

Lutheran Coalition for Renewal **CORE Voice** **A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans**

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Igniting Renewal Through Mission

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



***Editor's Note:** K. Craig Moorman is an NALC pastor of River's Edge Ministries in Maryland. Pr. Moorman encourages you to read Part 1 of his article as background for Part 2. Click [here](#) to read Part 1 which was published in July of 2022.*

Amid our first *City Mission* in April of 2014, the temperature dropped dramatically and unexpectedly to a bone-chilling 19°. Our base of operations was a 30' x 50' tent—we were *not* in the comfort, warmth, and familiarity of a church setting. This is how *City Mission* was born. It was an important moment of discovery, more of a blessed eureka moment, when we stumbled upon a basic truth: *Renewal is ignited through mission*. Now I am inviting you to engage in a missional experience that could reinvigorate the life of your congregation and bring *you* a season of refreshment and renewal.

Although I'm sharing a first-hand account of one such experience, *City Mission*, many of you have also been immersed into the mission field. You might recall how it revealed the heart of Jesus and His Gospel, a face-to-face encounter with the Cross. Oftentimes, there is a severe shaking from the core of our being when a reprioritization of our living takes place—new Christ-centered values emerge, a greater hope is gained, and renewal of body, heart, mind, and soul settles in.

These past two and a half years of navigating through a global pandemic and utter cultural turmoil have diminished our emotional

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Highlights of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly

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



NO MENTION OF JESUS OR GOD

[Here](#) is a link to the ELCA's description of the Highlights of its own recent Churchwide Assembly. Please notice. Two words are conspicuously absent – the words “Jesus” and “God.”

One would think that a church body that is holding its triennial, several-day assembly would consider some mention of Jesus and/or God in its Highlights, but not the ELCA. I have read the Highlights three times, but have found no mention of either.

This is even worse than the ELCA's own Summary of Actions from its 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Again, that summary makes no mention of Jesus, but it does make one mention of God, when it says that we are all created equal in the eyes of God.

In the summary of the 2022 assembly there is mention of greenhouse gases, D. C. statehood, diversity, equity, and inclusion, but no mention of Jesus or God. It is only a matter of time until the ELCA will bear little if any resemblance to a Christian church.

UPDATED UNDERSTANDING

In my August letter from the director I expressed my concern that the 1991 social statement on abortion (which is more conservative than what most in the ELCA would want) could be gotten rid of through archiving. Actions taken by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly included archiving several social policy resolutions, including a couple related to the issue of abortion. I knew that it was social policy resolutions (not a social statement) that were archived at the 2022 CWA, but I was concerned that since the 1991 abortion social statement takes a similar position to the social policy resolutions that were archived in 2022, what would prevent the social statement from being archived in 2025? It is good to

know that a social statement which is more conservative than the preferred and prevailing position within the ELCA today cannot just be gotten rid of through archiving.

Invitation to Memorial Banquet



On October 1, 2022, from 1-5 pm the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau ([ALPB](#)) will remember long-time treasurer Dorothy Zelenko with a memorial banquet at JC Fogarty's, 60 Kraft Ave. Bronxville, NY. Fogarty's is within walking distance of the

Bronxville Metro-North stop.

The Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor, Pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church in the Bronx, and First Vice-President of the Atlantic District, will be our event speaker as we remember Dorothy and honor the pioneering work that she and Fred Schumacher did in bringing to fruition *For All the Saints*.

The menu will include appetizers, salad, a choice of chicken marsala, salmon, sliced steak, choice of apple pie, or ice cream, cash bar. The price is \$30.



Please make your reservation by calling Donna Roche at 607-746-7511.

A copy of an obituary written by Pr. Frederick Schumacher can be found [here](#).

Coming Events

- **LCMC 22nd Annual Gathering & Convention**—Lakeville, MN—October 2-5, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **Encuentro 2022**—Chicago, IL—October 15, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **2023 Pastor's Conference**—San Antonio, TX—January 31– February 2, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **NEXUS 2023**—Des Moines, IA—July 16-22, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Lutheran Week 2023**—Oklahoma City, OK—August 7-11, 2023. Click [here](#).

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

No Acceptance of Confessional Faith at My ELCA Seminary

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

Note from CORE's Executive Director: Many thanks to a seminarian for writing about what it was like to attend an ELCA seminary. Students considering enrolling in an ELCA seminary, as well as members of orthodox congregations still in the ELCA, need to know what is being taught and what they can expect from their future pastor. Will this kind of woke educational experience train someone who will provide good pastoral care and leadership for your congregation? Those who believe that theologically solid pastors are and will continue to be available within the ELCA should know that there are some (Thanks to be God!) but the number is decreasingly rapidly.

