

The Horse Has Already Left the Barn:

An Analysis of Recommendations 1 and 7 in the Final Report of the ELCA's Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

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



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- Jesus is not really necessary in the ELCA's DEIA gospel
- Who is eating "the living flesh of dying beast?"
- Big changes on the horizon
- Spend time priming the pump of discipleship
- What's happening to make the imposition of DEIA easier?

The past couple years we have written extensively about the ELCA's Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, which was formed in response to action taken by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. We have expressed deep concern over –

- The primary mandate that was given to the Commission to be "particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism."
- The makeup of the Commission, with 20% being LGBTQ+ persons and 20% being DEIA officers or leaders at their place of employment and/or influence.
- The DEIA audit which the 2022 Churchwide Assembly instructed the Church Council to have done of the ELCA's governing documents and how the results of that audit might be incorporated into the work of the Commission.
- The consistent lack of specific information in all communications from the Commission.
- The way in which the ELCA dismissed and ridiculed persons who

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Lament for a Fallen Train Horse

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), NALC pastor from Pennsylvania and former board member of Lutheran CORE



Editor's Note: The image above shows soldiers harvesting and cooking a fallen horse. Brett writes, "While originally written in regards to Western culture generally, the thrust of this poem more particularly applies to the Christian orthodoxy at the heart of that culture suffering at the hand of theological progressivism within the Church." Please also check out his blog, [The Faith Conservationist](#).

The soldiers spit and then decry
The rottenness of all their feast,
Snarling as they're nourished on
The living flesh of dying beast

Whose labor brought them hitherto
With much travail and sacrifice,
And spared their feet the journey so,
Though all its strength could not suffice

To keep its feet unfaltering
On treach'rous pathways sought afresh;
Each misstep now recounted as
They glut themselves on tired flesh.

The horse that drew the wagon to
The edge of revolution's field
Though scorned by révolutionnaire,
In death its final strength does yield.

So nourished, soldiers soldier on
And never dream in their dull lives
How brave the heart that perished there
Beneath their cool, assuming knives.

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were concerned through the document which they released, "Myths and Facts about Congregational Governance."

- The amendments to the ELCA Constitutions which have been recommended by the Commission, approved by the Church Council, and are being presented to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, especially the proposed amendments to chapter 22 of the Churchwide Constitution, which would fast-track the approval process for amendments that come from the floor at the assembly.

But my concerns have only grown greater as I have read and analyzed the final report from the Commission, which was recently released. A link to that final report can be found [HERE](#).

I have studied and sought to grasp the entire report – all 75 pages of it. My overall impression is the same as what I have of all documents that come from the ELCA. It is too long and excessively verbose. I always wonder if the reason for the length and all the verbiage is to hope that people will not read it – at least not read all of it or read it carefully. My second impression is that rather than help facilitate functioning so that the ELCA can better focus on its mission, the Commission has made the process and structure even more convoluted and complex. It is as though the Commission has created deeper snow and/or thicker mud for the ELCA to now have to try to navigate its way through.

But what I find most alarming are Recommendations 1 and 7 in the final report, which have accomplished nothing less than cementing a DEIA value system and Marxist critical theory into the ELCA governing documents. **This infiltration of a radical leftist agenda into the governing documents is no longer something that we fear might happen this summer at the Churchwide Assembly. It has already happened. The horse has already left the barn.**

Recommendation 1 reveals the Commission's values and priorities. Recommendation 7 exposes their accomplishments.

Recommendation 1 - "Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism" - can be found on page 34 in the final report. This recommendation reveals what the Commission values the most and feels most urgent about. The Commission is recommending that

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Kicking the Can

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



The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) finally released their final recommendations to the ELCA Church Council—and to the larger church, particularly in regards to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly and beyond. In my estimation, it was an intentional kicking of the proverbial can down the road.

Missing from the recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly are any meaningful DEIA amendments to the ELCA Constitution and by-laws. There is one recommendation seeking to increase the number of under-represented groups at assemblies, but none of the major changes proposed by the DEIA audit.

But that does not mean the CRLC is dropping DEIA. Not by a long shot. In their report, their very first recommendation is “to immediately begin identifying and acting upon mutual accountability measures and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive centering of dismantling racism within the denomination. These measures and incentives shall be guided by the recommendations outlined in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.” The CRLC further urged the Church Council to have amendment and by-law changes ready at the 2028 National Assembly.

