

What Has Gone Wrong in the ELCA

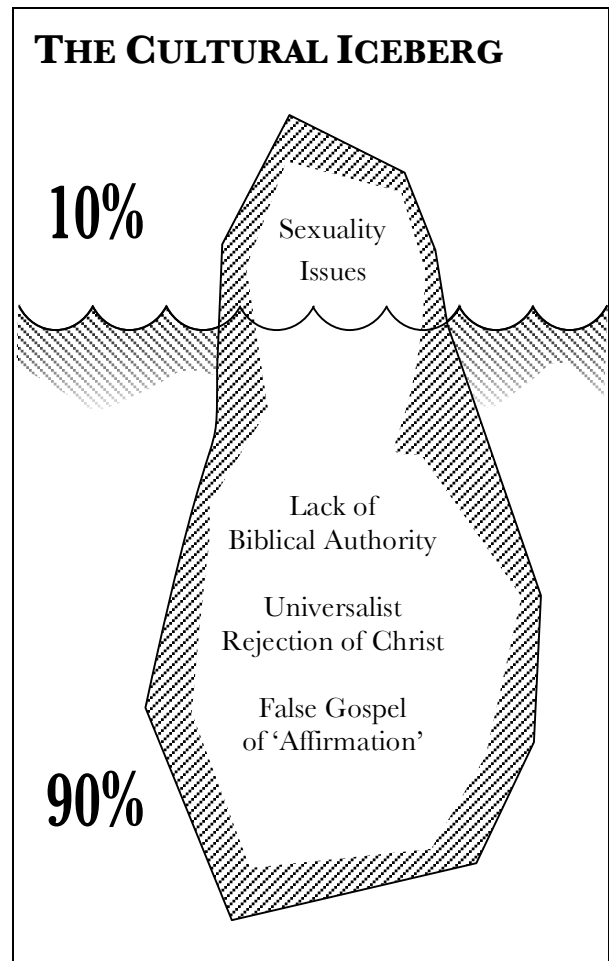
The Tip of the Iceberg

After a number of ill-advised course deviations over the years, those at the helm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have piloted the denomination into a deadly collision with the same iceberg that has caused other Christian bodies to fracture and sink. For many, the Churchwide Assembly votes in August 2009 – to affirm same-sex unions and lower the sexual standards of clergy – will go down in history as the defining moment of impact.

But the real danger in hitting an iceberg is that only a small portion of it can be seen above the surface. The greater problem is what lies underneath and cannot easily be seen.

The new social statement and policies on sexuality are just the tip of the iceberg. They are a single example of how far the ELCA has strayed from the authority of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. On a much deeper level, the changes taking place in the church today are altering the very message of Christ. When the Word of God is no longer taught as the basis for the Christian faith and life, a religious institution ceases to be a Church of Christ.

The time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)



The Decline of the ELCA

Consider the facts and disturbing trends over the years, shown here, since the forming of the ELCA:

ELCA Statistics	1988	2008	% change
Congregations	11,120	10,396	-6.5%
Baptized membership (millions)	5.25	4.63	-11.8%
ELCA new mission starts	50	25 ^a	-50%
Global missions (millions)	\$18	\$15.6 ^b	-13.3%
Global missions executive staff	22	25	+14%
ELCA missionaries ^c	471	180 ^d	-62%

^a 2007 figure

^b actual decline is greater when the \$15.6 million is discounted for inflation

^c missionaries actually supported by the ELCA churchwide budget (does not include Global Mission Associates supported financially by independent mission agencies)

^d 48 were one-year young adults in global mission

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Why We Are Leaving the ELCA

For many years, the WordAlone Network has worked to reform the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and to call it back to the Church's biblical and confessional foundations. Our time as a reform movement in the ELCA has now ended. We are moving forward as WordAlone Ministries, to directly support individuals and congregations in preaching, teaching and confessing the message of Christ.



For those who ask why we are making this move forward out of the ELCA, the following is a simple list based on the format of our Common Confession and expressing the concerns we have about the theological departure of the ELCA in these important matters of faith.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ

- use of the name "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" has diminished in worship materials
- biblical pronouns in reference to God have been eradicated, Scripture altered in the ELW
- Unitarianism tendency in describing a non-specific generic "god" rather than naming Jesus Christ
- the true gospel of forgiveness/repentance is replaced by a false gospel of acceptance/affirmation

2. The Gospel of Salvation

- a post-Christian form of Universalism (all are saved) is routinely preached in pulpits
- less than 200 missionaries are in ELCA, only a few with "evangelism" in their job description
- ELCA's paradigm of mission changed to support and "accompaniment" rather than evangelism
- lack of evangelism has resulted in a 600,000 decline in baptized membership in the ELCA
- LWF and mission support dollars are used to export a false gospel to world Lutheran partners

3. The Authority of Scripture

- educational materials and social statements show lack of respect for biblical authority
- Presiding Bishop acknowledges "two equal but irreconcilable" hermeneutics (March 2005)
- methods of "higher criticism" are used as an end, rather than as a means of proclamation
- seminary education stresses psychology and systems-theory rather than biblical teaching

4. A Common Confession of Faith

- teaching materials show a lack of respect for Scripture and our historical confessions of faith
- general American Liberal Protestantism has replaced specific Lutheran doctrine and practice
- a new definition of "bound conscience" grants authority to self-invented and individual truth
- the work of the Holy Spirit is regularly detached from the Word of God (aka. "Enthusiasm")

5. The Priesthood of All Believers

- the ELCA suffers from a rigid institutional, bureaucratic, and regulatory mindset
- there is lack of representation and accountability in assemblies of independent "voting members"
- the Lutheran understanding of ministry and ordination has been abandoned for Episcopal forms

6. Marriage and Family

- sexuality statement assigns morality and ethics to gospel (salvation) rather than law (creation)
- 2009 CWA actions change the traditional biblical teaching on marriage and homosexuality
- abortion is funded in the ELCA pension plan, contrary to the ELCA's own social statement

7. The Mission & Ministry of the Congregation

- the ELCA has a "three expression" church structure, contrary to the Lutheran Confessions
- the top-down ELCA governing system allows for no ratification of important decisions
- congregations are routinely treated as franchises, simply "feeding" national offices
- emphasis on political advocacy diverts 5% of hunger relief funds to ELCA lobbyists