

First Evangelical Lutheran Church Report From the Path Forward Committee

April 18, 2010

An Evaluation of Alternatives and Recommendation
to Resolve Our Differences With the
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Following the General Assembly Vote to Adopt the
Human Sexuality Social Statement and Ministries Policy

Forward

This report is the culmination of hundreds of hours spent researching, discussing, and deliberating over the best possible path forward for our congregation by individuals chosen to represent all members of this congregation. The report contains facts, statements, observations, and opinions gathered and formed by the Committee and its members along this journey. The recommendations in this report represent the Committee's view at this time, after having prayerfully considered the options before us. This report and recommendation are presented for this congregation's use in understanding the issues and decisions we collectively face.

1. Background

- 1.1. In February, 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) issued a report and recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA studies on Sexuality. This study was commissioned by the ELCA in August of 2001. Various forms of this social statement had previously been rejected in 2005 and 2007.
- 1.2. At the heart of the Social Statement were two recommendations that reversed existing ELCA policy: 1) the blessing of unions between persons in a "publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationship", and 2) the rostering of pastors in such relationships.
- 1.3. On February 25, 2009, memorial resolutions were submitted by a member of First Evangelical Lutheran Church (FELC) to amend and adopt policies from the recommendations from this report at the May 2, 2009 Eastern Washington/Idaho Synod Assembly. These resolutions were not discussed at FELC Council or congregation meetings. Rather, they were submitted to the Synod along with the requisite signatures, in accordance with ELCA policy.
- 1.4. On April 1, 2009, these resolutions were made generally known to the rest of the FELC leadership and members. During the month of April, 2009, several informational meetings were called by our Pastors to discuss these resolutions prior to the synod assembly on May 2. It became clear at these meetings that significant

differences of opinion over the Human Sexuality Social Statement existed within the congregation.

- 1.5. On April 10, 2009, a new resolution was submitted for the Synod Assembly to memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly “to adopt the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality and its implementing resolutions.”
- 1.6. On May 2, 2009 the Eastern Washington/Idaho Synod Assembly voted to accept this memorial resolution. (A “memorial” resolution is one which, if passed by the Synod Assembly, then goes to the Churchwide General Assembly.)
- 1.7. In August, 2009, the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA adopted the recommendations of the Human Sexuality Social Statement.
- 1.8. The Social Statement includes provisions for “structured flexibility” that is intended to give individuals and congregations the ability to exercise their “conscience bound” will to determine whether they adopt the practices of blessing unions and the rostering of pastors in publicly accountable, life-long, monogamous, same-gender relationships.

“The determination of where and when this flexibility would be exercised would depend upon the mission and ministry needs of the relevant settings, as well as the conscience-bound positions of the individuals and groups who, on behalf of this church, hold decision-making authority in those settings.”
- 1.9. In September, 2009, in response to a large number of members who disagreed with the ELCA position, the FELC Council called for a voter’s meeting to choose whether to accept or reject the ELCA social statement as provided for by the structured flexibility described above. The voter’s meeting was held on October 18, 2009. The result was to reject the Social Statement by a vote of 159 to 56, with 4 abstaining.
- 1.10. Following the vote on the social statement, a new motion was made that called for the FELC Council to establish a committee to evaluate alternatives to resolve our differences with the ELCA over the Human Sexuality Social Statement and Ministry Policies. This motion was passed by the congregation.

2. Appointment and Charter of the Path Forward Committee

2.1. In November 2009, the FELC Council established a charter for the Path Forward Committee as required by the congregation vote noted above. Council also directed the Path Forward Committee to evaluate options for resolving differences both by working to remain in the ELCA, and to evaluate alternatives to leave the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body. The Charter and Council Guidance are included in the Enclosure to this report.

2.2. At the November 2009 FELC Council Meeting, members for the Path Forward Committee were selected to represent a cross-section of the congregation with regards to views on the ELCA Human Sexuality Social Statement. The following congregation leaders were appointed:

Jim Dixon	Walt Reuter
Joanne Glissendorf	Paul Ritter
Justin Hasner	Bob Sawyers
Karen Hayes	Jeff Shadley
Joel Hubbell (Alternate)	David Sheldon (Co-chair)
Harlan Lerum	Dan Swanson
Carol Mason	Andy Wentzel (Co-chair)

2.3. The Committee did not extensively deliberate over the meaning, the merits, or the specific details of the Human Sexuality Social Statement, in order to honor the vote taken by the congregation. Instead, the Committee focused on the processes, relationships, and issues, both within our congregation and between FELC and the ELCA, which led or contributed to the conflict we now face over this issue.