There is the can kick.

But there is a bit of an incongruous note in the commission’s rationale. They say in their explanation, “The commission believes this work can wait no longer.” They even suggest that a special assembly might be needed to implement changes. This is a bit of a head scratcher given that they could have asked for changes to be implemented in 2025. So, why

wait?

Perhaps the answer lies in a recommended change in 2025 that has been proposed by the CRLC. Recommendation number 11 is intended to “streamline” the process of amending the ELCA’s governing documents. The changes to section 22:11 are worth reading in full:

This constitution may be amended only through either of the following procedures:

a. The Church Council may propose an amendment, with an official notice to be sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. The adoption of such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the members of the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting.

b. An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more members of the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed amendment shall be referred to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation, following which it shall come before the assembly. If such an amendment is approved by a two-thirds vote of members present and voting, such an amendment shall become effective only if **adopted ratified un-changed by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at the next regular Churchwide Assembly or a subsequent two-thirds vote of the members of the Church Council taken within 12 months of adoption by the Churchwide Assembly.**

If these recommendations pass, in 2028, a small group of people, 25, can propose any amendment. It can be passed by a 2/3 majority, and then become effective with a Church Council vote 12 months later. Synods potentially would have no input into the process or any chance to vote or send a delegate to challenge the amendment. There would be no “bottom-up” structure of the church at all. Everything would effectively be “top-down”. Indeed the DEIA audit’s own words speak to the direction this amendment leads to: “ELCA’s leadership needs to be more vocal, consistent and strong on expressing commitment to, and visibly advancing, DEIA, from the top down.”

There is almost no doubt that the cultural winds are blowing a different direction when it comes to how most feel about DEIA. When you are heading into a strong head wind, you have to find ways to make it easier to get through it. It seems like the CRLC’s recommendations are intended to do just this; intentionally kick the can down the road so that the imposition of DEIA becomes easier and less resistance will be met.

The ELCA's Quest for Greater Control

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



The [Lutheran Congregational Support Network](#) (LCSN) has recently released three more videos which tell of big changes that are on the horizon for the ELCA.

[HERE](#) is a link to Part 5 – “Changing the Constitution: The Fast Track Proposal.”

In July 2025, key constitutional amendments will be up for a vote – amendments that could reshape the church’s future. This video explains what is at stake and what these changes could mean. We urge you to watch this video so that you will understand the ELCA’s fast-track proposal and why it matters.

[HERE](#) is a link to Part 6 – “The ELCA’s Game Changer?”

This video unpacks a seemingly simple question posted by ELCA Vice President Imran Siddiqui: *“If you were to change the organizational structure of the ELCA, how would you do it?”* It explores how a single footnote in a recent report could have significant implications for congregational autonomy.

What does it mean when a lawyer-vice president calls a proposal to “eliminate congregational home rule” a “game changer (esp. in the legal sphere)?” This video takes a close look at:

How and why Section 9.22 of the ELCA constitution could be used in new ways

How a simple footnote could point toward a path for imposing churchwide mandates without congregational consent

The growing tension between local autonomy and centralized authority in the ELCA

[HERE](#) is a link to Part 7 – “Churchwide Assembly: Who Gets to Vote?”

This video tells of another change that will be voted on at the triannual gathering this summer – adding voting members who are not part of congregations. Instead, they represent Synod-Authorized Worshiping Communities (SAWCs), which are groups that are directly created and controlled by the Synod. You will also hear about other aspects of the amendment like the addition of voting members based on demographic categories and how this continues a broader institutional shift that sidelines congregational voice.

These changes are not theoretical. They could reshape how your ELCA congregation operates, makes decisions, and defines its mission.

If you have not already done so, I highly recommend that you go to the LCSN’s website ([LINK](#)) and sign up to be on their email mailing list. On their website you will find videos they have already released about the ELCA’s quest for ever greater control. The LCSN very intentionally approaches matters related to the ELCA not in terms of theology, and not in terms of cultural issues and Biblical moral values, but in terms of the ELCA’s Constitutions and the whole matter of congregational autonomy.

