

What Do We Do Now?

Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) offers these resources to help individuals and congregations make decisions about the best way forward given the Biblical and theological crisis in the ELCA.

It is important that those who want to uphold the authority of Scripture find ways to work together. We need each other. We want to work together to do what will be best for all of us and for the continuation of faithful Christian teaching in our congregations. Each congregation and individual must prayerfully discern the best way to be faithful.

Please pray for all those in ELCA congregations forced by the assembly's actions to make difficult decisions. Please pray for the leadership of Lutheran CORE and of the ELCA. And please seek ways to work together with others to uphold the authority of God's Word for the faith and life of the church.

Five documents are attached:

1. Lutheran CORE Steering Committee Members

Contact information is provided to make it easy for you to contact the members of the Lutheran CORE Steering Committee for answers to questions or for assistance.

2. What Can We Do When We Get Home?

A narrative description of options and questions facing ELCA congregations and suggestions for ways to move forward.

3. What You Can Do - Organizational & Legal Matters for Congregations

Suggestions on organizational and legal matters to help congregations have the ability to discern their future course in their relationships with the ELCA.

4. Possible Amendments to Congregation's Constitution

Amendments addressing significant issues resulting from the actions of the 2009 Church-wide Assembly which could be included in a congregation's constitution or bylaws.

5. What Might We Do? What Should We Do?

Three checklists of things to do based on different congregational situations:

- 1. For Those Who Choose to Remain in the ELCA*
- 2. For Those Who Would Like More Time to Discern*
- 3. For Those Who Want to Sever Ties with the ELCA Now*

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What Can We Do When We Get Home?

Keep Doing Your Homework

The arguments supporting the decisions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly were sophisticated, subtle and often appealing. The arguments being made now by ELCA leaders to assure its members that nothing significant has changed are, too. To understand those arguments and be able to counter them in an effective and appealing way is challenging, but vitally important. In particular, it is important to highlight the deep theological implications of the assembly decisions. Many documents and links at www.lutherancore.org and www.wordalone.org, as well as other web sites, can help to equip you to make the case that these decisions have caused a theological crisis in the ELCA.

Talk to Your Family, Friends, Relatives, Neighbors and Other Church Members

In this crisis, it is easy to think that everyone sees what a problem this is or that you are the only person in your church who sees the problem. Neither is probably the case. It is amazing even now how many ELCA members are unaware of what has happened, aware but do not fully understand it or are deeply upset but feel isolated. The more informed conversation that is generated around these issues, the more strength the movement will have.

If you are not already involved in a reform group in your area, find out if one exists. The reform groups in Lutheran CORE are listed at lutherancore.org/menu_call_pages/memberorgs.shtml. The WordAlone Network may have a chapter in your area that is working with Lutheran CORE so check the links on this web page: wordalone.org/imaps/regions.shtml. If you don't have internet access, contact a Steering Committee member for this information.

If there is no organized group in your area, start meeting with others in your area and consider forming a group. One way to form a group that has worked well is to plan a public meeting that addresses the need for confessional and evangelical Lutherans to hear about where the ELCA is headed and how to choose a different path that is faithful to God's Word. Gathering names, addresses and phone numbers of those who attend facilitates planning a follow-up meeting to organize a group. In some cases, groups have been organized at the initial public meeting.

If you organize a group, it helps to identify clear roles and responsibilities for at least 4-5 leaders so that one or two people are not responsible for doing everything. It also helps to clarify the group's goals and objectives. One model for doing this is to think of your group as gathering on a stable platform - a three-legged stool. Choose three legs (purposes) for the group, such as: 1) mutual prayer and support; 2) informing and educating; and 3) outreach to churches and people not yet aware of your group. Or the third leg might be a mission initiative in your area, such as starting/supporting a mission congregation or supporting a good ministry in your area (a Bible camp).