3. Division Within the ELCA and FELC

3.1. The Path Forward Committee recognizes the conflict arising from the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly and the division that this is causing within the FELC congregation. The ELCA Human Sexuality Social Statement task force stated that the recommendation will “prompt strong response in this church”. Indeed, there are other ELCA congregations across the country struggling with these issues in the same manner as FELC.

- 3.2. Those persons who are opposed to the ELCA Assembly action generally cite that scripture is opposed to homosexual relationships and affirm the traditional, or orthodox, Lutheran view that normative sexual relationships are between one man and one woman within the confines of marriage.
- 3.3. Those who are heartened by the decision of the ELCA Assembly generally maintain that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice, and that it is a trait people are born with, and consequently the church has no place condemning homosexuals in committed life-long relationships.
- 3.4. FELC congregation members on both sides of the issue have expressed frustration over the processes used to communicate and participate in the decision making that led to the Synod and Churchwide Assembly votes, as well as the congregational vote.
- 3.5. Regardless of which position individual FELC members have, the Path Forward Committee recognizes that these positions are heartfelt and no person should attribute evil to or condemn those who have a position different from their own.
- 3.6. The Path Forward Committee recognizes that division among the congregation cannot be wholly healed by the decisions made by this Committee, or future decisions rendered by Council or this congregation. Rather, unity will occur through prayer, the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and by personal forgiveness and acceptance of one another.
- 3.7. As such, the Path Forward Committee recommended to Council that additional initiatives be pursued to begin this healing process. The Council contracted an independent conciliation service, Common Ground, to begin this process.
- 3.8. The members of this Path Forward Committee all care deeply for each and every member of the FELC congregation and each and every non-member who worships, studies, prays and serves with us. Being divided greatly saddens us and it is our prayer that we find ways, with God's help, to reconcile.

4. General Evaluation Process

- 4.1. Path Forward Committee meetings began in December, 2009. Members signed a Covenant Agreement that enabled us to set ground rules for discussions and behavior (See Enclosure). These were a valuable tool to maintaining respect for each other's opinions and achieving consensus in decision making.
- 4.2. The initial meetings in December and January were used to establish those things that the members valued (or wanted to keep unchanged) about FELC as well as those objectives that we wanted to achieve as a result of this process. These were later used to aid in the decision making process for the final decision.
- 4.3. Two main subcommittees were formed within the Path Forward Committee with the goal of identifying the best alternatives to: 1) Stay within the ELCA; and 2) Join a different Lutheran Church body, consistent with the guidelines given by Council in our charter. Once the best alternative for each were identified, the Committee then evaluated which of these two options would best serve FELC.
- 4.4. Bishop Martin Wells of the ELCA Eastern Washington/Idaho Synod was interviewed during an open congregation meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to gain insight into the level of support given FELC by the ELCA, discern the level of accountability of the pastors and congregation to the ELCA, discuss the bishop's stance on the human sexuality issue, and the direction the ELCA is taking in the future.
- 4.5. The FELC staff was interviewed by the Committee to gain insight into their stance over the issue, the level of support they currently receive from the ELCA, and the impacts this issue is having on their ministry at FELC.
- 4.6. The Committee established criteria to select four final candidates from among 38 other Lutheran church bodies across the country. These final candidates were interviewed by the Committee (three at open congregation meetings and one by telephone conference) to gather information on their values and beliefs, history, structure, benefits, support, etc.
- 4.7. Committee members conducted extensive research through internet, telephone calls, emails, etc., throughout this process. A

web site was formed as a clearinghouse for all information gathered, meeting minutes, and recordings of interviews.

- 4.8. Congregation input and communication throughout the process included: open Committee meetings, seven separate congregational meetings between December, 2009 and March, 2010, question forms, emails, updates in newsletters, bulletins, and announcements, a website, and a book of documentation made available in the narthex.

