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2299 Palmer Drive, Suite 220
New Brighton, MN 55112-2202
Tel: 651-633-6004 Toll Free: 888-551-7254
Fax: 651-633-4260
E-Mail: wordalone@popp.net
Website: www.wordalone.org

NETWORK NEWS

**WordAlone
Network annual
convention
registration
material
enclosed!**

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NETWORK NEWS



Volume 9, Issue 1

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2008

Discerning the spirits

by Betsy Carlson, editor

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God." 1 John 4:1-3

Scripture tells Christians how to discern the spirits, according to speakers at the WordAlone fall theological conference held at First Lutheran Church in White Bear Lake, Minn.

Dr. Frederick Baltz, a keynote speaker, told his audience that spirits are real, though without bodies, and out to deceive and harm the Church. He said Paul considered discernment of spirits a spiritual gift important enough to list in 1 Corinthians 12.

"I believe we have tamed that gift called discernment of spirits," he wrote in his speech. "In the supernatural-rich environment of our first brothers and sisters in Christ, 'spirit' meant much more than simply 'attitude' or 'character' as it often does today.

I believe we have
tamed that gift
called discernment
of spirits . . .

"To the earliest Christians spirits that might influence the church or plague those the church was trying to rescue included the

diabolical kind which were discarnate, malevolent entities determined to deceive and harm God's people in numerous ways."

He cautioned the conferees not to think that the world has moved past that worldview and noted television shows such as "Medium" and "Ghost Hunters."

"What is the Holy Spirit's will in this? How can we know? Where can we start? What do we need to know above all? What questions should we be asking first?" Baltz asked.

He said the Bible was the most important tool in a discerner's tool box and that the Acts of the Apostles was the right source for learning how to distinguish what the Holy Spirit wants the church to do.

The Acts gives paradigms or models of what a Holy Spirit led church should look

like: It will offer **salvation** to the world through the cross and the grace of repentance.

It will have its **priorities** right: evangelism will be first with the social issues message second. Today's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has "flip-

flopped" these.

The Spirit led church will be **growing**. He

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(‘Discerning...’ Continues from page one)

gave as examples the Christian churches in North Korea and China and noted that even though the Lutheran church had a four century lead, the Pentecostals outnumber Lutherans 10 to 1.

The church listening to the Holy Spirit will be **relational** as was the early church, he

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Jaynan Clark Egland: president
Mark C. Chavez: director
Betsy Carlson: editor

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said, adding that they lived together, prayed together, ate together and even had fun together. He reminded the conferees that people who saw those early Christians were awed by what they observed and many came to believe through their witness.

“The gift of discerning spirits takes for granted a very important fact: the church can be wrong,” he said. “Discerning whether something is the will of the Spirit of God or some other spirit is really the issue underlying contemporary questions as they come before the church, the most recent being whether to ordain homosexual persons who do not abstain from homosexual conduct, and whether to bless their unions.

“Discerners knew them for what they really were, and knew what they were up to,” he said. “Finding and recognizing the paradigms in Acts is of vital importance for us, because they describe and define the activity of the church when it is obedient to the leading of the Spirit.

“Does the church wish to follow the Holy Spirit rather than some other spirit? Then it will pay attention to the paradigms. If it departs from the paradigms, it has departed from the Spirit’s leading.” ♦

A note of explanation

My sincerest apologies for the lateness of this issue of the WordAlone Network News. My husband and I moved in January from the Twin Cities in Minnesota to the prairies of southeastern South Dakota to live in Sioux Falls. My husband took a new job and I am able to move this writing and editing job with me, thankfully.

I am hopeful of getting back on track and on time with the next issue.

Thanks for your understanding.

Betsy Carlson, editor ♦

Bible study for women’s groups available from Sola Publishing

“In Harmony with the Word,” a new women’s group Bible study, is available through Sola Publishing, the newly created educational resources arm of the WordAlone Network.

This eight-session study is based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters 5-7 of the Gospel of Matthew. Pastor Steven King, WordAlone education director and author of the new study, said recently that he would like to model a style of Bible Study that actually focuses on the Scriptures, rather than simply the sharing of personal perspectives.

“For a long time, I have heard people asking for a different type of study from what they have been using for women’s groups,” said King. “People are looking for something that reflects the integrity of Scripture, while at the same time conveying the message in language that is understandable.”

