

CRLC and Critical Theory

by [Pr. Ryan Cordle](#), ELCA Pastor in Ohio



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In the September and November editions of *CORE Voice*, Dennis Nelson analyzed the activist constituency of the members of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). The fact that there are a number of activists on the Commission is not surprising, since the Churchwide Assembly’s directive to the ELCA Church Council was to create a commission to recommend restructuring the church being particularly attentive to the church’s commitment to “dismantling racism.” In other words, whatever recommendations the CRLC makes must take steps to dismantle racism within the denomination.

For many members of the ELCA, the question of racism in the church is confusing. In this instance, why is there a move to restructure the whole denomination around dismantling one particular sin?

To answer this question, it is important to understand the chief philosophical assumption of ELCA policymakers, namely, Critical Theory. In critical theory, the world is viewed chiefly through the lens of power and how some groups use their power to oppress other groups. There are oppressors and victims, especially in the sense that some groups are kept from having full access to the power that opposite groups enjoy. This oppression is racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc. This means that oppression like racism is much more than personal prejudice (which is how most of us would understand the term); rather,

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Is This What You Want?

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

We all remember with horror the ways in which traditional views on such matters as human sexuality were rejected and belittled at the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering. [Here](#) is a link to an article in the Summer 2018 issue of CORE Voice newsletter about that event, including the way in which ELCA public theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber led 32,000 young people in a chant rejecting Biblically faithful views as a lie from Satan. I think it is very interesting that as of the time of my writing this article, the website for this summer's ELCA youth gathering – taking place in July in New Orleans – does not yet include the names of the keynote speakers. However, in the information for churches that will be sending their youth, there are more than enough reasons for congregations that take the Bible and the historic Christian faith seriously to stay far away.

[Here](#) is a link to the information that has been prepared to help youth and youth leaders get ready for the gathering. The theme for the event is “Created to Be.” The preparatory materials are divided into five sections with two sessions each. We have been Created to Be Brave, Authentic, Free, and Disruptive Disciples. Each of the ten sessions starts out with a land acknowledgment, stating who were the original inhabitants of the land on which the gathering will be held, and from whom the land was stolen. Not only is the ELCA conditioning its young people to think and feel negatively about the country in which they live, they are also displaying their blatant and pompous hypocrisy. The ELCA is totally ignoring ways in which synods are abusing power and misusing a constitutional provision to take over the property of congregations. Also I am not aware of any situation where a synod has returned the proceeds from the sale of the property of a closed congregation to the original inhabitants of the land. Rather synods use this income to fund their radical-left agenda as their congregations, number of congregations, and the income from congregations continue to diminish.

The preparatory materials are filled with examples of ways in which the ELCA is indoctrinating its young people. For example, the “Go Deeper” section of Session 2 of Unit 5 (Disciples) makes the statement, “Many of our young people have experienced Christians who do harm, speak hatefully, and work for laws that hurt our neighbors.” The youth are then asked, “What negative words come to mind when you think of Christians or disciples? What harm



have you seen people do in Jesus' name?" In contrast, in the “Go Deeper” section of Session 1 of Unit 5 the young people are asked, “Is your church a Reconciling in Christ congregation? If so, how long did your church take to make that commitment and adopt a welcome statement? If not, what would it mean for you if your congregation became a Reconciling in Christ congregation?” Any pastor who does not want the congregation to become Reconciling in Christ – and/or does not want the issue to be raised within the congregation – needs to be forewarned. Also, the implication is that people with traditional views do harm, speak hatefully, and work for laws that hurt people, while congregations that are Reconciling in Christ are accepting, loving, and wonderful.

And how does the ELCA indoctrinate the people who work with its young people? Information regarding the general session speakers for the ELCA's Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza being held this month also in New Orleans is available. [Here](#) is a link to the website for this gathering for leaders in youth ministry.

Looking at the bios for the general session speakers, you will see that the overwhelming emphasis is on LGBTQ+ ideology as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. Here is information regarding three of the five general session speakers. If you want your ministry to and with your young people to be anything other than that, you need to look elsewhere.