5. Findings and Observations

- 5.1. FELC is a fellowship committed to leading all people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- 5.2. FELC is a Lutheran congregation and should continue to be a Lutheran congregation.
- 5.3. FELC needs to focus on its mission of leading all people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and not be distracted by divisive political and social issues which are not central to our faith.
- 5.4. FELC is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Eastern Washington/Idaho Synod, as required by the constitution of FELC. Having reviewed this relationship in detail, it is concluded that there are problems with the current relationship which need to be addressed by the final solution. Only one of these problems pertains to the sexuality issue. However, since it is the sexuality issue which has resulted in the creation of this Path Forward Committee, we will address that issue first.
- 5.5. Concerning the Human Sexuality Social Statement
 - a) Our understanding of Lutheran heritage begins with a positive focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, Scripture and Grace, which are the elements of faith that unite us as Lutherans. FELC should always be a congregation that teaches God's Word of both Law and Gospel, but should not focus its message or ministry on a categorization of sins.
 - b) We Lutherans confess that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23. "There is no one righteous, not even one," Romans 3:10. "We are all justified by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ", Ephesians 2:8.

- c) There are shifts in contemporary cultural opinion and understanding that are at odds with a traditional theological view of a normative sexual relationship being between one man and one woman.
- d) The ELCA Churchwide Assembly has given individual congregations and synods the ability to alter current ordination standards and the existing prohibition of blessing same-sex unions.
- e) The actions of the ELCA at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly have revealed serious theological disagreements among people of faith in the ELCA and at FELC relative to the correct interpretation of Scripture and the relevance of personal experience in interpreting Scripture.
- f) The majority of members of FELC disagree with the decisions of the ELCA General Assembly regarding sexuality, based on the October 2009 vote. Some base this on Scriptural grounds, some because they believe the ELCA should not be making social and political decisions for its members, and some because they believe that the ELCA should not have brought an issue they expected to be highly divisive to a vote (see 3.1).
- g) Some members of FELC agree with the General Assembly because they do not consider homosexuality a sin. They maintain that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice, and that it is a trait people are born with. The Social Statement was seen as a step toward being more accepting of all God's children.
- h) Many members of FELC have specifically requested their benevolence be discontinued to the ELCA as a result of their disagreement over the Social Statement. This has resulted in the FELC benevolence to the ELCA being diminished to less than half of the pre-Church-Wide Assembly levels.
- i) Regardless of opinions regarding normative sexual relationships, FELC and its members desire to welcome everyone, including homosexuals, and to proclaim to ALL the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and therefore FELC must declare that all people are welcome at FELC regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race,

national origin, economic status, political views, or any other characteristics whatsoever.

- j) Issues regarding homosexuality will continue to be the subject of disagreement among members of FELC and among Lutherans in general.
- k) There are many important subjects that are central to our ministry of bringing people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, and sexuality is only one of them.
- l) FELC members have demonstrated in the past that they are capable of discussing the sexuality issue openly and respectfully with one another (for example, past Bible studies). FELC members have also demonstrated that all people are indeed welcome, regardless of sexual orientation. It was not until the ELCA passed the Social Statement in this manner that this became such a divisive issue within the congregation.

5.6. Concerning Participation in the ELCA Churchwide Decision Making Processes

- a) The process by which congregations participate in decision making in the ELCA allows for limited representation. FELC chooses “voting members” to attend the Synod Assembly each year. Attendees to the General Assembly are chosen at the Synod Assembly.
- b) Voting members are selected in September, at the annual congregation meeting. Members are not required to represent the congregation, but are rather encouraged to prayerfully vote their own conscience.
- c) Resolutions for the Synod Assembly are released in late March or April each year, and the annual Synod Assembly takes place approximately 4-6 weeks later. This leaves little time to discuss issues with the congregation’s voting members.
- d) There is no ratification process in the ELCA to provide individual congregations the ability to vote on large changes to policy, statements, or ministry standards.

5.7. Concerning the Central Control of the ELCA

The ELCA is a large organization, made up of nearly 10,500 congregations and five million members. Inherent to such a large

organization are bureaucracy, hierarchy of controls, and limited delegation of authority. Issues the Committee identified regarding this control as it related to FELC include:

- a) The constitution process to leave the ELCA requires a two-thirds majority vote on two separate occasions at least 90 days apart. In addition, since FELC came from the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), we would also require approval by the ELCA after two successful votes.
- b) The ELCA makes claims to FELC property under certain conditions should FELC leave the ELCA and not join another Lutheran body, or should FELC dissolve as a congregation.
- c) Representation of congregations and individuals is limited as described in the above section. Policies and statements are generally dictated to the congregations.
- d) Benevolence processes invoked by the constitution require FELC to identify our support of the ELCA in our annual budget. Congregations are held accountable for this support.
- e) There is no accountability to congregations for how money is spent by the larger organization. Funding for lobbyists and social statements is an example of specific spending items that many members do not support.
- f) ELCA has restrictions that do not allow some individuals or organizations to receive funds directly, but rather requires an overhead be paid to the ELCA. For example, any money sent directly to an ELCA missionary has a portion returned back to the ELCA.
- g) In the event of the need to call a pastor or the need to be supplied an interim pastor, the Synod provides a limited number of names from which to choose, based upon availability and the approval of the Bishop. Lutheran Pastors outside the ELCA are not allowed to be considered by the congregation, even though clergy from other churches (e.g. the Episcopal Church) have been allowed by the ELCA in the past.

5.8. Concerning Social Statements

- a) The ELCA has a long history of working on Social Statements, such as the Human Sexuality Social Statement. Currently, there are several more being evaluated that deal with Criminal Justice, Human Disabilities, and Genetics and Evolution. The ELCA also maintains lobbying efforts in the nation's capitol.
- b) Some value that the ELCA is involved in political and social activities, and is a voice of change in the world.
- c) The ELCA emphasis on formulating and advocating numerous political and social positions was a key contributor to the conflict we face.
- d) The ELCA social statements can cause concern with sincere Christians who hold other political and social views, cause alienation and divisiveness between the ELCA and its members, and waste time, energy, and resources.
- e) The conflict arising from the Human Sexuality Social Statement has distracted both FELC and the ELCA from our focus on its mission of leading all people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

6. Evaluation Process

6.1. Evaluation of Option to Stay in the ELCA

- 6.1.1. Three options were initially evaluated to determine the best possible option if FELC were to stay within the ELCA: 1) Do nothing and react if necessary to policies implemented by the ELCA; 2) Be proactive to establish our position on the Social Statement definitively and work to change ELCA policy; and 3) Enter into a dual membership relationship with another Lutheran Church body.
- 6.1.2. The Committee identified that there are several concerns as noted in Section 5 of this report that should be addressed by this option.
 - 1) The vote taken to reject the Social Statement should be formally documented into the FELC bylaws to clearly define our position in writing.

- 2) Representation of the members of FELC, and of individual churches in general, with regard to ELCA policy and decision making processes should be improved.
- 3) The FELC congregation should stay informed of activities of the ELCA. The issues we face today are due, in part, to the lack of participation by this congregation in the past.
- 4) Accountability of those individuals who represent the members of this congregation needs to improve. This is affected both by our internal practices, and by the policies of the ELCA.
- 5) Based on the FELC Congregation vote taken October 18, 2009 to reject the Social Statement, the Committee believes FELC should actively work to reverse this policy within the ELCA.

6.1.3. The Committee assessed various options for conditions to stay within the ELCA and concluded that, should FELC elect to stay in the ELCA, the formation of a group of congregation members, similar to the Path Forward Committee, with the following charter would best suit the needs of FELC. The group should:

- 1) Consist of a minimum of 4 members: a chair elected by the congregation, and the three representatives to the annual Synod Assembly elected by the congregation. Other members could participate as well;
- 2) Be represented on the church council;
- 3) Keep informed of ELCA activities including current and future social statements, implementation policies, budgets, and other issues associated with the ELCA church at large, and discern the impact these have on the FELC;
- 4) Be a conduit for communication with FELC congregation members;
- 5) Draft bylaw changes that formally document the FELC stance on the Human Sexuality Social Statement, as voted on in October 2009;

- 6) Improve accountability for representation of FELC members at the Synod Assembly by recommending changes to both FELC and ELCA policy;
- 7) Recommend future resolutions to the congregation for consideration at Synod Assemblies to change ELCA policies pursuant to the desires of the congregation.

The Committee considers that changes to benevolence to the ELCA should be handled through the normal budget process.

The option stated above was one of the two final recommendations evaluated, and was compared to the final option to leave the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body described in below.

