

Drought in SW Madagascar

by [David Lerseth](#), Founder of Friends of Madagascar Mission



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Although some areas of the USA are experiencing drought in 2021, we still have adequate resources in terms of food and other goods. Our government even helps with assistance and local churches have food banks to help feed those who are hungry.

Now consider another continent and country, Madagascar. It is the fourth largest island in the world and is located off the southeast coast of Africa. Parts of the country are lush with rain and have exotic plants and animals. However, as one moves down to the tip of this beautiful island you come upon a dry, arid region where *they have gone four years without rain.*

The UN reports that this drought is affecting 1.5 million people. The drought is the worst in four decades and has devastated isolated farming communities in the south of the country leaving families to scavenge for food to survive. They have killed their livestock, eaten the seeds intended to plant a new crop, and are now eating grasshoppers and cactus to survive. Some even believe there is a type of mud that is safe to eat; that is how hungry they are.

What can you do to help these people? We are working to bring them the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, but one cannot proclaim the Gospel when stomachs are growling loudly. We want them to hear the Word of God! We know that we cannot solve this problem single

NEXUS: One Theology, Two Mentors' Perspectives, and a Triune God

by [Luke Ratke](#) and [Ethan Zimmerman](#)

Executive Director's Note: Many thanks to Ethan Zimmerman and Luke Ratke for telling us about their experiences at NEXUS this past summer. Ethan and Luke are both NALC college students and are planning on attending the NALC seminary after graduation. They have also made a video about NEXUS, which is posted on our website. A link to that video can be found [here](#).

NEXUS is a vocational discernment institute rooted in Lutheran theology hosted by Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa, and it is a week full of blessings! High school students who are contemplating their vocation, what God's call for their life is, come to NEXUS and experience fellowship with other young Christians who are going through similar journeys. Morning and evening worship, classes on the Old and New Testament taught by solid Lutheran professors, small group discussions led by college age mentors, and lots of prayer are all part and parcel of what NEXUS is, learning where God's call meets your life!

Hi, my name is Luke and here are some of my thoughts on NEXUS: NEXUS is a great organization, because God makes it one! I loved being able to be a college-age mentor and a leader for the high school participants at NEXUS. Furthermore, I also liked being able to learn about God at NEXUS with and through the high school students.



My favorite thing about NEXUS this year was getting to meet and talk to Christians I had never met before or only briefly. I was able to talk to pastors, professors, and other Christians about Christianity. For myself, who someday wants to do full-time ministry as my career, working at NEXUS let me have conversations with other college-aged students and high school students who think their vocation is full-time ministry. I also was able to practice and learn skills that will someday help me when I am doing full-time ministry because I was a college-age mentor at NEXUS. Such skills were helping lead a small group, writing/giving a devotion, talking about the Bible with other people, etc.

Hello all, my name is Ethan Zimmerman, and this is my perspective on NEXUS! NEXUS is something truly special, something that I don't think happens anywhere else. NEXUS is not just another church or



bible camp; discipleship and vocational discernment happen, and bonds of Christian fellowship that will stand the test of time are forged. My time as a NEXUS mentor was truly a blessing, and as my fellow mentor Chris put it, good for my soul!

The topic of discipleship is something that has been on my mind for quite some time. I have wondered how I can disciple the people around me while I am at college, and being at NEXUS showed me how! Even though we were only with the participants for a week, we lived life with each other, we worshiped together, learned together, ate, laughed, and cried with each other. God showed me that this was how discipleship happened, in the nitty gritty little things of life, right in the trenches with people as they go through things and think about what God has in store



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An Unanticipated Agreement

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

I find that usually I can anticipate fairly accurately with whom I will agree or disagree. However, there are times when I am caught by surprise. Such was the case with a public letter written by a member of the board of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM).

On its website this organization describes its mission in this way: “Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries **organizes** queer seminarians and rostered ministers, **confronts** barriers and systemic oppression, and **activates** queer ideas and movements within the Lutheran Church.”

