

An Incoming DEIA Disaster?

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



Recently, the ELCA posted the results of a DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) Audit¹ which was authorized by the Churchwide Assembly. The audit laid out its findings and made numerous recommendations for the church to implement practically and constitutionally.

It would seem as though a move towards DEIA would be uncontroversial. If you take the traditional meaning of each of those words, arguably every congregation would seek to be: diverse as the Gospel is for all people; equitable as God is just and fair; inclusive as, again, the Gospel is for all people; and accessible as we are called to be hospitable and welcoming. However, one of the great tricks of the postmodern world is to take common words and redefine them to mean something different. DEIA in the current secular fashion is less about including everyone and more about pushing out those who are labeled oppressors—usually heterosexual, white men. And while the audit does go to great pains to try and urge a DEIA policy which is rooted in biblical thought², I cannot help but see a Trojan horse which seeks to formalize secular DEIA within the church.

I believe this to be the case as I see these recommendations centering the church’s focus on DEIA and moving it completely away from its God-given mission to spread the gospel. I hope to show this in four points.

#1. The approach is top down. Don’t take my word for it. I quote

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A Warning of What is Coming

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

Many thanks to Kevin Haug for his very insightful article about the DEIA audit which the ELCA recently commissioned a law firm to do of its governing documents. I hate to think of how many of your benevolence dollars the ELCA spent on this effort. You will find Kevin's article in this issue of CORE Voice. It is a word of warning to all in the ELCA. You do not need to take my word for it that these recommendations actually are being given as part of this audit. You can check it out for yourself at [DEIA Report Part 2.pdf \(elca.org\)](#)

I am an ELCA pastor who has been retired for nearly ten years. When I read these recommendations, my first thought was, "I am glad to be retired." The immediate response of one ELCA pastor in his early 60's when I shared these recommendations with him was, "How soon can I retire?"

I thought of the strong, negative response I am certain I would have received if and when I would have shared these recommendations with the congregation council of the church where I was the pastor. I then thought, "We are already facing the challenge of trying to do everything that we are currently doing. How am I now supposed to get everyone on board, enthusiastic about, and actively engaged in fulfilling these recommendations?" And what will be the consequences for us in our synod if these recommendations become requirements and we do not meet them? If congregations that are DEIA-compliant are rewarded with such things as having extra voting members at synod assemblies and greater access to grants and other financial resources, how will congregations that are not DEIA-compliant be punished? For example, will they not be given any names of possible candidates for call if the congregation is looking for a pastor?

Here is just a sampling of the audit's Recommended Minimum DEIA Standards for Congregations. A question for all ELCA pastors and congregational leaders is this: Is this what you want to spend a considerable amount of your time, energy, and resources on?

1. Upgrade all personnel policies to reflect DEIA values.
2. Require annual DEIA training for all pastors, church staff, and lay leaders, using an Approved (approved by whom?) Provider. At a minimum this training will cover the following topics:
 - a. How does DEIA advance the values of the

Kingdom of God?

- b. Is this particular congregation perceived as hostile or unresponsive to members of historically marginalized groups, and if so, how might this congregation reverse that perception?

The ELCA defines "historically marginalized groups" as groups that have for some significant period of history been excluded from participation or leadership in the church on the basis of certain characteristics. They include racial and ethnic minorities, persons whose primary language is other than English, low income persons, persons with disabilities, gender non-conforming persons, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. (I have asked ELCA leaders who are so concerned for "historically marginalized groups," what about "currently marginalized groups"? Which I would say includes older, white, cisgender, heterosexual males with traditional views.)

This mandatory, annual DEIA training is also to consider such questions as these –

- a. What additional initiatives can this congregation pursue to promote DEIA values?
 - b. What financial resources does our congregation commit to promoting DEIA values and programs, and should we commit more and if so can we do so on an annual basis?
 - c. What is Christian White Nationalism, what causes people to adhere to it, and is it consistent with Jesus' teachings? How might members of historically marginalized groups be offended by Christian White Nationalism?
 - d. What is Black Lives Matter, is it consistent with Jesus' teachings, why are people drawn to it, what human needs does it address, and can the church do a better job at meeting those needs?
3. In addition, each congregation is to identify at least one other congregation with opposite or at least very different demographic characteristics and commit to starting at least a one-year relationship with them. This relationship is to include the following:
- a. Periodic meetings between the pastors to discuss ways in which the congregations can get to know each other better and plan joint activities to strengthen mutual understanding on DEIA issues. These activities may include joint DEIA training sessions with



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Operation Reconquista: Responses to Critical Questions

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

Editor's Note: Pr. Haug wrote a positive article on this topic in January ([click here](#)).



