

What Does The ELCA Social Statement on Abortion Really Say?

by [Rev. Thomas Jacobson](#)



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It is now old news that the issue of abortion in the United States, which has long simmered on medium heat in our national discourse, has recently boiled over. Because of the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health*, which overturned *Roe* (1973) and *Casey* (1992), individual states now possess increased ability to restrict abortion, including banning the practice outright. Though this is a significant victory for those who consider themselves prolife, the issue of the legality of abortion now simply shifts to a more local level. Even so, many abortion rights advocates are outraged, which has prompted commentary and statements from many, including church leadership.

It had been over twenty years since I first read the ELCA social statement on abortion when I was recently asked to do so again. The first case was for a class as a college sophomore. The second, the result of which is this reflection, was in response to ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton’s references to this statement in response to shifting abortion policy in the United States. My reaction after both readings of this statement was the same: Though far from what I would consider a

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The Equality Act

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

This research has been done and this article has been written in response to those who have expressed deep concern over the Equality Act, a bill that is now before the United States Congress.

The Equality Act, if passed, would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (including titles II, III, IV, VI, VII, and IX) to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, education, federally funded programs, credit, and jury service.

Much like the Supreme Court's June 2020 ruling in the *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* decision, which protects gay and transgender people in matters of employment, the Equality Act broadly defines sex discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity, adding "pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition of an individual, as well as because of sex-based stereotypes." The bill also defines this to include the intersex community.

While various similar bills have been introduced since the 1970's, the modern version of the Equality Act was first proposed in the 114th United States Congress. During the 116th Congress, it passed the United States House of Representatives on May 17, 2019 in a bipartisan 236–173 vote. However, the United States Senate did not act upon the bill after receiving it. On February 18, 2021, the act was reintroduced in the 117th Congress. The House passed the act by a vote of 224 to 206 on February 25, 2021, with support from three Republicans. The bill then moved on to the Senate for consideration.

While not yet passed into law, the Equality Act continually inches closer to being passed, and each time it becomes more expansive in what it entails. The latest version of the Equality Act is a grave threat to religious liberty, especially for religious institutions (churches, schools, hospitals, camps, sports, etc.) which hold to traditional views regarding gender and sexuality. There are wide-reaching implications. Also, the Equality Act does not stand alone. It builds upon and forms the basis for other legislation that has come through the executive branch (i.e., executive orders) and/or the judicial branch (i.e., SCOTUS cases).

Much work has been done to survey books, reports, articles, audios, and videos in order to prepare two resources for the friends of Lutheran CORE.

The first of these resources is a list of quotations from a wide selection of sources, which answer com-



mon questions. A link to that resource can be found [here](#).

The second is a resource list for more information on the subject. A link to that list can be found [here](#).

Although some information is included about the general implications (i.e., the impact on businesses or adoption agencies), the specific focus of the two resources is on the implications for religious freedom, both for churches specifically and for faith-based institutions generally (i.e., religious schools, religious camps, etc.).

Please note that the focus is intentionally on religious rather than political concerns.

Regrettably, there is little information, at this point, about what faith-based (and secular) institutions can meaningfully do to fight back against this legislation and its implications. The one recurring proposal is to support alternative legislation, such as the Fairness for All Act. This Act would implement similar LGBTQ+ rights as the Equality Act in the secular and business worlds, but would include specific protections of religious liberties for faith-based non-profits. Although it is by no means the focus of this report, some information about the Fairness for All Act has been included.

We would particularly recommend to you two resources, both of which can be found under Reports on the resource list.

The first is the document, [How Religious Organizations Can Understand the Equality Act and Discern Next Steps](#), by Caleb Kaltenbach of the Messy Grace Group. It is quite comprehensive, at over 100 pages, and includes not only practical information about the law and its implications, but also sugges-

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The Elephant in the Room: ELCA's Declaration to Muslims

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

One of the familiar clichés within Lutheranism is that making the right distinctions is the key to doing good theology. Admittedly, clichés are dangerous, as Robert Jenson warned in the book *Lutheran Slogans: Use and Abuse*.¹ However, I still believe that making distinctions serves the Lutheran Church well. Among those that I find helpful are the distinctions between Law and Gospel, and between the first, second and third articles of the Creed.

These distinctions are helpful in evaluating one of the recent declarations made on behalf of the ELCA by its leaders. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met from March 31 to April 2 of this year. At that meeting, the Church Council adopted [A Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community](#).² Like most of the declarations made on behalf of the ELCA, there are strengths and weaknesses. Here's where the distinctions come in.

When it comes to the distinction between Law and Gospel, Lutherans recognize that knowledge of the Law is not limited to the Christian faith. The Law is accessible to all people, but not without distortions due to sin. People of other religions, and people with no particular religious faith, have some knowledge of the Law. Furthermore, we recognize that the Law impacts people in several ways. We refer to this impact as the “uses of the Law”, but we should remember that we don't really use the Law. God does. There are at least two uses of the Law. A third use is debated among Lutherans. However, in this article, I want to focus only on the first use of the Law.

The first use of the Law is often called its civil use. This is when the Law gives order to society, restrains evil, and rewards virtue. No human society can function without some form of law, and regardless of the vast differences between religions and cultures, there are strong similarities as well. While religions and cultures differ greatly on what is the proper way to worship God or the gods, they have large areas of agreement when it comes to how we ought to relate to fellow human beings. Respect for elders, prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, lying and warnings against the danger of envy are pervasive. As a result, the civil use of the law provides common ground between Christians, people of other religions, and with people in civil society.

Another helpful distinction has to do with the Apostles' Creed. Following Luther's Catechisms, we



identify three articles in the Creed, one on Creation, Redemption and Sanctification respectively. It is under the article on Creation that Lutherans find the most in common with people of other faiths. In particular, Jews and Muslims share similar beliefs with us, including the belief that there is only one God, that God is the creator of heaven and earth, that we are to love God and love our neighbors, and that God has revealed his will to human beings. The article on Creation is the basis for our understanding of the civil use of the Law.

When [A Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community](#) speaks from the standpoint of the first article of the Creed and the civil use of the Law it does well. Lutherans should find common ground with other Christians, with Muslims, and with all people, in rejecting “subtle and not-so-subtle acts of aggression and violence, including vandalism against [Muslim] community centers and masjids (mosques).” We should “assure our Muslim neighbors of our love and respect and reaffirm our commitment to working together in our shared communities for the common good.” As Christians we are to “pray for our neighbors of other religions and worldviews; to seek understanding; and to stand in solidarity” with our neighbors.

