

***Eight Reasons Why Your Congregation  
Might Benefit from Lutheran CORE's  
Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative***

1. Your congregation has been engaged in an unsuccessful search for a new (solo) pastor for over 18 to 24 months. In fact, the number of viable applicants for your position has dwindled over time.
2. Your church has a weekly average worship attendance, post-Covid, of under 40 to 50 people.
3. You have exhausted your options when it comes to identifying and hiring an interim pastor; whether full-time or part-time.
4. You are having difficulty finding competent supply preachers on a weekly basis.
5. As your congregation's pastoral vacancy has become prolonged not only attendance but financial giving has been impacted.
6. When your congregational leaders discuss their future, the premise of these conversations is beginning to change from "when" you call your next pastor to "whether" you will find a pastor.
7. Even before the retirement of your previous pastor the median age of your members was increasing and there were very few members under the age of 50. Since your pastor's retirement this demographic trend has only become more conspicuous and disheartening.
8. As the Call Committee and Council members have begun to track both the number of church-wide vacancies and the number of seminary graduates, it has become apparent that—at least in the next ten years—the number of pastors available for call will only continue to **decrease**.

Some of the vacant congregations fitting the above description are, of course, past the point where any outside ministry initiative will result in significant, meaningful change. **However, in the context of the current, severe and worsening clergy shortage, many viable, relatively healthy and mission-oriented churches** have been unable to find a pastoral candidate to fill their vacancy.

In other words, there **are** numerous vacant churches where dedicated and faithful lay leaders are already leading their congregation's ministry through a very difficult transition period. But tragically, as these lay leaders begin to question whether they will **ever**—in the next few years—be able to find a pastor to call, they are beginning to doubt whether their congregation even has a future as a viable, Spirit-led ministry.

I believe that *some* of these congregations, perhaps including yours, can continue to faithfully serve their members—and their surrounding communities—without the benefit of a resident, ordained pastor. But the likelihood of this happening will depend on whether they pro-actively embrace a lay-

leadership ministry model. And this model—ideally—should not depend on whether the “right” pastor is found. Instead, this lay-leadership ministry vision would mean recognizing and utilizing the God-given gifts and resources they already have as a priesthood of believers.

Vacant congregations such as those described above are already—in the LCMC and NALC—facing a limited “window of opportunity”. It is extremely difficult to remain pro-active, as a congregation with a long-term pastoral vacancy, if your congregational identity depends almost entirely on the leadership of a resident, ordained pastor.

If you would like to learn more about Lutheran CORE’s Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative, you may contact me directly.

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