

ELCA Moves In And Takes Over

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



In my Summer Letter from the Director I told in great detail the disturbing story of how Bishop Yehiel Curry of the ELCA’s Metropolitan Chicago Synod threatened, intimidated, bullied, and abused power in order to gain control of a CORE-friendly congregation that was doing its best to reach out to its bi-lingual and Spanish speaking neighborhood with the love of Jesus. A link to that letter can be found [here](#). That bishop and synod council used chapter S13.24 in the Model Constitution for Synods as a way to move in and take over the congregation.

I recently become aware of another situation where the synod council of another ELCA synod – Southwest California – used the same constitutional provision to seize the property of a congregation. As a former ALC congregation, according to the ELCA constitution, Faith Lutheran Church of San Dimas, California should have had no problem keeping their property as they voted to disaffiliate from the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body. But that synod council used chapter S13.24 of the Model Constitution for Synods, along with rejecting the legitimacy of LCMC as a recognized Lutheran church body, to claim to have the right to the congregation’s property. My concern has only grown greater as I wonder whether these are two isolated incidents or is this a pattern – an intentional strategy – that we will see continue to unfold throughout the ELCA.

In part the relevant constitutional chapter reads as follows –

S13.24 - The Synod Council, itself or through trustees appointed by it, may take charge and control of the property of a congregation of this

In This Issue:

- Is the ELCA preparing for another exodus of congregations?
- Baltimore Marathon?
- Discerning God’s call
- Today’s social upheaval
- How are creeds properly vetted?
- Dead faith Christians
- Devotion options
- CORE video book review for July
- *SIMUL*’s spring edition

Inside this Issue:

ELCA Moves In.....[p. 1](#)
The Creeds Don’t Sparkle.....[p.2](#)
Dead Faith.....[p.3](#)
Pockets of Hope.....[p. 4](#)
Video Ministries– July[p. 5](#)
Book Promotion: The Power of Healthy Leadership.....[p. 5](#)
“Here Am I. Send Me!”.....[p. 6](#)
Caring Christian Faith Communities: Needed Now.....[p. 7](#)
Daily Devotion Options.....[p. 8](#)
***SIMUL*: Spring 2023.....[p. 14](#)**
Coming Events.....[p. 14](#)

The Creeds Don't Sparkle

by [Pr. Kevin Haug](#), ELCA



Note from our Executive Director: Many thanks to Kevin Haug, ELCA pastor in Texas, for his article about the Sparkle creed. This so-called "creed" has received a lot of attention and stimulated a lot of discussion since its recent use during a worship service in an ELCA congregation in Minnesota. We should all be alarmed over the way in which this statement rejects Biblical teaching and orthodox theology in its promoting the LGBTQ agenda and transgender ideology. We are saddened but not surprised as we read of many ELCA pastors who are praising it as a way to connect the Christian faith with life today. We are also saddened but not surprised by the total silence of ELCA leaders about it.

"Pastor, what are we going to do about this?"

Those words were spoken by one of my octogenarians after she heard two news stories about the "Sparkle creed," a statement that received national attention because of its use at an ELCA Lutheran Church in Minnesota. The congregation recited it at worship, posted the video online, and it went viral.

The "Sparkle creed" has actually been around for a year or two, but it was not until conservative news sites and blogs discovered it that it caused a bit of an uproar, and that uproar is not without merit. However, care needs to be taken when addressing this issue. I will attempt to show why.

First, let me define creed as a statement of belief.

In a very real way, everyone has a creed of some sort. Individuals have creeds. Organizations have creeds. Individual congregations have creeds. In fact, many biblical scholars say that the first creed was quite simple: Jesus is Lord. Those three words actually led to the death of Christians who would not say the Roman creed: Caesar is Lord.

Because everyone has a creed, one could argue that having a creed is actually a neutral concept. People believe all sorts of things. That they believe them is undisputed and neutral, but what they believe can be problematic and either good or bad. For instance, if I believe that all human beings are endowed by their Creator with fundamental rights, then that is a creedal statement. And I would happily argue that it is a good creedal statement for various reasons. Someone could hold a different position: that human beings are not endowed with rights from a Creator, but that governments decide what rights a person should or should not have. I would argue that this isn't a very good position to take, but that doesn't prevent some nations and people from holding it.

To change positions literally requires a conversion process as many, if not most, creedal beliefs are actually statements of faith not statements of science. For instance, science is practiced by using the scientific method: state a hypothesis; test and measure to see if the hypothesis holds water; formulate a theory; test the theory repeatedly. Is the scientific method a true way of getting knowledge? Well, you have to assume that it is. You have to trust that it is. You cannot test the scientific method by using the scientific method. Philosophers call this circular reasoning. Trusting that the scientific method is an accurate way of obtaining knowledge is a creedal belief. It is a deep, foundational belief, but it is a belief nonetheless, and one does not change those sorts of beliefs easily.

Which brings us to the Creeds of the Church, and I am intentionally capitalizing the letter C on both of those words. There is a reason for this as I shall get into shortly.

Within the Christian Church, there are three, recognized, orthodox Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, and what you need to realize about these statements of faith is this: these Creeds were recognized by the whole Church as true affirmations of the Christian faith. They were based in Scripture. They were developed over time or argued over or carefully thought through. They were not put together in a pastor's office to make a particular group or segment of society feel welcomed or accepted.

In general, they were written to stomp out heresy. They were written to unify a divided Church. They were written to solidify and codify what the Church believed about God the Father, Christ the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And as such, they are not to be trifled with.

