

ELCA Displays Misplaced Values and Priorities

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



Two recent news stories from the ELCA speak loudly about the values and priorities of that church body. The first one is dated November 16, 2020 and is entitled “ELCA Future Church design affirmed by ELCA Church Council.” A link to that article can be found [here](#). The second one is dated November 4, 2020 and is a transcript of a video message from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton about the national elections, which occurred the day before. A link to that article can be found [here](#). There are four things I would like to say about those two articles.

First, the article on the ELCA's Future Church design described the desired outcome as "so that more people may know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice, and love." Now certainly community, justice, and love are important. They definitely are a part of what the church needs to work for and offer to the world. But Jesus said that He is the truth and the life as well as the way (John 14: 6). The ELCA seems concerned only about pursuing the way of Jesus as they define it — working against gender injustice, racism, and white supremacy and affirming the full LGBTQIA+ agenda. The ELCA does not seem to value whether people know the full truth about who Jesus is and what Jesus did and whether people are experiencing the life that Jesus gives through a saving faith relationship with Him.

In Bishop Eaton's video message regarding the national elections,

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 - Why is support for free speech falling?
 - Do you want a pink or a blue hat?
 - How much did we raise for the NEXUS Institute?
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Ministry by Meaningful Conversation

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



What an incredibly difficult ten months this has been for so many Americans. In addition to the struggles many of us had with life in general pre-COVID, a recent national survey indicates that, during this pandemic, we have had a **three-fold** increase in the number of Americans exhibiting signs of depression! That is a staggering statistic.

Yet there is still an amazing, under-utilized ministry tool available to us, and which can be used effectively “at a distance”: the telephone. All of us should be considering whom we need to call; someone we suspect might need human contact during this depressing pandemic when so many are experiencing social isolation.

However, I am not suggesting one of those “Hi-how-are-you?-Fine” kind of conversations. I’m thinking of meaningful, thoughtful and repeated conversations where the recipient feels cared for; where you are both a friend and a counselor.

One of my favorite Scripture passages is Ephesians 3:16-19. “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is that love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” This text, at least in part, captures a vision of what the fellowship of the Body of Christ can and should be. And in pre-COVID, more “normal” times I would like to think that my brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling are being supported and encouraged by their congregation. Well even if that was the case *then*, it is far less likely *now*. There are so many out there who are feeling cut off from

whatever social support system they could once count on from their fellow church members. And this will be an on-going issue for many months to come.

This ministry challenge — *and opportunity* — came to mind when I read a November 19th *New York Times* column written by David Brooks. This article focused on some of the keys to having “deeper conversations.” And the following insights and recommendations from Brooks are by no means limited to face-to-face conversations. They can just as easily be utilized *on the phone*. Here are five of the recommendations David Brooks shares when it comes to facilitating “deeper conversations.”

1. “Ask elevating questions...Some questions, startling as they seem at first, compel us to see ourselves from a higher vantage: What crossroads are you at?...Whom do you feel most grateful to have in your life? What problem did you once have but now have licked? In what ways are you sliding backward?”

2. “Ask open-ended questions.” Instead of questions that tend to limit conversation, “better questions start with ‘What was it like...’ or ‘Tell me about a time...’” I would add, “What has been the hardest part of this pandemic for you personally?”

3. “Treat (your) attention as all or nothing...In conversation it’s best to act as if attention had an on/off switch with no dimmer. Total focus. I have a friend who listens to conversations the way congregants listen to sermons in charismatic churches — with amens, and approbations. The effect is magnetic.”

4. “Don’t fear the pause. Most of us stop listening to a comment about halfway through so we can be ready with a response. In Japan...business people are more likely to hear the whole comment and then pause, sometimes eight seconds, before responding, which is twice as long a silence as American business people conventionally tolerate.”