I attended United Lutheran Seminary (United), in Gettysburg, for 3 semesters. My time there led me to realize that there was no place for a confessional Lutheran faith within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Growing up in central Pennsylvania, I knew nothing of the other Lutheran denominations. Every Lutheran church within an hour of my house was ELCA and that was all I knew. Upon entering seminary, I was assured by my synod's bishop that there was a place for a confessional Lutheran in the "big-tent," that is the ELCA.

United did not share this view and I realized this in my first semester, when I began questioning the "sacred doctrines" of the ELCA that were invented in the last 10 years. My first semester I took the class Systematic Theology 1: Creation, Sin, and New Creation, which I thought would provide me with a greater understanding of the ELCA's newly held positions as well as a basic overview of theological concepts and systematics. I hoped that it would answer some of my questions and strengthen my ability to conduct ministry faithfully. I was disappointed to find that much of the class was heavily focused on womanist, feminist, and other niche and modern theological interpretation rather than core or confessional concepts. This was the only theology class that I was required to take. This lack of true theological instruction allows seminarians to believe they understood yet have made strawmen of a Biblical Christianity. Much of what the Church held for the last 2000 years could be dismissed as "privileged," "racist," or "sexist."

My first (and only) sermon I gave at United was for my homiletics class. I was assigned to preach on the first week of Lent, which includes the Gospel reading of Christ being tempted in the wilderness. In my sermon I mentioned, not as the message of the sermon but to highlight the goodness of Christ, that



hell was real. I felt relatively proud of my sermon while giving it. Given that it was my first sermon, it could have been better, but I stand by my message today. It shocked me when my homiletics professor opened my sermon up for critique and she implied that I shared a heretical message. I did not realize that the acknowledgement of hell was such a faux pas. After my professor shared that I was a heretic, much of my peers' remarks echoed her idea. I called my parents as well as a mentor that evening and shared that I wanted to leave seminary because apparently, I did not understand anything about the faith.

Getting raked over the coals for believing that Christ was not lying when He spoke of hell was the straw that broke me. I realized that I could not stay at United, and I would not be welcome in the ELCA, if this is where the publicly acceptable discourse is.

Some of the common talking points that the professors would push in a variety of their classes include: using non-masculine pronouns for God, the merits of a variety of sexual relationships, how the church has been a force for bad in the world, and leftist political talking points. It is a shame that there could not be serious theological discussions concerning these topics as to disagree with any point carried with it accusations of being "not-loving," among other unflattering titles, and being shut down by the professor.

When I told my synod's bishop about leaving the ELCA, I told her how I felt betrayed by a church that I grew up in and how I was lied to when I was told

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Encouraging and Improving Congregational Singing

by [Pr. Don Brandt](#), *Congregations in Transition*

First off, this is not an article about the relative merits of traditional and/or contemporary hymns and songs. So even if you suspect you might have a “chip on your shoulder” on that particular issue, you can calm down and read on. *This* article is about congregational singing regardless of whether your church sings traditional hymns; or contemporary Christian songs; or a blend of both. I want to focus on what is involved in facilitating quality congregational singing. In other words, what pastors and congregational leaders can do to encourage a high percentage of your members to actually participate and sing aloud during worship.

Before I get to some practical suggestions for improving congregational singing, it’s important to recognize two primary factors which tend to undermine congregational singing and decrease the percentage of worshipers who join in and actually participate.

A. The number of worshipers in attendance on any given Sunday. Now if you have more than one weekly service this issue is, obviously, about the number of worshipers attending at a given hour; not your cumulative, total attendance for your two (or more) services combined. Here’s the general rule related to your attendance at any one service: *The more worshipers present the more likely the majority will feel comfortable singing aloud. Conversely, the fewer worshipers, the more essential it is to facilitate singing when selecting and leading your hymns and songs.* And keep this in mind: It can be physically and mentally exhausting to sing aloud if you are one among a very small number of worshipers.

B. The median age of your worshipers is also an important factor. If a majority of those in attendance are over 65 to 70 years of age, this is an added challenge that should not be ignored, and one more reason you need to do all you can to facilitate and encourage congregational singing.

I suspect that, in many smaller and more elderly worshiping communities, the lack of participation in congregational singing is one factor—no doubt among others—directly leading to decreasing worship attendance over time.

So let me address this ministry challenge for a hypothetical Lutheran congregation that has one weekly service. This church—Grace Lutheran—has a worship attendance average of between 25 and 65. And the median age of their worshipers is between 55 and 70. And let’s assume that the acoustics in Grace Lutheran’s sanctuary, though not ideal, are ad-



equate.