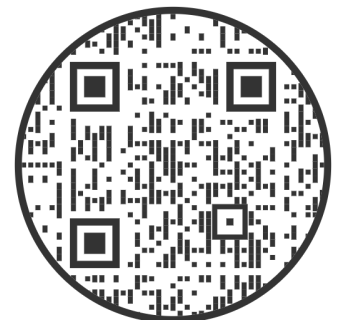
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The Quandary of Discipleship

by [Pr. Megan Ann Shaffer](#), NALC pastor in Pennsylvania



“Ugh, discipleship is so law-based.” Sadly, I frequently hear this as a disciple-maker. Quite frankly, I can understand why people hold such a position, which results in their hesitancy as Lutherans to begin making disciples intentionally.

However, this interaction got me thinking. What causes such hesitancy and resistance to discipleship? One answer is easy. For years, outreach and evangelism were a silo within the church. Tasks that fell into either of these areas were often left to a team and/or the pastor. As times have changed, that approach no longer works for most congregations. Gone are the days when we could safely assume our neighbors were Christian. Now such assumptions are invalid due to the diversity of our communities.

Secondly, individual faith in America has been a matter of privacy for hundreds of years. My grandmother taught me that there are two topics you do not discuss at a dinner party: politics and religion.

Additionally, Lutherans face another layer of complexity due to the proper distinction between law and the Gospel. As those justified by faith in Christ rather than by good works, we proclaim the Gospel. Why would we focus on something that could trap our parishioners in the cycle of the law?

As disciple-makers, we have a strong tide to swim against while working to reshape the culture in which we live—if we are truly going to live out our vocation to follow Christ’s command to go and make disciples of all nations. It’s a lot to think about, so where does one begin? That was the question I found myself asking as I began my call to a congregation eager to grow. Taking all of these and many other factors into account could easily have overwhelmed me.

When faced with something overwhelming, my seminary professors emphasized that those are the

moments when we need to use our toolbox. As pastors and church leaders, we are blessed with a wealth of knowledge available to us in our Lutheran tradition and within the broader Christian community.

Recently, I listened to a podcast featuring an interview with Pastor Bill Hull, who commented on the relationship between preaching and discipleship. He stated what my Lutheran homiletics professors taught me: how we preach and the focus of our preaching forms our parishioners. The idiom ‘you get what you give’ perfectly sums it up. Pastors preaching legalistic sermons form legalistically focused Christians. Likewise consumeristic preachers shape consumeristic Christians, and so on.

What Bill is saying makes sense: “If you want your parishioners to understand their identity as disciples, you must preach the Gospel accordingly.” But what made even more sense was what he said next: “We don’t start the conversation on discipleship at ‘make disciples.’” How can we expect our flocks to go out and make disciples if they have not been discipled?

As an example, when I was a child, my grandmother never *told* me to crochet an afghan. That would have been absurd since I had no knowledge of how to go about doing so. Instead, she sat down with me and showed me the basics. As I watched, Grandma demonstrated to me how she created each stitch. Additionally, she showed me how to seamlessly join colors, so they looked like they naturally flowed together. As she worked, I sat with her and would

repeat aloud what she was going to do next. Over time, I tried out simple stitches with her help. Eventually, I could also work on my own and seamlessly join colors, so they naturally flowed into a functional piece of art.

Similarly, the goal of discipleship is to empower others to follow the Great Commission, as my grandmother taught me to crochet on my own. *She did this by spending time with me. Christ invested in his disciples by spending time with them.* Telling our parishioners to go out and do something they have no clue how to do absolutely produces hesitancy and resistance. Conversely, if one has some familiarity with a concept because they have heard about it, it is less intimidating. So consider *priming the pump* of discipleship by introducing it through preaching.



“We don’t start the conversation on discipleship at ‘make disciples.’”

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“the ELCA Church Council immediately begin identifying and acting upon mutual accountability measures and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive centering of dismantling racism within the denomination.” These measures and incentives are to be guided by the recommendations outlined in the DEIA audit and the ELCA’s Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.

Complaining about the slowness of the progress of the ELCA’s becoming in their eyes a “truly welcoming church” that realizes “authentic diversity,” the Commission’s position is that “all constitution and bylaw amendments needed for the development and implementation of these accountability measures and compliance incentives must be developed and advanced in time for consideration by the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.” If they are not developed in time, then the ELCA Church Council needs to call for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to evaluate and enact the necessary constitutional revisions.