6.2. Evaluation of Option to Join Another Lutheran Church Body

- 6.2.1. The Committee evaluated 38 other Lutheran church bodies against a set of criteria established to keep fundamental beliefs, practices, and policies that currently are in place at FELC unchanged. Among these criteria were:
 - 1) The Bible is the Authority (traditional rather than cultural influence over interpretation)
 - 2) Does not support the Human Sexuality Statement of the ELCA
 - 3) Open Communion is allowed
 - 4) Women in Clergy/Leadership is allowed
 - 5) Traditional Lutheran worship (with some flexibility) is supported
- 6.2.2. Based on these criteria, the Committee narrowed down the selection to four candidates:
 - 1) North American Lutheran Church (NALC) (to be formed out of Lutheran CORE in August 2010)
 - 2) Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)
 - 3) The Lutheran Evangelical Protestant Church (LEPC)
 - 4) Evangelical Lutheran Conference and Ministerium of North America (ELCM)

- 6.2.3. Each candidate church body was interviewed by the Committee to gain insight into their values and beliefs, history, structure, benefits, support, etc. All candidates, except the ELCM, visited FELC during the month of March 2010, and participated in open forum discussions at congregation meetings. The ELCM was interviewed by telephone conference.
- 6.2.4. The LEPC and the ELCM were eliminated from further consideration based on their overall smaller size and geographical isolation (concentrated in other states). These placed constraints on the level of support that could be given to FELC (such as benefits, pastoral care, etc.).
- 6.2.5. There were several similarities noted between the NALC and the LCMC:
- 1) Both churches have strong roots with the ELCA. Both were formed out of the Word Alone Network, an organization formed by ELCA members and congregations to reform the ELCA church. The LCMC was formed in March, 2001. The NALC is proposing to form in August, 2010.
 - 2) Both share a strong focus on scripture and the Bible as the authority.
 - 3) Both have connections to seminaries, and have formal processes to assist congregations in finding pastors.
 - 4) Both have, or are proposing, constitutions that make no claims to a congregation's property or assets, and require a simple majority to join or leave.
 - 5) Both have, or are proposing, policies that give congregations more representation in big decisions made by the church. This includes a ratification process by individual congregations for changes to bylaws, constitution, or ministry standards.
 - 6) Both have stated that they have no government political ties or agendas.

- 7) Both have stated that they have not and will not work on social statements because they distract the church from its main mission.
- 8) Both have stated that benevolence should be directed to organizations chosen by the congregation to support, but that their parent organizations do require financial support from the congregations.
- 9) Both provide an adequate level of pastoral care and resources that are needed to support our staff and ministries.

6.2.6. There were several differences noted between the NALC and the LCMC during the evaluation.

- 1) The NALC is still in a formative stage. Although they are proposing to formally organize in August 2010, the constitution, organization structure, benefits package, etc. have only been proposed.
- 2) The LCMC has a flat organization structure, with less hierarchy than the NALC. The NALC will have a structure more similar to the ELCA. However, the NALC structure will still be more streamlined than the ELCA .
- 3) The LCMC is more “hands off” than the NALC because of its structure. This limited central control places more responsibility on the congregations for achieving the mission of the church and for accountability of pastors and members.
- 4) LCMC provides an Advisory Board to assist the congregation with accountability issues. The NALC will provide accountability through bishops, in much the same manner as the ELCA.

6.2.7. The NALC and the LCMC compared very closely during the evaluation. However, the LCMC was selected as the Lutheran church body to be evaluated in the final assessment primarily based on:

- 1) The stability of the church. The NALC not yet being formed was considered a significant risk.

- 2) The independence that places more responsibility on this congregation was considered an opportunity to grow spiritually.

The option stated above was one of the two final recommendations evaluated, and was compared to stay within the ELCA as described below.

7. Final Evaluation

The final evaluation compared the following options:

Option 1: *Stay in the ELCA and address the concerns as stated in paragraph 6.1.3 by the formation of a special group within the congregation.*

Option 2: *Leave the ELCA and join the LCMC.*

The Committee weighed the pros and cons for each option, and their impact to our values and objectives in order to discern the best option. Below is a summary of several key points that were discussed by the Committee in favor of each option, listed in order of relative importance to the Committee.

