

Is the ELCA Church Council Out of Touch with Reality?

by [Dennis D. Nelson](#), Executive Director of Lutheran CORE

The official report from the November 8-11 meeting of the ELCA Church Council, dated November 19, 2018 said that “the council engaged in discussions around a ‘well-governed, connected and sustainable church.’” I do not see how the Church Council could call the ELCA well-governed, connected, and/or sustainable.

The Math Doesn't Add Up

First, sustainable. The predecessor church bodies that merged in 1988 to form the ELCA achieved their statistical peak in 1968 when they reported a combined total of 5.9 million members. Fifty years later, in 2018, the ELCA reports having only about 3.5 million members. *That represents a 41% loss in fifty*

years. How long can a decline like that be sustainable? The synod in which I was rostered before I retired balances the budget by spending money obtained by selling the buildings of closed congregations. These buildings were built and paid for by faithful followers of Jesus whose view of the Bible, orthodox theology, priority of evangelism, and views on such things as human sexuality that synod rejects. *How long can a synod continue to exist and how can it be sustainable if it balances the budget by closing congregations?*

Actions Speak Louder

Second, connected. The 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly said that a wide variety of views on human sexuality, including the traditional view, would be treated with respect. And yet a keynote speaker at last summer's youth gathering (who could very well be the prime spokesperson for the ELCA) led 31,000 young people in rejecting the traditional view as a lie.

My letters to synodical bishops were totally ignored when I wrote to them about the free reign and amount of power that are being given to the LGBTQIA+

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community and about how the ELCA's doing so is a blatant betrayal and violation of trust because of the way in which the LGBTQIA+ agenda goes way beyond what was approved at the 2009 assembly. *How could a church that advocates for justice but then acts so unjustly, and that claims to be inclusive and yet consistently excludes, diminishes, and dismisses a significant part of its constituency call itself connected?*

Restore Sanity

Third, well-governed. In a recent letter to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton I challenged her to exercise the authority of her office and hold the organizers of the youth gathering accountable for their choice of speakers. I also called upon her to restore sanity to the ELCA's teachings on human sexuality by working with the administration and faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago to renounce the “We Are Naked and Unashamed” movement. That movement rejects marriage by any definition as normative for sexual activity. It was well-represented among the keynote speakers at last summer's ELCA youth gathering. Bishop Eaton gave a very limp reply when she said that she will be “speaking to the leadership team of the Youth Gathering.” She also said that she did not want to “give more attention and credence to a movement that is outside this church's social teaching by speaking about it publicly.” As Bishop Eaton refuses to speak publicly about movements within the ELCA that are out of control, Nadia Bolz-Weber is gaining visibility and notoriety as she is promoting her new book, [Shameless: A Sexual Reformation](#), and as she is calling upon women to send in their purity rings so that she can melt them down and make a statue of a golden vagina. *How*



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could a church that refuses to address actions and behaviors that are in direct violation of what it claims to be its beliefs and standards call itself well-governed?

Too Late for Damage Control

Either the leaders of the ELCA are in agreement with Nadia Bolz-Weber or they are not. If they are in agreement, we have a problem because they are joining with her in calling the traditional view of human sexuality a lie. If they are not in agreement, they have a problem because they have allowed her to become so prominent. They did nothing about her at a time when it would have been easier to do something about her. How would they be able to stop her now?

When a church body has allowed a situation that is doing great damage to become so large and out



of control, how could it call itself well-governed?

The situation created by Nadia Bolz-Weber is doing great damage because of the message she is communicating to young people and the turmoil she is creating in some congregations.

Repent and Re-Examine

That same report said that the ELCA Church Council formed a working group which would develop a document which would contain “a confession of this church’s bondage to the sins of slavery, racism, discrimination, white supremacy and quietism, and a commitment to begin the work of repentance, which this church confesses to be *‘the chief topic of Christian teaching.’*” The ELCA has far more that it needs to confess besides racism, discrimination, white supremacy, and quietism. It also needs to *repent* of its own acts of betrayal of trust, violation of agreements, and marginalization and even bullying and intimidation of pastors and congregations who hold to traditional views. It also needs to seriously re-examine its own theology. *How could it call itself confessionally Lutheran when it says that our need to confess rather than God’s work of salvation through Jesus Christ is “the chief topic of Christian teaching”?*

The ELCA needs to re-examine its own theology.