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Lutheran CORE expands, adds Great Commission as goal

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Lutheran CORE, a coalition of reform groups within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is gaining membership from Lutheran Churches of the Common Confession and is adding the Great Commission of Christ to its four previous goals.

Members of LC3 decided to “come under the umbrella” of Lutheran CORE at their recent annual meeting at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn. The two organizations were formed at the same time in 2005 and each has met yearly in conjunction with the WordAlone annual conventions.

Lutheran CORE has been a coalition for reform groups, churches and individuals while Lutheran Churches of the Common Confession, also called LC3, was established for churches to work together for local renewal. Leaders acknowledged that creation of the two groups—along side the WordAlone Network—made for a confusing “alphabet soup” of reforming groups.

Lutheran CORE’s four goals have been to work to uphold the authority of God’s Word; to advocate use of the name of the Holy Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; maintain Biblical standards for marriage

and human sexuality; and to work with and within the governance structures of the ELCA.

By adding the Great Commission as a fifth goal to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Lutheran CORE stresses its vision of returning Gospel evangelism to the center of the church’s ministry.

The LC3 steering committee is to work under the Lutheran CORE steering committee for at least a year, when the arrangement will be reviewed says Pastor Mark Braaten, new head of the LC3 committee. He will sit on the Lutheran CORE steering committee as well. Former LC3 steering committee member Pastor Eric Swenson of New Rochelle, N.Y., will be added to the Lutheran CORE Advisory Committee.

Braaten suggested at the annual meeting that LC3 have a two-fold focus on information sharing and networking.

Elections to the Lutheran CORE steering committee resulted in the reelections of pastors Paull Spring, Paul Ulring and W. Stevens Shipman. Pastor Rebecca Heber of Orlando, Fla., was elected to the steering committee. ♦

Convention is time for listening, electing

Besides hearing reports from partner ministries, attending workshops and listening to two keynote speakers, WordAlone members elected three incumbents and one new member to the WordAlone Network Board of Directors at the Network's annual convention in mid-April at Calvary Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minn.

(For a report on the keynote addresses, see page 3.)

Ministry partners whose representatives spoke were Institute of Lutheran Theology, ReClaim Resources, Latin American Lutheran Mission, Lutheran Youth Encounter, New Hope Mission Society, World Mission Prayer League and Bible Alive Ministries.

New WA board member Pastor David McGettigan, Ocean City, N.J., was elected to the board for a three-year term. McGettigan, in introducing himself before the voting, told the convention that he was introduced to the WordAlone movement five years ago by Pastor Paul Andell of Philadelphia. McGettigan said his WordAlone involvement has reinvigorated his ministry.

Re-elected to the board, also for three-year terms, were lay person Irv Aal, Surprise, Ariz.; lay person Carl Fynboe, Lakewood, Wash.; and lay person Phil Wold, Mankato, Minn. Aal is serving his second full term while Fynboe and Wold are coming off one-year terms, each having filled unexpired terms of persons who left the board early.

Two others on the nominations slate for the four positions were Pastor George Muenich of Brooklyn, N.Y., and lay person Phil Schlachtenhaufen, Tomahawk, Wis.

The convention acknowledged and thanked Andell who left the board as required after his second consecutive, three-year term.

Elected to next year's nominating committee by acclamation were Pastor Larry Cunnings, Dallastown, Penn.; Pastor Larry Gember, Merrillville, Ind.; and lay persons Mick Lee, Golden Valley, Minn.; Jim Lindberg, Mesa, Ariz.; and Bill Zimdars,

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Church sinks into modern culture of death

by Betsy Carlson, editor

Do you think Martin Luther ever took a stand that was not politically correct? Never thought of it that way, did you?

Yes, he did say politically incorrect things, according to James Kallas, a keynote speaker at the annual WordAlone Network convention in mid-April at Calvary Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, Minn. When Luther took his stand against the selling of indulgences, he went against the prevailing culture.