Last newsletter I hinted that I would write a follow up article about Operation Reconquista and offer some critical thoughts about the movement. However, after publication, I was introduced to two leaders in the movement; Richard Ackerman (AKA Redeemed Zoomer), the official leader of Operation Reconquista, and Benjamin Ruff, leader of the Society of Lutheran Advocates (SOLA). SOLA is the Lutheran Component of Operation Reconquista. Rather than simply offer critique, I offered these two gentlemen a chance to respond to my critical questions. What follows is their responses in an interview format which allows CORE readers to hear from them directly.

1. I hope you saw the article that I wrote for Lutheran Core. Did I accurately capture what Operation Reconquista is trying to accomplish as well as accurately convey your beliefs?

RA: Yes, you did accurately represent us. Here are a few things I would add: Firstly, Reconquista is part of a broader ideology that Christians have made the mistake of retreating from the culture and the world in the past 100 years, which has caused the culture to become more secular, which has caused more Christians to retreat, and so the cycle repeats. Reconquista is the belief that, when secularists hijack a Christian church or institution, faithful Christians should retake it rather than running away from it.

Secondly, the abandonment of mainline churches and the rise of Evangelical and non-denominational churches has caused Protestantism to lose its traditional and institutional rootedness, which is

something the Reconquista hopes to fix.

BR: I was very pleased to read your article. It was an incredibly brief and accurate representation of our goals. Affirmative responses were in short supply, so we were delighted to receive one from such a trusted source.

2a. For those who know history, the word Reconquista can conjure up images of violent response and take over. Obviously, you are neither advocating for nor implementing such things; however, knowing that there are those who say, "Words are violent," and that they might use that against the name of the movement: did you consider other names? How do you respond to those who might try to tie this to a violent takeover?

RA: I was the one who thought of the name Reconquista. Yes, it is a militaristic language. The Bible uses militaristic language. But the Bible is VERY careful to clarify "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." - Ephesians 6:12. Likewise, we are very clear to clarify that we are fighting Satan, and the heresies that he has spread in the church, not against churches and not against leaders in the church. We believe that in order to inspire young men to make sacrifices and take up a difficult cause, it is psychologically necessary to use strong militaristic language. We believe the failure of past conservative renewal movements in the mainline can be partially attributed to their timid and compromising nature. The progressives have never been timid in the slightest and have been rewarded for it with astounding conquest.

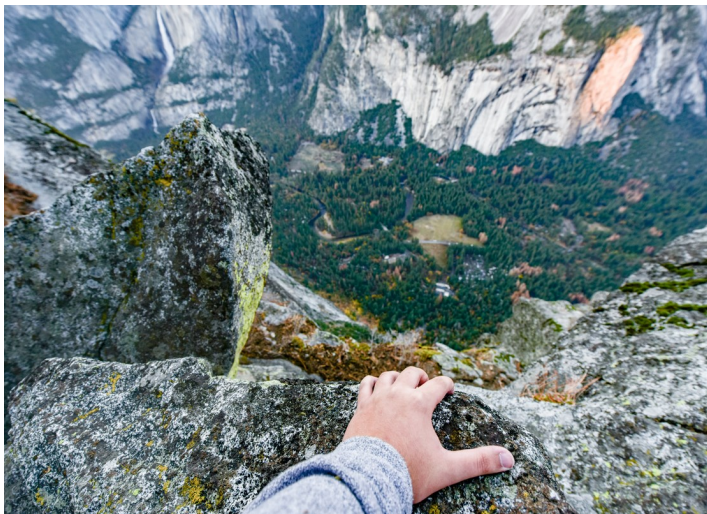
BR: I was not involved in the naming process of Operation Reconquista, but I was involved in the naming process of SOLA, and militaristic language just didn't strike us as the best way to describe ourselves. As far as those who try to associate us with violence, our usual response is twofold; Firstly, the Bible and theologians have never shied away from using militaristic metaphors to describe the life of faith, and secondly, we've never advocated for any sort of violence. We have only encouraged perseverance and catechism. We do what we can to ensure that when our members engage in debate, they conduct themselves in a Graceful and Christlike manner.

2b. For many people in mainline denominations the

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Thankful for the Opportunity to Share

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



I am very grateful for the recent invitation to have a zoom conversation with the director and associate director of the ELCA's Reconsiderations process. This is the task force that has been appointed by the ELCA Church Council to review the 2009 human sexuality social statement and reconsider the provision for "bound conscience." I am glad that I was able to share very openly and that they listened respectfully.