There is nothing else that the Commission sees as so urgent and compelling and feels as hot, bothered, and motivated about as dismantling racism.

There are two things in the Rationale for Recommendation 1 that I found alarming. First, the Commission admits that its “mandate was specific to the charge of dismantling racism.” But it has enlarged its concern to encouraging the Church Council “to expand the work beyond dismantling racism to include dismantling discrimination against all historically underrepresented groups.” More will be said about these groups in Recommendation 7. I remember early on in the work of the Commission when Co-Chairperson Carla Christopher used the language of “dismantling oppression” rather than “dismantling racism” in a video regarding the work of the Commission. I wrote to her and asked how that expansion happened, how victims of oppression will be identified, and whether people with traditional views who do not agree with the work of the Commission will become victims of oppression. She wrote back, back-pedaling from “dismantling oppression” back to “dismantling racism.” But here I see that she has reversed her course.

What is even more alarming in the Rationale for Recommendation 1 is the way in which it concludes with a sentence that gives a preview of what is to come in Recommendation 7. It says, “While much

that needs to be done to accomplish this work may be centered in our constitution and bylaws, which can only be amended by the Churchwide Assembly, the commission encourages the Church Council to act on continuing resolutions and policies that can advance this work before the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.”

Much of what we have feared the most is no longer something that might happen at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. It has already happened. The horse has already left the barn.

Recommendation 7 – “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Changes to Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups” – can be found on pages 47-49 in the final report. What is most disturbing here is that this Recommendation contains a number of continuing resolutions which the Commission recommended and which the Church Council has already approved, thereby making them already part of the ELCA’s governing documents. **What these continuing resolutions that are already approved have already done is nothing less than cementing a DEIA value system and Marxist critical theory into the official governing documents of the ELCA. The horse has already left the barn.**

5.01.H24. gives definitions of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. These definitions are now a part of the ELCA’s governing documents.

5.01.I24. commits the ELCA “to working to intentionally lift up voices from historically underrepresented groups.” There are many places throughout the final report and in the recommended changes to ELCA constitutions and bylaws where provision is made for “historically underrepresented groups” to have voice, vote, and representation far beyond their actual numbers within the membership of the ELCA. This continuing resolution identifies “historically underrepresented groups” as including persons of color, persons whose primary language is other than English, persons of diverse gender identities, persons of diverse sexual orientations, persons experiencing poverty, persons of lower income, persons living with disabilities, and persons who are not natural-born United States citizens.

There is certainly no doubt that God loves all people. In the First Reading for Easter Sunday Peter says at the house of Cornelius, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10: 34). The Second Reading for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

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describes “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb” (Revelation 7: 9). Consistently throughout the Bible God shows His love for the poor and commands that His people be concerned for the poor. And among the things that the prophet Micah says that God requires of us is “to do justice and to love kindness” (Micah 6: 8). What troubles me is the way in which through continuing resolution **5.01.J24**, the Church Council has not only fully embraced every form of sexual orientation and gender identity. It has also made the following a special privileged and protected class that one dare not discriminate against.

5.01.J24. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual orientations means individuals who identify beyond the sex and gender binary, individuals whose gender identity may be fluid, and individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or other sex, gender, and sexual identities that are more complex than sex, gender, and (sic). (I believe something has been cut off in the final report.)

And then, to make it completely clear, the final report states the following – “Continuing resolutions 5.01.G24, 5.01.H24, 5.01.I24, and 5.01.J24 (as amended) were adopted by the Church Council and are now part of the ELCA’s governing documents.”

Why would anyone still believe that bound conscience has a chance to survive in the ELCA? Bound conscience is the concept from 2009 in which the ELCA promised to provide a place of dignity and respect for those who hold traditional views regarding human sexuality. Why would any congregation still believe that they would have the option of not calling a pastor with a “diverse gender identity” or a “diverse sexual orientation”? **What we knew all along would happen has happened. The ELCA has officially turned its back on its promises from 2009. The horse has already left the barn.**

And not only that but Marxist critical theory has been incorporated into the ELCA’s governing documents through the actions of the Church Council. The whole language of dismantling racism – which is the primary mandate given to the Commission and as we saw in Recommendation 1 the primary concern of the Commission – reflects critical theory. In this ideology racism is not just something that people say and do that they must stop saying and

doing. Rather it is seen as so embedded into the very structures of society that those structures must be torn down. Built into the very systems of our culture are structures that privilege some people and lead to the oppression of others. Those who are in positions of power and privilege are not going to voluntarily relinquish that power and privilege, so those systems must be dismantled and destroyed. **This perspective has now been incorporated into the official governing documents through action that has already been taken by the Church Council. The horse has already left the barn.** Continuing Resolution **5.01.I24**, contains this sentence. “This church recognizes that humans have multiple aspects of their identities that are tied to systemic privilege and oppression that shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways.”