Imagine for a minute if you will, gathering with a

Continued on [page 11](#)

Dead Faith

by [Pr. Douglas Schoelles](#), Member of the board of Lutheran CORE



Don't play with dead fish! Mom said don't bring it home thinking we'll eat it! A dead fish is useless and worthless.

What are we to do with dead faith? Since a fish is a symbol for a Christian, maybe we can see how a dead faith isn't much different from a dead fish.

Why do we declare a dead fish dead? Most obvious is that it doesn't move. Ever poke someone who was still to see if they were still alive? I try poking motionless Christians to see if their faith is alive. They don't like it.

If our faith has no action, is it faith? James declares that faith with no action is dead (James 2:17). A living faith moves us: moves us to worship and praise our living God, moves us to pray and read his word, moves us to share Christ and bless others for His sake. A faith without the life-giving Spirit is dead (James 2:26). And a dead faith is as useless as a dead fish because it is not living the aliveness that God intends (James 2:20).

(A faith that is about making ourselves feel good about our righteousness is not faith in Christ. I will cover that in a future article.)

If our motionless faith is just words; an empty lifeless confession that we are a Christian but no swimming in life as a Christian, then our faith is dead. If our faith is just the stripes of ancestors and heritage from days gone by but does not inspire fresh living today, then, well, even dead fish have stripes. Knowing facts about God or Christ is like a dead fish skeleton. You can see the outline, but a skeleton alone does not manifest life. A static dead faith isn't just infertile and lifeless. Not having a living faith means we lack life-changing love, but rather are full of worry, obligation and tedium.

Why bother having a faith that is dead? Should a dead faith Christian just become an atheist to become dead to God all together? Should we just drop the farce of faith? NO!

Embrace your dead faith. Yes, you are dead in your faith and also dead in your sins where you stand. But God excels at dealing with the dead. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." (Eph 2:4-5)

You have every privilege as a dead fish Christian to call upon God to make your faith alive. You are baptized. You are baptized into the death of Christ so you can be raised to a new life in Christ. (Rom 6:3-6)

Are you content to be a motionless, dead fish Christian or will you pray for your faith? God promises to give you life. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." (Rom 8:11)

So, I invite you to drag your dead faith butt to worship. Sit there in the pew in your grave clothes of this dull, exhausting existence to hear the Word of God. Dead fish Lazarus didn't come out of the tomb patting himself on the back but rose up because Christ spoke to him (John 11:43-44). Christ calls you to be alive with faith.

**Embrace your
dead faith. [...]
God excels at
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dead.**



"He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." (1 Th 5:10)

Your servant in his Word, *Pastor Douglas*

Pockets of Hope

by Ms. Teresa Dubyoski, a mission partner of River's Edge Ministries based in Mt. Airy, MD

Editor's Note: This year Teresa helped lead the January Cross Country Mission in Pine Island, FL (including organizing all the food and meal prep teams) and City Mission in Baltimore, MD in May.



When I think of Baltimore, I often think of my early childhood home with a large magnolia tree in the front yard and a tall, hemlock pine in the back, where my siblings and I used to climb and play amongst the branches to our hearts content. I think of the cookies my sisters and I would sell in the neighborhood without supervision, pulling our bright red Flyer wagon full of a variety of cookies behind us. I was only 6 when we moved away, but I remember, even then, after being robbed multiple times and my brother being held up with a gun when he was 10 for his bike, that *I felt fear*.

It wasn't until I was older that I began to hear negative statistics about Baltimore and I came to see my siblings' and my childhood experiences there in a new light. Amidst all the negative media coverage, it's easy to believe that Baltimore continues in a downward spiral and there isn't much hope.

This year, from the first day of City Mission, I had the phrase "It's not a sprint, it's a marathon" on my heart. As an athlete, I've always preferred sprinting over distance running and that's true in other aspects of my life as well. The Lord has taught me a lot of patience through the years and, through seasons of burn out, He's taught me to pace myself more and rely on Him instead of trying to make change happen all on my own. So when this impression came to my heart, I didn't question it. Looking back now, it feels like a gift from the Holy Spirit because He knew how much I needed that reminder.

I'll be honest...It felt *heavy* seeing a woman come through a food pantry with her face apparently beaten and her eyes red and to watch as they called a volunteer over because she couldn't walk through by herself. Then overhearing another volunteer reminding her "I'm only a phone call away, okay? One phone call and we can get you out of there." It feels heavy when you walk into a tent city, hidden from the road, and see kids running around, documented or not, with people passed out on the ground (you hope it's not worse than that) and you learn that some of these individuals used to be businessmen and women, lawyers, police officers, etc. - people who hadn't spent all of their lives at the bottom. It feels heavy knowing that a stone's throw from one of the churches we partner with is the sex trafficking hub of the city. It feels heavy when a woman graduates from a recovery program and dies after running into someone she once did drugs with; one last hit and she was gone... just as she was beginning to rebuild her life.

One evening someone in the group shared that these churches, ministries, and organizations that we partner with in Baltimore are like "Pockets of Hope." It felt like the perfect description. That's truly what these places are.

Because of these "Pockets of Hope," we also experienced joy and immense encouragement, not just heaviness. We got to see how much good happens on a daily basis to help people in need, some desperately so. One of these places, after operating solely as a food pantry for a while, decided to expand and offer a deeper level of care through education, job resources, clothing distribution and more. We toured a large warehouse that is going to be an additional extension of their non-profit organization. It is so exciting to see their vision for the future and to think of how many lives will be touched there.