I appreciate the fact that they had read quite a number of articles on our website. One of their initial questions was what hopes I had for the process. I told them that I have no hopes for the process. My understanding is that the concept of bound conscience was first used to justify and defend revisionist views, but over time it came to be used in an effort to calm down and reassure those with traditional views in an attempt to minimize the number of pastors and congregations that would leave. However, there have been many loud and prominent voices that have been intent all along on eliminating bound conscience. They sensed at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly that the time had come. They had enough votes to begin the process that would eventually lead to the elimination of bound conscience. And they were right.

They then asked me what concerns I had for the process. I told them that what is at stake is the question of whether the ELCA can be trusted. If the ELCA cannot be trusted to keep its promise here – to continue to honor bound conscience – then it cannot be trusted to keep any promise anywhere. I also said that we all should know that no matter what is stated, included, decided, and approved in a reconsidered

social statement now, the ELCA is not going to stay there.

I then went through a history of specific times and ways in which ELCA leaders have ignored communication from traditional voices, not remained within the boundaries of what was actually voted on and approved in 2009, and favored revisionist views, such as in the makeup of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church and ReconcilingWorks' being given a non-voting position on the ELCA Church Council.

They asked me to communicate to our constituency (and I said I would) the fact that the vote on the social statement will actually occur in two phases. The first vote, which they call Reconsideration # 1, will take place in 2025. They describe the matters that will be voted on then as "editorial" – "small, clarifying word changes only" – brought about by the fact that "civil law governing same-sex marriages, public acceptance of such marriages, and diversity of family configurations have changed dramatically since 2009."

The second vote, which they call Reconsideration # 2, will take place in 2028. They describe the matters that will be voted on then as "substantive," namely "examining the coexistence in the 2009 statement of four different but valid convictions that Lutherans can faithfully hold about same-gender relationships."

They are still saying that the resolution at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly set in motion a process – "a reconsideration of these ideas but does not determine the outcome." But we all know that the empowered and preferred voices will work relentlessly until they have achieved their goal of eliminating bound conscience. We will keep you posted.

Coming Events

- **Following the Steps Premiere**—22-24 March, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **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/>

Hope for De-churched Lutherans

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



In my previous two articles, I talked about the dilemma facing De-churched Lutherans. Some cannot find an orthodox Lutheran parish in their area. Some have been made to feel unwelcome in their former congregation. Others belong to a congregation that cannot find a pastor.

I have suggested that there is help for De-churched Lutherans. There is no reason that a group of Lutherans who have no congregation or who cannot find a pastor should give up. Lutheran lay people can gather together for prayer and Bible study. As I have mentioned before, there are services found within Lutheran hymnals that may be led by lay people. These include the prayer offices of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline, along with the Service of the Word. (Check the Table of Contents in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* or the *Lutheran Service Book*.)

This month, however, I want to discuss resources that are available for you from Lutheran CORE. First of all, there are Daily Devotions available for personal use. Dr. Jeffrey Greene writes [Daily Devotions](#) for Lutheran CORE. Dr. Douglas Schoelles hosts a podcast called [The Daily Plunge Bible Study](#).

For adult education, Lutheran CORE has a [Video Ministry](#) that includes [Book Reviews](#) and series of videos in theological topics called “[CORE Convictions](#)”. In addition, Pastor Dennis Nelson, records a [Weekly Bible Study on the Lectionary Readings](#) each week.

For those who would like to hold a weekly worship service, Lutheran CORE has a [Worship Page](#). Pastor Cathy Ammlung has developed [Hymn Suggestions](#) and [Prayers of the Church](#) for each Sunday of the Church Year. In addition, she offers

Hymns and Liturgy Paraphrases for congregational use which she will be updating after Easter.

Finally, for congregations that are either too small or who have failed to find a pastor, there is hope. Small congregations and worshipping communities can raise up leaders from within. [The Congregational Lay-Led Initiative \(CLI\)](#) offers training and mentoring for lay leaders. The intent is not to replace pastors or seminary education but equip lay people for ministry in their own congregations and communities. If the lay leaders in your congregation need help, or if you would like to form a small worshipping community, [Don Brandt](#) would love to talk with you.

Of course, Lutheran CORE is not the only place you can go for help. Our ministry partners also have many resources that you can use. In particular, I recommend that you look at two independent Lutheran publishers, [SOLA Publishing](#) and [ALPB Publicity Bureau](#). SOLA Publishing offers weekly worship resources, Sunday School, Confirmation, and adult education curricula in print and on video, and much more. ALPB publishes books that would be very helpful for adult education worship planning. Of most interest, however, is the four volume series on daily prayer called [For All the Saints](#). A congregation that wanted to gather weekly for Morning or Evening Prayer would have all they need to make that happen, excluding hymns and musical settings for the services.

There is hope for De-churched Lutherans. Let us know how we can help.