Luther did not accept church tradition as the authority over what Paul wrote in Scripture, Kallas said. The retired missionary, former college professor and president said Luther did not buy into the church's tradition that said God became man so he could suffer, die and pay the price of guilt for humanity's sins. Luther rejected the politically correct tradition of buying indulgences to be freed from sins' consequences. Rather Luther said that Jesus died to defeat death and the devil, according to Kallas. He saw humans in bondage to a state of sin because Satan took us over, leaving us bent over by original sin from which only God could set us free.

Kallas said Luther took the fight against the wiles of the devil seriously. His belief in the powers of darkness was central. It showed up in his hymns, the Catechism and his other writings.

But Luther did not believe only in evil spirits. He read past the end of the Gospel of Luke where the resurrected Jesus appeared to the two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus, Kallas said. Luther kept on reading to Luke's book of Acts, to Acts 1:8 where the living Jesus was meeting with his apostles. Just before he was taken into heaven, Jesus told them, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

Though out of sync with the prevailing culture, Luther was a giant, one of the greats of western civilization, said Kallas, because he stood on the Word alone.

Fast forward to the 20th century though, back to Germany, to Marburg where a theologian named Rudolf Bultmann taught. According to Kallas this theologian bought into the modern culture so much that he consistently pushed for Scripture to be rewritten, to be interpreted anew. He wanted to "demythologize" Scripture so it would be more palatable to modern man. Parables, healings, miracles, exorcisms became myths.

"He said, 'Don't talk about Satan and the forces of darkness,'" Kallas said. Bultmann preferred to couch Scripture in psychological language, not demonology. Bultmann eventually said that resurrection was historically impossible.

Kallas said that when Lutherans set aside the spirits, they also set aside the Holy Spirit.

"Once you start to rewrite Scripture, all of our truths are discarded. We've lost our anchor,

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Dr. James Kallas

Agua Dulce, Calif.

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we’re adrift at sea. We don’t recognize sin,” Kallas said. He called the situation a morass and said the problem in the church today was not arguing over homosexuality, “but that we’ve lost the authority of Scripture.”

Pastor Gary Jepsen of Puyallup, Wash., the second keynote speaker at the convention saw another troubling entanglement affecting the church now, as in Luther’s time, the prevailing culture. He asked, “What is the hole into which our culture has fallen and into which it is dragging the church and many of its servants, its pastors?”

Jepsen responded that it is a culture of death. He said the late Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical in 1995 entitled “*Evangelium Vitae*,” which is translated as “The Gospel of Life.”



Pastor Gary Jepsen
Puyallup, Wash.

The document described our culture as a culture of death.

“That’s quite a contrast, isn’t it,” Jepsen commented. “Gospel of life versus the culture of death.”

Pope John Paul wasn’t talking just about literal death (abortion, murder, euthanasia or genocide), according to Jepsen. He was describing assaults on human dignity through slavery, torture, prostitution, worship of violence and worship of convenience. The pope expressed concern about people’s being desensitized by the dehumanizing effects of violence, impulsivity, vulgarity and raw sensuality.

Jepsen said he sees the culture of death leading to a degeneration of language and meaning, to a desire for distraction and to nihilism. Nihilism says life has no meaning and there’s nothing to live for except the moment . . . one’s own momentary convenience or pleasure.

“Little wonder people are left with lifestyles that are increasingly hedonistic and violent,” Jepsen said, “it’s eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.”

He added that the attitude of cynicism goes hand in hand with nihilism. Because, in this thinking, there is no God, and therefore there is no meaning, purpose or hope.

In summing up, Jepsen said the church has found itself in the black hole of a culture of death; an affirmation not of faith but of cynicism, ambiguity, relativity and subjectivity; tolerance of intolerable doctrine; and an open season on interpretation.

And what is God calling Christians to do?

“He asks us to be faithful in the proclamation of the Gospel,” Jepsen said. “To whom are you going to bear witness? The Jesus of Scripture or some emasculated Christ of political correctness?”

