

(Newsletter article by Scott Grorud to his congregation, Faith Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, MN)

The radical decisions made by the ELCA churchwide assembly this summer caused many members of Faith to ask where our church will align itself in terms of denominational membership. In discussing the options, one message has come through clearly: **We're confused!** There are too many groups and acronyms and organizations to understand them all or where Faith Lutheran fits.

To help cut through the confusion, we prepared this article to help show the Lutheran landscape today. It begins with the *ELCA*, which formed in 1988. Faith Lutheran entered it through one of the three Lutheran churches that merged to form it. The ELCA was organized so that advocates of various causes, not typical church leaders, moved into positions of influence and already by 1990, there was deep concern that the ELCA was in theological trouble. That year, over a thousand people attended a conference to raise the alarm, but the ELCA did not change course.

In 1996, a group of concerned pastors and laypeople formed an e-mail list to discuss new theological concerns. They decided to hold a meeting and over 300 people came! That was the beginning of the *WordAlone Network*, which formally organized three years later. Faith Lutheran has supported WordAlone from the very beginning.

It soon became clear that some churches in WordAlone already wanted to cut ties with the ELCA. Churches like Faith had formed an association within WordAlone to share resources, so in 2001 that group was spun off from WordAlone into a separate church body called *Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ*. LCMC did not require churches to leave the ELCA in order to join it, so churches like Faith (and Christ the King) stayed with LCMC and have had dual membership ever since.

Meanwhile, the trouble in the ELCA deepened and more people began to object, including many who had not supported WordAlone in the past and were not prepared to join it. Yet, the only reform group of any size was WordAlone, so they did want to work cooperatively. WordAlone also discovered that many small, regional reform groups had sprung up around the ELCA. So, to bring together all those working for reform under one umbrella, WordAlone formed *Lutheran CORE (COalition for REform)*. It now includes 12 different reform groups from around the country. WordAlone became a member of Lutheran CORE, even though it had created it! (I serve on the board of WordAlone and the steering committee of Lutheran CORE.)

As one theological crisis after another plagued the ELCA, WordAlone tried to fill the gaps.

*ELCA seminaries are a theological mess, so WordAlone started and then spun off the *Institute for Lutheran Theology*. Pastor Randy is now the chair of the board for ILT.

*The ELCA published a problematic new hymnal, so WordAlone began and then spun off *ReClaim Resources*, which is working on a hymnal and other solid worship resources.

*The church publishing house became very unreliable, so WordAlone formed *Sola Publishing*, to produce high quality, affordable curriculum for children and adults.

*Many churches, especially small ones, have struggled to get good pastors through the ELCA call process, so WordAlone established *Clergy Connect* to facilitate better matches.

*The ELCA has done less and less global mission, so WordAlone has partnered with a number of efficient, faithful mission agencies like the *New Hope Mission Society*.

There are other examples, but the end result is that WordAlone, without any grand plan to do so, has put in place all the typical elements of a denomination—including LCMC, a new denomination!

The decisions of the ELCA last summer spurred many folks into action. Over 1,400 people attended a Lutheran CORE convocation in Indianapolis. Its name changed to Lutheran COalition for **REnewal** and it was re-formed as a “free-standing synod.” *Free-standing* means it is entirely separate from the ELCA. *Synod* indicates that it is not a new denomination, but a gathering of confessional Lutherans who will support each other in ministry.

In early October, LCMC held its annual convention in Fargo and 700+ people attended, three times more than usual. There, Pastor Randy helped launch the new **Augustana District** of LCMC. LCMC districts function like the WordAlone Network—loose associations of like-minded churches that do mission together. The Augustana District should appeal to churches now leaving the ELCA that want to work with other solidly confessional Lutherans. It will be fully developed over the next year.

After trying to write this as briefly as possible, I understand why people are confused! There is a lot here, with a lot of history behind it. Please ask us any questions that all this raises for you.

It is also exciting to see all the creative work God has done through these reform efforts and how He has provided for this moment in a way no one realized as it was happening. That gives us hope as we face an uncertain future that God is leading the way and will guide Faith Lutheran to faithful actions that will further the mission He has given us.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Scott