Public, regional meetings will be essential for getting the word out to many ECLA members who may be just finding out about the ELCA's decisions in 2009. Steering Committee members can help you with the planning for these meetings, including suggested speakers. It is also helpful to set regular meeting dates so that people are able to plan to be active participants in your group.

Conversations with Your Pastor

1. On the basis of Matthew 18:15-20, you should speak with your pastor about your concerns. You should assure your pastor of your respect for the pastoral office and of your prayers for him/her and for your congregation. At the same time, you should make clear how serious the issues are for you and how determined you are to oppose the course set for the ELCA by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

If your pastor expresses opposition to the decisions of the ELCA at the Minneapolis Churchwide Assembly, thank your pastor and offer your support. Ask how you can help your pastor under the circumstances.

If your pastor expresses agreement with the decisions of the Churchwide Assembly — or if your pastor does not wish to take a position — you should sensitively but firmly express your disagreement. You may indicate that you plan to ask him/her to meet with other members of the congregation who feel the way you do.

2. Gather a small group of members of your congregation and meet with your pastor. The group, about five to ten people, should be active, regular, and faithful members of your congregation. In your conversation, you should indicate how serious the matter is and how you are all struggling within yourselves regarding your opposition to the decisions of the ELCA.

The key issue is what your congregation will teach about God's intentions for sexuality, about the orders of creation, about the Bible's call to glorify God in our bodies. It is not a question of who is welcome in our churches. Nor is it over who is sinful and who is righteous, but of what we will teach and preach about God's will for us and for the world.

If your pastor expresses support for the actions of the Churchwide Assembly — or tries to maintain a neutral position — you should make clear that you have to make some important decisions.

One would be to tell your pastor that you cannot in good conscience support your congregation with your time and money and that you intend to re-designate your benevolence to causes outside the mission support of the ELCA. You may also indicate your intention to withdraw from any active participation in your congregation (council, altar guild, committees, Sunday school teacher, etc.) and that you intend to use your time and efforts toward worthy community groups (Habitat for Humanity, food pantries, nursing homes, etc.).

You should also alert your pastor to a further possible action. You should indicate that you may have no other recourse than to leave the congregation's membership and to seek to join another one.

3. Whatever actions you consider, you should always be prepared to carry them out. You are not making idle threats, but are in the process of taking concrete actions.

Discuss the Implications and Options for Funding

It is important to discuss whether continued financial support of ELCA activities is faithful when the ELCA has officially made key aspects of Christian faith optional. There are many ways to try to use your offerings as faithfully as possible.

- Churches united against these decisions should consider re-directing benevolence gifts away from the ELCA and perhaps also the synod. Some synods have the option of giving to the synod only, with no pass-through to the ELCA. Others are creating that option in the wake of the Churchwide Assembly. The key questions here are the faithfulness of the synod and how effectively your offerings are used.
- If a church is not willing to re-direct all benevolence, ask the church council to create an option for individual members to do so with their own offerings. Ideally this would be done in such a way that members can impact that congregation's benevolence to its synod, if they so chose. However, even if this only results in a shifting of funds, it makes an important witness.
- Churches and individuals can give their benevolence directly instead to countless independent, faithful ministries. These gifts are often a more efficient way to put benevolence dollars to use. Lutheran CORE has begun to compile a clearing house of mission opportunities, but it will not be exhaustive or imply direct endorsement. The power of the internet makes it important for individuals and churches to check out the legitimacy of any mission organization.

Should Our Church Leave the ELCA or Stay in It?

First of all, that is *not* the question. It is essential to recognize that the ELCA is the one who has left us, along with the majority of the Christian Church. That is not just spin. It is the truth of the matter.

Second, whether inside or outside of the ELCA, the most important thing is for faithful congregations to remain in fellowship with each other, as we collectively discern what future God might be calling us to as a confessional Lutheran witness in North America.

Beyond that, the question instead becomes whether holding our ground necessitates formal action to sever ties with the ELCA. Here, too, there are several options.