It's a joy working together to be the hands and feet of Christ. Going out as a team and partnering with those who are already aware of needs in the city and who are actively giving of their time and resources is both encouraging and helpful to us as we try to make the most of our time there. These "Pockets of Hope" are essential to the mission there. Without them, not only would we become discouraged and overwhelmed, we would be in over our heads. It's in these places that we're given a tangible reminder that God truly is at work—whether we see it or not. We're not there to fix everything, we're not there to jump in and take over. *We're there to walk alongside, to plant seeds, to water seeds, to give a word of encouragement, a smile, or a hug.*

Continued on [page 12](#)

Video Ministries—July 2023

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



[Here](#) is a link to our You Tube channel. In the top row you will find both our Video Book Reviews as well as our CORE Convictions Videos on various topics related to Biblical teaching, Lutheran theology, and Christian living. You will find these 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. This month we want to feature a new Video Book Review.

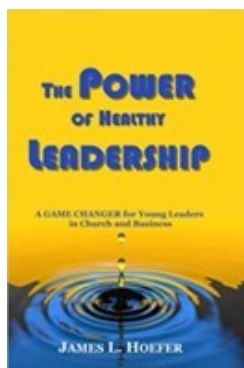
THE POWER OF HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

by James Hoefler

Many thanks to retired AALC pastor James Hoefler for his review of a book which he himself has written, “The Power of Healthy Leadership.” [Here](#) is a link to his video.

According to Pastor Hoefler, the central concept of the book is that we are in a leadership crisis today. Without proper grounding, self-appointed leaders are harming basic community building from the family to the nation. The thesis of this handbook is that healthy leaders have the hearts of stewards. Properly understanding our unique Lutheran heritage releases incredible spiritual and relational power which in turn builds healthy followers.

More information about this book can be found in this issue of CORE Voice.



Book Promotion: The Power of Healthy Leadership

by [James Hoefler](#), retired AALC pastor and author of *The Power of Healthy Leadership* by Pinnacle House Press



Leadership is not a title, a performance, or mere occupation. It is a sacred relationship creating ripple effects, for both good and bad. This book is about stewardship leaders, who are both the humblest and stubbornest people on the planet. Today in our “pro-choice” environment freedom is about choosing, the more choices the better. For stewards, freedom is about being chosen, knowing who you are, with assigned roles and tasks. Thus, healthy results radiate outward into your community, church, or workplace. Life becomes more gracious, business more successful, and the church more effective when you follow a call.

Central Concept: We are in a leadership crisis today. Without proper grounding, self-appointed leaders are harming basic community building from the family to the nation. **The thesis of this handbook is that healthy leaders have the hearts of stewards.** Properly understanding our unique LUTHERAN HERITAGE releases incredible spiritual and relational power which in turn builds healthy followers.

Takeaway Values:

Readers will learn why leadership is harder today, yet be motivated to hear God’s call.

- Readers will understand that leadership is not a title. It is not even an occupation. Leadership is more an art than a science, less a performance than a sacred relationship. When we face a problem, we almost always start looking for a program, some method with which to attack the crisis. But when God sets out to solve issues, he

Continued on [page 12](#)

“Here Am I. Send Me!”

by [Pr. Jeff Morlock](#), staff member of the North American Lutheran Church and Director of Vocational Discernment for the North American Lutheran Seminary.



Of all the voices in the world calling you to be this or do that with your life, how will you discern God's call? While God calls persons into full or part time ministry, biblically God's call has less to do with the job you get paid for and everything to do with the kingdom impact you were born to have on the world. Living in response to God's call involves trusting the Lord in the midst of the darkness and waiting for the light to dawn. But how are we to discern God's light, as opposed to the light of our own desires or our need to please others?

Isaiah's Vision

Consider the prophet Isaiah, whose call story is found in Isaiah Chapter 6. *"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple"* (v. 1). The mention of King Uzziah's death tells us something about Isaiah's state of mind. Israel prospered under Uzziah when he listened to the Lord, but he eventually ignored God's commands, and died in isolation as a leper. And Isaiah had reason to be discouraged. The king was dead, a new inexperienced ruler was on the throne, the nation was drifting into idolatry (again), and their enemies were growing stronger. Where was God in all of this?

"Above him [the Lord] stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke" (v. 1-4).

God answered Isaiah's question with a vision of

heaven in which it became clear that while weak and sinful earthly rulers may die or be unseated, God reigns eternal. The angels proclaim His holiness, which extends throughout the world. The temple is shaken and filled with the smoke of God's presence and power, echoing the pillar of cloud at Mt. Sinai, and the cloud of God's glory that filled the temple (Exodus 13:21-22, 19:18 and I Kings 8:10-12).

Isaiah's Reaction

In a time of uncertainty, God reveals Himself to Isaiah in His heavenly glory to confirm that He is King and reigns in heaven, regardless of what may be happening on earth. His sovereignty is never in question. This assurance is a prerequisite to hearing God's call! And what is Isaiah's reaction? *"And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!'"* (v. 5).

Despite his intelligence, privilege, personal integrity and devout faith, Isaiah sees himself for who he really is, a sinful man among a sinful people. In the light of God's glory, Isaiah's sins and failings became evident... and damning. He was before God without a mediator, without any covering or sacrifice. And if the priests could only go into the holy of holies once a year, and only after making sacrifices for themselves and the people so they would not fall dead, there was no chance of survival for Isaiah, who was in God's presence with zero preparation.