Jamie Bruesehoff is listed as an “award-winning LGBTQ+” advocate. Jamie and her at-the-time pre-adolescent transgender child spoke at the 2018 youth gathering. She describes her experiences raising a transgender child as “rooted in her queer identity.” She is the author of [Raising Kids beyond the Binary: Celebrating God's Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children](#).

The Rev. Carla Christopher (*she/they*) is co-chair of the ELCA's Commission for a Renewed Lutheran

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Operation Reconquista: ...

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

Can mainline denominations be reconquered from theological liberalism? A group named Operation Reconquista has emerged to attempt such a thing, and they are offering tactics on just how to proceed.

I had never heard of the group until asked to write about them and offer some thoughts. To get the full scope of what they believe and what they are attempting to do, please click [here](#) to visit their website. In a nutshell, their methodology is this: 1. Identify a moderate to conservative mainline congregation. 2. Attend there and become involved in leadership. 3. Work to strengthen that congregation in the orthodox Christian faith. 4. Resist any attempt to inject secular liberalism/progressivism. 5. Let the more liberal/progressive congregations die—as they will invariably do.

They believe this reconquest is necessary given the historical contributions mainline denominations have made to the American society; their cultural power; the beauty of their traditions and liturgy; and their historic buildings. “...Restoring them to the Gospel will revive the culture and reverse the persistent decline of religion in the West,” according to their website.¹

The group has targeted seven mainline denominations including the ELCA, and on Reformation Day, they “posted” 95 Theses to each of these denominations calling on them to reform. They reportedly sent these theses to every congregation in these denominations; however, I must also report that my congregation did not receive a copy, email or otherwise. Perhaps my reputation as a CORE contributor preceded me.

In this article, I will affirm the goals of this group and share my positive reactions. I will share my critiques in the next CORE Voice newsletter.

I truly admire the chutzpah of this group and their goals. I too share with them the thought that most mainline denominations have departed from the orthodox faith and are in major need of reform.

Like them, I agree that the liberal/progressives played the long game in their takeover of the mainline. In a way, this group is seeking to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Like them, I agree that schism is not the optimal response, and neither is leaving except in extreme circumstances. An extended quote from the Lutheran subgroup is appropriate here:

Stay in the ELCA. By leaving your church you let it dissolve into Liberalism, and eventually die out. The percentage of churches without pastors is noticeable, and because of this, entire churches, congregations, and even denominations simply melt away to Atheism or other denominations such as becoming an Evangelical.

If your church is truly very heretical and you are not being fed, go to your nearest Lutheran church, especially if its [sic] in the ELCA, rinse and repeat until you find a church you are comfortable retaking. If this means you must go to a WELS or LCMS church, then that's fine, but if possible, go attend an ELCA church.²

No small amount of digital ink has been spilled by those who have advocated for orthodox Christians to leave more liberal/progressive denominations and congregations, and I get it. I know that some have faced pressure from bishops and pastors to leave, and others have been kicked out. If that were happening to me, I would get out as well. However, I am also of a mind that the greatest weapon we wield is the Word of God and its preaching. That Word can and does change hearts and minds even within more secular progressive/liberal denominations, and this group shares that conviction.

There is a real sense of conviction, daring, steadfastness and a willingness to go to battle, that Operation Reconquista seems to embrace. This, in my estimation, is particularly appealing to men, both young and old, who have been dismissed, vilified, and objectified by a great majority of leaders in mainline churches. In fact, young men currently are the majority of members in Operation Reconquista, and given the lack of young men's involvement in the mainline, this isn't necessarily a bad thing.



It shall be interesting to see if this group has the stamina to have long-term success in their endeavors. If it is indeed powered by the Holy Spirit and is a movement of reform, they will eventually become a force to be reckoned with—and so I leave with a partial quote of the great rabbi Gamaliel in Acts 5, “Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

1. <https://www.operationreconquista.com/blank-1>
2. <https://sola-elca.squarespace.com/fags> SOLA is the Society of Orthodox Lutheran Advocates.