King explained that the series takes its name from a phrase in Luther’s Small Catechism, where Luther wrote: “God’s

name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God live in harmony with it.”

“In many ways, this theme describes the goal of the WordAlone Network, and what it hopes to accomplish with Sola Publishing,” said King. “We want to help individuals and congregations make the study of God’s Word a core element of a church’s ministry. By providing solid Biblical resources with a confessional Lutheran focus, we want to let the Scriptures speak in a way that will help people live their everyday lives in harmony with God’s Word.” He said the new women’s group study is just the first of many new offerings coming from Sola Publishing for adults and children. It can be ordered directly through the WordAlone office, for \$2.50 each, plus shipping. Sola Publishing has its own website (www.solapublishing.org). The site is set up to allow people to order materials online as well. ♦

ReClaim worship group announces fund drive and worship conference

A group working to produce Lutheran worship and devotional resources “to reclaim the connection between doctrine and ritual” has announced a major fund-raising campaign so they can hire an executive director and staff who can “focus their time and talents” on that ministry.

The group, ReClaim Resources, published in June 2006 an abbreviated, introductory edition of the Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home and in April 2007 Oliver Olson’s book, “Reclaiming the Lutheran Liturgical Heritage” and plans to produce a complete, hard cover hymnal.

In addition ReClaim, has scheduled a wor-

ship conference June 22-23 at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. The theme is “Theology of Christian Worship—Liturgical Issues Confronting Lutherans Today.”

Keynote speakers are Pastor Frank Senn, Immanuel Lutheran in Evanston, Ill., on “Orthodoxia and the Name of God;” Prof. John T. Pless of Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind., on “Can We Participate in the Atonement?” and Prof. Walter Sundberg of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, on “Does a Theology of Worship Matter?”

According to ReClaim, it has transitioned

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WA board of directors sets priorities for network

by Jaynan Clark Egland, president

The board of directors for the WordAlone Network engaged in brainstorming and strategic planning for WordAlone's future at the first quarterly meeting this year on Jan. 18-19 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in New Braunfels, Texas. The launching of our new publishing venture, Sola Publishing (www.solapublishing.org), was identified as one of our highest priorities in order to provide educational materials that are faithful, confessional and affordable. In parallel with this priority is the work of the newly launched Institute for Lutheran Theology.

The board, with several new members elected last spring, and our staff are focused on broadening the witness of WordAlone, increasing membership and establishing longevity through a faithful educational program that will be both user-friendly and cost effective.

Other priorities the board identified are: to promote and grow the network with direct contacts with churches and to enlarge the WA mailing lists; to provide practical plans and strategies for WA members, churches and chapters to be more effective in doing the work of the movement; to build a vocal and effective international coalition of Lutheran churches; and to work even more closely with the other Protestant reform groups.

In other matters, Irv Aal, treasurer, reported that donors had responded generously in 2007 in support of WA's ministries and that the network ended the year in good financial shape. The strong backing from individuals, chapters and churches is much appreciated and is very encouraging. The board adopted a budget for 2008 that sustains the priorities named above for the steady growth of the network.

Board members reiterated our continuing priority of supporting Lutheran seminarians in their educations and their consciences when they make requests for non-episcopal ordinations under the 2001 bylaw amendment. The board directed that each new "exceptional" pastor receive a letter of support and that WA continue to promote its Seminary Debt Relief Fund, which helps repay the seminary student loans for these courageous, confessional new pastors.

The board looks forward to the publication this spring of WordAlone's first book, "By What Authority?" The book has more than 20 different contributing authors and addresses the crisis now facing the Christian church across the denominations in North America. The dilemma is not one of shrinking denominational membership or declining budgets, but rather an inability to clearly confess that Jesus the Christ is the sole (also soul) authority in all of heaven and earth and for all time and space.

Dr. James Nestingen reported to the board about a reconfiguration of the Theological Advisory Board due to the deaths of some members and resignations of others and

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The launching of our new publishing venture, Sola Publishing . . . was identified as one of our highest priorities . . .

(WA Board... Continues from page four)

limited resources. He reported that the board was being rearranged with the intention of meeting in fall 2008 with a smaller, effective, confessional membership.

A plan for responding in a timely manner to the release of the first draft of the ELCA's social statement on sexuality on March 13 was discussed. A commitment was made to constantly remind our readership and membership to participate in the feedback process and to develop user-friendly resources to be made widely available as aids for analyzing the draft statement.