Prof. Kallas supplied the answer in his earlier address: “Do what Luther did. Tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”

[Recordings of the keynote presentations may be ordered from the WordAlone office; a detailed outline of Kallas’ paper and the text of Jepsen’s paper are on www.wordalone.org] ◆



Lutherans approach the Bible

by Roy A. Harrisville III, Ph.D., Pastor, Our Saviors Lutheran Church, Menomonie, Wisc.

[Editor’s note: This is an edited version of a paper that appeared first on the Lutheran Forum website. It was written in collaboration with some of the consultants for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s Book of Faith initiative and is offered as a contribution for the Lutheran approach to the Bible.]

This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life. (Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, C2.03)

The following is intended for the general reader and is to be understood as a brief description of how Lutherans have and should approach the Bible. A Lutheran approach to Scripture has certain necessary components. They are: the priority of Scripture, Christ the center of Scripture, law and gospel, the plain sense of Scripture, the power of Scripture and the inspiration of Scripture.

***Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)**

Lutherans approach the Scriptures as divine revelation. The first point in a Lutheran approach to Scripture is to acknowledge the primacy of the Scriptures in matters of Christian faith and life over all other voices. When the Reformation began, there were countless voices vying for the attention of the Church. Some came from within the church herself, others came from outside. Numerous Church traditions and practices had developed during the Middle



Roy A. Harrisville III

Ages because of people’s listening to these various messages. By Martin Luther’s day many of these traditions had become more important than plain Christian faith. In an effort to reclaim an emphasis on that faith Martin Luther and the reformers insisted on the primacy of the Scriptures as a way to refocus Christian devotion on the essential core of Christianity: Christ.

The reformers assumed that since the Scriptures were the founding documents of the Church, having been handed down by the apostles and their disciples (thus in a sense creating the Church), that the Bible was the best source of information about Christ and his proclamation, not later traditions and teachings. When they approached Scripture they recognized that it had

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Lutherans approach the Bible

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authority over all pronouncements of the church, including priests, bishops and the pope. The reformers writings themselves are subordinate to Scripture. Therefore, when Lutherans approach Scripture they do so with a certain reverence that is withheld from other books, teachings and messages. This is not to say that Lutherans refuse to acknowledge the positive contributions of science and archaeology or allow any contradictions and inconsistencies in Scripture. However, when Lutherans read the Bible they acknowledge that it is only in the words of Scripture that the pure message of Christ is to be found and nowhere else.

The Lutheran reformers wrote, “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone, ... Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged, whether they are good or evil, correct or incorrect,” as found in the Formula of Concord Epitome in “The Book of Concord,” edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert.

And again Philip Melancthon wrote, “We concede to neither the pope nor the church the power to issue decrees against this consensus of the prophets,” in the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” Article XII, para. 66.

For these reasons Lutherans look upon Scripture as the norm or standard by which all other teachings and teachers are judged. Other messages, writings, philosophies, thoughts or experiences are not to be placed

on an equal basis with Scripture, or the Word of God. Scripture retains its primacy even before the church and her creeds and teachings. The Word of Scripture is considered the authoritative voice in the church, not someone’s notion of the Gospel or God, for such opinions are necessarily derivative of Scripture.

Christ the center

Lutherans approach the Scriptures as faithful witnesses to Christ. The primacy of Scripture and its authority are dependent upon Jesus Christ, to whom the Scriptures testify. For Christians, including Lutheran Christians, Christ is the center of Scripture. “Take Christ from the Scriptures - and what more will you find in them?” as Luther asked in “The Bondage of the Will,” translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston. Therefore, any teaching that claims Scripture as its source must focus on the person of Jesus Christ and not (for example) on a vague notion of love.