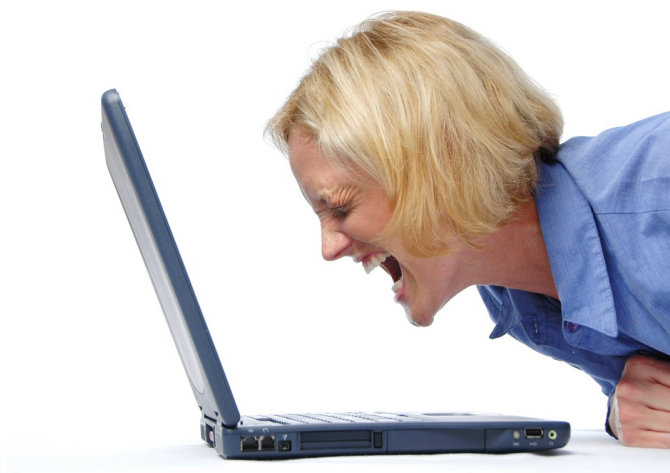
5. “Keep the gem statement front and center.” In this time when our culture seems embroiled in partisanship and conflict this is a particularly apt insight from Brooks. He writes, “In the midst of many difficult conversations, there is what mediator Adar Cohen calls the gem statement. This is the comment that keeps the relationship together: ‘Even when we can’t agree on Dad’s medical care, I’ve

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Video Book Review: Synopsis

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

Lutheran CORE continues to provide monthly video reviews of books of interest and importance. Many thanks to Brett Jenkins, NALC pastor and former member of our board, for doing this month's video review. Here is a synopsis of his review of the book *Live Not by Lies* by Rod Dreher.



“Support for free speech is plummeting among the young, while social mobbing and shouting have largely replaced principled debate on college campuses. There are striking cultural parallels to the early 20th century in pre-totalitarian Germany, Italy, and Russia. At a time when orthodox, Biblically serious Christians have increasingly found themselves not only culturally sidelined, but the objects of scorn and derision in the dominant Western culture, powerful new world-shaping technologies are changing communication and the market in ways whose closest parallel is the invention of the printing press... and the levers of power are in the hands of people who despise traditional Christians. While the reader may have serious questions as to how accurately Rod Dreher has read the signs of our times, his book *Live Not By Lies* is a forceful and timely call for Christians to remember the truth of the old adage that, ‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.’”

These reviews are posted on YouTube. Brett's review can be found [here](#). Our YouTube channel, which contains two other reviews, can be found [here](#). Many thanks to Chris Johnson, LCMC pastor, and David Charlton, ELCA pastor, for making the other two reviews. Both Chris and David are mem-

bers of our board.

Our plan is to publish a new video book review during the first week of every month. Many of the books that will be reviewed are described in the List of Confessional Resources on the Seminarians page of our website. That list can be found [here](#). When you look at a video review for the first time, please click on the Subscribe button. As enough people do that, it will eventually help us to get a channel name that will include our organization's name.

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never doubted your good intentions. I know you want the best for him.”



One additional quote that Brooks shared in this article is from journalist Amanda Ripley: “Humans need to be heard before they will listen.”

I have some suggestions of my own when it comes to these deeper, more meaningful conversations. And these apply to both phone and online communication. One is that for on-going relationships it can be helpful to set up each conversation in advance; preferable agreeing on a next time at the conclusion of the previous conversation. That way he/she has the assurance that you will continue to be available; that this is not a one-time-only conversation. And finally, I think that it is helpful if this person knows you will be praying for him/her. I'm not talking about the judgmental cliché, “I'll be praying for you.” Instead, “I want you to know that I am including you in my prayers each and every day.” And then *do it*.

Pastor Don Brandt
Congregations in Transition

NALC Life Conference—January 28, 2021

by [The NALC](#)

“Our Fourth Annual NALC Life Conference will be held on Thursday, January 28th, 2021 at Reformation Lutheran Church, [601 Madison Rd, Culpeper, VA 22701](#) from noon until 5PM. The event is free and will begin with a free lunch and will conclude with a communion service with Rev. Mark Chavez presiding.



This year's conference will be very special. Our keynote speaker will be Chrissie Gillette, director of Word of Hope for Lutherans for Life.

Chrissie earned a doctorate in clinical psychology from Spalding University and completed her psychology residency as an officer in the United States Air Force. She served four years active duty and another four as inactive reserve. God blessed her with a range of counseling experiences in settings such as: a domestic violence shelter, a suicide crisis hotline, military mental health clinics, and a Christian counseling agency. Transitioning from an emphasis on psychology to theology, Chrissie attended the Distance Deaconess Program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. She graduated in October 2018 and was commissioned as a deaconess with Lutherans for Life.

