

ELCA Support for the Equality Act: What Does it Mean?

submitted by [Pr. David Charlton](#), Vice-President of the board of Lutheran CORE



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Earlier this year, I noticed that ELCA Advocacy had given the Equality Act its full and unqualified endorsement. It also encouraged members of the ELCA to write their Senators, calling upon them to support the legislation. In doing so, the ELCA made reference to the social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (HSGT)*.

I wrote to Presiding Bishop Eaton, saying:

“The ELCA has declared its support of the Equality Act. It is also urging its members to write to their Senators in support of the Equality Act. What I am wondering is whether the ELCA has given any thought to how the Equality Act will affect those congregations who choose not to call partnered homosexual pastors, or who choose not to perform same-sex weddings.

“As you know, there is debate about whether the act will remove religious freedom protections from congregations and pastors. Has the ELCA considered this question? Is the ELCA prepared to defend the right of its congregations and pastors to act in accordance with their ‘bound consciences’ as was promised in 2009?”

The response came not from Presiding Bishop Eaton, but from Rev. Amy Reumann, Senior Director, Witnessing in Society, ELCA. She assured me that the ELCA is aware of the “implications with respect to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.” She further stated that the ELCA is “reviewing that language in consultation with a number of our full communion partners and ELCA legal staff.”

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Mountain Lion Cubs Do Not Stay Mountain Lion Cubs

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

Not too far from our home – in the Sonoran Desert outside Phoenix – is the Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center. This wonderful facility cares for many desert animals that have been injured or orphaned. The goal is always to be able to return them to the wild. But that is not always possible, so for some animals this place becomes their permanent home. Some animals are brought there by people who naively thought that a mountain lion cub would make a great pet. But mountain lion cubs always grow up, and people come to realize that something they thought would be safe has become a threat.

I thought of people who mistakenly believe that they could tame a mountain lion cub when I read the April 16 letter from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton addressing racial justice. A link to her letter can be found [here](#). In her call for reform to “any institutionally racist system” she essentially endorses Black Lives Matter. She encourages people to join Campaign Zero, which she describes as “a 10-point policy platform created by the #BlackLivesMatter movement to address and improve relationships between local law enforcement and the communities in which they serve.” She also urges people to learn more about ELCA resources at elca.org/blacklivesmatter.

I was relieved to read on the ELCA website that “the ELCA churchwide organization does not provide financial support to this chapter-based organization.” I have been deeply disturbed to read about some other organizations and businesses that do contribute financially to Black Lives Matter. It also seemed very reasonable to read on the ELCA website, “This movement does not seek to elevate Black lives above others. Rather, the movement seeks to help people recognize that Black lives matter no less than other lives.”

The ELCA website is correct when it says, “Scripture tells us that each person is created in the image of God. . . . All of us have integrity and value.” There is absolutely no question. Racism does exist, and racism is wrong. The First Readings for Easter Sunday and May 9 have both come from the account in Acts 10 when God clearly directed Peter to go to the house of Cornelius. In the First Reading for Easter Peter said, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality.” (verse 34) In the First Reading for May 9 “the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy



Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” (verse 45) Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (verse 47) If God has included them, how could we exclude them?

But for at least three reasons the ELCA’s endorsing and embracing the Black Lives Matter movement reminds me of people who think that a mountain lion cub would be safe.

First, the page on the ELCA website does not address the fact that at least two of the three original founders of Black Lives Matter are self-avowed, trained Marxist organizers. Marxism has led to political systems that have enslaved people and that have been severely hostile to the Christian faith.

Second, while the full embrace of the LGBTQIA+ agenda is very strong within the ELCA, I am not aware of any official action taken by the ELCA to affirm that full agenda. A document recently approved by the ELCA Church Council, “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline,” includes the sentence, “This church’s understanding of human sexuality is stated in its authorized social teachings.” (page 8) The most recent of these social teachings is the social statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” which was approved by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. Actions taken by that assembly provided for the blessing of and ordination of persons in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same sex relationships. They did not embrace the full LGBTQIA+ agenda. In contrast, Black Lives Matter has said, “We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative

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Repenting of the Sins of Our Nation: Part I — Accepting the Call

by Pr. K. Craig Moorman, Member of the Board of Lutheran CORE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ —

Over the course of the past few months, I have gained a much greater appreciation for the Book of Daniel and the message of hope that it brings to the Church for the living of these historically challenging days. But on a more personal note, on this particular day as I move into my 66th year of living, I'd like to make a b-day wish in the form of a prayerful declaration: I want to be like Daniel when I grow up! Here I am, nearly 35 years into my call, and only now am I beginning to understand the extent of what it means — and what it might mean — to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

In Daniel 9:3-19, we hear this well-seasoned prophet pleading and imploring Almighty God to show mercy to His people, the Israelites. He begins, *“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, ‘O Lord, the great and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments and ordinances; we have not listened to Thy servants ...’”* (vv. 3, 4) Yes, I want to be more like Daniel with whatever time the Lord allows me in this precious gift of living. I want to turn and set my face continually to the Lord God. I want to seek Him earnestly, even ‘wearing’ sackcloth and ashes (in a non-Pharisaic sort-of-way) ... and empty myself of *self*, in all humility at the footstool of His mercy seat. At this stage in my life, I desire to go deeper in my confession and repent, not on behalf of ‘their’ sins, but repent on behalf of *our* sins ... *my* sins!

Throughout his seventy years in exile, Daniel remained a pliable vessel of God and *continually sought out the Lord’s mercy and steadfast love on behalf of his people Israel*. Again, only now am I more fully embracing this essential ‘detail’ of my call, truly bearing the priestly role. I guess some of us are just a bit more stubborn and slower in understanding what it really means to serve in the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

I’m also reminded of a letter written by one of the Apostolic Fathers, (Bishop) Ignatius of Antioch, who was eventually condemned and sent to Rome to be killed by ‘the beasts’ in the amphitheater @108 A.D. While journeying to this final resting place, Ignatius wrote letters to various churches in Asia Minor, in-



cluding these words to the Church in Rome:

I am writing to all the Churches, and I give injunctions to all men, that I am dying willingly for God’s sake, if you do not hinder it. I beseech you, be not ‘an unseasonable kindness’ to me. Suffer me to be eaten by the beasts, through whom I can attain to God. I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts that they may become my tomb, and leave no trace of my body, that when I fall asleep I be not burdensome to any. Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not even see my body. Beseech Christ on my behalf, that I may be found a sacrifice through these instruments. (Ignatius to the Romans, IV. 1, 2)

Fascinating. I first read these words 37 years ago and am still challenged to the very core of my being, and wondering if I could ever present that ‘core of my being’ to the Lord in such a way? (cf. Romans 12:1) Ignatius continues in his words about what it means to follow Jesus Christ and be obedient in that calling, *“Grant me this favour. I know what is expedient for me; now I am beginning to be a disciple.”* (V. 3a)

Ignatius’ words are full of so much grace. Only “beginning to be a disciple” ... This profoundly humble statement encourages me to remember, first and foremost, that as one *called* into ministry, I am to remain teachable and malleable. So, in light of the lives

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Resources for Congregations—Sermons, Clergy Connect, and Congregations in Transition

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

Lutheran CORE wants to be of support and assistance to orthodox, confessional congregations in every way that we can. Three of the ways in which we are seeking to do that are through a catalog of sermon resources, Clergy Connect, and Congregations in Transition.

I have spoken with lay leaders of congregations that are either too small or too remote to be able to find and call a pastor. Other congregations are in the process of calling a pastor, and at this point do not have an interim. Some of these congregations have a pastor who is available to come, preach, and preside at communion once or twice a month. Many times it is a retired pastor, or a chaplain in a nearby care facility, who is able to help out. I have spoken with some pastors who travel a great distance in order to provide care for the people of God. Because of the distance, some of these pastors will preach and lead worship one Sunday a month, and then write and send sermons which a lay leader in the congregation can deliver on the other Sundays of the month. There are many different kinds of situations, and many different kinds of arrangements that have been made. We want to thank all of the lay leaders of congregations who “step up to the plate” and all the pastors, including retired pastors, who help meet the need.

We are also very grateful to Cathy Ammlung, NALC pastor and former secretary of the board of Lutheran CORE. Cathy has a special passion and heart for smaller and/or more remote congregations and congregations that do not have a pastor. She has begun the process of compiling a resource bank of sermons that lay leaders could use on the Sundays when their congregation does not have a pastor. She describes her concept and vision in an article in the March issue of CORE Voice. A link to that article can be found [here](#).