It is also right to admit and lament the fact that Lutherans have often failed to recognize that the protections of God's Law extend to all people and not just to fellow Christians. Jesus clearly taught that our neighbor includes all people, not just those who share

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How 'City Mission' Was Born, Part 1: Katrina, The Unwelcomed Reformer

by [Pr. K. Craig Moorman](#), Member of the Board of Lutheran CORE

Note: K. Craig Moorman has served congregations in Maryland as a pastor and mission developer. He is presently serving as the pastor/mission developer of River's Edge Ministries based in Mt. Airy, Maryland, and is involved regularly in leading small groups/missional communities in various settings from small discipleship huddles to larger groups for disaster relief efforts for clean-up and re-building. Craig and his wife, Nancy, are blessed with five children and three grandchildren and live in Mt. Airy, Maryland, along with a bunch of farm animals.



Over the course of the past three decades, I have had the immense privilege of leading disaster relief efforts around the country, typically following a natural catastrophic event. Since my young family and I drove down to Homestead, Florida in 1992 to bring aid to St. Andrew's Lutheran Church following the fierce storm, *Hurricane Andrew*, I have been more intentional in developing this ministry outreach, now known as *Cross Country Mission*. Here at [River's Edge Ministries](#), it has become a priority for us to avail ourselves to the needs of those who have been through the storm ... be it a hurricane, tornado, flood, human-generated catastrophe, or just the difficulties of life, by offering our time, energy, and resources. No doubt, many of you have participated in such satisfying and sacred work.

You might be familiar with an old Yiddish proverb, "*We plan, God laughs.*" In this article, I will unpack how a most fascinating derailment of 'well-thought-out' plans forever changed my life and that of many others. As it turned out, God had a much better long-term plan in mind. In Part 1 of this article, I will tell how *City Mission* was born out of *Cross Country Mission*, and the supreme importance of expecting the unexpected and getting out of the way to allow God to *be God* ... and make a way. Proverbs 3:5, 6 comes to mind: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight.*" Or to put it into terms that Henry Blackaby might have used, remember that God is the long-term planner and He is the One on mission. Our job is to look where He's working and join Him.

It was the spring of 2014, just weeks before I was to lead my 8th disaster relief effort through *Cross Country Mission*, when I received an unexpected

phone call from those who would be hosting us that the necessary housing for our team could not be provided. At that late juncture we had nearly 40 adults and youth signed up, committed, and excited about making the venture to the severely damaged shores of New Jersey. Finding myself in a somewhat awkward predicament, I turned to my wife and muttered something incredibly profound like, "Now what?!" She paused, for maybe five seconds, and responded with definitive and, dare I say, Holy Spirit-inspired clarity and conviction:

"*Why don't you 'do that thing' you wrote about back in 2006?*" Typically, she is measured and careful in weighing in on such circumstances. I listened.

What you'll read below originally appeared in small booklet form and served as 'a primer' to prepare those who will be entering into any given disaster zone and participating in various stages of clean-up, re-building, and healing. (In fact, this booklet is presently being revised for a second printing available in September and has been slightly updated for this July 2022 article.)

In Part 2 of this article, I will present how *City Mission* developed over the years and describe the most recent event that took place in May of this year, *City Mission: Baltimore and Beyond—2022*. As you well know, oftentimes it takes one door to close for another to be opened. This would not be the end of *Cross Country Mission*, but the beginning of a new missional ministry called *City Mission*. When our initial plans fell through, we looked to see where God was working and the Lord birthed something brand new, much better and more complete than I could

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NEXUS 2022: Train Them the Way They Should Go

by [Pr. Chris Johnson](#), Secretary of the Board of Lutheran CORE

King Solomon was blessed in many ways with the wisdom the Lord had given him. He asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9) and he received it. We must hastily add, he didn't always use that wisdom in ways becoming a servant of the Lord and as king of Israel. Nevertheless, despite his sinfulness, the Holy Spirit-inspired wisdom he has bequeathed to us is of surpassing value. Some of his wisdom, found in the book of Proverbs, is invaluable in helping to guide Christians in their thinking and in their doing. Perhaps many of you remember this from Proverbs: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (22:6). It's an important truth to remember in every generation.

A couple of weeks ago I was blessed to spend a few days at Grand View University (GVU) in Des Moines. GVU was hosting its annual NEXUS Institute, a week long program for high school students. Lutheran CORE supports this ministry because we take to heart what Solomon said above in regards to training the up and coming generations. Though these saints aren't that little, many of them were taller than me (which isn't difficult to achieve), we still need to train them in the way they should go, the way of wisdom and life (Proverbs 9).

Students began and ended the day with worship. There were plenty of opportunities for them to serve: reading Scripture, leading prayer, communion assistant, and so on. Though things could be awkward at times; what else do you expect from high schoolers? Embrace the youth by embracing their holy awkwardness! "Train up a child in the way he should go..."

Students were daily taught by Dr. Mark Mattes and Dr. Ken Jones. These sessions focused on the Old and New Testaments and how to read and interpret them. Students learned how to distinguish law and gospel, how to read Scripture and view life through the cross, and how to read Scripture with Christ as the center. In other words, they were teaching the students how to read the Bible like the Church has for 2000 years. They were teaching the students how Jesus, Saint Paul, Augustine, and Luther read the Bible.

Throughout the day, the students had time to enjoy Des Moines or relax back at the dorms. They would also meet in small groups to discuss among themselves what they were learning. The mentors at NEXUS, college age students, would help in the processing of the information, facilitating the group's



discussion. Most mentors had been a high school student at NEXUS in previous years. One mentor in particular I had the privilege of talking with is a young man supported by Lutheran CORE's Pastoral Formation Fund.

If you haven't yet, I encourage you to encourage others to experience the NEXUS Institute, either as a mentor or as a high school student. After all, "iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17). The students, mentors, and other leaders are Lutheran – NALC, LCMC, ELCA, and there was at least one LCMS thrown in for good measure. This is another reason why CORE proudly helps to financially support the NEXUS Institute at GVU. The NEXUS Institute helps connect confessional Lutherans from across America, advocating for Biblical authority and confessional fidelity – the very thing Lutheran CORE strives to do.