Law and gospel

The Scriptures portray Christ through the messages of **law and gospel**. Melancthon wrote in the “Apology,” Article IV, para. 5, “All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises. In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise concerning Christ.” The law (divine demands that convict human beings) says, “You need Christ.” The gospel (divine forgiveness that redeems human beings) says, “Here Christ is.” Depending upon the listener’s situation, various passages may function as either law or gospel. These two messages are always to be distinguished but

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never separated. The gospel is incomprehensible without the law, just as forgiveness is meaningless to those unaware of their sins.

Therefore, Lutherans do not shrink back from the law as negative and embrace only the gospel as positive, but rather they recognize the value of the law in its service to the gospel of Christ. When the law is separated from the gospel, the good news of Christ is cheapened and robbed of its significance. Some may wish to eliminate or marginalize scriptural messages that cause discomfort. Because Lutherans embrace Scripture as both law and gospel they should not seek to marginalize either law or gospel but retain both as divine functions of Scripture. In this way Lutherans honor Scripture as that force of God that both kills and makes alive.

The plain sense

Lutherans approach the Scriptures primarily as clear words, not as hidden symbols. Though certain passages remain obscure, the content and meaning of Scripture is open to all. Lutherans recognize that it is in the text of Scripture that God’s voice is heard, not something behind or under the text. An emphasis upon the plain sense of Scripture guards against the common error of subjectivism, peculiar readings and ideological interpretation.

For this reason, the literal sense of Scripture is to be preferred over figurative readings except where such readings are necessary in order to make sense of the words. In the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII, para. 45, the Lutheran reformers wrote: “Because of all these things, we are bound to interpret and

construe these words of the eternal, reliable, and almighty Son of God, our Lord, creator, and redeemer Jesus Christ, not as embellished, figurative, exotic, expressions, as would appear in line with our reason. Instead, we should accept the words as they stand, in their proper, clear sense, with simple faith and appropriate obedience and not permit ourselves to be drawn away from this position by any objection or human counterargument spun out of human reason, no matter how attractive it may appear to our reason.” And in the Formula of Concord, The Solid Declaration, Rule and Guiding Principle 1, the reformers stated, “First, we confess our adherence to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, as to the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which alone is the one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers and teaching are to be judged and evaluated.” (Kolb and Wengert, p. 527) For instance, when Scripture reports Christ’s words, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” they should be read literally, not figuratively. On the other hand, when Scripture portrays Christ as a slaughtered lamb (Rev. 5:6) it should be read figuratively not literally.

In many cases, Scripture can be used to interpret itself. If one passage seems obscure it is often enlightened by another. This does not mean that Scripture is monolithic, but rather that the immediate, general and canonical context of the whole of Scripture must be taken into account and used to understand the meaning of a single passage.

The power of the Word

Lutherans approach the Scriptures as

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Lutherans approach the Bible

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power. Since Christ is the center of Scripture, the Word has power to transform lives, grant the gift of faith and effect salvation through that gift. Luther said, “And note that the strength of Scripture is this, that it is not changed into him who studies it, but that it transforms its lover into itself and its strengths,” in his First Lectures on the Psalms, Luther’s Works volume 10. This is what gives Scripture its authority. Scripture’s authority is not dependent upon external human pronouncements concerning its historical conditioning or infallible character. (The use of various methods such as the historical critical method and the insistence of the inerrancy/infallibility of Scripture came after the Protestant Reformation.) Rather, its ability to change lives constitutes its very power and authority, regardless of what one may say about it.

For this reason human beings should not consider themselves as judges over Scripture but rather as persons who are judged and recreated by Scripture. Scripture is the Word of God that exists over against the individual who reads it. Moreover, as the transforming, and therefore authoritative Word of God, Scripture necessarily has a claim over the Christian as a means of God’s grace for the Christian. The Christian, therefore, should never consider herself the master of Scripture and its meaning, but rather Scripture’s pupil and servant. Scripture remains, but the hearer is changed.