God's Response

In response to this realization, the Lord acts. *"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for'"* (v. 6-7). The altar was the place in the temple where the people's sins were dealt with through animal sacrifice, foreshadowing the sacrifice of Jesus' death on Calvary as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The angel takes a burning coal to purify Isaiah's lips, which were the source of his sins and the instrument of his impending ministry. As a result of the angel's action, Isaiah's guilt is removed, his sins are forgiven, the source of his fear is gone, and he is fit for service.

The Call to Ministry

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom

Continued on [page 13](#)

Caring Christian Faith Communities: Needed Now *More Than Ever*

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



As Americans we are living in a time of increasing emotional despair. And this crisis presents the Body of Christ with tremendous challenges as local churches consider how they might respond.

In the past, when I heard people complain about the state of American society and the level of social upheaval, I would respond, “But it’s not as bad as it was back in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Well I no longer say that. I think the state of American society, in 2023, is now worse. I have never, in my lifetime, seen as many studies and statistics pointing to widespread depression and despair as I have read about in just the last two years. Some examples:

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been conducting major surveys of high school students every other year since 2011. The most recent survey—conducted in 2021 with the findings released in 2022—discovered an “overwhelming wave of violence and trauma and never-before-seen levels of hopelessness and suicidal thoughts among high schools students in the United States.” This trend has been particularly alarming among high school girls. “Almost 60% of female students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year, and nearly 25% made a suicide plan.” This represents a 60% increase when compared to the survey results back in 2011.
2. Nicholas Kristoff, a writer with the *New York Times*, recently wrote, “Americans die from deaths of despair—drugs, alcohol and suicide—at a rate of more than 250,000 people per year, and the number of walking wounded is far greater.”
3. Suicide-related visits to pediatric emergency rooms in the United States—between 2011 and

2020—increased 500% (five-fold) among children, teens and young adults. (*New York Times*, 5-1-2023)

Back in 1920 the poet William Butler Yeats wrote his poem, *The Second Coming*. His appraisal of the world of his day, no doubt shared by many of his peers shortly after the conclusion of the First World War, was incredibly stark. “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold, the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” Call me an alarmist, but I believe these words capture how a great many Americans—on *both* sides of the (political) aisle—view the current state of American society.

There are undoubtedly many factors contributing to these startling statistics. Perhaps the most frequent cause cited is the increased use of social media; especially among young people in general, and young women and girls in particular. There is also the on-going decline in the number of two-parent households; increased rates of addiction; and the increasing numbers of Americans living alone. And I would add the increasing secularization of our society and culture.

So what can the local church do to respond to all this despair? In my opinion congregations can potentially make a significant and positive difference. How? By reaching out to some of the “walking wounded” in their local communities and introducing them to the blessings of being part of a caring Christian fellowship. And, this introduction will typically happen one caring relationship at a time.

However, there are at least two challenges faced by a great many local churches which need to be addressed. One challenge is that too many congregations are just as polarized and conflicted as our surrounding culture. We must not allow our churches to be characterized by discord and disunity. It is incredibly difficult to witness to the love of Christ if this love is not evident within our congregations due to internal conflict.

A second challenge is that too many of our congregations have become immobilized by and fixated on their institutional decline. This might be apparent due to decreasing worship attendance, or reduced financial giving, or perhaps their inability to find a new

Continued on [page 8](#)

Daily Devotion Options

by Ms. Kim Smith, Lutheran CORE editor and webmaster



Editor's Note: Rev. Dr. Douglas Schoelles joined the board of Lutheran CORE earlier this year. Rev. Jeffray Greene has been writing devotions for us for many years. We are thankful to them both for their valuable contributions to Lutheran CORE.

Lutheran CORE's readers have been faithfully absorbing Rev. Greene's [daily devotions](#) for a long time. Some read them on the website and others view them on Twitter or on our Facebook page.

But it's nice to have options. Pastor Schoelles enables you to watch a video or listen to audio in the car. He records [The Daily Plunge](#) in which he encourages "a quick swim in the day's scripture reading." Pr. Schoelles says he works his way through books of the Bible in bite-sized pieces. And by bite-sized he means videos in the 4–5-minute range. Definitely digestible!

Dr. Schoelles recently asked Lutheran CORE if we would like to link to his devotionals from our website. The answer was yes, thank you! And so now we can listen, watch or follow along by 1) listening to the audio, 2) watching via YouTube, or 3) following along on his Facebook page. Click [here](#) to open our new Daily Plunge Bible Study page where you can choose the option which best suits you. Also, click [here](#) to see Dr. Schoelles' playlists arranged by books of the Bible.

Currently, Rev. Greene is about halfway through the book of Revelation while Dr. Schoelles is wading through 1 Corinthians. Please join us!

Both sets of devotions are available each day. Check [here](#) to see our new Devotions page. The

Daily Devotions page and the Daily Plunge Bible Study page are subpages under it but can also be accessed via the Devotions page.

Click [here](#) to see our revised web map reflecting these changes.

Caring Christian Faith Communities: Needed ...

Continued from [page 7](#)

pastor during a prolonged vacancy.

Granted, our society is becoming increasingly secular, and the percentage of Americans identifying as "religious" *has* been decreasing. However, more and more Americans—in their despair—are recognizing their need to be a part of a loving and supportive community. And they understand that this "community" needs to be in-person, not online.