This is not the kind of organization with which I would expect to find something to agree on. So how did that come about?

A few months ago in celebration of Pride Month (June) the ELCA posted a link to the document, *A Lutheran Introduction to SOGIE* by Reconciling-Works. SOGIE stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression.

Pastor Suzannah Porter, an ELCA pastor and member of the board of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, responded by commenting with concern that the ELCA was giving the impression that the whole church body is LGBTQ+ affirming, when in fact it is not, since there are congregations which hold to traditional sexual ethics with the church’s sanction. Pastor Porter supported her statement by quoting the Bound Conscience policy which is a prominent part of the 2009 social statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. That document described four different positions regarding same gender relationships, which it acknowledged that people within “this church” hold “with conviction and integrity.” On the basis of “the bound conscience,” it said, “We . . . believe that this church . . . will include these different understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world.” In other words, traditional views of human sexuality have the full endorsement and sanction of a social statement that was approved by no less an authority than an ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

What happened after Pastor Porter sought to expose the ELCA’s dishonesty by revealing that the ELCA actually sanctions traditional views when it tries to give the impression that it is LGBTQ+ affirming? Several things.

First, others replied to Pastor Porter’s comment with stories of lack of LGBTQ+ acceptance at various ELCA congregations.



Second, the ELCA deleted Pastor Porter’s comment - the only one, to her knowledge, that cited the Bound Conscience policy.

Third, Pastor Porter responded in an angry public letter condemning the ELCA’s action. She said, “It is Pride 2021 month, and I cannot be deleted today.”

Here is more of what she said:

“ELCA, get back here and answer for yourself. On the post listing Reconciling Works SOGI resources (found here: <http://bit.ly/elcasogipost>) you deleted my comment clearly stating that projecting the image that the ELCA is welcoming and affirming of queer people without clearly stating that it is also our policy that the church can call queer people to repentance and refuse to recognize same sex marriage is misrepresentation.

“After now hundreds of people think the whole denomination is affirming, you deleted the only comment that clarified your policy. And erased the testimony of the replies of people who labored to tell their stories. But you seem to keep the reattempt when I stated my position on the board and council. This leads me to believe that misrepresentation was not just an accident, it was the goal.”

What is going on here? A lot.

First, the ELCA sought to silence a leader in the LGBTQ+ community, in the name of being LGBTQ+ affirming.

Second, Lutheran CORE and ELM agree that honesty, integrity, and transparency are important. What is actually done in the church needs to match

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If Not CRT, Then What?

By Pr. Steven Gjerde, Former Lutheran CORE Board Member and Senior Pastor at Zion Lutheran Church, Wausau WI

Here's a true story, related to me by someone who witnessed it. A small church, considering departure from the ELCA, solicited questions from the congregation. One question surprised people, but it was, apparently, asked in earnest: *If we leave the ELCA, will we go back to being a church that bans people of color?*

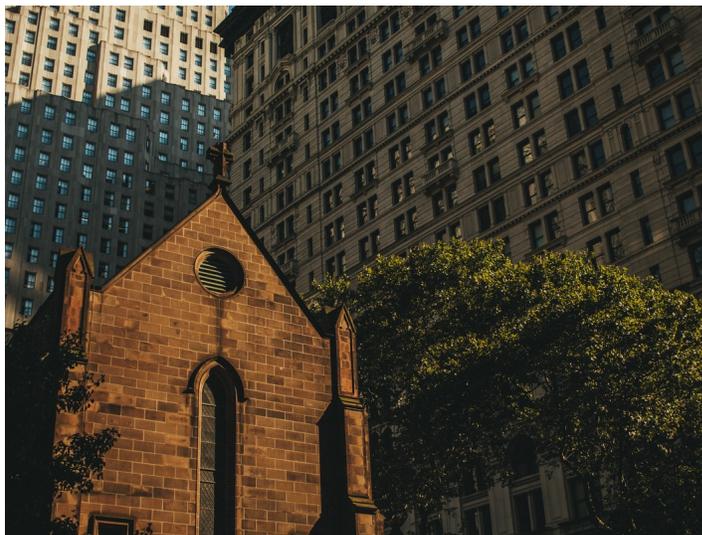
Wait—what? “Go back”? “Ban”? Some questions require their own hour to answer. Did the questioner believe that her congregation had once banned persons of color? Why? Also, had the questioner never heard that the ELCA is “the whitest denomination in America,” as one of its own pastors has called it (not that other Lutherans are far behind)? What string of pastors had neglected to teach, not only Lutheran failures in racial reconciliation, but also the Lutheran church's rich contribution to civil rights, refugee resettlement, and the fair treatment of all people in congregation, school, and institutions of care?