- Remain in the ELCA as the voice of opposition to its direction and decisions. Many of us have pursued this route for years to the point of exhaustion, but others still feel called to be a prophetic voice in the ELCA, while not being of the ELCA.
- Remain in the ELCA, but join Lutheran CORE as a public statement of adherence to the authority of Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions and the great Christian tradition. This can be an effective community witness in terms of what your church will teach.
- Remain formally in the ELCA, but withdraw functionally. Re-direct benevolence, do not participate in synod or ELCA events and play down the church's ELCA connection.

- Remain in the ELCA, but seek dual membership in Lutheran Congregations for Mission in Christ (LCMC) or another Lutheran church body. ELCA leaders will say that the ELCA constitution forbids this, but it does not. Dual membership churches have existed throughout its life. This step may allow a church to avoid the challenges of formally severing ties, but still find a new, more faithful church home.
- Sever ties with the ELCA and join another Lutheran church body. A church must be quite united to take this step. The ELCA model constitution for congregations requires two votes, each with a two-thirds majority, at least 90 days apart. In the meantime, the church must consult with the synodical bishop. Moving into another Lutheran church body recognized by the ELCA will generally allow the church to keep its property, but check your constitution carefully before proceeding.
- In any case, remain connected and in partnership with other churches in Lutheran CORE and/or any of the movements that are a part of it. While the situation of each church and individual is different, it would be tragic to allow the variety of responses to lead to a splintering of our efforts or result in a different kind of isolation.

This crisis has forced us all into a new and difficult position. If these suggestions do not fit your situation, consult with leaders of Lutheran CORE or others in your area for other ideas. Above all, let us bathe these efforts in prayer that whatever responses we make will be a faithful witness to Christ.

What if our ELCA Synod is orthodox and upholds the authority of God's Word?

Several ELCA synods have historically expressed strong opposition to the ELCA's new teaching and policies on sexuality. In synods that stay focused on the proper mission of the church, there might be ways for congregations to be involved in a synod's biblically faithful ministries. It is possible that those synods might take a confessional stand over against the ELCA churchwide's new teaching and policies. At least two synods have already decided that they will honor the request from congregations that no benevolence be passed along to the churchwide offices. Some synods might also consider a cooperative relationship with Lutheran CORE, which is a hope of Lutheran CORE.

In synods like this, it might be worth exploring the options. Even congregations that withdraw from the ELCA might find ways that they can work with an ELCA synod to do the mission of the church. Church councils could ask to meet with the bishop or synod council to discuss all the options. It might well be an opportunity for developing new, more effective ways to proclaim the Gospel and to do mission work.

What You Can Do Now

Organizational & Legal Matters for Congregations

The following suggestions are intended to help congregations have the ability to discern their future course in their relationships with the ELCA without undue influence from their synod or the ELCA churchwide organization resulting from the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. It is important that congregations have that ability regardless of whether or not they have any intention to leave or to consider leaving the ELCA.

■ **Examine your congregation’s constitution carefully.**

- Eliminate the provision automatically updating your congregation’s constitution to conform to the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations, if such provision is in your constitution.
- Avoid the automatic acceptance of possible future ELCA-mandated congregational constitution provisions.

■ **Consider potential constitutional amendments, bylaw amendments or continuing resolutions** (some examples are attached; Lutheran CORE can provide others).