7.1. Reasons to Stay in the ELCA

- 1) Many members have a long association with the ELCA. They value highly this history and tradition, and are very loyal to the ELCA. FELC has been a member of the ELCA since the 1988 merger.
- 2) Change can be difficult. It will take a concerted effort by this congregation to change organizations, and there are unknowns associated with this course. Staying with the ELCA requires the minimum effort with a known organization.
- 3) The congregation could be flexible enough not to make a significant issue out of ELCA matters. We could choose to simply live with and work within the ELCA policies, positions, statements, biblical interpretations and continue to follow our own Lutheran traditions.
- 4) Members and visitors identify with the ELCA and what it stands for. As an ELCA member congregation, FELC represents a

distinct and recognized worship in terms of services, liturgy and belief system with the community and with visitors.

- 5) For those who agree with the Human Sexuality Statement, staying within the ELCA offers an umbrella organization with beliefs similar to their own and offers an affirmation of these beliefs. Inclusivity is a major goal of the ELCA. The Social Statement is seen by those who agree with it as a greater step toward reaching all with God's message.
- 6) The ELCA is a distinctive Lutheran church and is an option for those who don't want a static traditional approach to Scripture. Traditional Lutheran beliefs may not appeal to some people and the ELCA is becoming more accepting of contemporary beliefs and social norms.
- 7) There is more opportunity to discuss social issues in the ELCA. The ELCA, because of its social justice commentary, will offer the opportunity to participate in discussions of social issues that might otherwise not be noted.
- 8) The ELCA has done good things with ministry at the local, national and worldwide levels. The ELCA has a strong national and worldwide benevolence program that is well established, although it has been diminishing in recent years.
- 9) The ELCA has resources to provide pastors for interim or permanent assignments. Available pastors, approved by the ELCA, are offered as needed to support the congregation.

7.2. Reasons to Leave the ELCA and Join the LCMC

- 1) Scripture interpretation will be more orthodox, or traditional. LCMC professes a biblical authority "sola scriptura" that is more traditional Lutheran. LCMC has clearly stated that they believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is not open to interpretation using experience, cultural attitudes, personal situations and adjustments to current social issues.
- 2) LCMC has stated that they will not write social statements. FELC would be more effective focusing on the Great Commission through our local missions and ministries rather than being distracted by working on social statements.

- 3) Leaving the ELCA represents a fresh start for all FELC members and would facilitate reconciliation among the congregation. Furthermore, this option allows all members to vote on this issue and be heard. It compels the congregation to make a firm decision and take ownership of the issue.
- 4) The LCMC provides for representation at the national level. Major changes to policy require ratification by member congregations prior to implementation. While the option to stay in the ELCA also has measures to improve representation, it is unlikely that changes of this nature will ever be made to ELCA policy.
- 5) In contrast to the ELCA, the LCMC has a flat and lean organization structure, and does not exert the level of control over local congregations that the ELCA does. This greater independence was seen as an opportunity to grow spiritually as a congregation.
- 6) The FELC full time ministry staff has indicated their dissatisfaction with the direction of the ELCA. They have affirmed that joining the LCMC would meet with their favor and would enhance their ability to conduct their ministry.
- 7) The direction of the ELCA leadership, particularly concerning interpretation of scripture, is deviating from the beliefs of many in the congregation. This option presents an opportunity to choose an organization and leaders that align better with the majority of FELC members.
- 8) Some have lost confidence in ELCA leadership due to the lack of shared vision and alignment within the organization, their willingness to take risks in regards to interpreting scripture, and the manner in which congregations were left to deal with the conflict over the General Assembly action on their own, despite knowing this was a divisive issue.
- 9) The pastoral call process allows more freedom for the congregation to choose from among many candidates. Resources and support is available, ministry standards apply and a formal call process is used; however, the list of applicants is not dictated by the church.

8. Final Recommendation

After weighing and prayerfully considering the options, the Committee recommends:

- 1) *That FELC resolve to terminate its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and*
- 2) *That FELC resolve to join Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.*

This was considered the best possible option for this congregation to enable us to continue our mission of leading all people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. The Committee vote was not unanimous, but was 11-2 in favor of this option. While not all members voted this as the preferred option, the Committee did reach consensus that this was a viable option for FELC. However, a dissenting opinion is provided to this report to elaborate on this position.

9. Impact of Recommendation on Property and Staff Benefits

The charter for the Path Forward Committee also required a review of legal, constitutional, and benefit issues associated with the option selected. Below is a summary of this evaluation.

9.1. Property

According to the FELC constitution, if the congregation passes the above resolutions in accordance with the proceedings outlined in our constitution, title and property shall continue to reside with the congregation as described in paragraph 5.7.a. Therefore, there would likely be no impacts to FELC property.

