

# CORE Voice



## Forming Pastors and Your Congregation

by Pr. Steven K. Gjerde, CORE Vice-President  
Part one of two

What can your congregation do to raise up evangelical and confessional pastors for the Lutheran church? Has your congregation ever discussed that question? Doing so is as crucial today as it ever was. A brief survey of American Lutheran seminaries reveals a number of troubles, from doctrinal drift to dipping enrollment and staggering debt.

Doctrinal crises have plagued the nation's largest Lutheran church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), for years. Some observers (notably, the ELCA's own Office of Research) cite this crisis as one cause for the ELCA's precipitous drop in seminary enrollment. In a report published last March, Adam DeHoek and Kenneth Inskeep reveal that ELCA seminaries have lost 500 students from 2004 to 2015. They further state that the ELCA's numerical decline has resulted, in part, from its decisions regarding same-sex relationships in 2009.

ELCA seminaries have felt the effects and responded in myriad ways. Financial concerns have sparked uncertainty at Wartburg and Luther seminaries, with the latter institution selling large portions of its property. Most of the remaining ELCA

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seminaries have either merged with other institutions (Southern with Lenoir Rhyne, PLTS with California Lutheran, and Gettysburg and Philadelphia with each other) or will do so in the near future (Trinity has announced that it will return to its mother institution, Capital University). For good or ill, it would seem that the work and influence of ELCA seminaries is shrinking, not expanding.



Within the smaller fields of the LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ) and NALC (North American Lutheran Church), at least four institutions compete for students: The Institute of Lutheran Theology, the North American Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul Seminary, and the Lutheran Studies Program at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Resolutely committed to the Lutheran confessions and the Word of God, each of these schools is small. Some graduate fewer than a half-dozen ministry candidates each year for a pool of congregations that reaches towards 1400 (931 in the LCMC, over 400 in the NALC). Others expand that number to a dozen or so through alternative routes to the traditional master of divinity program.

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The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod faces its own woes. In 2015, its seminaries failed to fulfill all

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# Forming Pastors and Your Congregation (continued from p. 1)

requests for first-call candidates in ministry, having only 124 seminary graduates for 154 requests. It also failed to fill all available internships (133 internships were available, but only 112 seminarians were eligible). As of 2016, its seminaries had 581 students preparing for service in the ministry (421 master of divinity students and 160 students in alternative programs). That figures out to about 145 new pastors a year for a church body of more than 6,000 congregations.

Lutherans seeking a cheerier outlook in the schools of other denominations might be disappointed. According to Clay Schmit, former president of the ELCA's Southern Seminary, almost all 273 members of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) are experiencing declines in enrollment, vitality, and finances, including such schools as Fuller Seminary.

Speaking at a pastors' conference in Wausau, Wisconsin, Schmit commented that Fuller, often regarded as an evangelical bulwark of pastoral formation, is operating on a \$4 million yearly deficit and has an overall debt of \$65 million. "And yet," Schmit noted, "there is no conversation in the ATS about these problems, or how to address them."

If it's missing from the ATS, the conversation is alive and well in Lutheran Coalition for Renewal (CORE). This next June, Lutheran CORE will host a Summit on Pastoral Formation at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. Leaders in edu-

***Almost all 273 members of the Association of Theological Schools are experiencing declines in enrollment, vitality, and finances***

cation and mission from the LCMC, NALC, ELCA, and LCMS have been invited to gather and unpack the challenges and opportunities facing pastoral education today. The results of this conversation may then serve as a springboard for improving the recruitment and education of confessional ministers.

As a network that is "congregationally-focused," Lutheran CORE has a special interest in how the church's grassroots will contribute to this process. Congregations and pastors have always played an important role in the formation of confessional leaders, and they will likely play an even more vital role in the future.

With larger institutions struggling to maintain their viability, the local parish holds promise as a "seminary in the field," where future servants of the Gospel are formed through more intense mentoring as well as hands-on training and theological study.

Especially where pastors and parishes have maintained a commitment to continuing education, theology, and the church's universal vision, a student could find in a single congregation the makings of a decent seminary, or at least a generous supplement to one.

The next *CORE Voice* will provide examples of how some congregations and pastors have already taken up this call. Perhaps you have some examples of your own to share! If so, please send information about what your congregation is doing to form pastoral leaders to me at [s.gjerde@dwave.net](mailto:s.gjerde@dwave.net) (click here for link).