I don't know how the congregation's leaders ultimately addressed that question, but it proves that the question of race is on people's mind. Lutherans want to know where it resides in their faith and church's life.

You know this. You can't breathe in America and not know it. It has dominated the news, and one particular development has especially captured recent attention: critical race theory (CRT). In general, conservatives have balked at CRT, criticizing instances of “CRT training” that seem to demean and unfairly condemn people of European descent. States have begun passing resolutions banning its use in government and public education.

That criticism has echoed in the church's halls as confessing Lutherans of various stripes point out where CRT differs from the Gospel's more liberating message of “neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Yet a question lingers: if not CRT, then what?

How shall denominations, congregations, and believers critique the biases that linger within their own hearts and minds? Are there aspects of Lutheran church culture that have made it one of the whitest denominations in America, and how might the Gospel overcome that culture?



Real Forgiveness for Real Sins

I don't pretend to have hard and fast answers. But as I've reflected on the question—and if you haven't reflected on the question, it's time to start, for the sake of the church you love—a few thoughts have struck me as worth sharing. You probably already know them, but it doesn't hurt to see them in print. As St. Paul told the Philippians: repetition doesn't hurt the author, and it's good for everyone else (Philippians 3:1).

It would all seem to start with real forgiveness for real sins. It's one thing to say, “We don't rely on CRT; we preach the Gospel” (and that statement is fair and true enough), but it's another thing so to preach that Gospel that it forgives a real sin brought to light. Where have you, your congregation, and your denomination been blind to persons of color? How have you or your church harmed them or rebuffed them, even if unintentionally?

These questions are safe for you to ask (that is, they may hurt, but they are ultimately secure and good), because you know the One in whose presence you ask them: Jesus, who has carried the sins of the world. You may let them have their way with you, critiquing, judging, and enlightening you, because you know that the more real the sin is, the more real the forgiveness that comes in Jesus' name. So let the sins take shape, in even startling contour, and then let the grace of Christ clothe them in a brilliant mercy that overcomes them.

The church has its own language for this kind of

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Video Book Reviews — Sep. 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 Ethan Zimmerman for doing this month's video review of Roland Bainton's classic, "Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther." Ethan is an NALC college student who plans to attend the NALC seminary. He is part of Lutheran CORE's younger persons group and has been a college-aged mentor with the NEXUS program of Grand View University. A link to his review can be found [here](#).

In this review Ethan focuses on three events in the life of the reformer. The first one is the time when Luther celebrated his first mass. He was utterly terrified because he did not feel worthy to consecrate the elements. Ethan mentions that this shows the genuineness and sincerity of Luther's faith. He really cared about what he was doing. The second event is the Diet of Worms, where Luther proclaimed, "Here I stand; I can do no other." Having personally come under attack for his faith, Ethan was inspired by the courage and conviction of Luther as he was being attacked for his faith. Ethan said, "I felt like I was in the room with Luther." The third event is the death of his fourteen-year-old daughter Magdalena. Ethan shares how he was deeply moved by this giant of the faith and giant of history showing his humanity in his expression of sorrow over the death of his daughter.

This review, as well as ten 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 either in the List of Confessional Resources on the [Seminarians](#) page of our website or in the Resources for Youth and Young Adults on the [Young Timothy](#) page of our website. Those lists can be found [here](#) and [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.