In her position as the Word of Hope Director, Chrissie answers hotline calls and emails. Understanding both the secular worldview and the Christ-centered perspective, she listens without personal judgment while also responding in Christian truth and love. Motivated by compassion, she often goes above and beyond to connect people with local services and natural supports. Beyond her typical hotline responsibilities, Chrissie writes articles, publicly speaks, and leads Bible studies on a range of topics related to life issues.

Valuing a Christ-centered lifestyle, Chrissie serves her neighbor through acts of mercy. Each year, she opens her heart and home to exchange students from around the world. Amongst her church family, she regularly visits folks who are hospitalized or shut-in, and enjoys the fellowship while creating crafts with members in her home. Within the rural and small-town community, she gifts numerous people with produce from her garden, home-cooked dishes, or crocheted newborn-baby blankets. Truly, to know Chrissie is to know her as your loving sister in Christ.

There is no registration required. But please email Rebecka Andrae at rebeckaandrae@yahoo.com if you will be attending the lunch so we can get a head count.



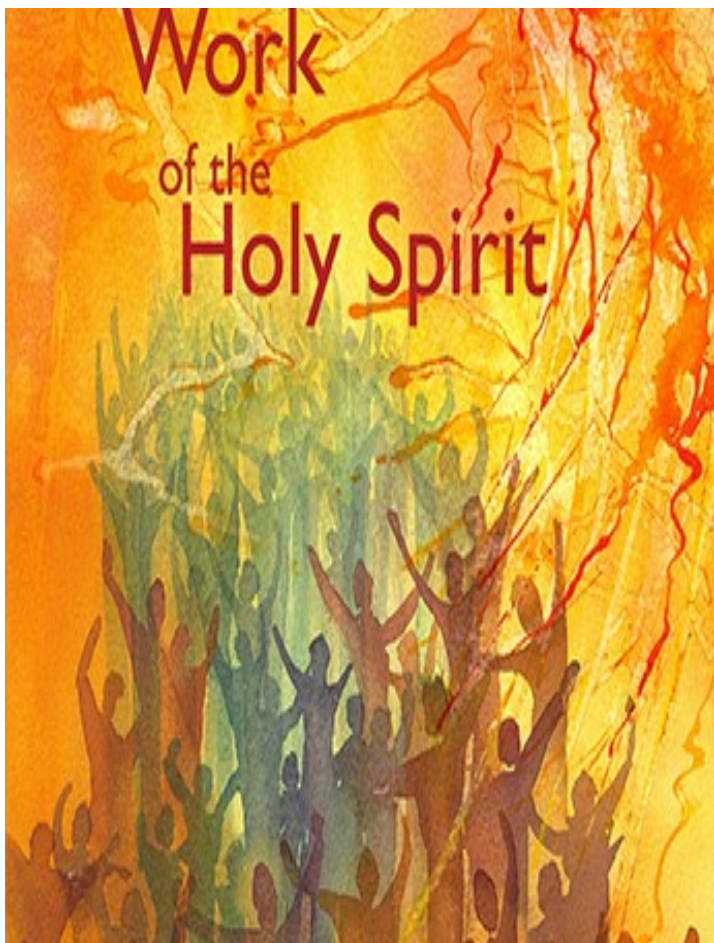
For those interested, the following day, Friday the 29th, we will be attending the March for Life in Washington, DC. The usual prayer service before the march has been cancelled due to COVID-19, but the march is on! We will be joining the LCMS contingent at 12th & Constitution from 12:00-12:30PM and then starting the trek to the Supreme Court at 12:30PM. If you need help on the day of the march you can call Pastor Dennis at the number below.

We are also taking orders for either baby blue or pink hats that we will wear during the march for \$10 apiece.

Orders can be made by calling Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at (703) 568-3346 or emailing him at dennisdimauro@yahoo.com You can send a check payable to “Trinity Lutheran Church” (with “NALC Life” in the notes) to 276 Cleveland St. Warrenton, VA 20186. Make sure and let him know whether you want a pink or a blue hat!

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

by [Donna K. Roche](#), ALPB Office Manager



Dear Reader of the ALPB,

The ALPB has just published a new book entitled "[The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit](#)." This book includes the fourth and fifth presentations of the Braaten-Benne Lecture Series from 2018 and 2019. As the title suggests, it is dealing with the "identity of the Spirit, the role of the Spirit, and historical and ecumenical debates surrounding the Spirit". A few of the contributors are Robert Benne, Paul R. Hinlicky, and Mark C. Mattes. The cost is \$17 plus postage.