*"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest." (John 4:35)*

***The local parish holds promise as a "seminary in the field," where future servants of the Gospel are formed***

## Help CORE Be Present at ELCA Synod Assemblies

ELCA synods are planning and preparing for their season of spring assemblies. If you would be willing to head up a Lutheran CORE display table at your synod assembly, please contact me at 909-274-8591 or [dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com](mailto:dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com). We will provide materials, which you can then copy as needed, to share the story of who we are, what we believe, what we stand for, and what we are doing.

**Please Support the Summit on Pastoral Formation with your prayers and your financial gifts to Lutheran CORE (click here to donate)**

# Pastoral Summit Gathers Prominent Leaders

by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson

*CORE President and Director*

Lutheran CORE is very pleased to announce the list of prominent leaders within the Lutheran community today who have confirmed their participation in phase one of the Summit on Pastoral Formation, which will be held at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa on June 21. This summit is being held in response to the concerns that have been expressed by pastors and congregational leaders who are wondering where their congregation's next orthodox and missional pastor will come from.

The ten leaders from different Lutheran church bodies – ELCA, LCMC, LCMS, and NALC – who will be coming to the summit include the following:

*Eugene Bunkowske – chair of the board of the Institute of Lutheran Theology, Brookings, South Dakota – professor emeritus, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota – retired missionary*

*Anthony Cook – former director of curriculum design and development at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri – currently director of United States Ministries for Lutheran Hour Ministries*

*Mark Granquist – associate professor of the history of Christianity, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota*

*Mary Havens – director of the Lutheran House of Studies at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina*

*Ken Jones – professor of philosophy and theology at Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa*

*Russell Lackey – senior campus pastor at Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa*

*Mark Mattes – professor of philosophy and theology, department chair at Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa*

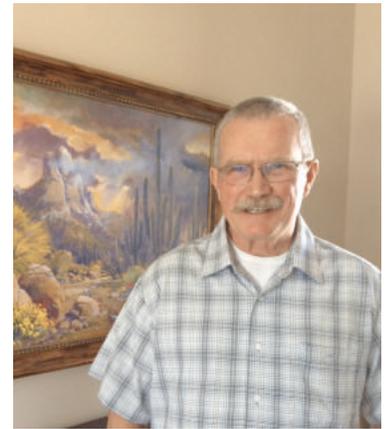
*Amy Schiffrin – president of the North American Lutheran Seminary*

*Jonathan Sorum – academic dean at the Institute of Lutheran Theology, Brookings, South Dakota*

*Gene Veith – provost emeritus and professor of literature emeritus at Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, Virginia*

These ten church leaders will discuss and develop a plan for addressing the question –

*How can we best raise up and support a new generation of Lutheran pastors who will be biblical and confessional in their theology and missional in their perspective and practice?*



*Pastor Nelson*

## The Next Phases

A second phase will be scheduled, during which participants will develop a statement on how to do missional ministry formation, as they draw upon the insights and ideas of the first phase.

Many have asked if interested and concerned pastors and lay members of congregations will be able to attend the pastoral summit. The third phase – also yet to be scheduled – is being designed as a conference that will be open to all. This event will equip the Church for doing missional ministry, including exploring how to create a congregational climate which will expect, appreciate, and support Great Commission-minded pastors.

Lutheran CORE is very grateful for the strong positive response from all who have been invited to participate in the summit. We are also very thankful to Grand View University for their enthusiastic support of and willingness and desire to be the location of the event. The response we have received from everyone with whom we have talked about the summit confirms the importance and timeliness of the topic.

Please pray with us that God will use this summit to raise up future pastors for His Church. Please also consider giving an additional gift to Lutheran CORE in honor of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation and to undergird financially this major and most strategic project.

**Thank you to all who support Lutheran CORE:  
A “Voice and Network” for Confessional Renewal**

# “Who’s the Boss? Congregation Presidents, Pastors, and Bizarre Power Dynamics” by Elliott Malm

by Elliott Malm

An acquaintance of mine recently began ministry in a new congregation. At his first social gathering, the council president walked up to him and said, “I’m the one who fired our last pastor.”

That man’s words show more than bad manners; they reveal spiritual sickness and an undeveloped understanding of the role of the pastor to the members of the congregation.