[HERE](#) and [HERE](#) are links to the official ELCA news releases which tell about actions taken by the Church Council at their November 14-17, 2024 and April 3-6, 2025 meetings. Do they give any indication of the full depth, seriousness, and significance of what happened at those meetings? Absolutely not! Instead the news release for November 14-17 uses this innocuous, non-specific language to describe the actions of the Church Council -

- Approved amendments to “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA” that were drafted in response to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility Audit.
- Recommended to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly certain amendments to “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA” that were brought to the council by the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church.
- Approved amendment of certain continuing resolutions in “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA.”
- Acknowledged amendment to the governing documents of this church related to nonbinary inclusion and to gendered language in the constitution.

And the news release for April 3-6 uses this equally innocuous and non-specific language. The Church Council –

- Authorized its Executive Committee to consult with the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity advisory team to review its purpose and to create an ELCA handbook that includes recommendations for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) standards for congregations.
- Adopted continuing resolution amendments to

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“Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA” that relate to the churchwide organization.

* * * * *

I would now like to conclude by saying a few words to those who might be persuaded to believe the ELCA’s claim that DEIA is supremely compatible with the gospel and truly reflects and is consistent with Biblical values. First, the ELCA’s DEIA is not the gospel of the Bible. The gospel of the Bible is the gospel of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life through Jesus and His death and resurrection. The ELCA’s DEIA gospel is a gospel of God’s welcoming, including, and loving all people equally. There is a major difference. Jesus is not really necessary in the ELCA’s DEIA gospel. Second, DEIA and critical theory are not gospel. They are legalism at its absolute worst.

With DEIA and critical theory there is no satisfaction. You can never do enough. No matter how much you apologize for, repent of, and grovel over your racism, abuse of power, and misuse of privilege, it is never enough. If you are white, and especially if you are a white male, you will never be able to apologize enough for, repent enough of, and grovel enough over the racism, abuse of power, and misuse of privilege of all white people around the world and in all times past.

With DEIA and critical theory there is no forgiveness. There cannot be forgiveness, because if oppressed and marginalized people forgive oppressive, privileged people who have apologized, repented, and groveled enough, then oppressed and marginalized people will lose their power over privileged people, and power is what it is all about.

With DEIA and critical theory there is no deliverance. If you are white – and worst of all, if you are a white male – then you cannot not be racist. You will do everything you can to perpetuate the systems that have privileged and empowered you. The only thing that can be done is for “woke people” – on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized – to tear down, dismantle, and destroy the systems that have empowered the privileged people. (The only problem is that the “woke people” who lead the process of dismantling will then come into positions of power and privilege and themselves begin oppressing and marginalizing oppressed and marginalized people. For that is what you get when the greatest value is power.)

The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1: 6-7). Paul then had some very strong words to say about those who were proclaiming a gospel contrary to what the Galatians had originally received. I believe that his words are very relevant to what is happening in the ELCA today.

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- **BYLD: Building Youth As Leaders Who Are Disciples of Christ**—Geneva College, Beaver, PA. July 7-12, 2025. Click [here](#).
- **The NEXUS Institute 2025**—Grand View University, Des Moines, IA. July 24-26, 2025 with mentor training July 21-23. Click [here](#).
- **2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly**—Phoenix, AZ. July 28 - Aug 2, 2025. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Lutheran Week 2025**—Pittsburgh, PA. August 3-8, 2025. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 25th Annual Gathering & Convention**—Lakeville, MN. October 5-8, 2025. Click [here](#).
- **Nicaea Pro Ecclesia: The Status and Potential of Our Nicene Heritage in Christian Catechesis and Ecumenical Dialogue**—Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, AL. January 12-14, 2026. Click [here](#).

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