Grace Lutheran’s pastor is Rev. Olsen. Now like most pastors, Rev. Olsen can indeed carry a tune. (In fact, like many pastors, the best experience Pastor Olsen ever had experiencing quality congregational singing was at seminary chapel services.) However, though he can indeed “carry a tune”, Rev. Olsen does not have a solo-quality voice and does not consider himself a songleader. More important, he has always considered hymns to be an integral part of worship; and is painfully aware of the poor quality of congregational singing at Grace. So Pastor Olsen starts searching online for articles about “Facilitating and Encouraging Congregational Singing in Smaller Churches”. *After exhaustive research, these were among the most helpful and practical suggestions he found for improving congregational singing at Grace.*

1. The majority of worship hymns and songs should be familiar “favorites” among your members. How was he going to discern which compositions fit this description? A survey, of course. And from the results of this “List Your Favorite Hymns and/or Christian Songs” survey Pastor Olsen came up with a “Top 40 (or 50)” list. Not that all worship songs on a given Sunday needed to be from this list. However, more often than not, Rev. Olsen made sure that at least one or two of the hymns at a weekly service was from the list of “favorites”. And when it came to hymn and song selection in general, Pastor Olsen learned the importance of avoiding hymns where the melody had a range of much more than one octave. (In other words, seven whole notes.) This is, he learned, especially important for older worshipers who are discovering that they can’t “reach the high

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Inter-Lutheran Hispanic-Latino Ministry Encuentro Returns October 15th

by [Pr. Keith Forni](#), STS, Encuentro Convener and former member of the Board of Lutheran CORE

After two consecutive pandemic cancellations, the Inter-Lutheran Hispanic-Latino Ministry Encuentro will take place again on Saturday, October 15th, 2022, 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. in Chicago's Hermosa Neighborhood, offering a day of learning, worship, resource sharing and fellowship at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, 2101 N. Kildare Avenue (at Dickens), on Chicago's northwest side. Free off-street parking is available.

Celebrating its 30th Anniversary, the Bilingual Ministry Resource Center (based in Joliet and Chicago) will co-sponsor the Encuentro with Lutheran CORE. A complimentary bilingual resource packet will be given to all participants. Resource materials in the packets are curated from a variety of suppliers, including Concordia Publishing House, Augsburg Fortress, American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, Liturgy Training Publications, Editorial Avance Luterana and others.

Returning as the day's presenter will be the Rev. Dr. Maxwell Johnson, ELCA pastor and professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. His highly regarded lectures and publications address sacramental theology, worship and liturgy. ***The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*** (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) and his subsequent lectures and articles have timely application at this time, given the recent impact of spiritual and cultural insensitivities of denominational leaders towards an ELCA Latino mission in Stockton CA.

Dr. Johnson will present two lectures at the Encuentro. The morning session is entitled **Reclaiming the Eucharist and the Great Thanksgiving in Contemporary Lutheran Worship**. Following a resource fair, lunch and mid-day prayer, an afternoon talk will be given: **The Virgin Mary in Liturgy, Doctrine and Life**. Ample time for responses and discussion will follow each presentation.

The Reverend Dennis Nelson of Scottsdale AZ, Director, will provide an update on the ministry of Lutheran CORE.

As in past years, the Encuentro will be valued by clergy and lay leaders with long years of experience in bilingual / bicultural contexts as well as by those exploring or recently entering this field of ministry. One-on-one Spanish liturgy read-throughs, avenues for evangelical outreach and resources for language



learning will be the focus of anticipated workshops. The 2022 Encuentro will conclude with 5:00pm Vespers with Prayers for Peace in the City. An optional dinner outing in the city will follow.

There is no cost for the Encuentro, as expenses are covered by a grant from Lutheran CORE and its member, hosting congregation, St. Timothy Lutheran Church - ELCA.

Registration is requested by October 4th. Contact Pr. Keith Forni, convener at keithlforni@gmail.com (815 600 3030) or Joel Awes, registrar, at joelawes123@yahoo.com (773 398 0564), 2101 N. Kildare Avenue, Chicago IL 60639. Lodging locations can be recommended.



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SIMUL: A New Academic Journal

by [Pr. Dennis DiMauro](#), NALC pastor and member of the Teaching Faculty at Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary

In the fall of 2021, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary launched a new academic Journal called *SIMUL*, and since that time its pages have featured articles by Bob Benne, Mark Granquist, Brad Hales, and many others.

But Why a New Journal?

When one looks at the landscape of Lutheran publications in the United States, there are many fine journals to choose from, including *Lutheran Forum*, *ProEcclesia*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, and *Logia*, just to name a few. So what makes *SIMUL* different?