Newly Updated Statement on Scripture

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

Several weeks ago there was considerable discussion in Lutheran CORE's Facebook group in response to a person who questioned whether it is appropriate to call the Bible the Word of God.

As part of that process, we posted our Statement on Scripture, which was written in 2007.

Because that statement was responding specifically to comments made by former ELCA presiding bishop Mark Hansen and to the ELCA's Book of Faith initiative, we felt that the document should be updated to reflect our current situation and without reference to that initiative.

We are very grateful to NALC pastor Ken Kimball, who, along with Bishop Paull Spring, wrote the original statement. Pastor Kimball graciously accepted our request to update the statement. We are also very grateful to Dr. Mark Mattes of Grand View University for reviewing the statement.

At its most recent meeting the board of Lutheran CORE unanimously voted to approve the statement. You can find the full text of that document [here](#).

As we said in the July 2021 issue of CORE Voice, the real issue behind the issue is more often than not the authority of Scripture. Refusing to call God Father, rejecting evangelism as part of the mission of the church, seeing faith in Christ as only one out of many ways to God, and embracing the full, radical LGBTQIA+ agenda all result from rejecting the inspiration, reliability, and authority of the Bible. Therefore, we are glad to be able to share with you this newly updated Statement on Scripture.



In the words of a hymn that has been set to the tune of "A Mighty Fortress" –

"God's Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever.

To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.

Through life it guides our way; in death it is our stay.

Lord, grant while time shall last your Church may hold it fast

Throughout all generations."

Helping Smaller Churches

by [Pr. Chris Johnson](#), Secretary of the Board of Lutheran CORE and Associate Pastor at Zion Lutheran, Wausau

The Church sometimes uses a hub and spoke model of ministry. In it a central congregation serves as the hub of a wheel with spokes radiating outwards in all directions.

Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau began helping smaller congregations a few years back. Wausau is a big city for North-Central Wisconsin. Zion is also located a manageable driving distance to a handful of smaller congregations. A couple of years ago one congregation reached out to us for pastoral support and services. At the time Zion had three pastors and the smaller church was struggling to find pulpit supply. After much prayer, the meeting of the councils, congregational meetings, and a mutually agreed upon contract we started to share our pastoral services, support, and love with more brothers and sisters in Christ.



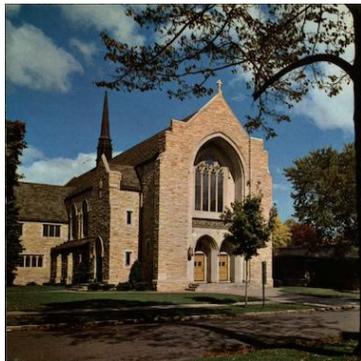
Zion serves as the larger (hub) church. The other church is a smaller (spoke) church located about 15 miles east. Each church retains its own autonomy (councils, calendars, actives, etc.). And each church shares in the pastoral leadership and support of 2 full-time pastors and 1 part-time, retired pastor. Between the two churches, every single worship service is led by an ordained pastor. Shut-ins are visited. Sunday schools run unabated. Word and Sacrament are freely shared.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. ~ Titus 1:5

Larger, hub-like churches and rural, spoke-like churches may want to consider doing something like this too. Zion has some practical advice which may help.

For the hub church and pastoral staff:

1. Pastors are to be the harvesters out among the wheat fields! As a pastor of a hub church, yes, you are primarily called to (and paid by) this congregation. However, don't let that limit the scope of



how you can serve Christ's Church more broadly. There are "other sheep" out there.