A Warning of What is Coming

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an Approved (again, approved by whom?) Provider and joint Bible Studies or Biblically based book studies on DEIA topics.

b. Monthly meetings between the lay leaders to plan and administer activities, joint discussions, and ministries.

c. At least six joint worship experiences, followed by a fellowship social hour.

At best these recommendations will be time and energy consuming. At worst they will be one more way in which the ELCA is relentlessly being pushed to the extreme left - in the direction of critical race theory and DEIA ideology.

Reflections on Mission

by Mr. [Jacob Moorman](#), River's Edge Ministries (REM), Mt. Airy, MD

Editor's Note: Jacob Moorman is a member of REM, which regularly hosts and leads mission work locally in Maryland, through City Mission, and annually in other states through Cross Country Mission (CCM).

I am certainly no theologian, so I am merely sharing my reflections from our most recent venture to the mission field. I had the privilege of serving on a CCM trip this year after an F3 tornado left a miles long path of destruction through Clarksville, Tennessee, just a few weeks before Christmas 2023.

Friends from different denominations and different states joined us on the mission to Clarksville. And many people prayed for us from home. Saint Matthew's Lutheran, a new mission partner from the Baltimore area, provided us with around 80 quilts which we were able to hand out to families. This often opened the door for more intentional conversation and prayer. Mission cannot be done without the support, prayer, and provision of the whole church. Mary and Ken Bates, leaders of the NALC Disaster Response team, paved the way for our ground crew. Members of The Way Baptist Church were gracious hosts, opening their doors to our group so we could serve more effectively.

And yet ... despite my experience on other disaster response trips, the Lord taught me new things. I learned about humility ("... *judge not, lest ye be judged.*" Matthew 7:1). I learned about His sovereignty ("... *not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" 2 Peter 3:9). And I learned about His love ("*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" John 13:34).

It can be easy to enter another person's "mess" of life and assume you (I) can fix it. I think this is especially true in disaster zones. I am learning, but sometimes it is hard to admit that I cannot fix everything. The rebuilding process is done one house, one board, and one person at a time. This is often humbling. Even our experienced mission group could only do a minute amount of the work that needed to be accomplished in that hard hit area.

God Teaching Me: In disasters, the physical damage is only the beginning. Sometimes we have seen spiritual decay amidst the destruction, even neglect and pain that has clearly gone on for years ... way before the hurricane, flood, or storm struck. It's so easy to pre-judge when this occurs. But the Lord opened my eyes to a new reality this trip. I have often wondered, '*Why do broken buildings, fallen trees,*



hard stories, and sorrowed people break my heart?' I think the truth is ... *it is my story!* I believe witnessing the physical brokenness after a disaster can reveal the spiritual brokenness in my own soul. Just like getting caught in a catastrophic storm, we are truly helpless in this world. We need help from outside ourselves. Perhaps that is why I feel mission is so important, it puts us in touch with Christ. We can begin to see with His eyes—not just the physical needs, but also the spiritual. External appearances do not guarantee that the soul has not experienced its own spiritual destruction.

Stories of His Love: While in Clarksville, we heard that a school had scheduled its Christmas program for Dec. 9th. It was to take place in a large auditorium which could hold 300+ people. However, the program was moved to an earlier day to accommodate some students who would be moving out of state. God's sovereign grace was manifest when that very auditorium, which would have held dozens of families, was utterly destroyed when the tornado hit on the 9th of December. Amazing grace, indeed!

I am astounded at the lovingkindness of our Lord. That despite the loss of material goods, He spared so many holy lives of people. What happened was a tragedy, but He worked it together for good and for life. We saw people with no hope, begin to find hope, as we shared our faith and the life of Christ with them. It's amazing how acts of charity will show forth the love of Christ in a way that words cannot. "*Serve one another ...*" (Galatians 5:13) Perhaps, in this, we see the truth and power of the Word taking on flesh in our own lives. Christ entered into our messy and broken world—through His incarnation, death, and resurrection Jesus met us in our darkest hour, healed our souls, and fully revealed His marvelous light ... the Way of Salvation.

His Mercy: I had the privilege of working on a house which still had a lot of debris in the backyard. In conversation with the owner, I learned that they were present as the tornado came through. The next-

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Contented Faith

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



When I was dating my wife Debra, I was so excited about being with her. I was eager to talk with her, be with her, and go off on adventures with her. I am still delighted that she is my wife. But I sometimes worry my beautiful wife may think I am too contented with her. I am surely tiptoeing on danger if I take her for granted. Does my contentment give me an excuse for being lackadaisical about our relationship?

As Christians, are we excited to belong to Jesus? Or are we just contented to be church goers?