While you are on our website, please check out the other books in this series, "Who Is Jesus Christ For Us Today: Part Two (2017)", "Who Is Jesus Christ For Us Today (2016)", and "Martyrdom and the Suffering of the Righteous (2015)." Delve even further to discover the predecessor books to the Braaten/Benne Lecture Series, the CORE Theological Conference papers: "Rightly Handling the Word of Truth (2014)", "On Being the Church in These

Precarious Times (2013)", "Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God (2012)", "No Other Name (2011)", and "Seeking New Directions (2010)."

All these books can be found on our website under "Shop" and then the [Braaten-Benne Lecture Series](#) tab.

If you are not a subscriber, join the Forum family by subscribing to the [Forum package](#), which includes four Lutheran Forums (edited by R. David Nelson) and twelve Forum Letters (edited by Richard O. Johnson) per year. There is a special, introductory price of \$28 for new subscribers. Go to our website at www.alpb.org or feel free to email or phone me. I will be happy to help. Thank you.

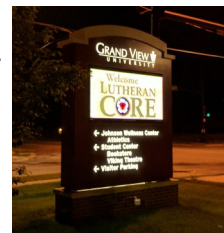
In Christ,
Donna
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NEXUS Update

by [Kim Smith](#), Editor and President of the Board of Lutheran CORE

In 2020, the board of Lutheran CORE committed to sending \$15,000 to Grand View University (GVU) for a summer 2021 theological camp. GVU's [NEXUS Institute](#) provides high school youth with a week of theological training during the summer.



As of the end of December 2020, we had raised \$10,127 of our \$15,000 commitment through your donations. Lutheran CORE would like to *thank you* for your generosity; a check for \$15,000 was sent to GVU on November 7th, 2020 and Lutheran CORE has received a thank you letter from GVU.

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she describes "the gospel of Jesus Christ as the basis for equity, justice, and peace for all people and creation." Again, I would fully agree that as followers of Jesus we must pursue equity, justice, and peace for all people and creation. But the gospel of Jesus is not primarily about equity, justice, and peace for all people and creation. It is primarily about what God has done so that we can be in right relationship with Him. Pursuing equity, justice, and peace for all people and creation, though important, is part of our response to what God has done for us, not our main message or the prime focus of our faith and mission.

At least Bishop Eaton's video message regarding the national elections was an improvement over the "Summary of Actions" which came from the ELCA's 2019 Churchwide Assembly. A link to that summary can be found [here](#). At least Bishop Eaton mentioned Jesus in the elections video. But one would hope that the Presiding Bishop of a Lutheran church body would mention Jesus. In contrast, the "Summary of Actions" from the ELCA's 2019 Churchwide Assembly never mentions Jesus. And it only mentions God once. And the sentence in which it mentions God is not focused on God. Instead it is focused on people. It states that all people are created equal in the eyes of God.

At least Bishop Eaton mentions Jesus as she refers to "the gospel of Jesus Christ." But in what she says next she does not seem to see the gospel as a record of what God has done so that we can be in right relationship with Him and with each other. Instead – typical of the ELCA – she speaks of the gospel as the basis for what we need to do. And what she defines as what we need to do has nothing to do with sharing the saving message of Jesus. Instead it is all about typical ELCA priorities – our holding "fast to our commitments to gender justice, to dismantling white supremacy as an anti-racist church, to welcoming the stranger and accompanying the neighbor, to affirming LGBTQIA+ siblings, and seeking economic justice for all."

If anyone were to claim that I am misrepresenting the ELCA and/or being unfair to the ELCA, I would refer them to the "Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment," which was

approved by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. A link to that document can be found [here](#). In that document the statement is made that we must be careful about claiming to know God's judgment regarding other religions, and that our main role is to love and serve our neighbor. In other words, according to the ELCA, the church – including the ELCA – has nothing unique to offer to the world.

Second, the article about the ELCA's Future Church design places great emphasis upon the need to reach and engage "new, young, and diverse people." Now certainly if the ELCA wants to have a future it needs to reach and engage "new, young, and diverse people." Any congregation that wants to have a future needs to reach and engage "new, young, and diverse people." Lutheran CORE needs to reach and engage "new, young, and diverse people." Any Christian ministry that wants to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19-20) needs to reach and engage "new, young, and diverse people."