Jessica Grose, a columnist for the New York Times, recently wrote an article entitled, "What Churches Offer That 'Nones' Still Long For". This article just appeared in the paper's 6-28-2023 issue. Keep in mind that Ms. Grose is a "none" of a non-observant Jewish background. This was her final article in a five-article series on the increasing

number of Americans leaving organized religion. She wrote, "The one aspect of religion in America that I unquestionably see as an overall positive for society is the ready-made supportive community that churchgoers can access." One of the de-churched "nones" whom Jessica interviewed for her articles said the following: "I was raised Pentecostal and went to church three or more times a week, so I desperately miss the community. It was where my friendships came from. I have very few friends now." I would dare to say that hundreds of thousands of dechurched Lutherans probably have similar stories. At the end of this article Ms. Grose wrote, "Almost everyone needs community to flourish." On a personal note, my wife and I, as we returned to more regular in-person worship attendance after the pandemic, realized how profoundly we had missed the worship and fellowship of our home congregation.

...congregations can potentially make a significant and positive difference [...] by reaching out to some of the "walking wounded" in their local communities.

Continued on [page 13](#)

ELCA Moves In And Takes Over

Continued from [page 1](#)

synod to hold, manage, and convey the same on behalf of this synod, if . . .

d. The Synod Council determines that the membership of a congregation has become so scattered or so diminished in numbers that it cannot provide required governance or that it has become impractical for the congregation to fulfill the purposes for which it was organized.

e. The Synod Council determines that it is necessary for this synod to protect and preserve the congregation's property from waste and deterioration.

The congregation shall have the right to appeal any such decision to the next Synod Assembly.

The way in which Bishop Curry and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Council used this provision to gain control of a former ALC congregation and its property I described in my Summer Letter from the Director. Here I will tell how the Southwest California Synod Council used the same provision to justify demanding the deed to the property of another former ALC congregation.

Six years ago Faith Lutheran Church in San Dimas, California, was a thriving congregation led by a very gifted, hardworking, faithful, committed, and orthodox pastor. I would say he was one of the best. After his retirement the congregation struggled as it had an extremely difficult time finding another pastor who would be appropriate for them. Attendance and involvement dropped and the preschool had to close during the COVID pandemic. Finally, after two years, they did find a pastor, but that pastor turned out to be a disaster. Later they discovered that that pastor had embezzled funds from a former congregation. (That information was shared as public information during the discussion at the synod assembly.) Attendance dropped even further, many of the positions on the congregation council remained vacant, and the congregation had to request forbearance on the loan for their beautiful new sanctuary.

Needing help with their situation, the congregation entered into a Synodical Administration arrangement with the synod. This arrangement is described in S13.25. of the Model Constitution for Synods, which says, "This synod may temporarily assume administration of a congregation upon its request or with its concurrence. Such synod administration shall continue only so long as necessary to complete the purposes for which it was requested by the congregation or until the congregation withdraws consent to continued administration." Three local ELCA pastors were assigned to the congregation to help

them through their difficult times.

But the real turnaround for the congregation occurred when they invited a non-Lutheran new church start to begin meeting on their property. With the presence of the other congregation and the dynamic, outreach-oriented leadership of the young, evangelical pastor, new energy came to the place. The synod continued to be unable to provide the congregation with a suitable pastor to call – or even a supply pastor or an interim pastor that would be appropriate for them. I understand from a former member of the executive committee of the synod council of that synod, that of the approximately one hundred congregations in that synod, forty-two of them are without a pastor. Because the synod could not provide a pastor, the ELCA congregation asked the young, dynamic, energetic, outreach-oriented pastor of the new, non-Lutheran church start to provide them with pastoral care and leadership. The non-Lutheran pastor would lead the ELCA congregation's traditional, liturgical service at 9 AM and then the new church start's contemporary service at 11 AM. The ELCA synodical bishop, seeing how the Lord was blessing the ministry, agreed to the arrangement.

The problem came when the congregation voted to disaffiliate from the ELCA and join LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ). As a former ALC congregation, they should have had no problem keeping their property. But the synod council accused them of joining LCMC only as a way of getting out of the ELCA with the intent of then joining this non-Lutheran group. The young, dynamic, energetic, outreach-oriented, evangelical pastor of the non-Lutheran church start offered to take courses in Lutheran theology so that he would be better equipped to provide pastoral care and leadership for the Lutheran congregation, and he was also mentored by a retired ELCA pastor, but that was not sufficient. The synod council said that the congregation can leave the ELCA, the congregation and the non-Lutheran new church start can rent the church building from the ELCA, but the congregation must surrender the deed to the property to the synod. The congregation appealed the decision to the synod assembly which is how I became aware. The appeal was decisively denied.

During the discussion at the synod assembly it was revealed that after the congregation voted to disaffiliate from the ELCA, the synod council changed their relationship with the congregation from Synodical Administration (S13.25), which is voluntary and temporary, to Synodical Preservation (S13.24), which is involuntary and permanent. (It is

Continued on [page 10](#)

ELCA Moves In And Takes Over

Continued from [page 9](#)

interesting that the president of the congregation said that they did not know that the synod had taken that action and changed the terms of the relationship until six months after the change had been made.)