Of course, excitement is a feeling or an emotion. We know emotions come and go, often because of circumstances. Where do we turn when our excitement has drained away and we are left with the day-to-day patterns? A faith dependent upon emotions will bottom out when hard times eventually arrive.

Are we so contented with our relationship with Christ, that our faith is a ho-hum contentment marked by satisfaction but not joy? Is contented faith acceptable to the Lord? We are warned by Jesus, “So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Rev 3:16)

While we may be bored, apathetic or lukewarm in our faith towards Christ, that is not how the Lord considers you. The LORD is not content for you to wander away in sin or indifference. The LORD seeks after us. (Luke 19:10) Consider how Christ came to call us sinners, not the righteous. (Mt 9:13)

Today we use the word “passion” to describe our emotional intensity. But in our faith, we use the phrase “the passion of the Christ” to communicate the depths to which God is willing to go to redeem us from sin and to convey the intense commitment of His love for us. Jesus tells us that the LORD rejoices

over you and every other sinner who repents and is saved (Luke 15:7,10, Zeph 3:14-17, Isa 62:5). Holy Week, or Passion week, is all about Christ Your Savior who loves you so much he is willing to die for you.

Do you feel like you are in a love affair with God? Do you have a contented faith where you are satisfied with just knowing who Jesus is? Is your faith excited about a what or a who?

Rather than speak about emotional excitement, the Spirit-inspired scriptures speak of rejoicing and joy. Do we rejoice in the Love Christ pours into us? “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,” (1 Pe 1:8, cf 1 Th 1:6–7) We are to have joy and rejoice with all our being in the LORD (Zech 10:7, Isa 61:10, Ps 70:4).

Is the Lutheran pattern for faith to be mildly contented and satisfied with minimal investment or contact with the LORD? No. Pastor Martin Luther was driven by a passion to exalt and praise God. Listen to his prayer: “Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won’t you make it turn out well?” The passion of Luther comes across on almost every page that you read from him.

As Christians we have the absolute assurance and presence of Christ to save His people from their sins. We can be contented that Christ’s work is complete (Christ Alone) and that through trust in Christ we are redeemed (Faith Alone). This faith is a gift of love from God, not our effort (Grace Alone). Such was Luther’s rejoicing that we stay focused on Christ.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5-6)

Your servant in Christ, Pastor Douglas



Click [here](#) for a list of Premiere Screenings of this full-length feature film!

When Does Life Begin?

by [M. Roy Schwarz, M.D.](#)



The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition defines "life" as "the property or quality that distinguishes living organisms from the dead or inanimate matter manifested in functions such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, and response to stimuli." These four criteria can be used to judge whether some object is alive or dead.

Science has taught us that the process of human development begins when the male sperm penetrates the female egg. This triggers a series of events leading to division of the fertilized egg. Hence, a single cell divides into two cells, these cells divide into four, those cells divide into eight, and those cells divide into sixteen. This all occurs before the fertilized egg attaches to the wall of the uterus. By seven days, or when implantation begins, a significant cell mass has developed. At ten days, the cell mass shows signs of differentiation as the cells become specific in their nature. At three weeks, the cardiac or heart muscle fibers may be seen that are capable of contracting. By six weeks, brain waves appear and, by eight weeks, the human form has appeared and organs are developing. By fifteen weeks, fetal movement is evident and, by twenty-four weeks, the fetus is a viable person. By thirty-six weeks, we have a full term infant. **THIS PROCESS, FROM FERTILIZATION THROUGH DELIVERY OF THE INFANT, IS CONTINUOUS WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS.** There are no stops and no pauses in the process. Once fertilization occurs, bio-chemical events are initiated that continue until a mature human being is formed.

So when does life begin? To answer that question, it is well to go back to the definition of life and use the four end points for judging if life exists. These include metabolism, growth, reproduction, and

response to stimuli.

Immediately after penetration of the egg by the sperm, bio-chemical events start the process of development. Thus, the metabolism end point has been met. When the cells begin to divide, the growth criteria has been met. Third, when the cells are reproducing in the course of their division, the criteria required for reproduction is met. The fourth end point, response to stimuli, is a little more vague. It is clear, however, that any cell when confronted with a toxic stimulus will respond by changing the movement of its membrane.