1) It's free. Its readers pay nothing to read the articles or share them with friends. The last thing our pastors and laity need right now is to write another check to a theological journal. And so, they are quite proud of *SIMUL*'s availability without charge. But quite honestly, it does cost money to produce. So if you would like to make a contribution to the production of *SIMUL*, you can do so by going to our website at <https://semcl.org/support-st-paul-lutheran-seminary/>. But please do not feel obliged to do so, because just like the gospel, *SIMUL* is a free gift.

2) It's online. To keep *SIMUL* free, it is offered online only. *SIMUL* can be accessed on their website at <https://semcl.org/simul/> and on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/St-Paul-Lutheran-Seminary-139019069505467>. It is also accessible through their email list. If you would like to be added to that list, send your email address to dennisdimau-ro@yahoo.com.

3) It's readable. Let's face it - you probably subscribe to a few print journals and actually read only one or two articles from every issue. Then you throw that copy out, feeling a little guilty. No more! *SIMUL* is a quarterly journal, and they plan on including just four articles per issue. Therefore, *SIMUL* is a journal you will actually read from cover to cover every three months, and when you are done, there is no need to walk to the recycling bin.

4) It's academic, but it's written for the church. *SIMUL* is an academic journal, and it is written by academics. All four articles in its first issue were written by Lutheran scholars who hold PhDs. The articles you will read in *SIMUL* are going to adhere to the highest academic standards, and they will include endnotes so you can reference where the authors are getting their information. *But just because our*



articles are written by academics that doesn't mean you have to be an academic to understand them. *SIMUL* is going to be readable, but not just by academics, and not just by pastors, but also by our church members, the disciples who move the church forward. And that is their goal – not to simply look smart in front of other academics, but rather, to edify the church.

5) It is going to introduce you to St. Paul Lutheran Seminary. The summer of 2021 marked the tenth anniversary of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, which offers something very special to the church: an affordable education, available online, from a Lutheran perspective, by professors who also serve the church as pastors. So let's take a look at the history of the seminary.¹

St. Paul Lutheran Seminary

St. Paul Lutheran Seminary (SPLS) began with a simple premise in the summer of 2011: to provide churches with an easily accessible, high-quality confessional Lutheran education and resources for mission, with a goal of equipping servant leaders. SPLS uses a "Paul-Timothy" model for preparing ministry candidates. They utilize pastor/academics to educate and mentor men and women for Word and Sacrament ministry. And SPLS allows students to complete their studies online at one of their residential locations. They offer MDiv, a DMin, and a certificate programs, as well as our Kairos program in association with Sioux Falls Seminary. They currently have 39 students studying domestically and another 33 studying at our overseas locations in Ethiopia, as well as in Mexico and Nicaragua (both of which are offered entirely in Spanish). In addition, another 500 students are enrolled in a weekly lectionary study led by their founder and provost, Dr. Jim Nestingen, and 22 others participate in a short preaching course for those interested in providing pulpit supply. Along with Dr.

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capacity, made us more prone to discouragement and vulnerable to despair. And, if that's not enough, let's pile on the usual daily grind and throw in more critical personal matters, some unresolved and unattended to. All of this leads us not to "green pastures" and "still waters" but, instead, a *wanting* and a desperate longing for peace and a renewal by the Spirit.

Therefore, I humbly invite you to engage in Gospel-centered mission. My hope is that it will serve as an antidote for what is ailing each of us individually, our churches/communities, and even the nation. I believe making such a commitment and engaging in Christ's Kingdom work will be the catalyst for this reprioritization that I spoke of previously. It can move us out of our lethargy, pre-occupations and distractions, misappropriations, and missteps, etc. AND gently (and graciously) push us in the opposite direction. Might this be repentance? I believe *mission* can significantly help us to get unstuck and experience such a metamorphosis ... *renewal*! A calling back into the mission field will place us right at the foot of the cross, from death to resurrection. What a gift.

In my earlier article, "How 'City Mission' was Born, Part 1," I wrote of how *City Mission* developed from another missional outreach ministry called *Cross Country Mission*. You may remember that CORE is an acronym for (Lutheran) Coalition for Renewal and bringing elements of 'renewal' to the broader Lutheran community has long been a part of our vision. Practically speaking, I pray that this article will bring you personal renewal and help reignite your passion for mission and bring it back to the center of the conversation.

Again, amidst our first *City Mission* in April of 2014, the temperature dropped dramatically and unexpectedly to a bone-chilling 19 degrees. Our base of operations was a 30' x 50' tent—we were *not* in the comfort, warmth, and familiarity of a church setting. This is how it all began. It was cold, uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and a little chaotic. Believe me, it was neither perfectly planned *nor* executed! We have since unofficially adopted a guiding principle, "*Expect the unexpected ... and see what God does.*" This has been freeing on so many levels!