Unfortunately, this problem is not unique to this congregation. Many congregation members and even clergy across this country are confused about the role of the pastor today. Conflict, power struggles, and a loss of vitality in the pastorate become all too common because we have all failed to submit ourselves to the teachings found in the Holy Scriptures.

We live in a time when people frequently put their own reason and intellect above the Scriptures. As a course of action, this conceit becomes spiritually fatal.

The proper understanding of our relationship to God and with one another becomes lost. From the Scriptures, pastors are understood to be shepherds of souls and preachers of the Gospel. (I’ve had the benefit of serving rural congregations where some people still refer to pastors as preachers.)

***“I’m the one who fired our last pastor”***

Pastors aren’t called to stand on soapboxes to decree their words; pastors are preachers called to humbly and faithfully declare the Word of God. Where the Word of God is neither loved nor respected, neither will love and respect be given to the pastor or preacher who is called to proclaim that Word. Martin Luther observed: “Whoever despises the office of the ministry will not think very highly of the Gospel.” Yet, hope always remains for all who faithfully cling to the Word of God and value it above all else.

God’s Word will never fail us and we, the body of Christ, will endure with Christ who is the head of the church. Ultimately, no congregation council president and no pastor is the head of the church of Christ. We are all to be members of Christ’s body who work together in harmony. In humility, may we turn to our Lord Jesus Christ and by our lives lead others to do the same.

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*Pr. Malm serves Mable First Lutheran Church in the ELCA Southeastern Minnesota Synod,*

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# Why We Need Each Other

## Part 1: Cataclysmic Change

by Pr. Brett Jenkins

I am going to begin this article by stating boldly a particularly radical claim of which I have become convinced: *We are in the midst of an epochal shift in global Christianity, the likes of which probably rival the Arian controversy of the third century.*

The crises of the third century gave us the Nicene Creed, the very definition of Christian orthodoxy over and against all other perspectives. How can today's controversies rival that?

As I hope to demonstrate in three separate but interconnected articles, there are multiple dynamics at work and these dynamics force us into what I firmly believe is a Providential interaction with and reliance upon other orthodox (traditional) Christians.

### The Threat of Parochialism

A recent plunge into pastoral care books of a clinical nature proved to me that not merely the demographic but the intellectual epicenter of the Church is shifting toward the global south. Western intellectuals are increasingly unaware of the Enlightenment's (now Postmodernity's) failings and are dogmatic about its claims. In Western Europe and North America — what was until quite recently referred to generically as “Christendom” — realignments of loyalties both within and across communions are ongoing. Scholars who would have pilloried one another as heretics in previous generations can now be found sharing lecterns, tacitly if not fully acknowledging the legitimacy of their rivals' theological perspectives. At one such event I attended, that bulldog of Southern Baptist doctrine Al Mohler quipped, “I may believe my Roman Catholic brother is wrong to pray to saints, but in the heat of a cultural firefight, I am more likely to ask him to put a good word in for me than argue with him.” Politics does indeed make for strange bedfellows. The question is, will Arius or Athanasius triumph in this round of Church history?

***Scholars who would have pilloried one another as heretics in previous generations can now be found sharing lecterns***

As we emerge from the season of Christmas when we sang the familiar carols that not only praise but teach us about Jesus — “veiled in flesh the godhead see, hail the incarnate deity!” — it is good to reflect that Arius not only waged his war against the incarnate Son of God at the Council of Nicaea amongst the “professional theologians,” but on the streets of the Roman Empire, using his musical gifts to write songs that train the singer toward his own idiosyncratic and unfaithful interpretations of Scripture. Knowing the power of music to catechize when sermons are long forgotten, revisionists of all stripes have worked hard to replace hymnals that praised the God of Christian orthodoxy in faithful ways using orthodox language, with ones that subtly (or not so subtly) push their own peculiar and thoroughly non-biblical agendas.

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How many hymnals have come out in your lifetime? Why was a new one needed? Was it the pressing demand for more organ music or new liturgies? Most congregations I have served are resistant to change, not demanding of it. More importantly, most congregations are unaware of the long-term dangers posed by such hymnals, and will cheerfully sing songs espousing theologies they would run their pastor out of town for preaching; at least two congregations in the NALC with whom I interviewed last year use the ELW hymnal, which is thoroughly revisionist in its liturgies, hymnody and pseudo-translation of the Psalms.