In closing, it should be pointed out that the verse from Proverbs 22:6 cuts both ways. If we aren't diligently passing on the faith we have received so that that our youth "will not depart from it when they are old," someone or something else will. Two brief examples from the recent past: (1) The ELCA has its agenda which can be seen in its various speakers from previous Youth Gatherings (Nadia Bolz-Weber, Jamie Brueshoff and her son/transgender daughter). (2) The subtle placement of the "Reconciling in Christ" booth at Detroit's Youth Gathering in 2015 was not so subtly placed in Houston in 2018. I was at both of these Youth Gatherings while still a part of the ELCA. There was a clear catechization going on here, make no mistake about it. "Train up a child in the way he/she/zhe/zir/they should go..."

If you consider yourself and your congregation

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A Note From a College Missionary in Italy

by [Jackson Watts](#)

Note: Jackson Watts is a member of an NALC congregation and a student at Oklahoma State University. He is part of Lutheran CORE's young adult group, which meets via Zoom about once a month. Many thanks to those who have given generously to our Pastoral Formation Fund so that Lutheran CORE was able to support him in his mission trip to Bologna, Italy.

“Ciao! I’m Jackson. I’m from the United States. What’s your name?”

This is the gist of how I started conversations during my time in Italy this past May and June. It was usually accompanied by the question, “Do you speak English?” and a handshake. This introduction was often followed by the student asking me why I was in Bologna, Italy. Since you’re probably wondering the same thing, I’ll give you some context.

My name is Jackson Watts. I am going into my senior year at Oklahoma State University, and I am considering attending Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, PA for my MDiv in order to become a pastor in the North American Lutheran Church. This past school year, I joined the campus ministry group Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), where I attended weekly Bible studies and other events. Early in the fall semester, I heard that Cru did summer mission trips at universities around the world, and the OSU branch of Cru was affiliated with Cru at the University of Bologna in Bologna, Italy.

I told myself that it sounded cool but wasn’t for me. As often happens to me with ministry opportunities, the more I told myself that I didn’t have the time or the resources for it, the more I realized it was God’s plan for me. After speaking with the team leader about it in November, I decided to apply to the six week Bologna summer mission trip. Since then, I have seen God work in more ways than I ever could have imagined, and I have had countless opportunities to grow in my faith.

One of the first ways in which I saw God work was in fundraising. I started fundraising in February, giving myself three months to raise the \$6,000 needed for the trip. The fundraising started off well. Lutheran CORE was my first supporter! However, I soon faltered. With three weeks left, I still needed \$2,500. There were 30 people I had mailed for fundraising who hadn’t gotten back to me. I began to lose hope when I realized that even if all 30 of those people gave me \$50 each, I would still be \$1,000 short. I



spoke to my team leader about it, and he told me he was confident God would provide the \$2,500 I needed in the next three weeks. I didn’t believe him, but I continued to fundraise, talking to new people and texting those with whom I had already been in contact. Not only did God provide me what I needed, but He provided an overabundance! Through the unexpected generosity of many people, I raised all the money I needed with significant extra, which I gave to other members of the team.

On May 17, 2022, eight other students, three Cru staff, and I departed for Bologna, Italy, to spend five weeks doing ministry at the University of Bologna. The University of Bologna is the oldest continually operating university in the world, having been founded in 1088 A.D. It has an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 50,000 and a postgraduate enrollment of approximately 35,000. The Cru group there has approximately 50 active students, and it calls itself Agape Studenti.

I soon discovered several major differences between the University of Bologna (UB) and traditional American universities, some of which made ministry difficult. One major difference was that UB doesn’t have a finals week like most American universities have. UB students finish classes at the end of May and take their final test any time during June. Most students were free to leave Bologna for a week or two before coming back to take tests.

This made ministry difficult because we met many students who couldn’t meet up again because they were about to leave Bologna and go back to their parents’ house for a few weeks, or for the rest of the summer. I met several students who were interested in my faith in Jesus and wanted to know more

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perfect document, the 1991 social statement on abortion is much more life-affirming than one might expect. The development of this statement involved input from people of different viewpoints who listened to each other and worked hard to produce a document that, while not satisfying everyone, incorporated various concerns in a balanced manner.

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that the ELCA statement on abortion, one of the earliest such social statements considered and adopted, has not been without controversy in the history of the ELCA and has been subject to controversial “interpretation.” The question of how or whether to harmonize the content of this statement with the health plan coverage provided by the ELCA Board of Pensions (now called Portico) was one issue that early on created for some a lack of trust in the leadership of the ELCA. Among these is Russell Saltzman, former ELCA pastor and now member of the Roman Catholic Church, who offered the following comments in 2010 in the wake of the ELCA’s policy change concerning pastors in same-sex relationships:

My real disaffection with the ELCA didn’t start with sex. It began in earnest over the ELCA abortion statement and the subsequent decision by the national council to treat elective abortion for pastors and dependents as a reimbursable medical expense under the church health plan. From the abortion statement, the church said to value my baptism as an infant regards my conception by step-siblings as a morally justifiable reason for terminating the pregnancy that became me at the baptismal font. From the schedule of benefits by the health plan, had my birth-parents in any way been covered under the ELCA health plan, my church would have paid to do it.

Comments such as these, the recent Supreme Court decision, and Bishop Eaton’s communications invite us to explore more fully what the 1991 social statement on abortion really says in its fullness. In fairness, documents such as this touch on a variety of issues and make several assertions. Nevertheless, one must ask whether Bishop Eaton’s comments about the statement accurately reflect the spirit of the document.

Reviewing Bishop Eaton’s Communications

On May 30, 2019, Bishop Eaton issued a communication in response to various attempts by states “to restrict access to legal abortion,” in which she invited her readers to revisit the ELCA social statement on

abortion. In the first incarnation of this message, she stated that “this church seeks to travel a moderating path by supporting abortion as a last resort for pregnancies that are unsafe or a result of rape or incest.” This is a fairly accurate summary of what the ELCA statement says. Not long after this communication went public, however, she issued a revised statement, nearly identical, but which omitted the words “for pregnancies that are unsafe or a result of rape or incest.”

In response to the leaked draft of *Dobbs* in May of 2022, she issued further comments about abortion, including many references to the 1991 social statement. She claimed that the content of the draft opinion “contradicts the church’s teaching” and that the 1991 statement affirms that “abortion must be legal, regulated and accessible.”