The ELCA knows that it is in major decline. It is fully aware of the fact that those who built the congregations, built and paid for the buildings used by congregations, and developed the educational and social service agencies are aging and dying. The builders and developers are not going to be around much longer to maintain the ministries and pay the bills. But ELCA leaders show no concern about the disaster they are creating and the fact that they are alienating those who built the organizations and built and paid for the buildings that ELCA leaders are selling in order to balance synodical and churchwide budgets. ELCA leaders are creating a disaster in the way in which they are reaching out to and engaging some "new, young, and diverse people."

For example, for the November 2020 issue of CORE Voice I wrote an article entitled, "You Reap Whatever You Sow." A link to that article can be found [here](#). In that article I told about an ELCA pastor by the name of Lenny Duncan, author of the book, *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the United States*. The ELCA had made Lenny Duncan into a hero-celebrity-poster boy. But now that hero-celebrity-poster boy has turned against the ELCA. He is demanding that over the next three years the

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ELCA set aside \$32 million in reparations funds in order to right the wrongs of centuries of racial injustice here in the United States. And if the ELCA does not do that, he will work through his “Defund Churchwide” movement to get people to divert \$32 million in contributions away from the ELCA to his reparations fund. Lenny Duncan is now also advocating for polyamory (multiple partners).

Lenny Duncan is only the latest in a series of people who are doing such things as demanding that the ELCA eliminate any kind of expectation that pastors be married in order to be sexually active, throwing out the Bible because they claim that for centuries the Bible has been used to abuse people, and eliminating the Lutheran Confessions because they were written by white males.

As an aside, a while ago the synod in which I was rostered before I retired created a new staff position called Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Ethnic-Specific Ministries. As a white, confessionally orthodox male within the ELCA, I should be an example of authentic diversity. So I responded to the announcement by writing to the synod asking how this new staff person would be relating to someone like me. As I expected, I did not receive a reply. I am no longer new and young (though I once was new and young), but within the ELCA I am an example of diversity – and maybe even authentic diversity. So the ELCA should have an interest in reaching out to and engaging with someone like me.

Those who valued the organization of the church built the organization of the church. Will the ELCA learn – from their experience with Lenny Duncan – what will happen if they continue to enable, empower, and cater to those who do not value the organization and would be very happy to tear the organization down? When will the ELCA come to realize what they are eventually going to have to deal with because of whom they have been enabling, empowering, and catering to? Or do those in leadership realize that these movements are already beyond their control?

Third, I am concerned about the second of six “new criteria” which “were affirmed for the ELCA” in the Future Church design – “Unite all expressions of the church (congregations, synods,

and the churchwide organization) into one church – together.” That statement was not further explained in the article. I am concerned about what that statement might mean for the future integrity and identity of congregations.

Fourth, there was one place where I found myself agreeing with the article on the ELCA’s Future Church design. And that is where it reported how Bishop Eaton told the Church Council that the ELCA has been witnessing “a pattern of significant decline” for more than thirty years and that “the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the need to respond more quickly to this rapidly changing world.” Here I would totally agree. Dr. Thom Rainer from Church Answers describes the pandemic as a change accelerator. He says that during this past year the dynamics and trends present in every congregation have been advanced by about four years. For example, if a congregation is in decline, its decline has been advanced by four years. In 2020 it already was where pre-COVID it would not have been until 2024.

The ELCA with its current leadership reminds me of a family where one generation built up the family business, and then the next generation is driving the family business into the ground. One generation gathered the resources. The next generation is consuming, if not squandering, the resources. The ELCA will be able to keep going for a while – because of all the buildings they can sell because of all the churches that will close. But even that source of income can only keep the ELCA going for so long.

The ELCA needs to re-design itself in a way that is faithful to the Scriptures rather than in a way that is in line with the current, top, social justice warrior causes if it is going to have a future.

Coming Events

NALC Life Conference — January 28, 2021 [Click here.](#)

March for Life, Washington, DC — January 29, 2021. [Click here.](#)

2021 Pro Ecclesia Conference— June 7-9, 2021. [Click here.](#)

NEXUS Course — Summer 2021. [Register here.](#)

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