Rest, Inc., Part 2

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



Finding Rest in (and for) a Restless World

Dear Friends—

When did so many of the mainline denominations begin to go adrift and lose their way? Why? How? What happened? Today hundreds, if not thousands, of those same churches and now non-denominational expressions of the Church, are adopting wokeism, universalism, neo-paganism, etc., and arrogantly moving from any form of Christian orthodoxy, all while simultaneously and carelessly hitching a ride on the slippery slope upon which our present-day culture is sliding. Absolute madness, and at lightning speed ... *at any cost!* So many questions. It's important to raise such questions because history will, inevitably, repeat itself. We are not exempt, especially if we don't remain vigilant and deeply rooted in Christ, being *well-rested* for these disquieting days.

No doubt, many of you have considered a vast array of possible responses to the fore-mentioned questions—Maybe it was because we shifted from the centrality/primacy of the Word of God, or perhaps it was how we began compromising on many 'social issues' in the name of compassion but forgetting that this compassion should remain grounded in Christ-centered orthodoxy, or possibly it was because of our introducing various forms of 'contemporary' worship to reach the bitter-battered-bored, but compromising truth. The list goes on. Maybe these responses will not provide definitive answers, but they can certainly help us to navigate a more effective and faithful future.

However, there is one obvious response that I hear little, if any, conversation about: Maybe it was because our leadership, as a whole, did not lead or

work out of life-giving rest, but only found this rest after leading and working and doing ... and doing some more, thereby losing its way. It seems that we've struggled with the age-old challenge of *doing* and *not being*, like Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19:9-12) and so many witnesses before us, forgetting about *just being still* and resting in the grace of Christ, and daring to 'hear' His Voice, in the midst of it all! I'm convinced that we would not be where we are today, with a large portion of the Church no longer practicing traditional Christian orthodoxy, had its leaders maintained a posture of *resting—IN Christ*. Without spending time in this place of rest—praying (not petitioning!), waiting, and abiding—at the very least, our senses become dull and we can lose our ability to discern the spirit of this present age (cf. Romans 13:11-14). A restless world, indeed! Perhaps, that's why the author of Hebrews is so concise about the necessity of rest: "*So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from His. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience.*" What does this mean to you, here and now, in your present context?

So, yes, I am writing this brief article, more as a personal letter, as a follow-up to the article I wrote for the November issue of CORE Voice Newsletter called [REST, INC.](#) As your colleague, I'm simply inviting you to re-evaluate your own personal pattern of building rest into your daily schedule. Many years ago, I became intensely aware of my own unhealthy pattern of not taking time to rest and choosing instead to live out my ordained calling through the obligatory production of parochial reports, and so much more! It was about then that I bumped into Acts 6:1, 2 where it reads, "*... the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word (and later in v. 4, "... we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.") to serve tables.*" For many reasons, this passage spoke volumes to me in how I would "do" ministry henceforth. I would stop waiting on tables, putting out fires, meeting all expectations, etc. I would, instead, begin the practice of rest.

Rest will not only serve as the antidote to help us, in our pastoral-prophetic roles, to avoid the slippery slope of which I spoke in the opening paragraphs, but it'll greatly enhance our ability to attend to the paramount work of disciple-making and mission. Find the rest you need, and even fight for it. There is much on the line.

Book Review: Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage?

by [Mr. Spencer Wentland](#), former ELCA missionary

21 Conversations from a Historically Christian View

Introduction and Summary

I have not read any of Preston Sprinkle's other books, including his more famous, [A People to Be Loved](#), but I have been asked to read and review this book. I am writing as a thirty-four-year-old, Side B, in process, queer and renewed Lutheran who has believed and contended for a traditional sexual ethic before, during, and after the ELCA's expansion into its Bound Conscience era. How's that for a late modern introduction!