Later that same day and into the evening hours, after all our 50-60 participants/leaders retired for the night, either commuting back to their homes or to their scattered tents, Brother Ray and I moved back into the quiet of the big tent and sat down on a couple of bales of hay. I'll never forget my dear friend look-

ing up, with tears in his eyes and saying, "*It just doesn't get any better than this.*" There we were, both in our late fifties, tired, worn down, cold, etc., but completely content and at peace. And yet I couldn't help but wonder why Ray had spoken those words. I've been thinking about Ray's statement for the last eight years. Something miraculous had happened and Ray knew it but at the time could not articulate it.

But what was it—what made his statement true? In a nutshell I believe we witnessed the Church operating as Jesus intended. He gave us *a foretaste of the feast* to come.

In the following paragraphs I talk more about *City Mission* and what we have learned from each event. These 'take aways' have morphed into lessons learned that are the building blocks for how *City Mission* operates and lives out its mission. I believe these lessons are transferable to others pursuing and engaged in mission in other congregational settings.

First, since our original disaster relief mission to Biloxi, Mississippi (post-Hurricane Katrina), in November of 2005, it's been a priority of *River's Edge* to help those who have been through the storm, be it a hurricane, flood, tornado, human-generated catastrophe, or just the difficulties of life. Our initial efforts came through *Cross Country Mission* and then through *City Mission*. *City Mission* was designed to engage the local parish in its own back yard.

Our *City Mission* base of operations is a 14-acre landbase situated just 20 minutes from downtown Baltimore. I would describe it not so much as 'disaster relief' but 'urban relief' because it involves cleaning up trash and litter, building out construction-related projects, landscaping, clearing of land, painting, gardening, and preparing meals. Your base of operations may be in your church building/campus or elsewhere.

One benefit of *City Mission* is that little traveling is needed. We intentionally identify and engage in mission on a regular and more localized basis. Too, it's typically less costly and feels more like a camp, retreat, workshop, and worship gathering all rolled into one. Another unique characteristic of *City Mission* is that its 'success' does not depend solely on *River's Edge Ministries*, nor does it look just like our church. This is most obvious during the evenings as we gather a large group for a meal, fellowship, and

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worship. In that gathering, a multitude of individuals are involved in food planning/prep, music, and speaking/preaching. *This, then, is a gathering of the larger Church.*

Second, our ‘take aways,’ now reflecting our core values, enable us to remain faithful and effective in establishing a Kingdom-oriented, repeatable, missional experience called *City Mission*. Establishing, implementing, and fine-tuning the following three specific components has been critical in contributing to the development and effectiveness of *City Mission*:

1. **Networking with Local Community Organizations and Leaders**—We have been intentional in networking with community organizations and leaders who are based in the mission field we serve, thus reflecting a more authentic heart, mind and will of the community.

- One of the unexpected blessings of this decision is that it allowed us to work more interactively with many different groups/folks, crossing racial boundaries. This foundational core value has revealed the power and efficacy of working directly with those who already have ‘boots on the ground,’ moving us beyond the familiarity of just our building and resources to work cooperatively with others who are well established and respected in the region.
- This bridge-building has created ‘natural’ relationship development with a vast array of people from many different backgrounds intimately involved with *City Mission* (i.e., the Baltimore Ravens, Towson University Gospel Choir, Helping Up Mission, Baltimore City Community Organizers, etc.) gathering together, literally, under one tent. The outcome of such intentionality has been nothing less than miraculous!

2. **Building an Alliance of Multi-denominational Churches**—Certainly, there is a place for Lutherans doing life/mission together; after all, this is what many of us are most acquainted with. But there is an even *greater place* and need to invite and gather the broader Church to do life together and share in the mission of Christ’s Church, especially in these challenging days. *City Mission* has been a highly effective and faithful conduit to bring the body of Christ together. This includes many different speakers, music, denominations,

etc., from many different backgrounds, all bound up in ‘orthodoxy’ and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s all about His work, His justice, His compassion, and His mission ... with no other agenda! Let us, as the Church, carry the narrative for the day and not allow others (with a radically different agenda and cause) to fill that void!

- After nearly a decade of building out this mission, it is a joy to share that we’ve had dozens of different churches from the various streams of the Church (Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal) participate in *City Mission* representing many denominational backgrounds including *River’s Edge Ministries, GraceWay International Community Church, Wilkens Avenue Mennonite Church, The Transformation Center, Mt. Union Lutheran Church, East Baltimore Graffiti Church, Baltimore Rescue Mission, Redeemer Lutheran Church, St. Timothy’s Ordinariate Catholic Church*, and many more.
- As a result of such broad-base missional effort, we have become much more united and effective as a ministry. In the High Priestly Prayer found in John 17, we hear Jesus praying to the Father, specifically that we—the Church—may be united, “... *that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me*” (v. 23) As a ministry, we are committed to pursuing such a vision for this hour.