Based on this analysis, one is led to the inexorable conclusion that: **LIFE BEGINS AT THE TIME THE SPERM PENETRATES THE EGG AND LIFE CONTINUES UNTIL DEATH.**

M. Roy Schwarz, M.D.

February 2024

"From The Cross: The Crucified Speaks"

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

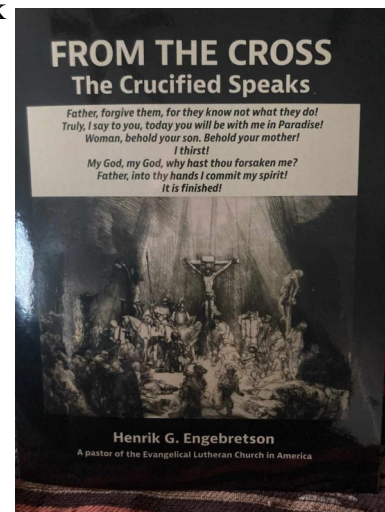
Retired ELCA pastor and friend of Lutheran CORE Henrik Engebretson has recently published a Lenten devotional book

based upon the Seven Last Words of Jesus from the cross. Pastor Engebretson writes, "The purpose of these meditations and also this book is to listen intently to what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is saying to us. In Jesus' words from the cross we hear His amazing love and His eagerness to forgive." Stirring pictures and beloved hymns further communicate the message and meaning of what Jesus said. Copies can be ordered for \$10 each (plus \$10 shipping and handling per order) from –

Speedwell Press

P. O. Box 131327

Roseville, Minnesota 55113



An Incoming DEIA Disaster

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the DEIA report itself, “ELCA’s leadership needs to be more vocal, consistent and strong on expressing commitment to, and visibly advancing, DEIA, from the top down.”² Right off the bat, we see that this implementation is not a grass roots movement which most lay people embrace and are calling for. This is an imposition of thought and practice that begins at the top and is forced upon the whole church, including recommendations for punitive measures for those who do not comply.⁴ Such practice does not exactly have a good track record of success historically and actually ends up being divisive and counter-productive.

#2. It shifts the primary focus of the church inward instead of outward. Not that many churches have escaped the problem of naval gazing, but this movement reinforces the tendency to focus on “us.” What do we look like? Are we making sure we have proper representation across all groups within our church? One might argue that this will force the church to look outward in order to check the appropriate boxes. It is a legitimate argument, but its practical application has been an abject failure within the ELCA for decades already. What makes us think it will change this time?

#3. It’s the wrong metric to measure congregation viability and engagement. Here is a suggestion from the audit: “Those incentives might include granting congregations with stellar DEIA achievements greater voting power at the Assemblies, as a form of enhanced membership, or conditioning any grants or other financial assistance to congregations on compliance with the Recommended Minimum DEIA Standards.⁵” Grant incentives to congregations with stellar DEIA scores, but not to congregations who are actively feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, and visiting the prisoners? Granting incentives to congregations with stellar DEIA scores instead of congregations who are growing in number? Granting incentives to congregations with stellar DEIA scores but not to congregations who are actively engaged in their communities and truly making an impact in those communities through their ministries? This is a bit more worldly, but...granting incentives to congregations with stellar DEIA scores but not to congregations who give big benevolence dollars to the synod? Need I go on?

#4 And probably the most damning. When the prophet Samuel went to anoint a son of Jesse to be the next king of Israel, a very interesting scenario

plays out. As Samuel approaches the sons, he gazes upon their appearance and makes judgments. Time and again, Samuel is met with this response or a similar one, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” This is not simply a truism of the Old Testament. It particularly is emphasized in the New Testament as the result of encountering the overwhelming grace and love of God. The human heart changes from looking inward (classical definition of sin) to looking outward towards God and neighbor—in that order. DEIA does not look upon the human heart, but upon outward characteristics. It completely reverses the stance God takes throughout the Scriptures. It must be rejected on this basis alone. To continue down the path of implementation will resort to nothing less than a disaster.

This is an imposition of thought and practice that begins at the top and is forced upon the whole church...

[1. REPORT ON THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT OF THE GOVERNING DOCUMENTS OF THE ELCA. Fox, Swibel, Levin & Carroll LLP. Chief Author: N. NEVILLE REID. November 2023.](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/DEIA_Report_Part_1.pdf)

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/DEIA_Report_Part_1.pdf

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/DEIA_Report_Part_2.pdf

[2. Ibid. p. 4, 6-7.](#)

[3. Ibid. p. 3.](#)

[4. Ibid. p. 3.](#)

[5. Ibid. p. 8.](#)

Pro Ecclesia

The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology

The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology (CCET) is holding a conference in Birmingham, Alabama June 10-12, 2024. *Early registration deadline has been extended to March 15th.* Click [here](#) for conference theme and details. Click [here](#) to register.

Operation Reconquista: Responses ...

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word Reconquista will conjure up images of the Conquistadores - not the people who reconquered Europe from the Ottoman Empire but the European powers that came to and conquered America and enslaved and mistreated indigenous peoples. How will you deal with the blowback you will receive from those who will dismiss you as just white, misogynistic, privileged, oppressive, western, Euro-centric males?