Many thanks to all those who have already responded and sent Cathy one or more of their sermons. If you have not already done so, please consider sending her one or more of your sermons which can be added to this resource bank. Sermons will be organized by topic, Scripture passage, and Sunday of the church year. Please email her your “best sermons” at cammlung@gmail.com.

Another resource I want to lift up is Clergy Con-



nect. A link to this page on our website can be found [here](#).

Many congregations have reported how difficult it is to find an orthodox, confessional, Great Commission minded pastor. An anticipated increase in the number of retirements of pastors post-COVID, and the decrease in the number of seminary enrollees, will make and have made this situation even more severe.

We invite you to post your position on our website. If you check out the page you will see the kind of information that other congregations have provided. Congregational search committees are asked to submit church name, location, description of the position and the congregation, and contact information. Vacancies can be emailed to lcwebmail@gmail.com.

Third, if you have a pastoral vacancy, please also consider our Congregations in Transition ministry initiative. We have a group of (mostly) retired Lutheran pastors who have been trained to be transition coaches. They are able and available to help congregations whose pastors have retired or resigned, or soon will be retiring or resigning, maintain stability and momentum in regards to the congregation’s vital ministries during the transition process. For more information check out our [Transitions page](#) or contact lcwebmail@gmail.com.

Navigating the Copyright Minefield when Live Streaming Worship

by [Ken Coughlan](#), Media Director at Trinity Lutheran Church, Attorney, and Christian Apologist, Joppa, Maryland

When COVID hit last year, having an online presence (often including live streaming of our worship services) became a more common tool to help churches stay connected with their congregations. However, many people may have discovered the hard way that we can't just put anything we want online. There are legal obstacles that need to be taken into account. Chief among these is copyright. As both an attorney for over two decades and the Media Director at Trinity Lutheran Church in Joppa, Maryland, this presented a proverbial dance that I was all too familiar with.

What is copyright? In short, it is the protection given to content creators to make sure other people don't take or use their content without their permission. If you write a song, you don't want another singer recording it and passing it off as their own. If you make a movie, you don't want a rival studio distributing it to theaters and making all the money off of it. Copyright is a way of making sure that if you create something, you get to decide what to do with it.

A lot of the things we are used to having in our worship services are subject to copyright. Do you sing music? There are probably copyright issues. Have you shown video clips? Again, someone owns the copyright. There are multiple levels of copyright. The original composition/tune, particular arrangement, individual performance, and even the recording can all have separate levels of copyright. So just because a hymn, for example, is in the public domain does not mean you can pull up a recording of the Westminster Children's Choir singing it and play it on your stream. *Public domain only covers the original tune, not the arrangement, performance and recording.*

So, does this mean we throw in the towel and don't live stream anything? Fortunately, no. We just need to make sure we are doing it the right way. For anything you put online, you need to make sure you have permission, and the way you get permission is by purchasing a license.

In Christian circles this means [Christian Copyright Licensing International](#), or as they're more commonly known, CCLI. CCLI offers different levels of licensing depending on the needs of your church. They have an enormous selection of Christian songs, both traditional and contemporary, in their Song Select library. In fact, you'll probably be hard pressed to find a Christian song that isn't in-



cluded. One level of licensing covers things you may not even have known you need a license for. For example, even if you aren't live streaming, making photocopies of music to hand out to your choir or displaying copyrighted lyrics on a screen for your congregation to read are things for which you should have a license. CCLI licenses allow you to do all of this. Their lowest level also gives you permission to record your services to be viewed later. If you want to live stream with your own musicians, you'll need their Streaming License. They even offer a Streaming Plus level that lets you use backing tracks or play the original artist's master recordings during your service if you like. The important thing is to look at the needs of your church, compare them to the various licensing options, and make sure you get the correct license for your needs.

There are two final caveats. First, a CCLI license only covers songs played or sung during worship services. It does not allow churches to make other online content with the music (i.e., podcasts, church produced music videos, etc.). Second, it covers only the songs, not someone else's music videos. So, for example, you may be able to play the audio of a song over your stream, but that does not authorize you to show all the images contained in the artist's music video for that song. There is another layer of copyright protection for the video images.