3. **Creating a Base of Multi-generational Participation**—Quite often it seems that youth ministry ‘programs’ are built on dynamism and the personality of a particular youth leader. The problem with this model is that everything hinges on that leader, including the availability of time and resources. Over the past decade or so, and as a lead pastor in at least three different congregational settings, I have taken a much different approach in overseeing/leading youth ministry/young adults. It has never been centered on the charisma of a youth leader. There is *always* a component of intentional discipleship and participation in mission. And even more importantly, parents and

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other older adults are almost always involved in this process. It seems that the presence of the older generation has produced a younger generation that is much better equipped and more deeply grounded. This model has been especially effective in *City Mission*.

Finally, on a more personal note, an unexpected (and invaluable) outcome from both the *Cross Country Mission* and *City Mission* experiences has been the immense even life-changing impact upon my children. I'll never forget interviewing for a call with about twelve adults present, nearly all of them parents, telling me that none of their children were attending church and certainly not in any type of relationship with Christ. I remember feeling extraordinarily sad. Then they asked me about my children, church life, and God. *They were shocked when I expressed to them that all five of my kids were not only involved 'in church' but had a deep and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ.* And, almost without hesitation, I said this was due to exposing them to the mission field beginning with our time in Biloxi, MS, after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and beyond.

Over the years, *City Mission* has impacted many hearts and minds for the sake of the Kingdom. If you've ever witnessed the catastrophic devastation in the aftermath of a hurricane, flood or tornado, you'll understand that the sights, sounds, smells and stories get in your belly—take up residence in your heart and minds—and never leave you the same. A calling to step into the mess inevitably surfaces and mission ensues. I suppose this is called compassion. Compassion seems to be that thing which drives our mission, which allows us to participate in events much larger than ourselves and our own worlds. Our lives are forever altered!



Our next *City Mission* is slated for May of 2023. It would be our honor to welcome you to our Missional Life Center and to host and house you for this event. It's an opportunity for you to 'test the waters' surrounding *City Mission*. Or

we'd be privileged to head in your direction to provide training at your base of operations.

The essence of this communicate is to encourage you anew, as a brother or sister in Christ, to simply engage in mission ... to at least *do something* regard-

ing mission ... and then make it a regular part of the ebb and flow of life. This is how renewal can be ignited and your life restored. May your life be renewed ... for the living of these most challenging and historically significant days.

Just this past spring, I asked our young adult, post-high school group (many of whom have participated in *City Mission* since their middle/high school years) to describe *City Mission* in just a few words. Ben, one of our 'veterans' who is now 24 years of age said, "*City Mission is a raw and unfiltered experience of what it means to be the Church.*" Truly such a youthful and unspoiled understanding of the nature of the church can replenish and enable us to embrace how mission can spark renewal.



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that there was a place for me. She was sorry and could not defend the actions of the ELCA from polygamy to the disbelief in hell. There is no Biblical defense, and she couldn't spin one. When I went to my home congregation to tell my pastor, whom I grew up with, he was not nearly as cordial. He tried to challenge me as misinformed when I pointed to the ELCA's radical direction. He accused me of being political for not agreeing with the ELCA.

Although the gospel is not preached there anymore, it is sad to know I am no longer welcome in my home congregation.

Since coming to the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), I have appreciated the professionalism of the professors in the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS), the comradery among clergy, and general support from congregations. It is refreshing to be able to read the Bible and confessions in a seminary setting and have genuine discussions about the application and use of the concepts. There is a fellowship among the students as members of Christ's Church, here for Christ, unlike what I have known within the ELCA.

I write this because this is my story. I could have shared more anecdotes about the inability of United to form its students, the unprofessionalism of the professors and ignorance of those who followed the party line, but these examples make my point. I do not want to slander the ELCA or any pastors or congregations in it. I only want to bring light to what is going on in the once great Lutheran seminary of Gettysburg, PA, United Lutheran Seminary.

It breaks my heart to have had to leave but I have found a home in the NALC.

Encouraging and Improving Congregational Singing

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notes" like they used to.

