars are part of church renewal. The degree to which “closed is closed,” I will not pose in this article. But suffice it to say, renewal seeks faith in the truth. Publicizing false confession in the pulpit or at the altar will not result in that faith, and thus, it will not result in that renewal. I understand that I may stand in the minority on this issue among my own ilk. But I also understand that the mere will to be one (or better, the mere will to be *distinct*), with all its social achievements will not herald the renewal of the Church.

That renewal takes place in local ministry. Denominational constitutions are the highways that plow across states and regions to move people along in mad efficiency. We need them, but they flatten the landscape in brute fashion. Local ministry is the footpath worn in re-

**Belief in the truth of Jesus:
here is the purpose of the
Church’s unity.**

sponse to the particular contours of a place, with care for the critters found in every burrow and den. It is there, as the congregation of believers both looses and binds, both admits and restrains, that the Church rises up from the ashes, its wings on fire—yes, it is there that faith is born.

Gateway

Those confessors remaining in the ELCA may therefore wish to pause and question to what extent their denomination’s manifold constitutions remain the gateway to their pulpit and altar—they may wish to review how open is open, and how closed is closed, in their local ministry. To start there, rather than in the baseline acceptance of a brokered political settlement, may prove illuminating and even reforming, if also excruciating. Similar illumination and crosses may await those who have left the ELCA, as they ponder the spiritual demand that faces them daily in Jeremiah’s call, quoted above.

The Church is a creature of the Spirit of truth. “If

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We Never Close

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LMVFM office volunteers, themselves vulnerable due to age and medical status, worked from home during the shutdown. Now that social distancing guidelines have eased, they're happily back in the office every Tuesday.

Chaplain Haines brings first-hand experience to her work with the military community. Haines, a Military Police Officer, retired with the rank of Major

LMVFM treats PTS as a spiritual and moral injury rather than a mental health disorder.

after serving 33 years in the US Army. Her deployment to a Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility, followed a month later by a combat tour in Iraq, gave her first-hand experience of the spiritual and *moral* wounds of war. The physical injuries she sustained in Iraq, which required her to be medically evacuated, paled in comparison to the spiritual wounds she sustained.

"In the military, we leave no buddy behind," Haines recalls. "I was that soldier, close to spiritual death. Had a Chaplain not been there and recognized my condition and worked with me, I wouldn't be here today. Recognizing that only Christ could heal those bruises on my soul or my buddies' souls led to the creation of LMVFM and our approach to treating PTS as a spiritual and moral injury rather than a mental health disorder."

LMVFM is a 501(c)(3) faith-based not-for-profit organization.

"Christ's Church has a mission to serve, with His love, those who have served us and are suffering for it," Haines says. "As a matter of principle, LMVFM neither solicits nor accepts any form of government support," Haines emphasized. "The Lord has continued to provide for LMVFM through the generosity of individual donors, congregations, and groups that love God, country, and veterans."

To donate or learn more about how you and your congregation can minister to veterans, military contractors and families, contact Chaplain Haines at 260-755-2239 or e-mail her at

lmvfm.org@gmail.com. LMVFM is headquartered at 3480 Stellhorn Rd., Fort Wayne IN 46815.



Wives and mothers of military personnel find friendship and support during weekly LMVFM Bible study.

Unity, Truth, and Renewal

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you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13) He knows how sweetness leads to sweetness, and innocence to innocence, and truth to truth. With this Father, if you ask for an egg, you get an egg. As we ask for the Church's renewal, we ask also for its unity, and to that end, we pray fervently for truth.

This Crisis Calls for Unity in Christ

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have no need to fear. (1 Thess. 2:4) (Col. 3:23, 24)

No doubt racism is wicked. No doubt needless death is horrendous. At the same time, the burning of buildings is terrible. And killing more people is wrong. We cannot justify or condone or stand with these heinous acts. Evil cannot be answered by evil. (Romans 12:17) For that we cannot stand silent. We must address the sin behind these matters—any other response will be fruitless!

We are all sinners in desperate need of a Savior. Again, we cannot come together in unity without Jesus Christ at the center.

There is great evil shouting from the rooftops. Anger. Fear. Racism. Hate. Murder. Riots. Looting. There is a greater mind (Satan) behind this pandemic, this murder, this so-called race war, and the many responses thereafter. We must expose the darkness. Bring it to the Light ... for everything brought to the Light is no longer darkness but light. (Eph. 5:11-14)

This push for “unity” is indeed demonic. It is one that pushes peace yet incites violence. One that says speak-up yet silences any alternative view. *It is a move to push for unity without Christ.* A destructive and dangerous plan by the enemy that I fear a lot of church leaders are falling in line with. They are deceived by the call for this false unity and fail to see or expose the evil behind it.

We must call out evil when we see it. We must count the cost of what it means to be a follower of Christ. We must be willing to take up our cross. We must be willing to die for Christ. We must be willing to speak the Gospel even if opposed and unpopular. We must give up all things to receive the one thing that matters ... Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus came so that we may have life. (John 10:10) We can be set free from sin! Lust, hate, sexual immorality, violence, anger, bitterness, licentiousness, debauchery, drunkenness—none of these have a place in the Kingdom. (Gal. 5:21) They were nailed to the cross and are dead in the grave for those alive in Christ. (Gal. 5:24)

When we die with Christ, we are dead to sin, wholly. No one who practices such as these will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Praise God He made a way. He is merciful and He is gracious. He is a loving Father. He died my death to give me life. He did the same for you.

Time is growing short. Judgment will come when the Ancient of Days calls for the trumpets to sound. We will all answer to the one true Judge on that great

and terrible and holy and marvelous day. But there is still time to proclaim the Gospel and heed the Good Shepherd’s call. The one who is marked by the blood of the Lamb will stand before him, guiltless. But the one who is marked by any other name, but that of Christ, will be cast out from His presence.

Yet, He is still loving. He is still gracious. He is mighty to save. He is the soon-coming King who is already on the throne. There is still time to proclaim the Gospel and heed the Good Shepherd’s call. God, the Holy One of Israel, came in the flesh and died so that *we* may walk in purity; that we may walk in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ... that we may walk by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:16, 25)

Now I must ask, if we as His people walk in such things, how can we stand in unity with sin and movements that condone and encourage sin? The only true unity that can come is that of and in the body of Christ. We cannot walk in unity with Christ and sin. We, the Church, cannot walk in unity with the world. We are in the world but not of it. Unity is only found in Christ Jesus our Lord. We should not be hoping for tomorrow on earth, we should be hoping for eternity in heaven. Our hope is in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and His coming again. Praise be to the One. Praise be the great I Am. All honor and glory belong to God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth. He will ever be glorified. May His peace be upon you.



One in Christ

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:25-28)