- Resolution to uphold ELCA ministry standards (pre-Churchwide Assembly) in congregation’s call process.
 - Congregation could adopt “Vision & Expectations” (as adopted by the ELCA Church Council in 1990). It should be noted that this document states: “The ordained minister supports not only the work of the congregation, but also the synodical and churchwide ministry of the ELCA.”
 - Congregation could adopt “Vision & Expectations” after editing it to change sections naming and supporting the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - Congregation could adopt sexual conduct statements from “Vision & Expectations.”
- Resolution to uphold and teach the traditional, historic and Scriptural understanding of marriage.
- Resolution that the pastor(s) serving your congregation may not preside at a same-gender blessing or union rite of worship.
- “Viability statement” specifying that so long as the congregation holds regular worship services, it is viable, regardless of the number attending the worship service. This addresses the ability of the synod to assert direct control over your congregation if the synod deems your congregation “non-viable.”
- Which form to use?
 - Constitutional amendments require synodical approval.
 - Bylaw amendments (and continuing resolutions) do NOT require synodical approval, but cannot be inconsistent with congregational constitution.
 - Constitutional and bylaw amendments require congregational votes, while continuing resolutions can be adopted by congregation councils.
 - Incorporation documents also require synodical approval.

■ **Consider incorporation of your congregation**

- Creates an additional hurdle under secular law in the (unlikely) event of a future dispute between the congregation and its synod or the ELCA churchwide organization.
- A relatively simple and inexpensive process, especially if you have an attorney who will do the work on a pro bono basis. Lutheran CORE may be able to help you in this process.
- Consider applying for your congregation's own 501(c)(3) tax designation from the IRS, separate from the ELCA's designation.

■ **Consider facility use policies**

- Consider implementing a policy that facility use must be consistent with the congregation's statement of faith.
- Consider never "renting" your facility, but allow its use for members only. This will protect you from being forced to rent your facility in a "fair use" situation because of secular laws.

■ **BE OF GOOD CHEER!**

Property issues really haven't been significant in the ELCA to this point.

- If a congregation chooses to leave the ELCA for another Lutheran church body, it should be permitted to do so pursuant to the current ELCA model constitution for congregations
- Former LCA congregations additionally require the approval of their synod council. We are not aware of any cases in which such approval has been denied after following the process outlined in the congregation's constitution.
- For this reason, many of the above suggestions are simply extra measures to add greater certainty that your congregation will control its property, even if the environment on these issues in the ELCA changes in the future.

The Lutheran CORE Legal and Constitutional Team is ready to help you! Contact us via info@lutherancore.org.

Possible Amendments to Congregation's Constitution

These amendments address significant issues resulting from the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. They could be included in a congregation's constitution or bylaws. The numbers indicate where the amendment would go in a constitution similar to the ELCA model constitution for congregations.

Amendment C6.07

Establishes a relationship between congregation and Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal).

Amendment C9.15

Uses language from the ELCA document, "Vision and Expectations," prior to the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to state the expectation that pastors of this congregation must maintain traditional Christian teaching on marriage sexuality in their ministry actions and in their personal behavior.

Amendment C2.08

Accepts The Common Confession as a summary of Lutheran teaching including the following statements that directly address significant issues resulting from the ELCA actions:

- 1. Defines marriage as between a man and a woman and as created by God and clearly states that "sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman."*
- 2. States that "The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life."*

C6.07. This congregation shall be a member of the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (Lutheran CORE).

C9.15. Ordained ministers, whether married or single, are expected to uphold an understanding of marriage in their public ministry as well as in private life that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this congregation. The expectations of this congregation regarding the sexual conduct of its ordained ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift from God and that ordained ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift. Ordained ministers are expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification, and all attempts of sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others. Single ordained ministers are expected to live a chaste life. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships.

C2.08. This congregation accepts The Common Confession as a summary of teachings in the Lutheran Confessions:

The Common Confession

1. The Lord Jesus Christ

We are people who believe and confess our faith in the Triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

2. The Gospel of Salvation

We believe and confess that all human beings are sinners, and that sinners are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God alone justifies human beings by faith in Christ — a faith that God creates through the message of the Gospel. As ambassadors for Christ, God uses us to speak his Word and build his kingdom.

3. The Authority of Scripture

We believe and confess that the Bible is God's revealed Word to us, spoken in Law and Gospel. The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life.

4. A Common Confession of Faith

We accept and uphold that the Lutheran Confessions reliably guide us as faithful interpretations of Scripture and that we share a unity and fellowship in faith with others among whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel.