The ramifications if you do not have an appropriate license could be severe. First, your church could be sued for a copyright violation. Second, whatever online platform you are using to live stream your services could revoke your ability to do so. But most importantly, getting the proper licenses ensures that the person who put in the creative effort to make the content is getting properly compensated for their work. If we are trying to set a Christ-centered example, then one way we can do that is to not use someone's else's property without their permission.

Increasing (in-Person) Worship Attendance: “One Sunday at a Time”

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



From a *Washington Post* article on March 29, 2021: “Church membership in the United States has fallen below the majority [of the population] for the first time in nearly a century ... First time this has happened since Gallup first asked the question in 1937, when church membership was 73%.”

Some caveats here: Gallup uses a “scientific” yet relatively small number of respondents for their surveys. However, Pew Research uses a far larger number of respondents. And Pew has been seeing a similar, dramatic decline when it comes to not only whether people are formally affiliated with religious institutions (i.e., membership), but also a significant decline in the percentage of Americans who self-identify as Christian. Second caveat: This Gallup survey was focused on formal institutional affiliation, and Americans have become increasingly cynical about almost *all* institutions, not just religious ones. But again, I would refer you to multiple Pew Religious Survey results which have been revealing significant declines not just in formal church membership, but in people self-identifying as Christians by faith.

Now back to this very recent Gallup survey. From a long-term historical perspective — something Gallup provides — this current survey should be something of a “wake-up call” for church leaders. One more quote from the *Washington Post* article: “In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque.” This Gallup survey “also found that the number of people who also said religion was very important to them has fallen to 48%, a new low point in their polling” going all the way back to 1937.

Not surprisingly, the Gallup and Pew Research findings are being reflected in *decreasing worship*

attendance. And this worship attendance decline was painfully evident in a majority of Lutheran congregations long before the current pandemic.

In the last issue of this newsletter I wrote of ways to improve what your congregation offers to *online* worshippers. And I do consider online worship as a needed outreach strategy in the years to come. However, do not think you can afford to give up on offering quality in-person worship. Those who already are — and soon will be — worshiping in person deserve your congregation’s best efforts. Below are some specific, practical suggestions regarding **how you can incrementally increase in-person worship attendance: “One Sunday at a Time.”**

As mentioned, a majority of Lutheran congregations were already dealing with decreasing worship attendance even before COVID. Needless to say, this can be demoralizing for faithful members on a “number” of levels. First of all, for them this is about more than numbers, because this decreasing attendance represents friends who are “missing in action”; whether due to inactivity, their having moved, or illness. Whatever the factors involved, low worship attendance is perhaps the single clearest indication — to members and visitors alike — of a congregation in decline. Given this fact, anything that pastors and lay leaders can do to noticeably increase attendance will most likely improve congregational morale and bring added energy and enthusiasm to worship services.

Perhaps the best, initial strategy would be having the pastor and a few congregational leaders commit to meeting monthly to coordinate the implementation — one Sunday at a time — to the following, multiple strategies. (Disclaimer: This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I realize your congregation might already be employing some of these ideas.) *I encourage you to utilize at least one of these ideas on any given Sunday.*

1. **Special Music** - This could be a solo, a duet, a vocal ensemble, or an instrumental performance. Offering this not only improves the quality of your worship celebration, but it also requires the presence of the above musicians; many of whom bring one or more guests to hear them perform.

2. **Congregational Sermon Survey** - In preparation for the next Sunday’s sermon these very short surveys can be filled out by worshippers during the previous

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Video Book Reviews — May 2021

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 Ken Coughlan, media director and director of international programs for Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church and Christian School (NALC) in Joppa, Maryland, for doing this month's video review. His review is about the book, [Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions](#), by Greg Koukl.

Ken Coughlan describes this as “a unique book that fills a gap for many pastors and lay-people alike.” He further writes, “The book is less about the ‘what’ and more about the ‘how.’ In other words, people know the Great Commission tells us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, but they often feel held back by nagging questions like ‘How do I begin the conversation,’ ‘What do I do if they ask me something and I don’t know the answer,’ or ‘Shouldn’t I get some seminary classes under my belt before I go out there?’”

In this review, Ken Coughlan summarizes some of the unique contributions Koukl provides in giving Christians a game plan to talk to non-believers in a respectful manner that honors Christ and reassures us that we can and should share our faith in Jesus with the world.

This review, as well as six others, have been posted on our YouTube channel. A link to the channel can be found [here](#). Many thanks to those who have made the reviews.