Board members expressed their appreciation to the staff and Pastor Paul Owens in Alpena, Mich., for making available on the web site the new "Daily Devotions with Pastor Paul." A suggestion was made to announce the availability of this faithful resource and try to broaden the readership.

Doug Dillner, a WA board member and also a member of the board of regents for the Institute of Lutheran Theology, reported on the development of the institute. Three new courses are being offered this winter. You can find more information about them at www.instituteoflutherantheology.org

Rev. Scott Grorud, a WA board member and member of the Lutheran CORE steering committee, reported on the work of Lutheran CORE, the coalition for reform of the ELCA. This ministry is done in conjunction with WordAlone and under the administration of our director, Mark Chavez. Organization of networks within synods and election of 2009 churchwide assembly members are the priorities, and are moving forward in a very broad based manner through our local contacts for WordAlone and Lutheran CORE.

Plans for the upcoming annual convention of WordAlone April 13-14 at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn., were discussed. The theme of the convention is "Defending the Faith," with our keynote speakers being Dr. James Kallas from Agua Dulce, Calif., and Pastor Gary

Jepsen from Puyallup, Wash. The board encourages all WordAlone churches and chapters to send multiple representatives to this event in order to educate and excite the Network about our important calling as Lutheran Christians.

The fall theological conference in November will focus on the two opposing gospels in the ELCA under the title, "A Different Gospel--Christianity at Risk."

While in New Braunfels, the board experienced the best of Texas hospitality. St. Paul provided an opportunity for board members to meet with church leaders on Jan. 18 over dinner and hosted an open meeting on Jan. 19 where members of area churches were able to meet with the board. St. Paul invited me to preach at their Sunday services on Jan. 20 and lead an adult forum. Four other Texas churches in Knippa, Mission Valley, San Antonio and Seguin also hosted our board members and staff to preach and lead forums on Jan. 20. Numerous opportunities to tell our story and confess our faith were heartening. We were once again reminded of the importance of holding two quarterly board meetings outside of Minnesota with the hope of expanding the Network and sharing our witness.

The WA board understands the difficulty of our calling to witness inside and outside the denomination and church institutions. The historic and geographic reminder that we were meeting only a few miles from the site of the Alamo was cause for some humorous comments, but also serious consideration. As we "Remember the Alamo" we are reminded of those who chose to fight for what they believed was right and necessary for the future of Texas and the United States. The defenders at the Alamo were overwhelmingly outnumbered and their supplies extremely limited, but they did not quit. Though they paid the ultimate price, their stand inspired others to greater commitment. As we remember the Alamo we must also reflect upon the cross and the Crucified One, who radically redefined what winning and losing look like to the faithful. ♦

Bewildering!!!

by Mark Chavez, director

Sometimes the news in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is completely bewildering. Here are two such recent items.

The ELCA Washington office, a political lobbying office, advocates for the environment. But to do its work, the staff uses air travel, which results in carbon emissions. An ELCA news release (Dec. 13, 2007, 07-205-AL) reported the office had begun purchasing "carbon offset credits to mitigate their carbon emissions accumulated through air travel." The credits are investments in renewable energy projects.

Even a secular commentator, Peter Schweizer, commented ("Offset Away Our Guilt," USA Today Blog, Sept, 26, 2007) about such credits, "If we can buy 'carbon offsets' for our environmental missteps, why not for our other sins?"

Perhaps the ELCA Washington office should cut back on air travel? If the office has surplus funds for the credits, why not divert the money to global mission, starting new churches or disaster relief?

Here's the other matter.

Many persons already know the ELCA's baptized membership declined by 6.6% from Dec. 31, 1998, to Aug. 1, 2006. So who got picked to be the new executive director of Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission in Chicago? The ELCA announced (Nov. 14, 2007, 07-192-FI) it was Stephen Bouman, bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, one of the most rapidly declining synods in the ELCA during his tenure. Only three other synods declined at rates greater than Metro NY's 15.5% in that period. Why not recruit someone from the seven synods that didn't decline in recent years? Why not choose a director with a proven track record for helping congregations thrive?