Sprinkle sets two foundational premises he wants his audience to be aware of and informed by before he moves speedily through twenty-one commonly made arguments for a [gay] affirming position. Firstly, people don't usually have a real open mind to ideas, rather ideas usually are manipulated to serve what people already believe to be true, so he wants us to take a full stop and have an open mind. Secondly, the Bible's vision of marriage is rooted in sexual differentiation ala male and female as revealed in the opening chapter of Genesis, and affirmed by Jesus directly in his own understanding of marriage.

So, we already know this book is somewhat of an apologetic against the affirming position. Each affirming argument is followed by his response. He concludes that the church needs to do a better job of being consistently against all sin, more consistently loving, and in particular loving and making space for sexual minorities so they can thrive in a traditional sexual ethic.

Strengths

Sprinkle deals with a lot of arguments, the more popular ones and others that may not have been considered and heard. He shows a careful commitment to the task of exegesis and establishes how the traditional view is the historically Christian view in scripture. I appreciated the way he has worked to champion side B Christians against conservative elements that want to police the language they use to describe themselves or otherwise surround queer Christians with greater scrutiny than straight Christians.

Weaknesses

Sprinkle is writing to a more conservative Christian audience, and this comes at the cost of always feeling like he is dealing with each of the arguments fully in the context of the perspectives from which they come. In many instances he comes



across as dismissive. He never really wrestles with hermeneutical questions that are often a crucial component in some affirming arguments. The crux in these arguments is not what the Biblical authors meant in their own worldview but how that translates or fails to translate into the modern world. He does not address this.

Finally, he does not really deal with the moral imagination of those who concede marriage is clearly heterosexual biblically speaking, but that there may be other legitimate covenanted alternatives that could allow for homosexual relationships to be morally acceptable. This point of view is represented in two of the four *commonly held understandings* in the ELCA Social Statement *Gift and Trust*.

* I am usually not a fan of labels, but Side B represents a category of Christians who hold to a traditional sexual ethic but do not envision following Jesus as needing to claim complete healing from homosexuality or avoiding adjectives like gay, lesbian, queer etc.

Coming Events

- **Y4Life Youth Conference**—Hilton Crystal City Hotel, Washington, DC. Jan. 18-20, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **March for Life** w/NALC banner. Meet at noon on Jan. 19th at 12th and Madison Sts., NW in Washington, DC.
- **Pro Ecclesia Conference**—Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL. June 10-12, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **NEXUS 2024**—Des Moines, IA. July 21-27, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Online Convocation**. August 9, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 24th Annual Gathering & Convention** — Marion, IA. September 29- October 2, 2024. Click [here](#).

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

Considering the Challenge of Transitioning from Clergy-Led to Lay-Led Congregational Ministries

by Pr. Don Brandt, [Congregational Lay-Led Initiative \(CLI\)](#)



This article is written especially for smaller congregations that are either 1) already experiencing a pastoral vacancy, or 2) know that their solo pastor will be retiring within the next one or two years.

If your congregation fits this description it is essential that you understand the full scope of the challenges you will face, or already are facing, when it comes to finding and calling your next pastor.

You might be hesitating to read further. After all, you might be convinced that the “right” pastor is out there, and the Holy Spirit will undoubtedly lead him or her to your congregation. But know this:

The current shortage of Lutheran pastors is unprecedented. Moreover, this shortage is unprecedented in my lifetime...and I was born in 1951!

However, if you keep reading you will learn of a congregational ministry strategy that provides you with a viable “Plan B” if and when you decide that it is highly unlikely that your congregation will—in the near future—be able to identify and call the “right” pastor. And please note: Lutheran CORE is ready to come alongside your congregation to help you address this ministry challenge. Now back to the matter of “unprecedented in my lifetime.”

About the only advantage to being 72 is all the recent history I have witnessed. And in my lifetime I have witnessed phenomenal and dramatic changes in the mainline Protestant church in general, and the Lutheran church in particular.