Finally, after the actual opinion, which does not differ significantly from the draft, was released in June of 2022, Bishop Eaton emphasized again that the ELCA’s position is that “the practice (of abortion) should be legal” in spite of “deep concern” over the number of induced abortions. Further, she expressed her concern that “Overturning *Roe v. Wade* and placing decisions about abortion regulation at the state level encumbers and endangers the lives of all persons who need to make decisions about unexpected pregnancies.”

What the Statement Says

How does one effectively summarize the content of a ten-page statement, especially one that seeks a nuanced approach to a difficult moral issue? This is a challenging task, to be sure, and Bishop Eaton does communicate some truth in the parts of the statement that she cites. In her communications, she quotes liberally from the 1991 social statement. Yet there are many things in this statement that she overlooks and in at least one case even misrepresents.

Before addressing the issue of the legality of abortion, it is important to note this statement’s expression of the value of unborn life: “Human life in all phases of its development is God-given and, therefore, has intrinsic value, worth, and dignity. Guided by God’s Law, which orders and preserves life, human beings are called to respect and care for the life that God gives.” It goes on to state that “We mourn the loss of life (through abortion) that God has created” and that “The strong Christian presumption is to preserve and protect life. Abortion ought to be an option only of last resort.” As a consequence of this commitment to preserve and protect life, the statement declares that the ELCA “in most circumstances, encourages women with unintended

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pregnancies to continue the pregnancy.”

The social statement on abortion does speak of certain situations where it can be “morally responsible” for a woman to obtain an abortion, such as in cases of rape, incest, or extreme fetal abnormality. Even so, however, the ELCA “opposes ending intrauterine life when a fetus is developed enough to live outside a uterus with the aid of reasonable and necessary technology.”

While the social statement seeks to balance the importance of the life of an unborn child and the life of the woman bearing that child, it clearly states that “government has a legitimate role in regulating abortion.” In fact, it states that the ELCA opposes “the total lack of regulation of abortion.” To be sure, it also opposes “legislation that would outlaw abortion in all circumstances” and laws that “deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions.”

This all leads, however, to a concluding paragraph about the regulation of abortion, which reads as follows:

The position of this church is that, in cases where the life of the mother is threatened, where pregnancy results from rape or incest, or where the embryo or fetus has lethal abnormalities incompatible with life, abortion prior to viability should not be prohibited by law or by lack of public funding of abortions for low income women. On the other hand, this church supports legislation that prohibits abortions that are performed after the fetus is determined to be viable, except when the mother’s life is threatened or when lethal abnormalities indicate the prospective newborn will die very soon.

Beyond these situations, this church neither supports nor opposes laws prohibiting abortion.

I suspect that many would be surprised to know that the ELCA social statement on abortion directly opposes abortion after viability and even supports legislation that prohibits abortion after viability, only considering abortion “morally responsible” in the difficult circumstances above. Bishop Eaton’s assertion that abortion must be “legal, regulated and accessible” can only be responsibly read to apply to these difficult circumstances of saving the life of the mother, rape, incest, and embryonic or fetal abnormalities incompatible with life. Similarly, if the *Dobbs* opinion “contradicts the church’s teaching” as she claims, it would only do so if individual states enact laws that

prohibit abortion in these difficult circumstances.

Getting to the Root of the Matter

As mentioned, the 1991 social statement touches on many other important issues involved in the abortion debate, such as supporting pregnant women in their needs, encouraging adoption and foster care, the use of contraceptives, and encouraging congregations to be places of hospitality for women facing difficult circumstances. But the foundational issue for our society in its discussion of abortion is the very thing that leads to the perceived need for abortion: sexual intercourse and its appropriate context.

It might also surprise readers of the statement to learn that the ELCA states the following: “Marriage is the appropriate context for sexual intercourse. This continues to be the position of this church.” Moreover, it affirms that congregations and church schools should emphasize values such as “abstinence from sexual intercourse outside marriage” and that “young men and young women be taught to exercise their sexuality responsibly.”

Clearly, the authors of the 1991 ELCA social statement on abortion recognized the challenges posed by a society that had by then begun to face the shockwaves created by the sexual revolution. The over three decades since 1991 have seen even further movement away from the vision that marriage is the appropriate context for sexual intercourse. Sex is most often portrayed in entertainment media as an inevitable part of taking a relationship to another level and most always as purely a part of adult fulfillment and pleasure, detached from concern for procreation. Any life created by these sexual encounters is viewed as an inconvenience and unfortunate consequence.

I encourage ELCA leadership to study this social statement on abortion and to take seriously what it actually says. I also encourage other Lutherans to do so. There are some aspects of this statement with which I and others disagree, but there are many things in this statement worthy of our consideration and affirmation. Significantly, if our society is to address the crisis of abortion, we must not only address the desire for abortion as it arises. We must address the underlying issue and lift up the call of God for sex to be used responsibly, between a man and a woman who are married and committed to nurturing life created by that loving union. Regardless of what Lutheran church bodies we are members, the ELCA social statement on abortion can be an encouragement to us in lifting up that important vision.

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our religion, nationality, or language. (Luke 10:25-37) Not only violence, but harsh rhetoric and “crude polemics” are a violation of the Law, namely the 8th Commandment. Therefore, it is correct to reject the harsh polemics of the past, even when they come from Martin Luther himself.

Perhaps this is one place where Lutheran clichés have been abused. We are to distinguish Law from Gospel, and Creation from Redemption and Sanctification. However, we are not to separate them. It is possible to become so focused on preaching the Gospel of salvation and the need for redemption that we forget that we still live within this world. We have no right to abandon the Law in its first

use, to fail to care for Creation, to neglect our families, communities, nations and world. Instead, we are called to do good works that benefit our neighbors in our various vocations within the world. In the words of the second offertory prayer in the LBW, we are to “dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that [God has] made,” not merely to the redemption of all things. Just as the separation of Old and New Testaments has led to many evils within the Church, the same can be said about the separation of Law and Gospel and the separation of the article on Creation from those of Redemption and Sanctification. We are not “Unitarians of the Second Article.” We are Trinitarians. We cannot neglect the Law and the First Article.

The greatest problem with the [Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community](#) comes about when it attempts to talk about repentance and the Gospel. For instance, in the first paragraph the Declaration says:

As people who know that we live by the grace and in the sight of the one, almighty and merciful God, we have confidence that our engagement will result in mutual learning, growth, and enrichment.