2. Church councils care for the well being of their own church, and also the well-being of their pastor. Thanks be to God! But remember, Christ's Church is bigger than your own slice of the kingdom. We must care for the "least of these, my brothers" who are without adequate pastoral support. What will the Lord say to us if we neglect them at such a time as this?
3. You are a congregation with resources – thanks be to God! Those resources can be used in supporting smaller, rural congregations with leadership – pastoral, musical, educational, or otherwise.
4. This will make pastors a bit busier, but it is good to be busy for the sake of the Kingdom of God! Of course, one must weigh the demands of two (or more) congregations appropriately. Pastors can't be everywhere and do everything. This means the hub church will be willing to receive a little less attention from their pastor(s) because they are sharing them with another church.
5. It will be important for the membership of the hub church to know what their pastor(s) are doing at the spoke church. They are invested too and need to be kept in the loop.

For the spoke church:

1. Help is *not* on the way. Pastoral shortages, baby-boomer retirements, and a myriad of other issues have brought us to where we are today. Grieve it and move on. This is one model (hub and spoke) which might be able to make things work given the current circumstances.
2. God loves your church, no matter what size. You exist to glorify God where you are at. God also loves bigger churches too. They can help you. Never be ashamed to ask for help from your brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. Having pastoral support is essential for keeping



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Discipling Your Online Worshipers

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

With the Delta variant reminding us that this pandemic will be around at least into 2022, many congregations are facing the fact that they will not be seeing a significant percentage of their members returning to in-person worship this fall. And the longer some members continue to only worship online, the more likely many of them will rarely, if ever, return to worship in your sanctuary.

As I have been coaching church transition teams and call committees over the last eighteen months I always ask what their current attendance is compared to 2019. In almost all cases the answer is that average in-person worship attendance has dropped 30 to 50%.

Needless to say, this is a serious congregational ministry crisis that needs to be addressed. But what can be done? I suggest *two strategies*. One is to provide an on-going, quality member-care ministry for every member who worshiped regularly in 2019 but has been consistently absent from in-person services since then. The second strategy is to institute ways these online worshipers can be engaged and disciplined by and through your weekly online sermons. Only a combination of these two strategies, in my view, will significantly **reduce** the number of online worshipers who will eventually be lost to inactivity.

Your member-care effort should include phone conversations, every two to four weeks, with lay volunteers who have been recruited and “trained” for this ministry. These conversations would be to see how this person is doing, and to ask if he/she has any personal prayer requests. The volunteer would not only offer to pray personally for the member; he/she would volunteer to pass the prayer request on to the congregation’s prayer team. Ideally, each of these online worshipers should be contacted, consistently, by the same volunteer.

Now for the second strategy: Striving to engage online worshipers through your weekly sermons. One example is how one LCMC congregation in suburban St. Louis used a sermon series on the Gospel of Mark to encourage both in-person and online worshipers to read the entire Gospel. Members were asked to read a chapter each week in preparation for the following Sunday’s sermon. The chapters were broken down into daily devotional reading texts to encourage members to develop a daily Bible-reading discipline. Another idea would be to invite online comments regarding the next Sunday’s sermon theme. This feedback could be in the form of survey



questions where their answers—sent in via email—could be incorporated (anonymously) into the following Sunday’s message. One more idea is to offer a mid-week online, interactive Bible study for members who are on Facebook. This would make it possible for live “classes” where participants could make comments in real time. The result would be a discussion-oriented Bible class/devotional time. And finally, why not have your congregation host one or more weekly Zoom Bible studies? This could achieve a group dynamic which would be almost the same as gathering in person. I have done a lot of work these last eighteen months on Zoom. I find these Zoom meetings to be very discussion-oriented; especially when the total number of participants is not more than six to nine people. And since the beginning of this pandemic a great many more Americans have become comfortable with and open to the idea of gathering and conversing online.

All the above suggestions would help prevent increased inactivity among those members who are not yet able—or comfortable enough—to return to your in-person worship services and classes. However, please note that the second-strategy ideas above presume that you will continue to offer online worship; at least as long as this pandemic continues. You will want to do this not only for your members, but also as an outreach to the unchurched in your community.