First there is my family history. I am a third-generation Lutheran pastor. My parents were missionaries in China when, in 1949, they and my older sister had to be evacuated when the Communists took over the country. My father—Les Brandt—subsequently had parish ministry calls in Minnesota and North Dakota; i.e., “Luther-land”. In 1958 my father was called to start a new

congregation in Orange County, California. This was when Southern California was experiencing a significant migration of Midwestern Lutherans to that part of the country. (In fact, Orange County, in the 1950’s, experienced a 278% growth in its total population!)

Now for what I personally experienced as a member of the Baby Boom generation. In that rapidly growing Orange County congregation I was surrounded by the children of my generation; children whose parents expected them to attend church and Sunday school. Not surprisingly, my experience growing up in the church was profoundly impacted by being a part of what was then the largest generation in American history. This included being a part of active church youth groups, and working for Lutheran Student Movement in the early 1970’s. When I started Luther seminary in 1974 all the dorm rooms were occupied and the student body was close to 600 students. (And there were then seven other Lutheran seminaries I could have attended.) When I graduated (from Wartburg Seminary) there were only three students out of a class of 60 who had a call by the time of graduation. Fact was there were far more graduates than there were available calls.

Then, on a less personal note, there is the matter of the milestones in American church history I have witnessed. The year 1960 was the year when 63% of Americans were members of Christian congregations. In 2020 it was 47%. In 1960 two-thirds of Americans identified as Protestants; mostly belonging to mainline churches. Today less than 15% of Americans are part of mainline denominations. As recently as the 1980’s and 1990’s a great many Lutheran congregations were benefiting from the phenomenon of nesting-stage Boomers who were returning to church because they decided that church would be “good for the kids”. In one article about Boomer parents returning to church the weekly magazine of the Los Angeles Times quoted a parent who said, “I was pretty wild as a teen and young adult. But now I am a father and I want my kids to have some values.”

So much for nostalgia. In 2024 the picture is far more bleak. And one of the dramatic examples of this—in addition to only 15% of Americans currently being a part of mainline Protestant churches—is the crisis when it comes to too few pastors available for too many pastoral vacancies. The easiest way to explain this clergy supply shortage is to understand

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Resentful Faith

By [Pr. Douglas Schoelles](#), Lutheran CORE Board Member

While visiting another Lutheran church in the area as the gathered worshipped the LORD through the prayers and praised God through the songs, across the pews I saw a man, arms folded, a closed lip face saying, “I dare you.”



How can you be resentful in worship when we should be joining the angels in singing and celebrating the glorious grace of God?

If you say to yourself that you won't sing louder; if you argue within your spirit against the invitation to give yourself to worship - Right there! Right in that thought of your rebellion dwells your sinful resistance. If you hear the Word in a sermon and you are whispering in your mind, “Pastor, you can pound sand!”; just perhaps you have a resentful, rebellious faith.

Is your resistance because the call to worship is unbiblical or contrary to faith? No. Is being resentful and stubborn to the invitation of God unbiblical? No. Unfortunately we see a lot of stubborn resistance in the Bible.

After people fled from the Babylonian siege in Judah into Egypt, the wives gave themselves over to worshipping a goddess. Even though idolatry and false values were the reason for all their previous troubles, still they traded the LORD for gods and priorities that have no power to give life. When the prophet Jeremiah warns them, they resent the prophet for meddling (Jer 44:1-30). Is that your attitude? “Don't tell us how to be faithful to God.” Do you have a resentful faith where you want Jesus, but don't want him “telling me what to do!”

In worship, we gather not for our amusement. We gather to celebrate the glory of God. When your pride and your resistance to worship gets your hackles up, you are not worshipping or faith-filled to God. When you are offended for being called to worship regularly, your stubborn nature is resisting God's grace.

As redeemed sinners we need to recognize that the very act of worship is spiritual warfare. That the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God and the Gospel of our Crucified Savior are doing battle with the false

gods and values embedded and bonded to our human nature. Worship is about the very act of being called, exorcised, out of darkness and brought into God's marvelous light by the Spirit.