2. The next suggestion pastor Olsen found for improving congregational singing is to **provide the best possible music leadership**. Since Grace Lutheran had an organ they could no longer afford to "keep up", and since they had been unable to find a competent organist after their previous organist retired, Pastor Olsen realized that *something* needed to be done

in this regard. He decided his best option was to find a competent song leader, accompanied by a competent pianist, to play a high-quality piano. (Which—fortunately—Grace Lutheran already owned.) He also learned that for this songleader-and-pianist duo to be effective, they needed to lead from the front of the sanctuary, not the back balcony. But unfortunately, no one among the members at Grace had the necessary confidence to be a solo worship song leader. However, Rev. Olsen did convince three members with good voices to lead congregational singing as a trio. And for the pianist? For that position he needed to find and hire someone from the surrounding community. Fortunately he found the right person who not only had the necessary keyboard skills, but who was familiar with many Christian hymns and songs.

3. A third suggestion in the articles Pastor Olsen read was that hymn and song **lyrics should be projected for worshipers**. This was to serve two particular goals: a) So worshipers would be looking, while singing, in the general direction of the song leaders, and b) so worshipers were not singing with their heads buried in their hymnals or songbooks. Pastor Olsen initially had some misgivings about this suggestion. After all, there was the considerable expense of purchasing a projector and screen for the sanctuary, and the fact that it was not feasible (due to limited space on a screen) to include musical notes along with projected lyrics. But Pastor Olsen was pleasantly surprised by the difference projected lyrics made in the quality and volume of congregational singing. And to minimize member complaints, the hymn/song lyrics were also printed out each week in the worship bulletin for those who preferred that option. (Not to mention the fact that the hymn number was also listed in the bulletin for those who wanted to sing from the hymnals still located in the pew racks.)

There were other suggestions Rev. Olsen found in his online research. For example, the recommendation that unfamiliar songs and hymns should always **be taught**, and that new hymns or songs should always be a part of the worship service at least two consecutive Sundays. In the past Grace Lutheran members would often have to struggle through new hymns that were totally unfamiliar; without any instruction or practice of any kind from worship leaders. Another recommendation: That worshipers should rarely be expected to sing more than four verses of any hymn.

Suffice it to say that congregational singing at Grace Lutheran Church markedly improved—once these changes were implemented—and improved in a matter of weeks, not months.

Video Ministries—September 2022

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



Lutheran CORE is always looking for ways to take our ministry to the next level and expand our work of being a Voice for Biblical Truth and a Network for Confessing Lutherans. Our most recent new effort is to expand our video ministry.

For about two years we have been posting on our YouTube channel a new video book review on the first day of every month. Many thanks to the Lutheran pastors and theologians who have been recording these reviews of books of interest and importance.

We are calling our new video ministry CORE Convictions. This new video series is being planned particularly for those who are looking to strengthen and renew their Christian faith. We believe that these videos will be a valuable resource for those who wish to grow in their knowledge of Biblical teaching and Christian living as well as for those who want to know more about how Lutherans understand the Bible. We also want to provide this resource for those who do not have the opportunity or the option of attending a church where the preaching and teaching is Biblical, orthodox, and confessional.

[Here](#) is a link to our YouTube channel. In the top row you will find recordings from both sets of videos – in the order in which they were posted, beginning with the most recent. In the second row you will find links to the Playlists for both sets of videos – Book Reviews and CORE Convictions. Here is some more information about our two most recent video book reviews.

VIDEO BOOK REVIEWS

“THANKS BE TO GOD: MEMOIRS OF A PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN”

Many thanks to NALC pastor Dennis DiMauro for recording a video review of Robert Benne’s book, Thanks Be to God: Memoirs of a Practical Theologian. A link to his review can be found [here](#).

Dr. Benne is the Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion Emeritus at Roanoke College in Virginia as well as the founder of the college’s Benne Center for Religion and Society. He currently serves as Professor of Christian Ethics at the Institute of Lutheran Theology.

In this book Robert Benne tells the story of his life from a small-town upbringing in an ethnically German area of Nebraska (which Dennis DiMauro describes as like Ozzie and Harriet wearing Luther Rose t-shirts), to the University of Chicago and a few

sabbaticals in Germany. At first enthralled with the seminary radicalism of the 1960’s, he soon discovers that this is not for him. He moves from Chicago to Roanoke College in Virginia, where he works to reclaim the Lutheran identity of the college.

In 1982 he founded the college’s Center for Religion and Society, which later was named after him. He worked with Lutheran CORE in a failed attempt to uphold traditional views on marriage in the ELCA and worked with Carl Braaten to start the NALC’s annual theology conference (which later was renamed the Braaten-Benne Lectures), and the younger theologians colloquium, of which Dennis DiMauro is a member.

Dennis DiMauro concludes this enthusiastic recommendation of this book by saying that it is a wonderful memoir that details Dr. Benne’s journey from left-wing activist to iconic Christian ethicist. It demonstrates how one person can fight the good fight for God’s Law and Gospel and make a difference in the world while succeeding in academia against all odds.