9.2. Benefits

The Committee has evaluated the benefits available from the LCMC and determined that the pension and benefit plans are comparable to those provided in the ELCA. The LCMC has a full range of benefits available to its members, just as ELCA does. By law, the ELCA would have to make its pension plan portable to whatever group we elect to manage FELC benefits. A detailed analysis of each benefit plan would have to be made by Council before deciding on a new plan.

Dissenting Opinion

The FELC Path Forward Committee reached the decision to leave the ELCA in favor of the LCMC, identifying several concerns. The dissenting minority believes that it would be possible and preferable to continue to work within the ELCA to accomplish the Great Commission, with each of us approaching our differences on social issues and Biblical interpretation with Christ-centered love. The dissenting minority acknowledges the majority's concerns regarding the governance, structure and leadership of the larger church organization. The minority also recognizes that FELC's response to the Human Sexuality Statement will affect the direction of our ecumenical relationships and our outreach within our local community. Additionally, the minority recognizes the theological differences (scriptural interpretation) between the majority at FELC who rejected the Human Sexuality Statement and the majority that approved the Statement at the ELCA General Conference in August. We recognize that the same theological differences exist within FELC, and acknowledge the intensity of emotions that arise from that disagreement.

The dissenting minority, however, asserts that the tension, divisiveness, and hurt within our congregation is a result of our sinful brokenness in interacting with each other, within the congregation. Furthermore, the contentious discussions associated with our response to the Human Sexuality Statement have caused our congregation, collectively and as individuals, to elevate this Statement above our call to serve others and preach The Word.

Submitted by: Justin Hasner, Joel Hubbell, Paul Ritter, Walt Reuter

INTENTIONALLY BLANK

This report and recommendation are submitted by the Path Forward Committee of First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Idaho Falls, Idaho on this day, April 18, 2010.

Jim Dixon _____

Joanne Glissendorf _____

Justin Hasner _____

Karen Hayes _____

Joel Hubbell (Alternate) _____

Harlan Lerum _____

Carol Mason _____

Walt Reuter _____

Paul Ritter _____

Bob Sawyers _____

Jeff Shadley _____

David Sheldon (Co-chair) _____

Dan Swanson _____

Andy Wentzel (Co-chair) _____

Enclosure to the
FELC Path Forward Committee
Final Report

Supporting Documents

Path Forward Committee

Charter

Evaluate alternatives to resolve our differences with the ELCA over the Human Sexuality Social Statement and Ministry Policies.

Additional Council Guidance to the Committee

1. Committee membership will consist of a minimum of 11 not to exceed 13 voting members elected by the Council. Committee decisions will be made based on majority vote in accordance with our constitution. Working committees will be open to additional members of the congregation as determined by the committee or sub-committee chairs.
2. The Committee should evaluate options for resolving differences by working within the ELCA.
3. The Committee should evaluate alternatives to leave the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body.
4. The Committee should evaluate all legal and constitutional issues associated with the above options.
5. The Committee shall communicate openly with the congregation and shall hold periodic meetings open to the congregation to provide information, report progress, and solicit feedback from members.
6. The Committee shall inform the Council of the results of this evaluation by March 23, 2010. Results of this evaluation shall be subsequently reported to the congregation.
7. A voter's meeting will be called by the Council should the Committee make a recommendation to leave the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body. The Council will vote on this recommendation to decide whether to endorse it; however, the recommendation will be brought before the congregation regardless of Council endorsement.

Path Forward Committee Covenants

As a member of the Path Forward Committee I agree to...

1. Respect the decision of the congregation and work to move forward as intended by our charter.
2. Communicate early, honestly, and completely; value each other's opinions by listening with empathy.
3. Treat my fellow members with mutual respect, trust, and dignity and believe that they are acting in the best interest of the congregation.
4. Contribute constructively, never undermining another member or the work of the Committee.
5. Work to build consensus. Work jointly to resolve disagreements in good faith. When decisions are made, accept and support these decisions based on the process used to make them.
6. Honor each other. Maintain discretion and confidentiality as appropriate.
7. Help each other. Go out of the way to provide support for one another.
8. Maintain the highest degree of professionalism as a leader in this congregation.
9. Pray for God's guidance; that His will for our congregation be done through the work we do.
10. Hold each other accountable to these covenants.