How can we resent the Lord who loves us stubborn folks so much, that not only does he give us the blessing of each breath and each day, but gives his own beloved Son to die on the cross for our stiff-necked sin to release us into the joy of faith? Rather than stubborn resistance, we have been reconciled to God through Christ so we may bask in God's grace, love and forgiveness. Rather than arm folded resentment we are called to angel flying joy of praising the One who loves us.

Since Jesus endured the cross and its shame so that we may gather in the joyful assembly, we have something to be joyful and excited about. In the presence of God we glory in the hope and joy we have received through Christ. As God's people we are celebrating the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit.

Christ wants you to have the full measure of his joy. Faith replaces resentment. Be filled with faith.

May the proven genuineness of your faith result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7).

Is This What You Want?

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Church and chaplain for Proclaim, which her bio describes as “an ELCA ministry that supports LGBTQIA2S+ seminarians and rostered leaders.” She serves as Assistant to the Bishop for Justice Ministries in two ELCA synods and is a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Consultant for multiple synods and faith-based organizations.

Deacon Ross Murray is director of the Naming Project. The website for that organization describes their goal as to “provide a safe and sacred space where youth of all sexual orientations and gender identities are named and claimed by a loving God.” They also work to “advocate for systemic change in church and society.”

If that is what you want your congregation's youth ministry to be all about, more power to you. If that is not what you want, stay far away from both gatherings and from any potential youth worker who attends or who would promote either or both gatherings.

Aging and End-of-Life Decisions

by [The Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman](#), *The NALC Life Ministries Team*

“Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and will bear, I will carry and will save.”
Isaiah 46:4 (ESV)

Among the important “Aging and End-of-Life Issues” presently being confronted in both the church and in our North American secular culture is euthanasia. A recent article in the Washington Post Newspaper stated that the number of Americans over the age of 65 continues to be rising quickly. “In the past century, it’s grown five times the rate of the rest of the population and is now approaching 60 million people.” While this is welcome and good news for people who are enjoying happy, healthy golden years, for many others the “golden years” are not so golden.

Providing care and the costs of care for an aging population are often overwhelming issues for seniors, their children and society in general. One’s view of euthanasia is a faith issue impacting a variety of aging, quality of life and end-of-life decisions.

The biomedical evolution has touched the lives of all of us, and this means that as the end of our life or that of our loved one approaches, increasing numbers of us will be called upon to apply the principles of our faith and God’s Word in making decisions about the meaning of life. Being a church that believes in the sanctity of life, how can we facilitate helpful conversation and provide guidance in decision-making that often involves complex issues and requires theological and spiritual integrity?

Writing about euthanasia as members of The North American Lutheran Church Life Ministries Team, our purpose is to lift up God’s gift of life across the entire span of human life from conception in the womb to the end of life and all circumstances in between. Our Lutheran understanding about aging, illness and end-of-life decisions pivots around two central points: Upholding the sanctity of life because life is a gift from God to be received and lived with thanksgiving; and providing hope and meaning as the end-of-life approaches. Such hope and assurance are possible even in times of suffering, and death itself: Truth powerfully proclaimed in the resurrection faith of the church.

So, what is euthanasia and how do Christians who believe in the sanctity of life respond?

“Euthanasia,” in its proper sense, is derived from two Greek words meaning “a good death.” Euthanasia is something we do or fail to do that causes, or is intended to cause death. For some, the word

“euthanasia” is a synonym for “mercy killing.”

Surrounded by a culture of death, which chants, “My body, my life, my choice,” what is our Christian response?

Many of us who are pro-life hold that there is a difference between “active” and “passive” euthanasia. Christians in North America face strong forces contending for “mercy killing” and assisted suicide. We must lay a sound foundation for our own understanding of what it really means to provide care at the end of life and then work together to oppose the terribly-distorted image of care that is projected by “mercy killing.” Active euthanasia refers to an action one takes to end a life, such as a lethal injection. Passive euthanasia refers to an omission, such as failing to intervene at a life-threatening crisis or failing to provide nourishment.