Inspiration

Lutherans approach the Scriptures as inspired. The reformers never developed a doctrine of scriptural inspiration. They

assumed it. God is the assumed author of Scripture as attested by many statements in the reformers’ writings. For example Luther wrote, “Neither councils, fathers, nor we, in spite of the greatest and best success possible, will do as well as the Holy Scriptures, that is, as well as God himself has done,” from Luther’s Works Vol. 34, para. 284. Scripture is therefore understood as a divine Word that transcends humankind. Though it is also considered of human origin, Scripture’s message and content are divine. Martin Luther therefore maintained that the Holy Spirit is necessary for the proper understanding of Scripture. He wrote in “The Bondage of the Will,” “The truth is that nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures.” And from the same source, “The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture.” Though Scripture can certainly be read and appreciated by non-believers, it is only when one has the gift of faith by the Spirit that one is truly opened to the power and impact of Scripture and able to understand the true character and nature of the Word.

Conclusion

Lutheran Christians are not the only ones who approach the Scriptures with reverence and faith. However, whether we use various methods to enhance the reading of Scripture, a “Lutheran” approach is guided by the concepts mentioned above. Any reading of Scripture may be said to be Lutheran that incorporates the following approaches: a reverence for Scripture as God’s Word; as law and gospel; as Christocentric; as open and plain; as powerfully transformative and authoritative. ♦

Meet Luther’s small cat in new curricula

by Betsy Carlson, editor

As promised, Sola Publishing, an educational ministry of the WordAlone Network, made its debut at the WordAlone annual convention in mid-April at Calvary Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minn.

In fact, Luther’s small cat was there too. That is, several small, fuzzy, stuffed black and white kittens welcomed visitors to Sola Publishing’s display. Pastor Steven King, Education Director, explained that as he worked on curricula and study materials for young students and Sunday school classes, he kept reminding himself to quote from Luther’s small cat—actually meaning to quote from the Small Catechism. Along came the kitten.

For ordering numbers and pricing information, check out the web site, www.solapublishing.org. To order, call toll free 1-888-551-7254 or in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, a local call, 651-633-6004. You can meet Small Cat on the web site!

King calls it a “wise little cat” and “the frisky character” and says it appears in study materials and on matching catechism

posters. He has rewritten Luther’s Small Catechism, into a children’s version, in what is described in marketing materials, as a simplified edition written in easy-to-understand language with illustrations.

He notes that traditional texts of works such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer are included for memorization. However, these texts are accompanied by modern versions, written in “everyday language.” Sola also offers a five-session, elementary school age Sunday school series, “Learning the Ten Commandments” with Scripture stories, puzzles and questions to help in exploring the meanings of the commandments.

Sola also offers a women’s Bible study, “In Harmony with the Word,” and two other adult studies, “Three Keys to What Lutherans Believe,” and “A Reading and Discussion Study of the Augsburg Confession.” Of the two adult studies, the former is a basic introduction to Lutheran theology, King says, while the latter is an eight-week adult education series and more challenging. ♦

Talking about the elephant in churches yet? You need to . . .

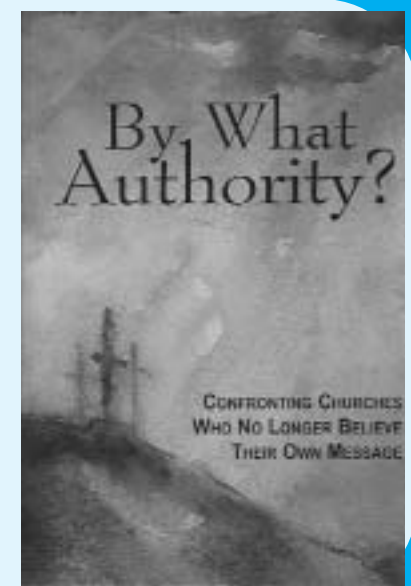
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St. Paul said, 'Be not conformed to this world'

by Deacon Mary Gieseler, RN, St. Paul's Lutheran Church (ELCA), Mobile, Ala.