That is a vague statement at best. What is this grace about which the Declaration speaks? Is it the grace of creation or the grace of redemption in Jesus Christ? It's important for us to know. To which God does the Declaration refer? A Muslim might suspect that the ELCA is attempting to get him to

affirm the Trinity and salvation in Christ by sleight of hand. On the other hand, a Christian might conclude that the ELCA is avoiding a clear confession of its faith in Jesus Christ in order not to cause offense. She might further wonder whether such an avoidance actually constitutes a denial of salvation through Christ alone.

Later, in the fifth chapter, the Declaration promises to:

“confess when our words or deeds (or lack thereof) cause offense, harm, or violence to our neighbors” and to “repent and seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation with our neighbors.”

The same problem arises as above. Is this a subtle attempt to coopt our Muslim neighbors into a confession of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus Christ? Is it a subtle denial that forgiveness from God and true reconciliation with our neighbors is available only through Jesus Christ? This ambivalence can easily cause offense to Muslims and Christians.

What's missing, in other words, is any attempt to address the Elephant in the Room. Christians and Muslims are divided over the question of who Jesus of Nazareth is. They are also divided over the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians can find common ground with Muslims under the first use of the Law and under the article on Creation. It is the Gospel and the Second and Third Articles that divide us. How do we live together in a way that asks neither Christians nor Muslims to sacrifice the integrity of their faiths? Neither orthodox Christians, nor orthodox Muslims, are willing to settle for a vague universalism. My hope is that the ELCA is not willing to settle for that either. Doing a better job of making important distinctions (but not separations) would have helped this Declaration a great deal.

¹ Jenson, Robert W. *Lutheran Slogans, Use and Abuse*. American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2011

² "[A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Muslim Community](#)"

The Equality Act

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tions for what churches can do. In addition it presents religious, legal, and moral arguments against the Equality Act.

The second is the "[Protecting Your Ministry from Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Lawsuits](#)" guide jointly released by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and Alliance Defending Freedom. This document specifically concerns protecting churches from lawsuits. At this time, the guide has yet to be updated to reflect the Equality Act, but it is useful in drawing attention to the sorts of things which churches will have to worry about, now and into the future, as lawsuits regarding LGBTQ concerns arise.

I am reminded of how Jesus said in Matthew 10: 16, "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." We certainly are living and doing ministry in the midst of wolves. May we be what Jesus has called and empowered us to be.

How 'City Mission' Was Born, Part 1: Katrina, ...

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dream or imagine! Back in March of 2014, I'm extremely grateful that I cried out, "Now What?!" to my most important confidant, and that I listened to her inspired words, "*Why don't you 'do that thing' you wrote how about back in 2006?*" So, here is 'that thing' that I wrote about over sixteen years ago:

Many thought-provoking questions were raised during a church leadership conference I attended in January of 2006. But there was one significant question put before the group that remained unanswered: "What will it take to get those who are embedded in the so-called Institutional Church to fully understand the urgent need to be about mission, here and now?" For me, this question triggered many more questions—"Where are the resources that can be released immediately to those who need them?" and "Where is the sense of urgency to touch the heart of the poor—those whose lives have been shattered—and to receive their touch?" and, more pressing, "*What will it take to awaken the sleeping giant, known as*

the Church?" Though words were not spoken, my gut stirred with a response, "It will take another Hurricane Katrina." I present this article not as an answer but as a soulful wrestling. Let me explain.

A Perfect Storm Changes Everything in its Wake

On August 29, 2005, a Category 4 hurricane named Katrina forever altered the landscape of the Gulf Coast. There had been other immensely powerful storms in the past, but Katrina was different. It radically reformed the terrain from what it had been for hundreds of years into thousands upon thousands of acres of complete and utter devastation. The destruction was apparent in ways small and large—from children's dolls and other signs of innocent and precious life wedged high in treetops, to the giant floating casinos washed up on shore. You may have read the storylines or seen footage of the aftermath, much of which looked like a war zone, or a scene from a post-nuclear bomb drop. The climatic conditions were just right for the perfect storm, leaving in its wake a coastline that will never be the same.

It was Thanksgiving week, just three months after Katrina hit, when my wife, our three oldest kids, and I headed to Biloxi, Mississippi. Quite frankly, our decision to head south came as a visceral response to an invitation we had received just a few weeks before. Like some of you, we had seen the footage of the storm's destruction, but nothing had prepared us for what we would experience firsthand. Hurricane Katrina approached the Gulf Coast, then stubbornly sat and churned for 18 hours, mercilessly redefining the landscape in apocalyptic ways, forever altering miles of coastline and either completely annihilating or severely impacting dozens upon dozens of communities.

We spent three days in the East Biloxi area. Our last day was Thanksgiving morning. We spent those privileged hours helping to gut the rear interior of Norman and Patricia's home. The scarce and mold-infested remnants of their belongings were carefully piled under a large plastic tent in their backyard. Norman was obviously still reeling in the aftermath of the storm. As he eventually explained: "Because we'd been through so many storms we decided to stay; besides, we heard on the news that the center of the storm was going to hit New Orleans. You know, if you leave, they come in by the truckloads and steal everything in sight, so we stayed."

He shared much through his storm-shocked yet

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resolute demeanor. He had awakened the morning after Katrina hit to a power outage ... the dead calm of Katrina’s eye ... and then more of the 150+mile/hour winds slammed into his home as the far side of the storm’s eyewall hit Biloxi. And then the water ... his own mother floating on a sheet of plywood tied to cables for 12 hours ... his wife and two children up in the attic for eight hours, the water continually rising ... and then the 28-foot storm surge ... 40 of his friends and neighbors killed. And so the stories went. Later in the morning, I noticed a few boxes of collector’s cards (mostly sports-related) and I asked Norman about them. He told me that card collecting had been his hobby since he was a boy and that he had had literally thousands of cards. In fact, three months after the storm, “you could still walk about anywhere along the beach or in the neighborhood and you’ll find one of my cards,” Norman said. His many cherished and scattered cards are an apt metaphor to describe the reality of so many innocent lives forever changed ... blown away ... torn and scattered.

A New Way of Seeing

It’s been nearly 17 years since our first visit. Our second trip came during Holy Week of 2006. Our third hurricane relief effort was tentatively set for April of 2007 with the hope of broadening the base of interest and participation. The truth is that once you’ve been down, the sights and sounds and smells and stories get in your belly. And they never leave you the same. I suppose this is called compassion. Compassion seems to be that thing which drives our mission, which allows us the privilege to participate in events much larger than ourselves and our own worlds. At a time when our own family was in the midst of major transition, the trip to Mississippi flipped our lives upside down and inside out and reprioritized our living in big ways. We have been blessed and given new perspective through these experiences. Certainly the few days we’ve spent in Mississippi have reformed our lives permanently.