Our plan is to publish a new video book review during the first week of every month. Many of the books that are being and 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.



Mountain Lion Cubs Do Not Stay Mountain Lion Cubs

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thinking.” It is interesting that the page that contains that wording from Black Lives Matter appears to no longer exist.

Third, what Black Lives Matter used to call its “Full Manifesto” also is on a page that appears to no longer exist. One of the most disturbing sentences in the “Full Manifesto” reads as follows - “We disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children.” Every orthodox Christian parent should be horrified over a statement like that, which advocates for the state’s taking over the raising of children. Every Christian parent needs to do everything they can to keep from losing the ability to influence the faith formation of their children.

To me it is interesting – and I believe significant – that some of the statements from Black Lives Matter that have caused the greatest alarm are on website pages that appear to no longer exist. If you can find them, please let me know. Has the Black Lives Matter movement modified and/or softened its position? I doubt it. I believe they are just downplaying it. They want people like the ELCA to believe that there is nothing to fear. What Black Lives Matter advocates for, every reasonable person should be in favor of. Mountain lion cubs will stay mountain lion cubs.

Coming Events

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

NEXUS Course — July 11-17, 2021. [Register here.](#)

Lutheran Week @American Bank Center, Corpus Christi, TX — Aug 2- 6, 2021. [Click here.](#)

LCMC 2021 Annual Gathering and Convention — @Upper Arlington Church, Hilliard, Ohio—October 3-6, 2021. [Click here.](#)

ELCA Support for the Equality Act: What Does it Mean? (con't.)

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Finally, she said that the ELCA hopes “to work with these Senate offices in discerning legislative language that achieves a bi-partisan and fair bill for protecting equal rights and religious integrity.”

I was very pleased to hear this and I had only two requests. I asked if the ELCA would be willing to reiterate what Rev. Reumann told me in a public statement to ELCA congregations and whether I could share her reply. She said yes to the latter. In regard to the former, she asked what kind of public message would be helpful in my context.

It is at this point that our conversation began to go awry. I gave her a fairly detailed response, clearly stating what I would like the ELCA to reaffirm. Essentially, I asked that the ELCA publicly restate that choosing not to call a partnered homosexual and not to perform same sex weddings, and teaching in accord with positions 1, 2, or 3 of HSGT are still permitted and encouraged by this church. Secondly, I asked that the ELCA publicly state its opposition to any language in the Equality Act that would or might punish ELCA congregations for these approved practices.

From that point forward, I received several replies reiterating ELCA policy, along with historical documents that detailed the Ministry Policy Resolutions adopted in 2009. However, the question about whether the ELCA would publicly reiterate its commitment to those documents and to religious freedom protections for its congregations was not answered. Finally, after a full week and another e-mail to Presiding Bishop Eaton, I received an e-mail telling me that my concerns would be addressed in ELCA Advocacy materials that would come out in April.

In April, ELCA Advocacy did in fact include the following words in its message:

Some U.S Senators support the intent of the Equality Act but have broader concerns about religious exemptions. There may be amendments proposed responding to these concerns.

As in the Senate, in the ELCA there is a diversity of beliefs and debates about possible impacts of this legislation on religious exemptions.

In an April 13 “guest blog” on [ELCA Advocacy Blog](#), ELCA General Counsel, Thomas Cunniff, wrote:

We urge the adoption of legislation that ensures the full rights of LGBTQ+ persons without infringing on religious liberty or permitting improper government interference in the ecclesiastical activities of religious or-

ganizations. Blanket exemptions for anyone claiming a religious motive are too broad and would eviscerate necessary civil rights protections for historically marginalized groups. Not providing space in which dissenting religious groups can practice their beliefs free from government interference, however, would gravely damage freedom of conscience. Moreover, fully exempting statutes from RFRA sets a dangerous precedent of permitting the government to forcibly impose the views of the majority on minority religions, a precedent which could easily be weaponized by a future Congress and President. For these reasons, the ELCA is committed to continue working with others, including full communion partners, to find a solution that fully protects the civil rights of our LGBTQ+ siblings while at the same time protecting the free exercise and conscience rights of religious objectors.