Coming Events

- **LCMC 2021 Annual Gathering and Convention** — @Upper Arlington Church, Hilliard, Ohio—October 3-6, 2021. [Click here.](#)
- **2022 March for Life** — Washington, DC—January 21, 2022. [Click here.](#)

Drought in SW Madagascar

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handedly. It is a problem for the government, wealthy nations, and large corporations to help solve. And what about the large Christian agencies that claim to have compassion for hungry people? [Friends of Madagascar Mission](#) (FOMM) has approached Lutheran World Relief numerous times, we have asked Feed My Hungry Children, and the answer has been they cannot help.

So FOMM, with our limited resources and lack of “corporate power,” have begun a Drip Irrigation Program to teach people how to possibly raise enough quality food during the drought to feed their families. It is not going to solve the problem in southwest Madagascar, but it shows we care about them. We provide food at a Lutheran Hospital called Ejeda so those coming for medical care may be fed while healing. Currently we are applying for a large grant to help drill deep water wells, hundreds of them, that will be used to provide water for drinking and the drip irrigation programs. We are going to work with other non-profits to manage and run this program. We hope our efforts will bring the government of Madagascar into a conversation with us and to work with us in setting goals that will benefit the people of the southwest.



We invite you to pray with us, support us with gifts, and even your own knowledge about how to help starving people who are hungry for food, and yes, even for the food of God’s love and care for them. Mail checks to: Friends of Madagascar Mission, PO Box 46381, Eden Prairie, MN 55344. You may also donate online using PayPal www.madagascarmission.com/donate. While you are there, check out “Projects” under “Get Involved” and learn more about our Drip Irrigation Project.

Pray with me, Father, in your mercy open the heavens and send rain on the fields of Madagascar and end this drought, and until then, open the hearts and purses of the developed world and feed the starving children. Make us your hands and feet to bring resources to those most in need. In your Son’s dear name, we pray. Amen.

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for their life. Are they to be pastors? Missionaries? Youth leaders? Being there with these young participants while they pondered these questions and sought to answer what the Lord has called them to was truly a blessing and an eye opener as to what discipleship could look like.



I left NEXUS feeling encouraged, not just because I saw what discipleship and vocational discernment looked like in the lives of young folk, high schoolers, but because of the friendships that I left with. From the late nights discussing theology with the other mentors, to the goofy laughs shared with the participants, I left encouraged that there are other young Christians out there yearning to pursue God and answer the call He has given them in their lives, and that not every young person is all about decadent hedonism, but faith is still alive amongst my generation. I praise God for NEXUS, for the lives changed by it, for the doors opened because of it, and for the continued ministry it will have in the future!

We both think that every high school student that is a strong Christian should pray and think about coming to NEXUS next summer. Every high school student should think about going to NEXUS, not just high school students that think or know their vocation is full time ministry. We want to thank the Lutheran CORE for financially helping [The NEXUS Institute](#). And last but not greatest of all, we want to thank God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for NEXUS!



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preaching, distinct from the vocabulary of secular justice warriors. The Bible may not speak of racism and inequality or inequity, but it does speak of old-fashioned, rotten things like enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, pride, divisions, envy, greed, and the like. How do these works of the flesh, unearthed for us by the Spirit, illumine our problems with race, and what is Christ's forgiving word for them?

Preach it, and expect that preaching to change things, including you.

“You Do Not Have Because You Do Not Ask”

St. James has his moments. The second verse of his fourth chapter might be one of the better ones: have you *tried* asking? Once God has spoken to us in our sin, we speak to Him by His generous grace. Only by His Word do we have words to speak, and when His Word calls out our sins and tells us, “These sins are forgiven; there is a limit to their power; you need not live under their bondage,” then we know what to ask. Ask Him for what He desires; ask Him for the sin to be overcome and healed; ask for your soul, your congregation, and your church to welcome the people of every nation.

There's really not too much more to say about this call to prayer, I don't think, except *do it*. Pray daily for the Gospel that we preach and the doctrine we confess to be the means by which the Lord draws all nations to Himself. Maybe you pray from a place where God's answer to that prayer won't change how your congregation or life looks very much—congregations reflect their neighborhoods, after all, and so not *every* congregation has to be a microcosm of “The Church,” somehow ideally diverse, and thinking that it does actually denies the catholic nature of Christ's body—but you're not praying for only parochial concerns. You're praying for the whole Church, and for the Fisherman's net to be cast across the world.