### An Arian Nation?

Arius believed Jesus was a particularly worthy human being who had divinity bestowed upon him at his baptism. He flatly denied the text most of us heard read in church on Christmas, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” If being a Christian means accepting the clear meaning of Scripture according to plain reason, Arius was not a Christian. I might have a beer with the guy, but I wouldn't commune him, ordain him, or plan an ecumenical worship

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## Why We Need Each Other (continued)

service with him; we don't worship the same God and I believe his witness to be a false one, spiritually harmful to himself and the world.

This month we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and as we do, it behooves us to ask a question: Is a person a Christian because they claim to be, or is more required? How much agreement is needed for us to work together? Mormons claim to be Christians, but they are theologically Arians; in their belief system, Jesus was born from a perfectly normal (one is tempted to say Greek or Roman) physical union between God the Father and Mary (virgin no more). His obedience earned him godhood of his own, something we can aspire to through our obedience. Jesus is not "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God," and so our salvation ends up being something we must earn. All heresy ends in some form of works righteousness.

I would cheerfully serve alongside Mormons at the local food pantry, but I would not worship with them, despite the fact that they believe themselves to be Christians — there is not enough common ground between us for us to praise God together. In fact, I would seek to winsomely evangelize them, teaching them the true gospel, of which I am not the inventor, but a mere grateful recipient.

### Evangelical and Catholic Opportunity

As we approach the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we have reached the crucial juncture of this installment: The opportunity for witness. Many wearing collars and filling the pews of American churches are functionally or explicitly Arian. Any variant of "Jesus is mainly a great example for us" is the false theology of Arius. Surely Jesus was an example for us, but since He was without sin, He is an example we cannot hope to emulate. Jesus' fundamental significance to us is that He is "the incarnate deity," the spotless Lamb of God, both our High Priest and the Sacrifice rendered, and we need to hear this reality preached to us again and again merely to resist the maelstrom of our culture that seeks to blow us this way and that.

***Many wearing collars and filling the pews of American churches are functionally or explicitly Arian***

The unity we are fundamentally to pray for as we enter the week from January 18, the Confession of St. Peter to January 25, the Conversion of St. Paul, is the unity spoken of in Ephesians, "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God [so that we might] become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13) The witness we must give is evangelical. The faith we must witness to avoids parochialism by being Nicaean or catholic — "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." (Jude 1:3)

Of course, Ephesians begins speaking of the hope of such witness by saying, "It was He [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith." There is a practical side to the question, "with whom shall I partner in ministry?" This series will explore the answer to that question more thoroughly in future installments.

*Rev. Brett Jenkins, STS is the pastor of Abundant Life Lutheran Church, a mission congregation of the NALC, and is the author of the Faith Conservationist podcast and blog: [www.FaithConservationist.org](http://www.FaithConservationist.org). You can listen to this article through the Faith Conservationist podcast ([click here](#))*

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## Coming Events

**NALC Pastors' Conference**, February 14-16, Crowne Plaza Universal, Orlando, Florida. "Martin Luther and Vocation." Dr. James Nestingen, presenter. Click here for information or call 614-378-6023

**LCMC Leadership Conference**, April 30-May 2, Lutheran Church of the Master, Elkhorn, Nebraska. "Discipline by Design." Click here for information or call 734-788-7476

**Pro Ecclesia Conference**, June 5-7, Loyola University, Baltimore, MD. Topic: "Repentance and Forgiveness." This is an ecumenical conference for clergy and laity. Among other presenters, Carl Braaten will deliver the banquet address. Click here for more information.

**Lutheran Week**, Women of the NALC, Braaten-Benne Lectures, NALC Convocation and Mission Festival, August 8-11, 2017, Sheraton Music City Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee. Hold the dates!

**LCMC Annual Gathering**, October 8-11, Hilton Minneapolis. Hold the dates!

**And please pray for the invited participants who will gather at the Lutheran CORE Pastoral Summit June 21 at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa.**

**We are happy to list coming events of interest to confessing Lutherans as space permits.**

Send information to  
[prsteveshipman@gmail.com](mailto:prsteveshipman@gmail.com)  
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### **CORE Voice** News and Information from Lutheran CORE

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