The synod council used chapter S13.24 of the synod's constitution to argue that demanding the deed to the property was something they needed to do and had the right to do in order to "protect and preserve the congregation's property from waste and deterioration." But the congregation's property was not in danger of "waste and deterioration." Energy had returned, attendance was up, the preschool had reopened, the congregation was able to resume payments on the loan, and people were again involved in ministry and willing to serve in positions of leadership. The synod misused this provision in the constitution because they did not like the fact that the congregation was moving in a different direction – and in a direction which was working out better for them. In fact, a pastor who is a member of the executive committee of the synod council argued in front of the assembly that the synod needed to invoke S13.24 and seize the property in order to keep the property "from deterioration into a non-ELCA entity."

The synod council also argued that LCMC was not really a valid church body, so in joining LCMC the congregation had not met constitutional requirements in order to be able to keep their property. For me one of the most alarming parts of the discussion was when Synodical Bishop Brenda Bos said in her initial presentation that LCMC is "a very, very loosely affiliated Lutheran denomination" and then suggested that "LCMC may have been created for exactly this constitutional clause so that congregations that do not want to be Lutheran anymore can go into that system and keep their property." During the discussion the member of the executive committee mentioned above quoted from the LCMC website which says, "We're not a denomination, we're a movement" and then said about LCMC, "They are imposters." (It makes me wonder how often the same line of argument has been used or will be used against other former ALC congregations that will vote to leave the ELCA and join LCMC.)

As I watched and listened to the discussion in the You Tube recording of the second day of the synod assembly, there were two images that came to mind. The first is the old proverb, "If the camel once gets his nose in the tent, his whole body will soon

follow." Once the congregation invited the synod to come in and administer the congregation (under S13.25), it was very easy for the synod to remain, take over, and seize the property (under S13.24).

The second are the words near the beginning of the book of Exodus – "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Bishop Bos of the Southwest California Synod obviously did not know – nor did she bother to find out about - the actual issues that led to the formation of LCMC. It was not to give churches who did not want to be Lutheran anymore a chance to get out of the ELCA and keep their property. Rather the precipitating event was the ELCA's approving the Called to Common Mission agreement with the Episcopal Church. In that agreement a certain structure – the Episcopal version of the Historic Episcopate – became mandated. The founders of LCMC argued – on the basis of Article Seven of the Augsburg Confession – that "the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." Therefore, no particular human, governmental structure is necessary in order for the church to be the church. LCMC was formed in 2001. Since then the organization has grown to be an international movement of around one thousand congregations, including around eight hundred congregations here in the United States. Many of those congregations are former ALC congregations who voted to disaffiliate from the ELCA and kept their property as they then affiliated with LCMC. Precedence strongly supports former ALC congregations' being able to leave the ELCA, join LCMC, and not have any problem keeping their property. As time passes more and more synodical bishops and other ELCA leaders are not going to have been a part of the issues and struggles that led to the formation of LCMC and the NALC. They are simply not going to be aware of them, let alone understand and appreciate them.

But a third thing that completely floored me was when Bishop Bos, at the end of her presentation, called upon the assembly to "deeply consider the legacy of the Lutherans that came before." During the discussion leading up to the vote which denied the congregation's appeal, the argument was made that for over sixty years faithful Lutherans had been working and giving to start and support a Lutheran presence and ministry in the city of San Dimas. Therefore, the assembly should not break trust with six decades of faithful Lutherans and allow a schismatic group to now take the property and give it to a non-Lutheran ministry. I was absolutely astounded hearing this line of argument. I realize

Continued on [page 11](#)

ELCA Moves In And Takes Over

Continued from [page 10](#)

that the young, dynamic, energetic, outreach oriented, evangelical pastor of the new church start does not have a sacramental view of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but I truly believe that his view of the Scriptures, moral values, and the mission of the church is far closer to that of the founders of that congregation than the ELCA is today. And since when does the ELCA care about not breaking trust with faithful Lutherans of the past?

The 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly is approaching, when voting members will consider a plan to reconstitute the church, review the 2009 human sexuality social statement, and possibly (probably?) eliminate the provision for bound conscience. Bound conscience is the language that the 2009 human sexuality social statement uses to declare that a variety of views on same sex relationships – including traditional views – do exist within the ELCA and will be viewed as valid, and those who hold them will be treated with honor and respect. I assume the ELCA knows that there may well be another wave of congregations wanting to leave the ELCA, so are they taking steps now to make it as difficult as possible for congregations to leave with their properties? As congregations continue to decline and congregational, synodical, and churchwide income continues to drop, will the ELCA grab as many properties as possible and make it as difficult as they can for congregations (even former ALC congregations) to leave with their property? Please let me know if you know of other examples of this dynamic.

One final thought. The August 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly approved a Land Back Memorial, in which they supported a resolution which called upon the ELCA to “support creative programs of restorative justice in partnership with Indigenous people, including, but not limited to, whenever considering a transfer or sale of real property, including returning land (and any structures built on it) after satisfying any financial obligations, to the appropriate Native nations, and when direct return is not feasible or not desired by the Indigenous people, to return the proceeds from the sale of the land to the ELCA Native American Ministry Fund or other local Indigenous led ministries or organizations.” Will the Southwest California Synod, in order to not be complicit in something that they are so concerned about – the stealing of land from Indigenous people – follow through with and make good their concern and give the newly acquired property – or the value of that property – to Indigenous people?