That was not the last word on the matter, however. On April 16, ELCA Advocacy sent an Action Alert with the following apology:

Issuance of the Action Alert related to the Equality Act on April 13 elicited strong reaction communicated through social media and other channels. Anger, deception, confusion, and contribution to a deepening of harm already part of the lives of many LGBTQIA+ members and other siblings surfaced, along with questioning advocacy process and accountability in the ELCA. For presenting a lack of care on these deep-felt issues, we apologize. [\[alert\]](#)

Any congregation with traditional views on marriage and ordination is left uncertain about the future.

It further stated that

The blog post, “Equal Rights and Religious Freedom,” remains public on our [ELCA advocacy blog](#) not for prescriptive purposes but as background on “a false choice between equal rights and religious freedom.” Anticipated is a guest blog post that will provide further perspectives.

This seems to indicate that Mr. Cunniff’s blog post does not express the opinion of the ELCA and in no way indicates how the ELCA will proceed in relation to the Equality Act. So we are left with a deeply ambiguous and equivocal statement of ELCA policy regarding “bound conscience” and religious freedom.

Sadly, this leaves us where we began. Any congregation with a commitment to traditional views on marriage and ordination is left uncertain about the future.

Repenting of the Sins of Our Nation: Part I — Accepting the Call

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of Daniel and Ignatius — and all of the saints that have gone before us — it is with great humility that I begin this three-part article, *Repenting of the Sins of the Nation*. In Part I — “Accepting the Call”, you’ll quickly recognize that it’s a personal grappling — an open confession — with how I am trying to navigate through the turbulent waters of these desperate times. No doubt, this is a journey we are all needing to face, and necessarily needing to face ... together. In fully *accepting my call*, I realize that these times require me to engage both pastorally and prophetically.

There is something insidious permeating every nook and cranny of every segment of our present-day society. Have you felt it too? I believe it started with the mid-1960’s countercultural movement and it has evolved immensely over the past two decades. Some citizens of this country and much of the Western world have been more purposefully redefining new ways of living out truth, justice, compassion, love, etc., *according to their own morality and rooted deeply in secular humanism, Marxism, utopistic pursuits, etc.* Let’s, then, call this redefinition, a *transformative awakening*.

Herein, we quickly discover that these redefined core values for living *clash painfully* with more traditional systems of authority-governance, orthodox Judeo-Christian values, long-established interpretations of our history and the American Dream, etc. I believe the buildup of tension we are presently experiencing equates to a significant season of great shaking, shifting, and sifting in our nation and our churches. We reluctantly find ourselves at a most critical crossroads, a place of tension — this *transformative awakening* — where revolutionary choices will be made, new leadership will arise, causes will be defined, and life wholly changed. But we’ve been here before, this place of choosing (potentially) between life and death.

In Joshua 24, history records that Joshua “... gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God.” (v. 1) Then he continued speaking to the People of Israel, helping God’s People to remember who they were; and, thus, re-enter into a covenantal agreement with the Lord on that day: “*Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served ... choose this day whom you will serve,*

whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (vv. 14, 15)

Of course, this has been the story of God’s People, *our story*, from the beginning of time — facing many a crossroads and needing to choose between that which is life-giving or life-stealing! Darkness and Light stand juxtaposed — hoping to either take captive or captivate the souls of those most vulnerable *or* receptive. One entity, darkness, will coerce itself into/upon that life (*nephesh, נֶפֶשׁ = soul) and, ultimately, steal away that life (John 10:10a); and, the other, Light, will graciously extend an invitation to that life to receive the fullness of Life (John 10:10b). (*It’s interesting to note that this Hebrew word, nephesh, when combined with another Hebrew word, rūach- רֹּחַ, meaning “spirit”, connotes a part of humanity that has no physical form, like one’s mind, will *or* seat of emotions, intellect, personality, etc.)

At this monumental historic crossroads, who or what will win the day and take captive or captivate the life, the corporate soul — minds, wills, intellects, and personalities — of our nation? It seems clear that this transformative awakening will, I believe, produce either death or life in our nation, depending on how it unfolds. There is much conversation these days about the woke culture, a slang term that is finding its way into the mainstream vernacular. This word, added to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary in September of 2017, states: “If you frequent social media, you may well have seen posts or tweets about current events that are tagged #staywoke ... awake is often rendered as woke, as in, “I was sleeping, but now I’m woke ... ‘Woke’ is increasingly used as a byword for social awareness ... Stay woke became a watch word in parts of the black community for those who were self-aware, questioning the dominant paradigm and striving for something better. But stay woke and woke became part of a wider discussion in 2014, immediately following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.”