RA: This one is easy. In all global conflicts between liberals and conservatives in a denomination, the white countries have churches that are trying to push the church in a liberal, LGBTQ affirming direction, and the global countries have churches trying to resist it. Two enormous examples of this are: 1) the African Anglican churches recently hosted a meeting of conservative Anglicans from all over the world in Kigali, Rwanda, to condemn the Church of England's affirmation of same-sex blessings. 2) the United Methodist Church would have voted for gay marriage in 2019 if it weren't for all the African congregations voting against it. Generally, theological liberalism emerges from privileged white cultures. Even within American mainline denominations, minority congregations are almost universally more theologically conservative on average.

BR: Here at SOLA, some of our current goals include establishing a women's group, either just for SOLA or potentially for the entire Reconquista, as well as contacting and including ethnic church voices in the movement. If we ever have the resources to do so, we would be delighted to publish theological resources in other languages. It is a fact that young white males do make up the majority of our membership, but the white-ness of our movement is only a reflection of the ELCA's demographics, the youthfulness of the movement is because many of the ELCA's older orthodox members have already jumped ship (Or joined organizations such as LCORE), and the male-ness of our movement is a result of it being spread on the internet, where women are typically less active.

3a. I noted that among things that Operation Reconquista sought to preserve in the mainline was cultural power and relevancy. How would you respond to those who believe that mainline denominations are no longer relevant and actually have little to no cultural power?

RA: The mainline has POTENTIAL to have cultural relevance, but that potential is not actualized due to the mainline refusing to hold to its historic beliefs.

The Catholic Church has strong cultural influence these days because they are institutionally rooted and theologically conservative. Evangelicals are theologically conservative, but not institutionally rooted, so they don't have much influence. However, if the mainline, which is institutionally rooted, becomes more theologically conservative, it will gain back its cultural influence.

BR: The reason the Mainline doesn't appear culturally relevant is because it hasn't been utilizing that cultural relevancy in any meaningful way. If Mainline churches began preaching things apart from modern culture and properly teaching orthodox faith, the changes it would be able to make would be truly profound. It's also important to note that a more orthodox mainline wouldn't just be utilizing its own cultural power, it would also be amplifying the cultural power of Christianity as a whole by presenting more visible unity in Christian thought.

3b. I personally believe the Church should not be interested in obtaining cultural power but should strive to be invitational and not impositional. The times the church has taken cultural power have not generally ended well. What are your thoughts regarding this?

RA: "Cultural power" does not necessarily mean a marriage between church and state. It simply means the church can have a moral influence on the outside world. Liberals in the denomination already believe this. They believe the church's job is to speak out against injustice. About this they are correct, they are just doing it on secular terms instead of Biblical terms.

BR: I think these concerns are valid but slightly premature. At this moment, Operation Reconquista's mission is restricted exclusively to the church and its congregants. I pray that when the day comes that our mission has the opportunity to expand our sights to other institutions, a wise decision will be made, and whatever we do will be pursued in a Christ-like manner.

4. Is the mainline truly worth saving? What if the death of mainline denominations is a removing of the branches of the vine that do not bear fruit (John 15)?

RA: It is hard for Americans to understand this, but institutions matter. Generational resources matter. Traditions matter. The mainline contains generations and generations of donations from faithful Christians, only to be hijacked by those who do not hold to the

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values that such people donated to. Mainline churches have decades and centuries of history and heritage quite literally carved into their walls. They have old cemeteries. They are living testimonies to the beautiful things Christians built for the glory of God. Their choirs and liturgies are still relics of what they created back when they were more faithful.

BR: I would argue that the ELCA still bears fruit. Not Theological fruits, but the ELCA's commitment to charity and community under the motto "God's work our hands" is (to my knowledge) unparalleled among Lutherans, in addition to the fact that the ELCA has been able to provide sacraments more regularly than a lot of other Lutheran churches, and even if many parts of the ELCA are barren in God's eyes, we hope that by building up the orthodox congregations within it, some twigs and leaves will remain.

5. A more practical question: the secular progressives indeed played a very long game to seize power in mainline denominations, and they were very successful. There are numerous accounts (Dennis Nelson has chronicled several in the CORE newsletter) of them pushing out orthodox believers and seizing control of congregations to ensure their agenda continues. Are you prepared for the blowback that you will inevitably receive?

RA: Yes there will be persecution. Jesus said we would face it. However, persecution only makes the church stronger. Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire but ended up taking it over. The way of Jesus is the way of suffering and rejection, but in the end, the church will be triumphant because God is on our side.

BR: Only time will tell if we are strong enough or lucky enough to weather the backlash from the ELCA's leadership and members, but I can say that all the members of SOLA are incredibly passionate and committed people who are aware of these threats, and willing to face them as they come, though that's not to say we're going to paint targets on ourselves or our churches without needing to.