But since our first visit, a question has slowly surfaced: Is it necessary to head south to do the work of the Church? Of course not, but because these experiences have given my family a different perspective—with new eyes—our answer has been Yes. But new eyes for what? Because of Katrina we see more clearly what is in our own backyard, under our own

large plastic tent. We live in Mt. Airy, Maryland, just 40 minutes from Baltimore and 55 minutes from Washington, D.C. Now that we’ve “seen” the intense suffering of the residents of the Gulf Coast, we’re no longer able to so easily overlook those who recurrently struggle with the effects of poverty and crime. How can bridges be built between where I live in the artificial comfort of suburbia and the complex challenges of these cities? In the life of my family, and in many lives of faithful Christians who have attended to the needs of those struggling in Katrina’s wake, the storm has become a reformer of sorts. Unsought, unwelcomed, but a powerful force in changing our lives and what it means for us to be the Church. *Katrina has become “an unwelcomed reformer.”*

Luther: Another Unwelcomed Reformer

There has been another. On October 31, 1517, a different sort of storm blew through Northern Europe. On that day, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses upon the north door of the Castle Church and forever altered the ecclesiastical, political, and spiritual landscape of the world. He has been compared to a “bull in a china shop” and even a “wild boar invading the Lord’s vineyard.” Like Katrina, he was unsought and unwelcomed. But the conditions in the Church (and the surrounding culture) were just right for his perfect storm, and the Church has never been the same. Reform truly is a messy and costly affair. Could it be that though Katrina destroyed so much in the lives of those who live in the Gulf Coast region, in her wake the Church is discovering anew how to be the Church? Katrina redefined the lives of those who live in the Gulf Coast, but has she also reformed the way Church is Christ to those in need? In short, has Katrina (like Luther before her) brought out the best of the Church?

It’s been said of Biloxi—and I imagine the whole region—that if it weren’t for the incredible and ongoing work of the Church, and other volunteer organizations, the region would be entirely lost. The Church has responded and continues to respond out of its core. And through Christ, the impossible becomes possible ... and new (Revelation 21:5). During any given crisis, the Church so often shines as that radiant Bride spoken of later in verse 9—I wonder why?

I believe there have been significant lessons given to us through Katrina, lessons that should be transferable to any time and place. How about the Katrinas that have blown through our own inner cities?

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The Katrinas that have destroyed the settled peace in our own backyards—what are we trying to protect under our plastic tents? When a Katrina hits, the playing field is leveled. All of our props, scaffolding, programs, assumptions, plans, neatly planned budgets, and designated line items are swept unto oblivion, like Norman's baseball cards. What happens when that which was of penultimate concern is now no longer a concern because it does not exist? When all is stripped away, what does the Church look like?

Why Does it take a Storm to Awaken Us?

Unfortunately, it seems to take a Katrina to awaken the Church to be all she was meant to be. Whole cities are being lost because the Church is waiting for the next big crisis instead of looking just around the corner at the terrible daily suffering and grinding destitution in our inner cities. And the painful irony is that it seems that just up the street another church is closing its doors, sitting on a huge memorial fund but not able to move forward and be the Church! Surely Christ—and those witnesses who have gone before us—are weeping from the place of heaven as one "well-established" church sits on its untapped resources while another small but viable church the next block over is withering away because of lack of monies. Just when the world desperately needs the Church, it is asleep. Worse, sometimes it is found defiant and turning its back on the world.

Lord, move us beyond our places of comfort. Help us not to play Church but be the Church!

Lord, help us get our eyes off the Church and on to the brokenhearted and to the base of our mission ... the purpose of our existence. Lord, motivate us not to attend to our programs but to Your people ... let nothing keep our hearts from breaking as we peer into the eyes of the people You love, the Normans of the world who have been through the storm. Help us let Katrina reform Your Church as Luther did over 500 years ago. Help us read the theses Katrina posted for us on the shattered remains of houses in New Orleans, Biloxi, and countless other communities along the Gulf Coast. And help us read the theses posted for us on the vandalized and graffiti-covered doors of shuttered inner-city tenements and storefronts. Help those of us in suburbia who are

shuttered into our desperate worlds of materialism and busyness.

During our first trip to Biloxi, we stayed at Bethel Lutheran Church, which had become a Lutheran Disaster Center overnight. As we approached the church building and grounds, it was immediately obvious that Bethel had been transformed into a M.A.S.H. unit: The front entry sidewalk became a drop-off for boxes of various supplies, the narthex became a health clinic, the pastoral offices became the "war room," the Sunday school rooms became sleeping dorms, the sacristy became storage for canned goods, the fellowship hall became the main dining area, the kitchen was still the kitchen, the worship space became overflow for sleeping quarters and supplies, the side yard became a place for shower stalls, and the parking lot became a mini-trailer park. And with all of that it continued to do its Sunday morning "Church thing." What an immense joy to witness the Church being the Church. And this was a small Church. BUT, this is the Church in all her glory, and it was repeated through hundreds of churches throughout the Gulf Coast.

Becoming the Body of Christ: His Hands and Feet

No doubt, through the paradoxical power of the cross, Katrina has redefined the Church in at least three arenas. These are some of the observations I was privileged to behold and hopefully learned from the Church in the Gulf Coast region:

- Petty differences don't render the Church passive, let alone immobilized. **There is now a visible and potent unity** stationed throughout the area;
- Because church facilities were being utilized to their fullest potential, the Church was able to **exist as a base of operation** sending forth groups and, thus, continually and consistently building bridges of compassion;
- And, similarly, there was a holy and vibrant chaos—A 24/7 movement from the base to the field. It served as a center to send forth individuals through teams in the name of Christ, an army of men and women and boys and girls, **offering the fullness of their giftedness on the chaotic edge** of adventure and living.

What (and/or Who?) is the Katrina in our midst, even now? Again, what happens when all the props are brought down and the playing field is leveled? Isn't it time for the Church to be transformed into one

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massive M.A.S.H. unit, no matter the time of day? Just imagine if every one of the 350,000+ churches scattered throughout our land became Church. It is time for the *Sleeping Giant*—for the Church—to rise. It is time for the Church to be the Church “while it is still day.” (John 9:4)

We brought a piece of Biloxi back home with us: A life reformed and even more sacred. I invite you to join us in this revolutionary movement ... Simply being His Church for such a time as this!