Unfortunately, the word *woke* became enmeshed with the *Black Lives Matter* organization and other radical, leftist organizations (i.e., *Antifa*, etc.) and is now being exploited to bring societal change through radical and often violent means. Its agenda is not life-giving, and its understanding of resolving injustice and racial tension is polar-opposite from that of a

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Repenting of the Sins of Our Nation: Part I — Accepting the Call

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traditional, orthodox theology/ideology, where genuine reconciliation can be found. An even greater concern is that this form of bringing about a *transformative awakening* has infiltrated every segment of our society, including the government on all levels.

Our nation does not need a transformative awakening that is bent on dismantling and even destroying all that has existed for 245 years; it needs, instead, one that transforms the hearts and minds of her citizens with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through another Great Awakening. In fact, we need another awakening that would dwarf our country's first two Great Awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries. And with any Great Awakening, there should be a deliberate and long season of listening to the heart of God through passionate, intercessory prayer on behalf of the nation.

Again, I'm hearkening back to Daniel's approach in continually (throughout the entire twelve chapters of the Book of Daniel) resolving (1:8) to confess and repent, seek out His mercies, pray, and give praise to the Lord for His sovereign goodness. Only then will we be able to faithfully and effectively call the nation to repentance and graciously challenge her citizenry, beginning with us/me, to turn back to God, specifically in Jesus Christ. But, will I be part of it? Will we, as Lutherans, be part of it?

In Part II — "Speaking the Word", I'll be addressing how we are witnessing the rise and intensification of darkness; but I will also lift up the eschatological reality that during this same season of dread (cf. Matthew 24), the brightness of the Light will shine brighter through the grace of the Holy Spirit. So, we must hold on to such a Hope. In the meantime, and in the midst of it all, should we not be carefully weighing the cost and *calling* of entering into this reality? *Everything is on the line.* Again, what or who will take captive or captivate the soul of this nation, at this hour? If the Church remains oblivious of such a 'harvest' (cf. Matthew 9:35-38), then surely the devil and his minions will expediently pounce upon these 'little ones' and drag them into the pit of despair and darkness. Or we could rise to the occasion and *be the Church* — here and now, for such a time as this — and reap a harvest of souls who could be ushered into the *transformative awakening* of a life claimed by Jesus Christ! Amen?

This is what I've been intensely struggling with, especially these past few months. In a nutshell, here's my angst and concern in the form of a question: "Will I or will I not find the courage to accept the call

to step into this place of mess, that chaotic void, and engage those who are desperately seeking truth, justice, compassion, love, etc. and point back to the cross, etc." At the same time, I find myself crying out, "*Lord, show me how to lead at this hour ... beginning with my own family!*" A simple question and plea, but wow, so difficult and complex at the same time. As leaders in the Church, we should be thriving now; but, to the contrary, it seems that many of us have been struggling and agonizing over how we should respond to this day and age. It is time, Brothers and Sisters, to reclaim who we are as "the children of the Kingdom of Light" (cf. 1 John 1:5-2:6 and Ephesians 5:8), and to remember that we have already been given all that we need to fully accept our call ... and enter into the arena. (cf. Ephesians 6:10-20)

No doubt, many of you are familiar with one of the most widely quoted speeches of Theodore Roosevelt's career; here's an excerpt from that speech given on April 23, 1910:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Only by God's grace will we be able to enter the arena of *our* culture. But enter we can and must. Certainly, there will be Jonah moments ... fleeing from the Lord ... experiencing mighty tempests ... being tossed out of the boat ... being swallowed by a whale ... anger and regrets ... but, in the end, I encourage us to assume the posture of another prophet, Daniel, and remain resolved and humble before the Lord (Daniel 1:8). Until next time, stay the course ...

In Christ's love,

K. Craig Moorman

Increasing (in-Person) Worship Attendance: “One Sunday at a Time”

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Sunday’s worship service. Tell them not to sign. Mention that you will be using some of their comments and opinions in the pastor’s next sermon (or sermon series). Odds are this will be an encouragement for some otherwise infrequent worshipers to definitely show up the following Sunday.

3. Drama Skits - There are excellent Christian drama skits available. One example: Drama Ministry at dramaministry.com. This Christian ministry offers over 750 small-cast scripts for performance. Obviously, a short (usually under 10 minute) drama means the guaranteed presence of not just cast members, but probably their families, and maybe some friends. Note: Many of these scripts are quite humorous.