I am an Episcopal deacon who is delighted to serve an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation. I rejoice to experience the plain word of God preached, the sacraments rightly administered and the fellowship and love of the congregation. It is an honor to serve my Lutheran brothers and sisters as their congregational nurse.

To be brief, I am disgusted at the actions of my own church and delighted to be where I am. Our pastor obviously loves the Scriptures, is devoted to Lutheran doctrine and loves his people.

I've been asked if I am planning to join the ELCA. My answer is, "Not at this time," because I see no point in re-living the degradation of doctrine and polity I've already experienced in my own church. The ELCA lags behind The Episcopal Church in "keeping up with the

times," but you're gaining on us in a hurry! In both churches, the leadership seems to be afraid to use the ugly word **sin** for fear of appearing unkind or uncaring. If I'm not a sinner, why would I need the Church? Why would anyone?

Somehow many Christian leaders have forgotten St. Paul's directive: "Be not conformed to this world."

If we are to "live into" our Baptism, if we expect to behave as Christ calls us to behave, we must look to the Ten Commandments and the Creeds, not the advice of popular entertainers and television psychologists. Lately we find

ourselves listening to religious leaders who are evidently trying to "make the best" of the way people are living today, **without calling them to account**.

My impression is that the ELCA, like The Episcopal Church, is embarking on a long downhill road of spending literally millions of dollars to "study" and "deliberate" and "achieve consensus" and "promote an atmosphere of love and trust" regarding an issue that has already been settled—in Scripture. In my opinion it is a sin to throw good money after bad, convening groups at various levels of the church—whichever church—to argue about a "done deal."

If the ELCA leadership has already decided that there will be some sort of "acceptable partnerships" outside of the marriage of one man to one woman, go ahead and declare it. The Episcopal Church has already done so and is now heavily engaged in "saving" the real property and money they can wrest away from parishes and dioceses that dissent.

There is no reason to repeat this expensive farce—just move on! Be prepared to do as the Episcopal Church is doing—experiencing a painful fracture into many small bodies that claim to represent "the true religion" and have ties to "mother churches" all over the map. At least you will have the memory of previous church bodies you might return to—we don't have that to fall back on.

Years ago my (Lutheran) father said that sooner or later there would be one faithful liturgical church—and "everybody else." Apparently he wasn't so wrong after all! ♦

WordAlone, Lutheran CORE have info for responding to the proposed human sexuality social statement

WordAlone Network and Lutheran CORE remind members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that the clock is running toward the Nov. 1 deadline for critiquing and responding to the draft social statement on human sexuality. The topic has been under study for many years and the social statement will be voted on by the 2009 churchwide assembly to be held in Minneapolis, Minn.

For help in responding to the draft ELCA statement individuals and groups can read essays and questions with answers on the two reform groups' web sites. Go to www.wordalone.org/education.shtml#marriage or to www.lutherancore.org/papers/marrfam.shtml. The draft social statement may be downloaded at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/draft/draftstatement.pdf or ordered from Augsburg Fortress (call 800-328-4648). ♦

Responses to the social statement are due by November 1

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

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.

The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Sacramento, California

Position: Senior Pastor

Send résumés to: Inquiry and mobility form contact is Pastor William Wong, Sierra Pacific Synod 800-275-3522 or email wong@spselca.org

Central Lutheran Church

Tacoma, Washington

Position: Pastor

Contact: Send resumé to Leonard Bernhoft at Lbernhof@aol.com or mail to Call Committee, Central Lutheran Church, 409 Tacoma Avenue, No., Tacoma, WA 98403.

Faith Lutheran Church

Otterbein, Indiana

Position: Part-time Pastor

Contact: Dann Keiser, call committee chairman at keiser@tctc.com or 765-366-7010.

Turtle River Ministry

Larimore, North Dakota

Position: Pastor

Contact: Julie Mutch at 701-343-6369, or Our Savior's Lutheran Church at 701-343-2861. (church address: 302 Booth Ave., Larimore, ND 58251)