... and Now Many of Them Are Just Lost

by [Pr. Brian Hughes](#), Lutheran CORE Board Vice-President and gifted storyteller



Just over a year ago Christine and I found ourselves in Florence, South Carolina. Nice place just off I-95, we found a fixer-upper on the little lake in town. Pro tip: don't buy a fixer-upper in your 60s. You know you can do the work, but you don't want to ... except finding contractors in a small southern town you trust will bring you back to the pro tip of avoiding the original purchase. But I digress.

When people ask where Florence is, I mention South of the Border as you head to Florida. We're about 45 minutes south of there. Or we're 25 minutes south of the new Buc-ee's travel center. Wasn't looking to retire and move to SC, but then our daughter-in-law announced that our first grandchild was on the way. Christine made clear: "I've followed you all over the country for your callings. I have a calling to be a grandmother and that calling is in South Carolina." No way I was going to win that one, so I uttered the only Norwegian I've learned from her family, "Yes dear."

Never moved before without a clear sense of call and certainly not to a place where the person cutting your hair asks if you've found a church, three different neighbors stop in and ask, the guy installing your new gutters inquires, the electrician who fixed something, the two fellows who encapsulated the crawlspace and the one other contractor we hired, the fellow who redid two of our bathrooms.

In a place where everyone seems to be churched and asks where you attend what do I as a Lutheran have to offer? As David Keener of the NALC likes to say, "We Lutherans are less dense here in the South" and the nearest NALC congregation is 50 minutes away.

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... and Now Many of Them ...

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Then I attended my second lunch time gathering of pastors who are part of Helping Florence Flourish (HFF). One of its priorities is supporting marriage and families. OK, you have my attention. The pastor sitting across the table with his wife shared with me, “I fear my granddaughter will never meet a decent, Christian young man to marry. *We’ve lost all our young men and now many of them are just lost.*”

At the prior gathering of this group the Director of HFF had pitched a vision for a marriage and family blessing gathering at a local park. He didn’t have many details in place but lifted up the idea. It was well and thoroughly embraced which had led to my lunch table conversation with a troubled pastor.

Perhaps someday I’ll share what I’ve found when poking around Luther and his passion for marriage, family, and especially the role of the household in faith formation. But that’s a story for another newsletter.

About a decade ago the last congregation I served embraced something called [Faith 5](#), a process put forth by Lutheran Pastor Rich Melheim that led to a book entitled, “Let’s Kill Sunday School before it kills the church.” Snappy, eh? It is a simple, five step, 15-minute way of entering conversation as a household; sharing the pains and joys of the day, reading scripture, seeking ways the Word may speak to the highs and lows, praying for one another and ending with a blessing. I mentioned this approach to the Director. He’d never heard of it. He ran it by one of his staff people. I showed him an example of the [bookmarks](#) that go with the process. He ordered a stack of them and told me “You’re up to present this to our gathering.” OK then.



March 3rd we met in the park. Because I’m one of *those* Lutherans I brought along balm from Israel as I planned to anoint as well as pray and bless. An elderly woman wept. A young clergy couple spoke with me at length. Another wants to talk to me about launching a ministry in the drug and prostitution corridor of Florence. I have an invitation to speak in a congregation. We Lutherans have a lot to offer even if we aren’t very dense.

Reflections on Mission

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door neighbors were home as well. After receiving a tour of the sacred space where their neighbor had lived, I learned that the neighbor, with two other adults and a child, crowded into the bathroom for shelter ... Looking at the house it was easy to see that the bathroom was the only room left standing—all others were torn off and even the roof was mostly blown apart! That family was spared. God’s mercy was truly prevalent.

When I see the path of destruction left in the wake of a tornado (or other ‘storms’), it reveals a greater truth. Homes in shambles. People in shock. Tragic death and loss of what was once good. There’s no way to go back, and perhaps that’s the hardest part of the suffering in this world. We must move on. This storm humbled me. Witnessing the vast devastation put me in touch with the devastation of my own soul. It made me realize how much I need Him. It brought to light the spiritual reality that Christ truly is the only One who can heal and restore. While the team worked, we also saw the Holy Spirit work in the lives of those we served. In this same serving, I believe He healed my own soul. Perhaps that is why St. Paul implores us, “*Let us not grow weary of doing good...*” (Galatians 6:9)

Christ certainly met us on the road to Clarksville this year. I hope that you have a similar opportunity to join in Christ’s sacrificial love by stepping into the brokenness of the world and sharing His Light with those you encounter. May our souls find greater healing as we dare to immerse our very lives in the mission field.



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