It is important to not confuse passive euthanasia with the morally legitimate decision to withhold medical treatment that is not morally necessary, and respects that God alone is author of life and of all our days. When the God-given powers of the body to sustain its own life can no longer function and doctors in their professional judgment conclude that there is no real hope for recovery even with life-support measures, a Christian may in good conscience “Let nature take its course.” At such times medical interventions are no longer effective expressions of Christian care but instead involve burdensome prolongation of a person’s dying.

Does a person have the right to refuse medical treatments, or must one always use every possible medicine and medical technology available to keep ourselves or another person alive who is dying?

Believing that life is a gift from God, “Lutherans for Life” opposes physician-assisted suicide and other efforts by individuals and medical professionals to take life or speed a person’s death through so-called “mercy killing.” Destroying life created in God’s image is contrary to core Biblical teaching about the sanctity of life. Scripture tells us that even our suffering entrusted to God will not be in vain and can bring glory to God (Romans 8:18-28). Our last days can witness our faith to family and others, deepen our relationship with Jesus, bring reconciliation with



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CRLC and Critical Theory

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racism is systemic and institutionalized.

The assumptions at work in the ELCA's effort to "dismantle racism" rely on a subset of Critical Theory usually called Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory has been popularized recently by books like *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi and *White Fragility* by Robin Diangelo. In Mainline Christianity, Critical Race Theory has long been defended by ELCA Pastor, anti-racism advocate, and author Joseph Barndt. Barndt offers the distinction in his work that power can be used by Christians for good when it is shared without exclusivity.

The modern anti-racist movement based on Critical Race Theory makes a fundamental claim: You are either a racist or an antiracist. Within this framework, you are either supporting racism or you are working to dismantle racism. Because, in this view, racism is so enmeshed in American culture, one cannot simply be "not-racist." There is no neutrality. If you are a White person, racism is your original sin. Furthermore, because racism is institutionally enmeshed, to be anti-racist is about supporting particular political policy changes that deconstruct supposed hierarchies of power within society.

Connected to this understanding of Critical Theory is the understanding of Intersectionality, which asserts that there are interlocking systems of oppression that affect more than one individual trait. Thus, oppression based on race is intricately tied together with oppression based on sexuality, gender, ability, etc. Under this framework, for example, opposing the full inclusion of practicing homosexuals on the roster of Word and Sacrament is descriptive of institutional racism. To be anti-racist is to support the full inclusion of any group that claims oppression.

Understanding this will help one understand many of the ELCA's policy commitments. Working to end so-called Global Climate Change is an anti-racist policy, because it is argued that Global Climate Change disproportionately affects minorities. Likewise, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's statements such as those regarding Israel and Palestine or the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse, which drew the ire of many moderate and conservative ELCA members, can be understood through the oppressor/oppressed framework of Critical Theory.

The question is, what will it mean to restructure a church around the tenet of dismantling racism? Barndt answers this question in his book *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Journeying toward Whole-*

ness, providing six steps: Commitment to Institutionalizing, Full Power Sharing, Assured Cultural Inclusion, Mutual Accountability, Multiplying Inclusion, and Restored Community. The purpose of these steps, according to Barndt is, "The ultimate vision that drives the process of institutional change is a future in which both the church and the wider community overcome systemic racism." Consequently, this means that the fundamental goal of a church restructured to be anti-racist is to be an institution that can partner with the world to overcome systemic racism. In other words, the anti-racist church will be on the leading front of the anti-racist policies that shape the world.

Understandably, when one hears the phrase "dismantle racism," it is easy to hear it through what we all know: Racism is a sin. There is no question, and the church must always call racism what it is; however, when you hear ELCA policy makers using phrases like "anti-racism" and "dismantling racism," please understand the goal is to structure a church around political activism. This ought to concern those in the ELCA who understand that Christ has given his church a different commission, a commission found in Matthew 28:16-20 and John 20:21-23.

Aging and End-of-Life Decisions

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loved ones, and see dying in Christ as a good part of life.