Whatever Bouman's gifts may be for evan-

gelism and serving congregations, his support for ELCA approval of homosexual behavior probably didn't hurt his chances of being considered for the position. He joins a churchwide staff that strongly supported all three sexuality recommendations presented to the 2005 churchwide assembly.

Bouman has supported the Metropolitan New York Synod's positions in favor of approving of homosexual behavior. A leader of an ELCA church in the synod told me that the synod's approval of homosexual behavior had made it extremely difficult for his church to reach the predominately non-Caucasian people in his community. Disregard for the biblical norms for sexuality turns people away, he said. It also works against the ELCA's goals of becoming more multicultural.

Bouman also has made a most bewildering statement. When asked once if he would have disciplined Katrina Foster, an ELCA pastor in Metro NY who "came out" in August at the churchwide assembly as a homosexually active ELCA pastor, a lifestyle still prohibited for pastors by church standards:

Bishop Bouman said he would not have disciplined Pastor Foster anyway. "She is someone whose faith is genuine and she lives it in a very bold and inclusive way," he said. "She's not afraid to tell people that she loves God and that God loves them." (NY Times, Nov. 25, 2007)

Does this mean that Bouman would discipline a pastor for not having a genuine faith if Bouman thought that were the case? Since when is genuine faith the criterion for whether or not to discipline a pastor for wrongdoing? And who other than the Lord is able to judge whether someone's faith is or is not genuine?

These bewildering reports reveal tragic theological confusion in the ELCA. ♦

Lutheran Clergy Connect

Clergy Connect is a way for churches seeking a pastor or other leader to connect with candidates who believe that Christ alone is sufficient for the unity of the church and that the Word of God is the authority for the church. A full list, including more listings and detail, is posted at: www.wordalone.org/clergy.shtml

Immanuel Lutheran Church Saratoga, California

Position: Pastor

Contact: Melva Vollersen, Call Committee Chair, at mvollersen@comcast.net or 408-867-2032.

Spring Lake Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Branch, Minnesota

Position: Pastor

Contact: Marv Widmark, Call Committee Chair, at marvndee@yahoo.com, 651-674-5121 or 612-819-8822.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church Midland, Texas

Position: Pastor

Contact: Send resumé to John Langhoff at johnl@eglresources.com or mail to Call Committee, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, 3309 Neely Avenue, Midland, TX 79707.

Messiah Lutheran Church Saskatchewan, Canada

Position: Pastor

Contact: David Glaeske, Chair of the Call Committee at glaeske.md@sasktel.net or 306-642-5306.

Lutheran Church of the Master Omaha, Nebraska

Position: Associate Pastor

Contact: Pastor Kip Tyler at tyler@churchofthemaster.com or 402-333-4444.

First Evangelical Lutheran Church White Bear Lake, Minnesota

Position: Associate Pastor

Contact: Robert J. Clemens, Call Committee Chair, 159 Canabury Court, St. Paul, MN 55117-1503 or at 651-776-1044; or Pastor Stephan Turnbull at sturnbull@flcw.org.

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church Tomah, Wisconsin

Position: Associate Pastor

Contact: Senior Pastor William L. Rice at srpastor@charter.net, 608-372-4758 or 608-343-4183.

To list your search on Clergy Connect, mail or fax your request on church letterhead, signed by an officer or call committee chair, to: WordAlone Network, 2299 Palmer Dr. Suite 220, New Brighton, MN 55112 - Fax: 651 633-4260. Include: title, church's name (city and state), contact person with phone number and e-mail address. Please inform us when you fill the position.

('Reclaim...' Continues from page three)

from being an "author" organization partnered with a publisher for design and marketing services and has become a "full-fledged publisher" overseeing "everything necessary to make a resource available." Because of this major change, the group has initiated a \$200,000 fund-raising campaign and put publication of the full, hard cover hymnal on hold, pending the fund drive.

The group plans to hire staff, set up an office and broaden publicity and marketing efforts through the fund-raising efforts. For more information, write ReClaim Resources, 514 Atlantic Ave., Suite 101, Morris, MN, 56267; or call 800 590-6001. The group's web site is www.reclaimlutheranworship.org

(Editor's note: This report is based on a news release from ReClaim.) ♦

Defending the Faith

WordAlone Network
Annual Convention

April 13-14

Keynote presenters: Dr. James Kallas
and Pastor Gary Jepsen

**Calvary Lutheran Church
Golden Valley, Minn.**

Registration information
enclosed