So, this reflection-observation piece is what I wrote in 2006 and became the basis for launching our first *City Mission* during Holy Week of 2014. Again, in Part 2 of this article, I will describe in detail how *City Mission* has grown into a multi-generational-denominational movement and impacted many hearts and minds for the sake of the Kingdom.

(Image: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center)

NEXUS 2022: Train Them ...

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confessionally minded, treasuring the Book of Concord and its content as a faithful exposition of the Scriptures, and you are dedicated to the Scriptures themselves and how the Church has always understood them, it's crucial to know to what you are



sending your youth. The NEXUS Institute is a wonderful meeting point for Lutheran youth. There certainly are others (LCMC Youth Gathering, LCMS Youth Gathering, Higher Things Youth Gatherings), but this one truly is a gift in the heartland of the U.S. It is a wise investment, for Lutheran CORE, for you, for the youth of the Church. As Jesus once said: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).



A Note From a College ...

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but weren't free to meet up until after I left Bologna. This was one of the most frustrating parts of the trip.

Another major difference was that there were no clubs at UB like the clubs at universities here in the U.S. This was a challenge to ministry as well. When talking to students I couldn't present Agape Studenti as a club with weekly meetings at a designated time and place. The students would see that as a very strange thing. In fact, Agape Studenti doesn't have weekly meetings at UB. They did in past years, but the staff decided to drop the weekly meetings because of low attendance. Because the idea of a club is so foreign, students at UB prioritize hanging out with friends over weekly meetings with an organization at a designated time. Now, the staff meets with students one-on-one to read the Bible together.

Although I'm more comfortable with the American style of campus ministry, I had to adapt to the culture. When doing ministry in the United States, I prioritized getting students involved in weekly Bible studies. In Italy, I had to focus on being friends with students whom I met, telling them about how my faith in Jesus has changed my life, and introducing them to an Agape staff member.

The difference which was most relevant to ministry was the extremely low number of practicing religious adherents of any kind. As a group, we met around 300 students and had spiritual conversations with around 200 students whom we didn't meet through Agape Studenti. To my knowledge, none of those people consistently attended a worship service, mass, mosque, or synagogue. We did meet one Italian student who considered himself an evangelical Christian and grasped the concept of salvation by grace through faith only, not by works. We met another two to five students (forgive me for not knowing exact numbers, as it was hard for me to keep track of the students contacted by other members of my group) who could be considered practicing Roman Catholics because they attended mass a few times a year. We met three to six students from other countries, or whose parents were from another country, who considered themselves either Protestant Christians or Eastern Orthodox Christians. One of these students was already involved in Agape Studenti. The rest were not involved in any Christian student organization or any local church. The majority of the students we met were Italian students who had been baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church but had not been to mass in years.

It may come as a surprise that Christian international students who come to Bologna don't make more of an effort to get involved in a Christian group. However, this makes more sense given that many of these students can't find a Christian group of any kind.

Although there are a few protestant churches on the outskirts of the city, there are only two in the center of the city, and both of these have fewer than 100 in attendance per Sunday. This is in a metropolitan area of around 1 million people and a city center of around 100,000 people.

In addition, to my knowledge, there is only one interdenominational Christian student organization at UB, Agape Studenti. I heard of a Catholic student organization, but this organization seemed to have a low presence on campus. Out of the 300 students whom we had conversations with outside of Agape events, we met only one who was an active member of any religious student organization (in his case, Agape Studenti). Given the extremely low presence of religious organizations on campus, it's easy to understand why Protestant Christian students coming to the University of Bologna don't know where to turn to find fellow believers. Part of my job was to find those students and get them involved in Agape.

In order to find interested students, we had to meet students. There was no easy method for meeting students; we just had to start conversations with strangers. One of the easiest places to start a conversation was in line to get food in the cafeteria. I always started with "Parla Inglese?" (Do you speak English?) To which they usually answered "Sì." I then asked what food I should get. After they answered that question, I introduced myself in the manner I explained in the first paragraph. When I met students in other places, I had to start with a different question, or just introduce myself and start talking. They were often confused at first about why an American started talking to them randomly, but they were willing to continue in conversation. They usually asked why I was in Bologna, which gave me an opportunity to explain a little about Agape, and possibly about my faith.

Telling students about my faith in Jesus wasn't always easy. At some point in the first conversation, I usually got a chance to ask students about their religious beliefs. I only met two students who didn't believe in any god at all. Most students said they believed in a God but didn't see any point in practicing the religion they had grown up practicing. They had gone to mass regularly as a child, but the ritual prayers there felt meaningless. The idea of a personal re-

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relationship with God was a mostly foreign idea to them. The message of the Catholic Church was that a personal relationship with God comes through regular attendance of mass. Because Italian students did not feel any joy or connection to God through this participation, they usually stopped participating after confirmation.

By the time I met them, they usually felt resentment towards the Catholic Church for various reasons often having to do with positions on sexuality. They had very little knowledge of the Bible, but what they did know tended to follow a pattern: Jesus taught good morals, and the Old Testament has scientifically incorrect teachings and defunct morals. This was usually a good avenue for me to share what I believe about the Old Testament – it shows the brokenness of humanity and points to a coming savior – and the New Testament – Jesus is the savior of all who repent and believe in him. These concepts were mostly foreign to Italian students. A few times I asked what they had been taught in confirmation class. None of them could remember.

Through the difficulties of having to share my faith day after day to new people who didn't understand it, a passage which guided me and gave me encouragement was the story of the woman at the well in John chapter 4. Jesus started his conversation with the woman with a simple command, "Give me a drink." The woman questioned why Jesus would talk to a Samaritan such as herself. When Jesus says he has what she needs for eternal life, she seems to miss the point and is instead interested in finding a way to avoid coming to the well again. When Jesus shows her that he knows her past, she realizes he is a prophet.

However, she is determined to create a division between herself and Jesus. She says, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." She creates a division between "my people" and "your people" with her words, and she points out a difference between them that was not even relevant to what Jesus was talking about. However, Jesus is unfazed. He says the truth of why he came, and how she can have a personal relationship with God. Three times the woman pointed out the divisions between their societies, but Jesus focused on how to *end* the division between herself and God.