5. The Priesthood of All Believers

We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit makes all who believe in Jesus Christ to be priests for service to others in Jesus' name, and that God desires to make use of the spiritual gifts he has given through the priesthood of all believers.

6. Marriage and Family

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

7. The Mission and Ministry of the Congregation

We believe and confess that the church is the assembly of believers called and gathered by God around Word and Sacrament, and that the mission and ministry of the church is carried out within the context of individual congregations, which are able to work together locally and globally.

What Might We Do? What Should We Do? *For Those Who Choose to Remain in the ELCA*

- Talk with others about your concerns about the ELCA (especially the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly).
- Talk with others about ways your congregation can affirm the authority of Scripture.
- Talk with others about ways to affirm marriage as an institution by God between a man and a woman.
- Join Lutheran CORE. Add this relationship to your constitution or bylaws.*
- Adopt The Common Confession. Add it your constitution or bylaws.*
- Adopt the sexuality portion of “Vision & Expectations” (pre-2009) as a standard for your pastor(s). Add it to your constitution or bylaws.*
- Discern faithful and appropriate ways to provide benevolence giving beyond your congregation. Consider benevolence suggestions from Lutheran CORE.
- Connect with neighboring congregations to see if there are ways to work together and to move in similar directions.
- Consider joining or forming a local or regional reform movement.
- Work with your bishop and synod staff to see if there are ways for your synod to take actions to remain faithful (for example, adopting The Common Confession, maintaining ministry standards, joining Lutheran CORE, etc.).

* Examples of provisions which could be added to your congregation’s constitution and bylaws are available at www.lutherancore.org.

What Might We Do? What Should We Do?

For Those Who Would Like More Time to Discern

- Talk with others about your concerns about the ELCA (especially the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly).
- Talk with others about ways your congregation can affirm the authority of Scripture.
- Talk with others about ways to affirm marriage as an institution by God between a man and a woman.
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- Discern faithful and appropriate ways to provide benevolence giving beyond your congregation. Consider benevolence suggestions from Lutheran CORE.
- Study your congregation’s constitution to note the process for ending its relationship with the ELCA. Discern if that is a realistic option for your congregation.
- Connect with neighboring congregations to see if there are ways to work together and to move in similar directions.
- Consider joining or forming a local or regional reform movement.
- Work with your bishop and synod staff to see if there are ways for your synod to take actions to remain faithful (for example, adopting The Common Confession, maintaining ministry standards, joining Lutheran CORE, etc.).
- Consider other possible Lutheran church bodies with which to affiliate. For those who wish to take immediate action and wish to continue to affirm women in leadership and as pastors, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ may be the best option at this time. Other options may emerge in the future.

* Examples of provisions which could be added to your congregation’s constitution and bylaws are available at www.lutherancore.org.

What Might We Do? What Should We Do?

For Those Who Want to Sever Ties with the ELCA Now

- Talk with others about your concerns about the ELCA (especially the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly).
- Talk with others about ways your congregation can affirm the authority of Scripture.
- Talk with others about ways to affirm the marriage as an institution created and blessed by God between one man and one woman.
- Join Lutheran CORE. Add this relationship to your constitution or bylaws.*
- Adopt The Common Confession. Add it your constitution or bylaws.*
- Discern faithful and appropriate ways to provide benevolence giving beyond your congregation. Consider benevolence suggestions from Lutheran CORE.
- Study your congregation's constitution to note the process for ending its relationship with the ELCA. Discern if that is a realistic option for your congregation.
- Connect with neighboring congregations to see if there are ways to work together and to move in similar directions.
- Consider joining or forming a local or regional reform movement.
- Work with your bishop and synod staff to ensure a smooth transition.
- Consider other possible Lutheran church bodies with which to affiliate. For those who wish to take immediate action and wish to continue to affirm women in leadership and as pastors, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ may be the best option at this time. Other options may emerge in the future.

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