4. Refreshments Following the Service - Provide a light “brunch”; if not weekly, then perhaps monthly.

5. Involve Children and/or Teens in Some Part of the Service (They typically come with parents!) - This could be a musical performance, or as Scripture readers, or ushers and greeters.

6. Celebrate and Honor People from Your Community - Do this as part of your worship service and invite not just *members* who qualify but non-members from the community as guests on this Sunday. Some examples include schoolteachers, first-responders, veterans, fire fighters, police officers and especially in this time of COVID, health care workers.

7. Enlist Additional Volunteers to Celebrate Church Year Festival Sundays - Maybe enlist members who are infrequent worshipers to help out on these Sundays. In addition to Christmas and Easter, do not forget the first Sunday in Advent, Epiphany Sunday, Palm Sunday, All Saints Sunday, and Pentecost. Plan for creative ways to utilize these volunteers.

8. Use Special Video Resources - While this strategy does not increase attendance on a given Sunday, it can improve the overall quality of your worship celebration. And *that* will most likely improve attendance over time. Free resources on the internet include live performance music videos from Mercy Me (“Even If”) and Chris Tomlin (“Is He Worthy”); and many more. Obviously, you need to be sure that showing any given video does not violate any copyright laws. There are also short sermonettes online that could emphasize the pastor’s theme for a given Sunday. Additional video resources that involve a reasonable fee include drama skits from “The Skitguys” at skitguys.com, and video messages available from the ministry Sermonspice at sermonspice.com.

Obviously, this is only a partial list. And you can no doubt come up with more and better ideas for your congregation. But remember the principal that underlies all of the above: Working on the quality of

your worship celebration not just for your faithful worshipers, but in the hope of connecting with new people over time. So why not organize that small team, involving the pastor and a few lay leaders, to strategize and plan for worship attendance growth: “One Sunday at a Time.”

Note: In the next CORE newsletter issue I will cover the theme of “How to Disciple Online Worshipers.”

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Spring Devotional

by [A. Nestenprest](#)

Editor's Note: This piece was written by a Luther Seminary student earlier this spring.

I can't tell you what spring is like in places beyond the Midwest — I'm sure they have it but it certainly pales in comparison to the spring that we enjoy in Minnesota. Saint Anthony Park and the ever-creaky Bockman Hall were covered in snow one day this week and basked in warm sun the next. Through open windows a new breeze blows in and with it the promise of a new age. A new age not held by the chains of ice and cold but one dominated by the warmth of the sun.

It is on to this odd state of transition that I cannot help but project my own faith. We as believers live in a time of transition. We have felt the warmth of the Son but are all too familiar with the cold and death of sin. Yet just like those experiencing spring in Minnesota, we know that the days of sin are numbered. We may not know for certain what that number is but that God has assigned it.

There is a moment in early March (and yes, I am a hardy one) when we first feel the warmth that God has given us. It is a feeling unlike anything else as it brings us to the end of our reality and then on to the next. That first warm day in March announces that winter is ending and summer is soon to follow. It is a sweet promise but one that loses its meaning if we spend the rest of the season behind closed windows and in a dorm. There, away from the sun, the promise becomes stale.

I remember the moment when I first felt the warmth of Christ. It brought me to the end of my reality and on to the next. Yet it is a warmth unappreciated when it is followed by distance and silence — by greeting the new breeze with closed windows and walls. Like students in spring, we as believers must live into the warmth and not merely observe its effect through a double-paned window. We will never replace the experience of when the Son first broke the cold but we can continue to live into the promise of it which the Son brings.

How do we live in the sun in a time when winter looms so close? I really couldn't say but certainly we must first step from our dorms and houses and into the place where that light shines. We know darkness because we have seen light; cold because we have felt warmth. There

**I remember when
I first felt the
warmth of Christ.**



is wisdom in that simple pairing — now that we have known, we should know.

The snow on my window's ledge is gone but, without any regard of my own attitudes, it may return tomorrow. Spring is a time of transition, one that aims to break us of winter and usher in a period where we need not worry about snow. Until that time, I will have to wait and celebrate the warmth as it is given — that is the reassurance that allows us to hope for summer even when winter surprises us again.

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