DEBATE BETWEEN ERASMUS AND LUTHER

Many thanks to Ethan Zimmerman for his review of the debate between Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther on the issue of free will. Ethan is a first-year student at the North American Lutheran Seminary. A link to his review can be found [here](#).

This debate took place in the mid-1520’s as Erasmus stated in his Diatribes that the will is free, while Luther insisted in his Bondage of the Will that the will is bound to Satan or to God. Erasmus’ work is a very methodical, precise piece according to the best tradition of the humanists. Erasmus uses Scripture to support his point because he knows that Scripture is the only authority that Luther will accept. Luther argues his point on the basis of the same passages of Scripture which Erasmus uses, plus some additional passages.

A major difference between the work of these

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Video Ministries ...

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two men is the tone. Erasmus' writing is very professional, polite, concise, and academic. Luther's is emotionally charged, vehement, and down to earth. Reading Erasmus is like reading a textbook. Reading Luther is like reading a fiery sermon.

Ethan Zimmerman concludes by saying that reading these two books "will more clearly elucidate both the men of the debate, the issues of the reformation, and shed light on the core tenants of the Lutheran tradition and why we are the way we are today."

CORE CONVICTIONS

We now have four videos posted in our CORE Convictions series –

- "Defending Christian faith and morality without being a nasty jerk or a defensive Bible thumper" by NALC pastor Cathy Ammlung
- "Jesus is the only way to salvation" by Russell Lackey, campus pastor at Grand View University (ELCA)
- "Teaching the faith to children of all ages" by NALC pastor Jim Lehmann
- "What does it mean to be Confessional?" by NALC pastor Jeffray Greene

More videos will be posted as they become available. My August letter from the director contained a summary of and a link to Cathy's video. Here is a summary of and a link to Russell's video.

IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO SALVATION?

Many thanks to Russell Lackey, senior campus pastor at Grand View University in Des Moines, for his answer to the question, Is Jesus the only way to salvation? A link to his video can be found [here](#).

Some will interpret John 14: 6 as Jesus' narrowing the way to God. "No one comes to the Father except through Me." Instead Dr. Lackey points out that here Jesus is providing a way to the Father. "No one comes to the Father." On our own we would never be able to come to the Father. "Except through Me." Jesus provides the way. It is as if we were all stuck in a dark room and were unable to find our way out. Someone needs to open the door, provide a light, and show the way.

Pastor Lackey also refers to Revelation 5: 2-5, where the question is asked, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" Only Jesus is worthy. No one else is able to provide the way.

We will all die. No one can escape that. Jesus

alone overcame the grave, opened the way, and provides a way beyond the grave. The best news of all is this – Jesus has made a way to the Father.

SIMUL: A New Academic Journal

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Nestigen, they have some wonderful professors: Dr. Marney Fritts, who teaches theology, as well as Drs. Bud Thompson, and Orrey McFarland who head up their biblical studies classes, and so many other dedicated pastor/theologians.

So academics are their strength, but they have made the curriculum practical as well. Their program includes a 6-course series called "Being a Pastor," which is taught by experienced pastors who love parish ministry. The classes feature open discussion on such topics as "how to enter a community," "maintaining healthy boundaries," "parish administration," and other areas of concern to aspiring pastors and church workers.

They are also blessed with an amazing board of directors who lead them financially and administratively, one of whom, Dr. Edwin Spruth offers a wonderful article in their first issue. It is they who govern the seminary.

The result is a seminary which is orthodox, Lutheran, confessional, and ready to prepare students for ministry. To quote their dean of students, Rev. Julie Smith, "All of this theology is for the sake of faithful preaching, for the sake of setting sinners free."²

What's Ahead?

We are so excited about this coming year. Summer 2022's topic is the "Uses of the Law - 2 or 3?" (they will attempt to remain civil and avoid any further schisms). And their Fall 2022 issue will cover the subject of the sacraments, something which has come under much discussion during the COVID-19 shutdowns.

Their 2023 annual theological conference will be at the historic Jekyll Island Club in GA on April 11th and 12th, 2023 - always a fun time in a beautiful place, with so many wonderful speakers. You can register at <https://semcl.org/conference-registration/>

So I hope you enjoy the first-ever issue of *SIMUL*. And if you have any questions about the journal or about St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, please email Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Di Mauro at dennisdimauro@yahoo.com

1 A more detailed history of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary can be found on our website at <https://semcl.org/about/>

2 Julie Smith, "Address to the Augustana District Conference in 2018," <https://semcl.org/about/> (accessed Sept. 29, 2021).