I found myself in similar situations often. I wanted to tell students about the Living Water, Jesus

Christ. When I brought up my faith in Jesus, they brought up the hottest topics of the day which divided us, usually having to do with homosexuality, or the Catholic Church being hypocritical in some way. When they found out I was American, they wanted to hear my opinion on the most recent American news, of which there was always too much. I learned to not get wrapped up in politics, or get defensive, but focus on the task at hand. After the woman at the well tried to create a division, she realized what Jesus' true message was. She went to the town to spread the news of what Jesus had done for her. I tried to do the same. I have access to many resources, and I know my Bible well. However, I try to keep my initial message simple when talking to students: look at what Jesus has done for me.

At the beginning of the trip, we decided as a group that if even one person accepts Jesus as their savior as a result of our mission, our mission would be a success. It seemed like a good goal at the time, but now I view the mission differently.

According to statistics we kept during the mission, we initiated conversations with 372 different people (not all of whom were students). This doesn't count people we met at Agape events who were previously involved in Agape. We had 270 spiritual conversations with students (conversations with the same person at different times were counted separately). We presented the gospel 63 times.

We saw zero decisions for Christ. Even though we didn't have any decisions for Christ while we were there, I still saw evidence of God's working in the lives of the students we met. We connected several Protestant Christian students to Agape, giving them a safe place to profess their faith in Jesus and giving them a resource to help them spread that faith to others. In addition, our final Sunday in Bologna, two UB students attended church with us at a local Protestant church.

On a separate occasion, one of the students I met bought a Bible and read all of Genesis in five days. He told me it was beautiful. Over the course of the trip, I had several students express interest in getting together to read the Bible with me.

Our final week in Bologna, Agape hosted an event to which we invited all of the friends we made during the mission. At the event we discussed the meaning of love, focusing on its meaning in John 3:16 and John 13:34. Around 25 UB students attended, and they were all introduced to at least one Agape staff member. Earlier in the trip, we had several previously agnostic students show a genuine deep interest in our message of salvation through Jesus.

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The Society of the Holy Trinity

25th Anniversary General Chapter Retreat

The [Society of the Holy Trinity](#) is a pan-Lutheran ministerium of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament who subscribe to our Rule and who seek, in and through their vocations, to grow ever closer to Christ. By participating in retreats with others in their local chapters, through the daily prayer of the Church (the Divine Office), through regular confession of sin and the receiving of absolution, we strive to live a life of obedience to Jesus.

The Society was founded in 1997 when 26 pastors, gathered in retreat, affirmed our Rule and subscribed to it. Today, some 185 pastors are members of the Society representing a range of Lutheran traditions from Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), and some six or seven other smaller Lutheran bodies. The Society recognizes that there are many differences between our ecclesial bodies, but our role is not to resolve those differences but, rather, to concentrate on our common understanding of the Office of Ministry as that which is a gift from God for the sake of the whole Church. (CA.5)

Given our founding in 1997, this year of Our Lord 2022, will be celebrated as the 25th anniversary of the Society. Each year we have gathered for our General Chapter retreat which, in recent years, has been held at St. Mary of the Lake conference and retreat center (on the grounds of the University and Seminary) in Mundelein, outside Chicago. There, some 200 plus of our members and others will gather in retreat to pray the Divine Office, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, have the opportunity for Confession and learn from our teaching theologians.

The theme for this anniversary year is “Evangelical Catholicism in the Rule of the Society of the Holy Trinity.” To address this theme, we have three speakers – Father John Baldovin SJ, Ph.D. who teaches theology and liturgics at Boston College who will

speak to “The Genius of Catholicity;” Dr. Melanie Ross who teaches at Yale, who will speak on “The Genius of Evangelicalism;” and The Reverend Dr. Kent Burreson who teaches at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis who will speak on “Lutheranism as an expression of Evangelical Catholicity.”

There will also be a special anniversary dinner this year at which the Reverend Dr. Richard Johnson STS will be our keynote speaker. Some may know Richard as the editor of Forum Letter published by ALPB, but Richard has also served as a parish pastor and adjunct faculty in Church history at Fuller Seminary.

You do not have to be a member of the Society to attend the General Chapter nor even an ordained person. Guests are always welcome. So, if you are interested in joining us from September 20-22 for what promises to be a wonderful retreat and gathering, please contact our Secretary Pr. Pari Bailey at revsbailey@redred.com.

In our common life and service

The Rev'd Patrick J. Rooney STS

Senior of the Society of the Holy Trinity



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However, I do not consider the trip a success for these reasons.

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” Back in November, I realized God wanted me to go to Italy this summer. Because I love God, I trust He is working for good in ways I can see and in ways I can’t. Therefore, I consider the trip a success.

The ABC's of Lutheranism Video Series

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



Wanting to expand our video ministry and increase the number and scope of resources that we offer, we are now developing another series of videos which will answer the question, What is the core of the Christian faith that we as confessional Lutherans want to maintain, preserve, hold on to, and pass on? Many thanks to the Lutheran pastors and theologians who will be making these videos, which will deal with such topics as, Is Jesus the only way to heaven?, How to read and understand the Bible, and What does it mean to be confessional? Each video, which will explore some area of Christian faith and life, will be about half an hour in length.

The first of these videos will be available soon. They will be posted as soon as they are ready. Each month we will be featuring one of them in our monthly publications and various forms of social media.

Coming Events

- **LCMC Youth Event** - Des Moines, IA - July 19-22, 2022. Click [here](#) to register.
- **2022 NALC Convocation** - Online - August 5, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **ELCA Churchwide Assembly** - August 8-13, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 22nd Annual Gathering & Convention**—Lakeville, MN—October 2-5, 2022. Click [here](#).

More events: <http://lutherancore.website/events/future/>

Video Book Review — “The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience”

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 Dr. Paul Hinlicky, professor emeritus at Roanoke College in Roanoke, Virginia, for giving us a review of Simeon Zahl’s book, [The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience](#).

Prior to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, during the early years of Reformation theology, part of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer was seen to be the giving of a new heart, new emotions, a change in one’s desires. This book helps regain that emphasis. Faith is not just a matter of intellectual conviction. It is also something that strikes home for us personally. It changes us and what we love.

Grace can be an abstraction – simply the idea that God is merciful and loving. Instead grace needs to be and can be a concrete experience of the merciful Jesus Christ, who finds His way into our hearts through the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit.



[This](#) review, as well as twenty others, have been posted on our YouTube channel. A link to the channel can be found [here](#).

CORE Voice Newsletter

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[Kim Smith](#), Editor

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