Lastly, it is important to be honest with each other that in making end-of-life decisions, pastors, family and medical professionals who are committed Christians can disagree. Deliberate and prayerful conversation needs to continue regarding the meaning and definition of passive euthanasia. As Creator, God alone knows with certainty whether an illness or an injury is incurable.

Our disagreements may remind us that Martin Luther once said that there are times we "sin boldly" knowing even our best efforts may lead to error; yet, we are forever covered by God's "Word of Grace and Forgiveness" through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We move forward boldly living by Grace, pondering God's guidance, and seeking ethical and lawful ways to bring God's love to each other and our neighbors in promoting a culture of life. Life is not ours to give, nor is it ours to take. Respecting the sanctity of life God assures us that even in our old age with gray hairs, he will bear us, carry us and he will save.

The Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman

Considering the Challenge of Transitioning ...

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two current realities:

1. Too many Boomer pastors are retiring. And the youngest Boomer pastors will not reach the age of 65 until 2029. This means that, for at least the next five years, the number of vacancies will only increase.

2. There are far too few men and women pursuing a seminary education. And many of these students will graduate at an older age than used to be the case; meaning that their time as active parish pastors will be relatively short.

Now for the unique challenges when it comes to smaller congregations identifying and calling the “right” pastor. The current reality is that smaller congregations are at a distinct disadvantage even when they are able to provide an adequate salary package. With too many calls for too few candidates, pastors today have multiple call options. And most of them are applying for call opportunities at mid-sized and larger churches.

Finally, the good news. Lutheran CORE is offering coaching assistance for smaller Lutheran congregations who are already looking for a pastor, or who soon will be. This ministry is the Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative, or CLI. One important key to this particular ministry is to tap into the growing number of active, retired Boomer Lutheran pastors. Some of these pastors are ready to coach a church, like yours, as you address the current clergy supply crisis. (This would be online coaching, not in-person.) With CLI your congregational leaders would be mentored by a capable pastor as you enlist and train a few members of your congregation to take on the role of lay ministers.

Details about the Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative can be found [here](#) on the Lutheran CORE website. Also, click [here](#) to read a previous article which provides one possible, detailed scenario regarding how a congregation can launch this type of ministry. And then, if you still have questions and want to communicate with a human being, contact me directly. I would welcome the opportunity to connect with you (pastordonbrandt@gmail.com or 503-559-2034).

Preaching in Wittenberg

by [Dennis Di Mauro](#), NALC pastor in Warrenton, VA.

Want to preach in the "Luther" churches in Lutherstadt Wittenberg? Wittenberg English Ministry (WEM) is looking for pastors ... click [here](#).

March for Life and Y4Life Conference in January!!

by [Dennis Di Mauro](#), pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church (NALC) in Warrenton, VA.



The NALC Life Ministries team is once again preparing for the March for Life in Washington D.C. this January, but our plan is a little different. Instead of holding a life conference, NALC Life has decided to team up with Lutherans for Life (LFL) and participate in their events at the March! Their youth conference, Y4Life, will be held at the Hilton Crystal City Hotel from Thursday, January 18th, 2024 through Saturday, January 20th, 2024 and it has over 400 kids already registered. Click [here](#) to register. We encourage all our Lutheran youth to participate in this conference.

On Friday, January 19th we will be once again participating in the March for Life under the NALC banner, and I hope you can join us at 12th and Madison Sts., N.W at noon as we march to the U.S. Capitol. Before the march there is a prayer service at DAR Constitution Hall 1776 D St. NW (18th and D St.) Washington, DC 20006 starting at 8:30am. All our Lutheran friends are invited to attend this service and our clergy are invited to participate (stoles are white).

If you have any problems at the march, please contact Pastor Dennis Di Mauro at (703) 568-3346. Pastor Di Mauro can also host you in his home if you would like to stay overnight in DC. We can't wait to see you in our nation's capital this January!!

CORE Voice Newsletter

Published by Lutheran CORE;

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