Pray, and say the *amen* in the confidence of God's faithfulness.

The Grass Isn't Always Greener

This last suggestion (I know: there are lots more things to be said; what we have here is just a smattering) runs afoul of certain strands of church critique. I call it (fairly, I think) the anti-institutional critique, which insists that buildings and polity and such things are irrelevant to faithfulness in mission, if not harmful to it. To be sure, the faithfulness of a church is never measured by its stuff. But stuff is no

more irrelevant to the conduct of the ministry than our bodies are.

God will raise our bodies, and so He calls us to steward this flesh in a certain way. So also will He liberate creation from its bondage to decay, and so we steward creation in a certain way. In particular, the Lutheran church should probably start paying more attention to where it lays its foundations, as in, its literal foundations.

The church has always needed buildings for its mission. The fact that the church first met in homes wasn't a rejection of public buildings as much as it was the commandeering of private buildings for public use. Throughout the church's history, wherever missionaries spread the Gospel, they quickly built a shelter for its public proclamation, and they chose the placement of those shelters wisely. It was an incarnational move, seeking to proclaim by the place wherein the Body gathers who and what the Body is.

How our churches continue this ethic today may be key to understanding our problem with race. That is, looking at our buildings and where we put them may be one way both to identify our real racial sin and to welcome God's gracious balm for it. For how we build has everything to do with how we use our money and why, and those economics may be the deeper root of Lutheran racial woes.

A case in point (another true story, and one repeated other places): a church in a mid-sized city had a beautiful neo-Gothic church in a busy, even crowded downtown. Because that downtown had grown so busy, and so few of the people at the church lived there any longer, they decided to sell that building in favor of building a new house of worship far on the city's margins, surrounded by a lush, green campus—it's fair to say, not too different from a country club. I knew this church a few years ago and just recently drove through its city. I decided to check on it, and what did I find?

I found the downtown church, still a bit crumbly but nevertheless standing and beautiful, purchased by another congregation with a more evangelical thrust and looking very well visited by a variety of people. As for the new Lutheran church—well, I



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almost didn't find it. Surrounded by beautiful green trees and a busy, suburban commercial center, it was easy to miss. It would take effort, in fact, to find. It would also require a car to attend, and it would take some personal courage, I imagine, to drive up to such a very *nice* church with anything less than a very *nice* car.

So in the city where this church stands, where white people comprise the Very Nice Car classes and blacks and Latinos fill cheaper housing downtown near the bus lines, which of these churches will have a better start to overcoming racial barriers? In order to overcome such barriers, the church must be *present* as its Lord is present—and how present is a church hidden behind well-manicured trees?

I'm not saying, "Build it, and they will come." We've seen that approach fail so many times. There's no gimmick here, and the soul-work of preaching and prayer is more than everything else. I'm also not suggesting that persons of color are always poor or whites always rich. But I am saying, as many others have said, that racial divisions may find their deeper roots in class divisions, and the Lutheran church's recent architectural history may illustrate the truth of it (as does the fact that that our churches appear to lack poor and working class whites as much as they lack persons of color!). The church must be present to those whom it seeks. It must bring the font and Bible and altar to them, clothed in their own neighborhood.

Taking up that calling will mean that those already in the church may have to dedicate their resources and wealth for local ministries and houses of worship either not in service of themselves or at a distance from their own homes, requiring them who are more equipped to travel to do so. Why not? What checks the sins of enmity, pride,

greed, and rivalry more than for those with the most to take up a weekly pilgrimage to gather with those who have the least? Wouldn't such a pilgrimage confess, "These sins are forgiven, and therefore, they no



longer set the limits and conduct of our devotion”?