The Creeds Don't Sparkle

Continued from [page 2](#)

group of Christians circa 250 A.D. You are in hiding because Christianity is still not a recognized religion of the Roman Empire. It is the Easter Vigil, the time that it has become traditional for converts to be baptized into the faith. As the baptismal liturgy begins, the presider looks into the eyes of the converts. He begins addressing them and asks them three questions: Do you believe in God the Father? Do you believe in God the Son? Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit? And the converts begin reciting what they have been taught about who God is; who Jesus is; and who the Holy Spirit is. These statements have come together over decades of persecution and trial. Speaking them would immediately set these converts apart from the dominant culture and could lead to arrest and persecution. Such is the nature of the Apostles' Creed.

Or consider a church divided by various sects all claiming to represent the one true faith. Yet, those beliefs are contradictory at times. Some are not grounded in scripture. Some are off the charts. What does it mean to be a Christian? What are the foundational beliefs? Is this world truly, totally evil? Does only the spiritual count? Was Jesus indeed fully human and fully divine or a really good human being only adopted by God and infused with the divine Spirit? What do you Christians truly believe? And bishops from far and wide gather to hammer such things out. They consult deeply with the scriptures; argue their points vehemently and passionately; and put together a statement of faith which declares: this is it. These are the non-negotiables. It is accepted by the church council and has stood the test of time for centuries. Such is the nature of the Nicene Creed.

The "Sparkle creed" shares none of this history. It was written for entirely different reasons and has not even come close to being vetted by the whole Christian Church on earth. In fact, the majority of the Christian Church on earth would outright reject it.

Therefore, it follows, that it has no standing to replace the Creeds in worship.

The "Sparkle creed" [...] was written for entirely different reasons and has not even come close to being vetted by the whole Christian Church on earth. In fact, the majority of the Christian Church on earth would outright reject it.

Pockets of Hope

Continued from [page 4](#)

The phrase I mentioned earlier, “it’s not a sprint, it’s a marathon” served as a subtle reminder to me to let go and free my heart from the burden of expectation of wanting to see certain results and change happen, in order to embrace being a part of what God is doing right in front of me. I really felt free to do that.

As I’ve continued to think about this phrase, I’ve realized how much it really applies to all of life and ministry as a whole. If we’re in this for the long haul, pacing ourselves and living out our callings through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, is essential. Our hearts were never meant to carry the burdens of the whole world. Many of us are often weighed down from the burden of too much news from all over the world, to the point where our discouragement becomes immobilization and we end up doing nothing. *It’s just too much.*

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” My prayer is that we would take this to heart. When we give those burdens to God, we free ourselves up to be a vessel for good instead of being so consumed with worry and anxiety that we can’t be effective at all. When we leave it in God’s hands, it frees us up to allow His love, joy, hope, peace and other fruits of the spirit to take up residence in our hearts and flow out from there. That is such an essential part of being the hands and feet of Christ because those are the things that point others to Christ - the fruit of His spirit within us.

We go, we speak, we care for others and act as His hands and feet, we love, we encourage, we speak the truth... and then we need to let God do the work of the heart. The Holy Spirit changes hearts, not us.

It is such an honor to partner with these “Pockets of Hope” in Baltimore - from recovery programs, to food distribution centers and churches in the heart of Baltimore that are out there every day reaching out to the lost. We are so encouraged and excited by what God is doing in this city and are blessed to be a part of it, even in a small way.

Mother Teresa once said, “The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference toward one’s neighbor who lives at the roadside, assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.” Her

response to that? “Do small things with great love.”

That “small thing” is significant and may have a bigger impact than you or I could ever imagine.



Helping an ailing mission partner

Images in this article courtesy of Teresa Dubyoski.

“Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to do infinitely more than we might ask or think.” -Ephesians 3:20

Book Promotion: The Power Of ...

Continued from [page 5](#)

always starts with a person. The Holy Spirit calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

- Readers will discover that there is a rich LUTHERAN theology of leadership, underutilized yet critically needed, which puts individual character at the forefront.
- Readers will gain insights and encouragement to grow in vision, courage, integrity, as they build their team and understand the riddle of power.

Unique Features:

- Each Chapter focuses on biblical characters, discovering healthy and unhealthy models of stewardship.
- This handbook is complete, in that all major issues of leadership are included.
- Personal experiences of the author, his friends, and historical figures, illustrate every point.
- Rather than focusing on gimmicks for success, each chapter focuses on the theology which produces long-term healthy results.
- Each section concludes with Reflection Questions for personal or small group discussion.

Organization: The book is divided into an introduction followed by six chapters. The first chapter is foundational, sharing the surprising power and freedom God’s calling gives us. The succeeding chapters address the stewardship of vision (two), heart (three), community (four), opportunities (five), and finally power (six).

Click [here](#) to purchase the book, published by Pinnacle House Press, and available on Amazon.

“Here Am I. Send Me!”

Continued from [page 6](#)

shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, “Here I am. Send me!” (v. 8). God revealed Himself to Isaiah for the purpose of preparing him for ministry. Prior to his cleansing, Isaiah heard only the angels proclaiming God's holiness, and of course, the accusing voice of his own conscience. But now he can hear the voice of the Triune God speaking to the council of angels, asking, "Who will be the messenger to my people? Who will go for us?" And this time Isaiah answers without hesitation or reluctance, "Here Am I. Send me." The assurance of God's absolution and a clear conscience are evident in Isaiah's desire to answer the call. And from his experience we can draw three conclusions.