Yes, I know that persons of color are guilty of their own sins of enmity, pride, greed, and the like. I also know that they aren't the ones most likely reading this article, and I know it because most of you are Lutherans, and Lutherans are one of the whitest Christian traditions in America. It needs some new and more Biblical attention. CRT is not the way, and so what is? Preaching, praying, and showing up to be present, all of it concrete and real and down-to-earth, seems to be the way I know, the way that I've been given to confess. What are some other parts of that way? I imagine you know, or that God will show it to you if you ask.

An Unanticipated Agreement

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what public statements say will be done and what official policy says should be done.

Third, the ELCA's misrepresentation, as Pastor Porter calls it, is dishonest and unhelpful both to people seeking LGBTQ+ affirming communities and to those who hold to traditional sexual ethics. It would be far better for the ELCA to be truthful and honest and consistent all across the board.

Now, to be sure, Lutheran CORE and Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries would have totally opposite purposes for raising these issues.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries would want the ELCA to eliminate language that sanctions traditional views, while Lutheran CORE would want the ELCA to keep its promise and live up to its commitment to also honor and provide a place for traditional views.

Nevertheless, Pastor Porter's point stands, and we agree. The ELCA's actions were dishonest and unhelpful.

Click [here](#) to read the ELCA's original post.

Click [here](#) to read Pastor Porter's original post.

CORE Voice Newsletter

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Helping Smaller Churches

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vitality in a church. Churches can flounder without a shepherd or waiting for one. If you are a rural church, you know how long it takes to get a pastor and chances are, depending on your denominational affiliation, you are low on the priority list. Be proactive – find a larger congregation in your vicinity that might be willing to share their pastor. You never know unless you ask!

4. If you do connect with a bigger church, know that the primary loyalty of the pastor will be to the congregation they are called to. Don't expect this pastor to now devote 40 hours a week to your congregation. An agreed upon contract will make clear what you can and cannot expect from a pastor or a pastoral team.
5. Be willing to be flexible to make things work. If you want a pastor to preach and preside at the Supper, changing the time you worship, even if you've worshiped at that time for the past 50 years, might be necessary.
6. You have resources too! Partnering with a larger church does not now mean their pastor is cheap labor. Be as heavily invested in this partnership as possible. Be generous in how you compensate the larger church in their pastoral support of your congregation. You may not be able to compensate a full-time, benefits included pastor, but you just might enable the larger church to do that very thing. Everyone wins!
7. Remember what is central for the Church: Receiving Jesus Christ and the gifts He gives in Word and Sacrament. Your worship life will have a renewed sense of importance because of this partnership. Worship will be the main area of concentration for the pastor who is helping you out.

Remember, we are not entering uncharted territory. Nor are we entering into unprecedented times. The Church has weathered far worse challenges than what we face today. This doesn't make light of the current struggles but puts it into perspective. It is God's will that His Church grow and flourish. May this good and gracious will of God be done among us as we look at newer (or older!) models of making ministry happen.

ALPB Book Package

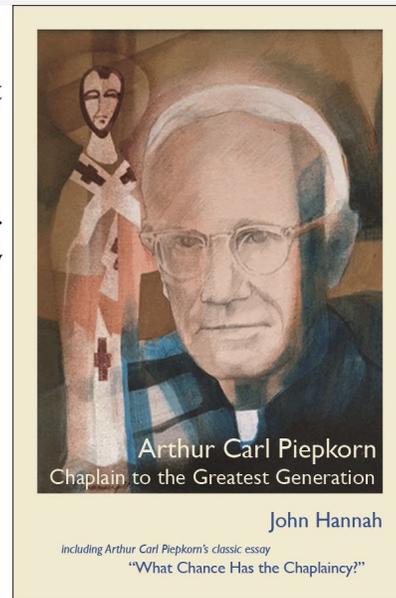
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Welcome to the Board!

Pastor Brian Hughes is a retired NALC pastor who lives in Maryland. We are looking forward to how he will help Lutheran CORE offer resources to congregations such as vision casting, development of discipleship ministries, and conflict resolution.