1. **Worship precedes service** - humbly seeking the Lord in worship is the first step in determining the what, where, when, why, and how of God's calling in a particular season of your life. In Scripture, God's call sometimes came through a vision, dream, or some other supernatural phenomenon. But most experience an urging of the Holy Spirit to serve in a particular way or to use a particular gift of the Spirit for the common good.
2. **Self-awareness precedes action** - understanding one's current condition and circumstances will clarify what you lack that God must provide before he can use you for his intended purpose.
3. **Formation precedes confirmation** - formation refers to the process of preparation one undergoes in order to carry out their ministry/calling. But formation is not the same as confirmation. Some think that if you have a Bible college or seminary degree or if you have a special skill in service or leadership, you automatically qualify for a particular ministry. But no one in the church is self-appointed. God always uses the Church to confirm a person to ministry after a time of formational preparation, whether lay or ordained.

I pray that in this season of life, as you seek the Lord, His call to you will become clear, as it did for Isaiah. And that you will respond as he did, "*Here am I. send me!*"

Pr. Jeff Morlock is on the staff of the North American Lutheran Church and is Director of Vocational Discernment for the North American Lutheran Seminary. He may be reached at jmorlock@thenals.org

Caring Christian Faith Communities: Needed ...

Continued from [page 8](#)

Writer Kirsten Sanders, in the recent March/2023 issue of Christianity Today, did an excellent job of describing the kind of Christian community which could reach the “walking wounded” of 2023. “What makes the church (unique) is its knowledge of itself as called by God to be his representative on the earth, to be marked by unwieldy and inconvenient practices like forgiveness, hospitality, humility, and repentance. It is marked in such a way by its common gathering, in baptism and Communion, remembering the Lord’s death and proclaiming it until he comes...When the church becomes preoccupied with defending itself to the world, it eventually becomes incoherent. The only way to be a church is to speak the peculiar language of peace, of forgiveness, of repentance and resurrection.”

One of my favorite New Testament passages that I believe presents a vision of God’s love and Christian community is Ephesians 3:16-19. Paul writes, “I pray that out of (the Father’s) glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Don Brandt

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It is incredibly difficult to witness to the love of Christ if this love is not evident within our congregations due to internal conflict.

The Creeds Don't Sparkle

Continued from [page 11](#)

I mean: if someone wants to say that they adhere to the "Sparkle creed," then they can personally say that they believe exactly what is in that statement. If a congregation wants to go so far as to use this creed in worship, then they are free to do so, but I strongly believe it should be introduced as a statement of that individual congregation, not of the Christian Church—it is not "the faith of the Church, the faith in which we baptize."

For to use it in such a manner is to actually separate one's self and congregation from the global Church. It is to become myopic and rather self-centered. Arguably, it is creating one's own personal faith and religion—dare I say one's own god.

And yes, I am quite aware that I belong to a denomination whose founder separated himself and then many congregations from the larger Church body of the time. The irony is not lost on me; however, Luther didn't mess with the Creeds. He affirmed them and what they stood for repeatedly. He didn't tinker with the Creeds or try to change them for he never wanted to split with the Church of Rome. These statements of belief were not up for negotiation or reformation. They were good "as is."

They still are. They are meant to hold us together despite our disagreements on secondary issues. Trying to put "sparkle" in them only causes more division.

Leave the Creeds alone.

Arguably, it [Sparkle creed] is creating one's own personal faith and religion—dare I say one's own god.

Coming Events

- **NEXUS Institute Summer 2023**—Des Moines, IA. July 16-22, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering**—Phoenix, AZ. July 17-20, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Lutheran Week 2023**—Oklahoma City, OK. August 7-11, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 23rd Annual Gathering & Convention**—St. Charles, MO. October 1-4, 2023. Click [here](#).

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

SIMUL: Spring 2023

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

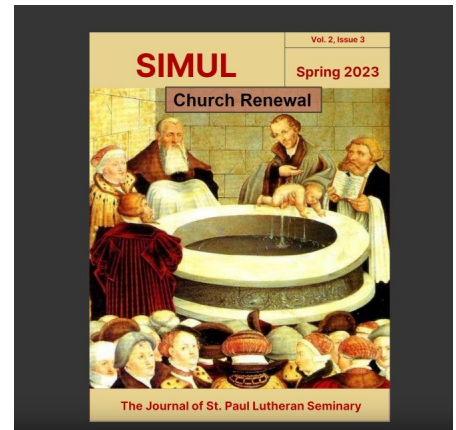
The Spring 2023 *SIMUL*, the Journal of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, is out – and best of all, it's free! Click [here](#) to access it.

The Spring 2023 edition includes a number of insightful articles concerning church renewal. In this volume, John Pless explains how revitalization flows from the font, pulpit and altar. Tom Hilpert explains the value of small groups in any effort to restart a congregation. Tony Ede emphasizes the importance of creating a church renewal plan. Randy Freund shows how the scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions are invaluable guides for recharging a church. And Brad Hales underscores how discipleship and visitation are key elements in any effort to rejuvenate the church. Finally, I close out this issue with a review of Sarah Hinlicky Wilson's delightful new novel *A-Tumblin' Down*.

SIMUL can be read three ways. One can enlarge and read through the flip book on the top of the webpage (there is a full screen button that can be clicked on the lower right-hand side of the flipbook), or one can scroll down and read each individual article. This second option allows readers to share individual articles (that can be read on a cellphone) without sending the entire issue. You can also download a pdf to your device and keep it forever!

Enjoy!

Dennis



CORE Voice Newsletter

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Kim Smith, Editor

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